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## book reviews

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*24/7: Late Capitalism and the Ends of Sleep.* By Jonathan Crary. London; New York: Verso. 2014.

Jonathan Crary, the genealogist of the spectacle, has written a little book that is markedly different in style from its predecessors *Techniques of the Observer* (1990) and *Suspensions of Perception* (2001) while expanding and reorienting their focus on perception and attention towards what is in many ways its antithesis: sleep. This book is a diagnosis of contemporary capitalism and how it captures and restructures human subjectivity, with a special focus on lived time, relevant for anybody working in the field of humanities and social sciences. The main thesis is easily summarized: sleeping time is non-productive time, making sleep the sworn enemy of capitalism. Crary here links up with a rich tradition in Western Marxism, arguing capitalism does not stop at subsuming working time through the wage relationship, but has the tendency to incorporate ever more spheres of life into its networks of surplus value generation. Sleep, in Crary's account, is that irreducible aspect of human existence that resists the demands of a 24/7 capitalism that requires us to be always 'on', available for the demands of the employer and the market. Hence the remarkable – but unreferenced – statistic that 'the average North American adult now sleeps approximately six and a half hours at night, an erosion from eight hours a generation ago, and (hard as it is to believe) down from ten hours in the early twentieth century' (p. 11).

Crary uses the figure of sleep to diagnose 24/7 culture. It is an erudite and minute exploration that ranges from military research into migrating birds that do not sleep for several days, drones in Afghanistan and Yemen that constantly monitor the battlefield, a reading of *Arkwright's Cotton Mills by Night* as a description of capitalism's tendency to enforce 'homogenization of time and a conceptualization of uninterrupted process that override natural and social constraints' (p. 64), to an analysis of television as the first mediatic *dispositif* that introduced disciplinary techniques in the heart of the home. Media and communication technologies play a crucial role in Crary's analysis, and he dedicates many pages to different technologies as ways to capture and compartmentalize human attention, with some scathing remarks on the revolutionary potential of social media for collective action, echoing Jodi Dean (2009).<sup>1</sup>

One point of critique. If Crary is an erudite and gifted diagnostician of the maladies of capitalism, he does remain short on the remedy. After reading the essay, the reader is left with a feeling of helplessness vis-a-vis the all-encompassing powers of 24/7, which is an odd affect given the book's occasional approving nod towards more activist stances, like the Tiquun collective. Similarly, I am not convinced that the 'imaginings of a future without capitalism begin as dreams of sleep' (p. 128). Writing this review in the midst of a student occupation at the University of Amsterdam, a movement that in many ways embodies the ideals of collective action that drive this book, I cannot but notice how little sleep these courageous students

desire – and get. To them, sleep does not seem the adequate metaphor that drives their collective action.

### Note

1. Dean, J. (2009) *Democracy and Other Neoliberal Fantasies: Communicative Capitalism and Left Politics*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

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