

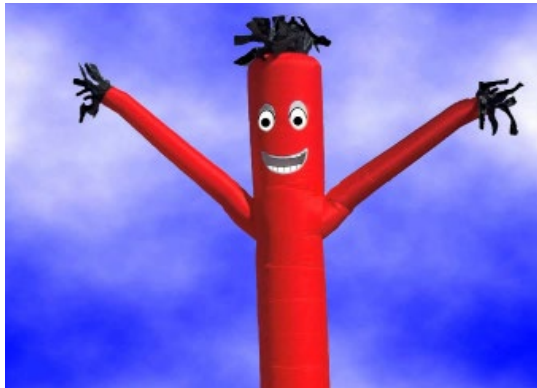
*Body*  
*at*  
*Rest*

André Alves



Let's start with a category close to mythical proportions: the worker. What is a worker? What makes this abstract unanimous mass, defined in terms of the capacity of being productive rather than by the distinct productions taking place? Portrayed in terms of continuous energy giving, of happy giving, the worker does not live by its own rule, autonomous, but submitted to the production feeding the larger cycle of accumulation. The ideal worker

is the one that never tires, effortless, happily in a never-ending dance. This ideal finds translation in the wide smile of the air-dancer. But while the air-dancer proposes the image of a tireless longevity, the body of the worker is a delicate material.



Bodies are trapped in temporal cycles of energetic fading and restoration within the arch of a lifespan. Sleep is the mechanism through which bodies are restored to its productive potential. To be at rest is to be always in relation with productivity. But what can be read from an act of rest is cyphered. Is it a sleep or a nightmare, reposing from an

exasperated dull or thrilling existence, a body comforted by silence or exhausted by force of alien oppressions, a collapse from famine or the manifestation of the privilege that spending time is?

Rest is inseparable from (and vulnerable to) activity, since it is by means of energetic restoration and dreamy activity that bodies are brought back into cycles of production and demand. But sleep isn't only what guarantees the body to be brought back into work. It is also the expression of a freedom, of enjoyment, a pleasure one looks forward to.



Henri Rousseau  
*The sleeping gipsy*  
1897

The smile of the fatigued worker in Rousseau's "The Sleeping Gypsy" is as enigmatic as Gioconda's... It is not clear if fatigue exposes the worker to perils, or, if in turn, the withdrawal into sleep reads as the only escape from the ferocious guard of activity - either as a consolation, as the only possibility to escape endless production, a relief from the pressure to perform (Verwoert 2008:106).

Rather than an unavoidable mechanism of the living, sleep is revealing of distinct vulnerabilities to work. It requires closer inspection of the complex relations of dependence developed between subjects and productive cycles. Why is rest so highly-regulated/disciplined and the not-at-work, laziness so heavily bashed?

This form of ever-productive existence shows a tendency to regard the becoming of subjects in relation to the cycle of accumulation. If one accepts that post-industrial societies develop damaging modes

of ever-production existence, can deliberate forms of non-activity offer some kind of criticality, be proposed as a transformative gesture? How does fatigue or sleep operate as a possibility to dialogue with our vulnerabilities to work?



Mladen Stilinic  
*Artist at work*  
1978 - 2015

Mladen Stilinic was particularly invested in this problem and developed a series of performances entitled “Artist at Work” in which he performed a non-active body - resting or sleeping - in the museum space. Visitors would meet the artist performing rest/sleep (physically, but also in photographic documentation) under the suggestion of ‘being at work’. But the paradox of a body that is said to-be-active even when drained of energy, also matches the description of how in post-industrial societies subjectivity, the soul (the energy that transforms biological matter into an animated body, according to Franco Berardi) is always at work. Souls have become the instrumental part of our expanded labour reality. A reality based on communication, the creation of mental states, of feeling, imagination and creativity rather than the muscled

transformation of nature. In such a configuration, work is neither based in the separation between body and intellect/soul that defined industrial labour, but through a permanent production of social communication of the soul. Something that is felt in terms of an expropriation, an outpouring from the subject (Berardi 2009:115).

As aesthetic material, bodies are inescapably productive, they are inseparable from productivity simply because in aesthetics terms every presentation is an experiment of context and meaning. On stage or in the exhibition space, bodies are amplified; in pictures they become precisely pointed, detailed - even if only to reveal the paradoxical impossibility of full disclosure through the act of exposure. What else is Stilinovic essaying with his productive non-productiveness, if not the intertwined relation subjectivity has with productive time?



Mladen Stilinovic  
*Material Value of Laziness - Fragile Sense of Hope*

In "The praise of Laziness" - a 1998 manifesto opposing the over-determinism of artistic productivity - Stilinovic restates the importance of dull time as an imperative for the very aesthetic experience. Because if one accepts that the aesthetic experience (if existence) is reduced to a managerial act, and the possibility of different forms of thought,

imagination and hope is narrowed to formulaic experiences (Berardi 2009:133-134), if one accepts the argument of a possible synchrony between spiritual fatigue and relentless working-subjectivities, then, attempts of interrupting accumulation of speed and productivity might come at-hand. Claiming, for instance, narcolepsy as a pathological help against insomniac tendencies, and laziness (rather than micro-management) in the expectation to open critical reactions to the dominant systems of governance and demand.



Eight-hour day movement/40 hour movement  
circa 1817

Disciplinary structures of labour kept body and cognitive activities and affective faculties apart. That separateness allowed for the possibility of overturning the submissive body (Berardi 2009:139). The trapped body of workers left the intellect unattended to imagine the possibilities for the subject's autonomy. But also to develop empathy, not only a matter of being, but of finding a common world in company of neighbouring bodies. But as industrial labour morphs into a techno-semiotic model of economy and the communication of subjectivity becomes the very material that feeds capitalism, publicity replaces sweat put into working hours. Here, the distinction between leisure time and work time became meaningless (Lazzarato 1196:134).



Auschwitz gates  
*Arbeit Macht Frei* - Work sets you free

The morality of disciplinary work at the gates of Auschwitz -“work sets you free” - is now replaced by a more pervasive form of extermination: language, relations, thoughts, cognitions and affects are no longer estranged by the model of economy, because economy became a techno-semiotic model (Berardi 2013:215). A reality based on communication, the creation of mental states, of feeling, imagination and creativity rather than the muscled transformation of nature.

In such a configuration, work is no longer based in the separation between body and intellect/soul that defined industrial labour, but through a permanent production of social communication of the soul (the energy that transforms biological matter into an animated body, according to Franco Berardi). Souls have become the instrumental part of our expanded labour reality. Something that is felt in terms of an expropriation, an outpouring from the subject (Berardi 2009:115). What else is Stilinovic essaying with his productive non-productiveness, if not the intertwined relation subjectivity has with productive time?

Stilinovic’s “Artist at Work” is as didactic as it is powerful. It claims that the artist’s condition is one already vulnerable to work, since the artists’ sensitivity and attention easily slip into an artistic making. This matches the argument of expropriation that late-capitalism produces

over subjects. Bodies and souls are put into the work of communicated creativity and personalisation, oriented to open access, to disclosure. It is in this sense that Stilinovic's sleep is a strike, an withdrawal from the expectations about exposure of artistic labour.



Mladen Stilinovic  
*Artist at work*

The critical agency of meeting this art striker relies in interrupting the rhythms of spectatorship, delaying and frustrating a ready-to-consume spectatorship. It also functions as evidence of an expropriation, as if this body stated the inevitable fate of ever-producing. But it is also a tease, a statement of the class privilege inherent to being an artist, and the exquisite privilege of being paid to sleep in turn of others.



Barbora Kleinhamplová  
& Tereza Stejskalová  
*Sleep.*  
*A three-act play with six actors*  
Tranzitdisplay gallery  
2014

Barbora Kleinhamplová & Tereza Stejskalová establish a correlation between the oppression of work (losing the privilege of rest) and the privilege of artists. According to them, sleep is a mirage in the world of never-ending tiredness, anxiety and restlessness that contemporary



artists act in. In their videos “Sleep. A three-act play with six actors” and “Sleeper’s Manifesto,” sleep is presented as a contested space of democracy. Because sleep is presented as a democratic and egalitarian biological event, because the unconsciousness of bodies blurs their profiled differences, then, the right or control of rest is an attempt to discipline the general unconscious.

The way through which they describe the contemporary activity (of the artists) of being always-at-work, even during sleep, is that of an existence turned into a somewhat somnambulist state of consciousness, something they term sleep-mode (alike to technological devices that are neither turned off nor turned on).



Cornelia Parker & Tilda Swinton  
*The Maybe*  
Serpentine Galleries  
1995 - 2015

Existence appears as a form of living insomnia, as an incapacity to fully withdraw from productivity, to be freed from the stimuli of immanent demand and excitement. As a state of being neither fully awake nor fully at rest, this insomniac existence makes visible the unlearning of rest, the collective investment in the accumulation of speed, in states of permanent readiness to supply and show. But also the unlearning of autonomy, the coercion to entrainment and connectedness that estranges the subject both from its seclusion and unique rhythm.

Sleep enters the contemporary in the category of enchantments: Warhol’s “Sleep”, Burden’s “Bed Piece”, den Harder’s “Sleep,” or, Parker and Swinton’s “The Maybe” appear in the exhibition space as incantations,

as experiences of magical proportions - since who is expected not to perform? But there is another side to the spectacle of sleep, since the real-time experience of rest can never be witnessed by the self. Sleep is an ungraspable, imagined experience, where existence pauses and magically restarts. These sleeping bodies are ostentatious demonstrations of a privilege and of waste. They are in the opposite end of the credo that is best to burn-out than to fade away (Verwoert 2008:106).



Ben Vautier  
*In a bed*  
Gallery Sct. Agnes  
1985

They resonate with the reflections made about the relation between energy and equity, in which to be faster is made at the expenses of a slower speed: faster velocity meant someone else's time is more precious, more productive, more valuable (Illich 1974:38-39). Drawing parallels to this, rushed sleep exists in relation to precious waking activity: short sleep is more precious than longer sleep. To be found asleep is either a semblance of poor productivity (one sleeps more because one produces less) or a privilege of few (one can afford to sleep longer because one is free of economies of productivity). And that is why to be found asleep

in the exhibition space fails to produce a yawning in the spectator: it enervates the productive time of spectatorship, while exposing the irony (and joy) in paying someone to sleep in our turn.

As aesthetic material, bodies are inescapably productive, they are inseparable from productivity simply because in aesthetics terms every presentation is an experiment of context and meaning. On stage or in the exhibition space, bodies are amplified; in pictures they become precisely pointed, detailed - even if only to reveal the paradoxical impossibility of full disclosure through the act of exposure. In dance and music performances, exhaustion is helpful to make visible the limits of the performing body, the limits of action, and the correlation between control and strength, to unbalance the rule of the performer's mind over the behaviour of flesh. But Stilinovic's performance isn't simply a demonstration of the limitations of the acting flesh. Stilinovic's stance must be read as a position with the circulation of visual art, as strike with the demanding consumeristic eye of aesthetic appreciation, delaying with the power of spectatorship as an accumulation of awoken experiences. The power flip is increased not only because the expectation to see artists at work (an implicit condition of performance and live art) is denied, but because (as Melville would put it) nothing so aggravates an earnest person as a passive resistance (Melville 1856:10): the very spectator appears in the exhibition space as if it was an imaginary product of the artist's sleep.

In "Artist at work" Stilinovic reiterates how the body is exhausted by the presence of others, giving evidence of this by explicit engagement in non-engagement. Stilinovic sleeping is committed to preservation, showing how the cycle of supply and demand (of producing and exhibiting) wears out existence (of the artist). Stilinovic's sleep is a form to expose what one awakes for and into. As in any awakening, it is a process of recognition, of moving from the self into the world. Awakenings such as James Luna's "The Artifact Piece" in which sleep is the condition that turns the everyday into object of archaeological value, of Ami Dahlstedt's "Female Immortal" a performative-lecture detailing how the lying body of a woman cannot escape the signifier of vulnerability (and sexualisation), of Alexander McQueen's "Voss"

in which the body (as material of beauty) appears arrested in a state of precarious (ever-changing) suspension, or of Francis Alÿs' "Sleepers" dogs and people sleeping in the streets exposing their equal vulnerability to survival.



Francis Alÿs  
*Sleepers II*  
2001

Rousseau's painting of "The Sleeping Gypsy" can also be an interesting reflection about the ambiguous relation between productivity and fatigue. Rousseau's painting is a useful reminder that activity and rest are inherently related to safety, because to be at rest is to cease to be vigilant. This relation between safety and rest is implicit in the economy of labour, since it is through the impersonal activities of labour, that the individual accesses the comforts of collective well-being and public security. An expropriation of existential discomforts made at the costs of uneasy reflection, brooding, dreaming, worry, love, and hatred (Nietzsche 1924:173). Autonomy and safety are at odds.

In the novel "A Man Asleep," George Perec reflects about the compromising of autonomy in face of the regularity of culture. "A Man Asleep" describes a young student's attempt at autonomy from a society he sees built as a project of collective indifference. The novel is written in the voice of the second person singular - you - detailing the inner dialogue of the student, describing his confinement to certain spaces and restricted to sets of repetitive routines. The first step in his course-of-action towards autonomy consisted in suspending interaction with society and the attempt to rehearse indifference to material desire and

ambition.

Perec's sleeper wishes to produce no value by fasting from the machine of capitalistic production surplus. And like fasting, repetition and endurance are used as crucial techniques. This sleeper does not want to become a piece of the puzzle, he wants to break with the chain of social relations that confine subjects in a lifestyle where *everything is arranged, everything is prepared in the minutest detail: the surges of emotion, the frosty irony, the heartbreak, the fullness, the exoticism, the great adventure, the despair (...)* [where] *everything is ready for your death* (Perec 1967:155; my emphasis). As a strategy of intimate resistance, his fasting expropriates the self from the time of high-performance culture, the programming of existence in micro temporalities of the right-now (Verwoert 2008:99). The point of such withdrawal, of such fasting, is not necessarily a wanting less but a recovery from the collective indifferent sensitivity.



Bernard Queysanne (after George Perec novel)  
*A man Asleep*  
1974

Perec's sleeper puts at-work the same forms that signal existential void (mechanisation and repetition, a fully programmed life, the spatial confinement of bodies). Like Stilinovic's performances, the first implication is one with temporality, delaying time and tensioning ready-consumption. An estrangement with the accelerated, atomised time of

supply and demand, rendering visible the vulnerability of sensitivity to the rhythms of functionalism, the dissociation of time and subject. Temporalities that do not bleed into one another, thus creating a sense of discontinuity and acceleration, and void. The time to complete something is interrupted by the time to start something else - the individual is simply left without time (Han 2015: 21), neither a time to be or time left to spend, but literally left without the sense of time, a suspended sense of lacking duration, a void.

The time of this sleeper is a time of a convalescence, a recovery which turns a simple act into a longevity, an instant, a spontaneity into a duration. Perec's sleeper's indifference to society is a reflex of collective experience, of functionalism as a project against empathy, against the solidarity from one to another.



But his non-productive indifference is almost indistinguishable from the conditions of depression and agoraphobia. And read through that lens, indifference is futile, neutrality is meaningless, indifference is not transformative of the self (Perec, 1967:219-222). It is difficult to disambiguate this retreat from a depressive mental state. As effect of capitalist hyper-regulations (and more so with the techno-informational development of capitalism), the depressed subject experiences a circumstance of disconnected connectedness, a troubled relation of autonomy unrelated to the sense of time, duration or the joy of the self found in solitude. In the attempt for antidotes Perec's sleeper ends up rehearsing the poison: the perverted production of apathy. His rejection

to material desire is combined with a rejection of others, an indifference to others - the affective effect of functionalism. But also a rejection of the self, a rejection of desire, the aesthetic material through which the reinvention of life, of a different, un-programmed life, becomes possible. Unlike in Stilinovic's "Artist at Work", Perceps sleeper misses-out the chance of turning an aesthetic private gesture into a public body, and to give evidence of the body as site of un-captured forces of production and desire. Perceps sleeper gives us the full picture of the operation of high-performance capitalism, not an animated body - just a shell.



André alves  
*We don't think happy/We feel happy*  
2016

But more than an effect, it might be worth exploring depression as a possibility to irritate the rhythms of high-performance capitalism, by affirming it as a state that withdraws into a temporality whose purpose is the weaving of solidarity and resilience, attentive contemplation and tarrying with certainty. To transform depression from being a result of capital formations, into a state of un-pressured re-activation of the soul (Rolnik, w/p). And that re-activation must be developed from what the body knows. That knowledge is first of all a knowledge of one's own rhythm, and second of one's own desire to protect and to offer. To rethink subjectivity through actions of care of sensibility and self-esteem (rather than profitable profiling and narcissistic exposition to external approval) is likely our best hope.



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He studied at the Finnish Academy of Fine Arts (2013-16), holds a MFA in Drawing from the University of Cincinnati (2011) under a Fulbright fellowship, a MA in Art Education (2009) and a BFA (2005) from the University of Porto.

André Alves work and research looks into the transformation of emotional ecologies and vulnerabilities of human sensitivity to work. It responds to the large research question of how to curate existence (with a particular interest in the so-called psychopathologies of subjectivity - depression, loneliness, madness,...) into images, how to use the languages offered by these states not to produce translations but to transform artistic languages.

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