



Sleep, radical hospitality, and makeover's anti-matter

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Abstract

Sleep has long been associated with transformation. Here I review how this manifests in fairytale, science fiction, and managerial/corporate approaches to sleep. I argue that, in line with neoliberal sensibilities that overvalue action, self-control and self-transformation, sleep is increasingly understood not as a state of rest, release, or dreaming but as an active mode of being that needs to be analysed, controlled, used to improve production, and indeed *acted within*. In the second part of the article I introduce two contemporary texts that work with sleep in transgressive ways: Julia Leigh's 2011 feature film *Sleeping Beauty* and Philipp Lachenmann's 12 minute video *SHU (Blue Hour Lullaby)*. Both works deploy sleep to explore spaces of stasis, of hollowiness, and to express what I call the anti-matter of the neoliberal imperative to 'Just Do It.'

Keywords

makeover, passivity, sleep, transformation, transgression

Sleep is significant for the most basic biological reason: although nobody really knows why, human and non-human animals simply cannot live without it. Some animals (sharks and certain birds) are in constant movement while sleeping. Dolphins and whales sleep 'consciously' so they can resurface to breathe. For humans, complete sleep deprivation is a biological disaster. Fatal Familial Insomnia (FFI) is a genetic mutation, one of a cluster of prion diseases, related to mad-cow disease.¹ It is, luckily, extremely rare but plain old sleep deprivation is not. People in urbanized, industrial cultures sleep two hours less per night than their counterparts of half a century ago. Scientists suggest that we

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suffer from chronic sleep deprivation that leads to compromised productivity, poor health and loss of memory (Roenneberg, 2012). In order to understand this and other changes to sleep we must first acknowledge that sleep is a cultural and social – not simply a biological and physical – practice.²

We know that sleep is differently patterned according to time and place. Historians have shown how it has moved from being a collective to a private activity (Elias, 1978), how it became confined to the night, and how it changed with electric light (Ekirch, 2001). Sleeping is an indicator of levels of industrialization. China and India – where daytime napping (known as polyphasic sleeping) is still common – are changing to monophasic sleeping patterns as workforces become industrialized (Steger and Brunt, 2003). Conversely, in overdeveloped countries daytime napping is becoming valued as a way to enhance productivity (Baxter and Kroll-Smith, 2004) with Google, for example, introducing sleep pods in its offices (Yarow, 2010). Researchers who are turning to sleep argue it is worthy of study in itself while also being a powerful subject through which to examine key socio-cultural concerns and theories (Baxter and Kroll-Smith, 2004; Harrison, 2009; Williams, 2002, 2005). Others are beginning to develop analyses that show how sleep is an embodied practice intertwined with gender, sexuality, ethnicity and class, as well as with media and cultural products (Hislop and Arber, 2003; Krafl and Horton, 2008; Steger and Brunt, 2003; Valtonen and Veijola, 2010).

In this article I show – using fairy tales and science fiction – that sleep has long been associated with transformation and, further, that it has intimate connections with makeover culture. I argue that in line with makeover sensibilities that overvalue action, self-control and self-transformation, sleep is increasingly represented not as a state of rest, release or dreaming but as an active mode of being that can be controlled, used to improve production and, indeed, *acted within*. Then, more importantly, I show how some recent artistic works about sleep show a resistance to makeover culture. I engage with two contemporary texts that work with sleep in transgressive ways, Julia Leigh's 2011 feature film *Sleeping Beauty* and Philipp Lachenmann's (2002/8) 12-minute video *SHU (Blue Hour Lullaby)*. In these works sleep is represented as both malignant and enchanted, and is used to radically question contemporary values of self-control and self-transformation as well as the punishments that await those who fail to live up to them.

Makeover culture's citizens are wide awake

In previous work I have developed a theory of makeover culture, in which I have identified a contemporary cultural paradigm where, put simply, *becoming* is more desirable than *being*. In makeover culture, I argue, everyone is in a permanent state of potential; the basic premise of this theory is that we could all, always, become something better. I have shown how good citizens of makeover culture perform never-ending renovations of themselves and their environments (Jones, 2008a, 2008b, 2009, 2012a, 2012b). Although makeover culture has inherited some mythology in which transformation happens to the unconscious subject (see Jones, 2008b), it is widely understood to be enacted through conscious, aware, self-determining citizens. In other words, good makeover citizens are those who are wide-awake. Here I ask how sleep fits in with this ever-alert paradigm and I suggest that sleep is being co-opted by makeover culture. In line with sensibilities that

overvalue action, self-control and self-transformation, sleep is increasingly represented not as a state of rest or release from consciousness but as a mode of being that needs to be understood, controlled, used to improve output and acted *within* so that time spent sleeping is not 'lost'.

A television advertisement for business class air travel:

A white-sheeted bed sits in the middle of Times Square, New York. A man in a business suit walks briskly towards it, gets in, and says 'goodnight'. The picture fades to black, soft music plays for a few beats, and as the lights go up again we see that the bed has been transported to the centre of Piccadilly Circus, London. The man gets up, says 'good morning' and strides away.

This text tells us much about contemporary notions of sleep, most notably that 'good' sleep is a part of a global citizen's corporate toolkit and that sleep is a commodity. As a corporate life coach writes, sleep is 'a secret weapon that you can utilise to increase your performance and be at the top of your game in both work and in life' (May, 2012). Sleep in this ad is linked not just to wellbeing but also to productivity and value: indeed, the protagonist (notably a white male) is such a successful and active sleeper that the world itself turns for him.

Contemporary culture increasingly teaches that sleep is, ideally, used to transform and transport and that in it we should perform. Sleep is represented as a tool for the responsible makeover citizen to deploy in his or her performance as a working and productive subject. Dynamic workers are those who are flexible and available 24/7, yet they must also be able to achieve 'good' sleep: the man in the television ad is a perfect meld of these two. The governance of sleep is coming into line with other biopolitics such as those that are already established around alcohol and food: news media are beginning to teach us that 'like alcohol ... sleep deprivation significantly decreases our work performance and compromises our health and memory' (Roenneberg, 2012). Sleep has become a moral concern, much like obesity and alcohol consumption. It is being commercialized, with associated products from drugs to deluxe mattresses to cars that encourage drivers to take power naps (Campbell, 2012).

Clearly, there is a cultural urge to bring sleep into line – to make it over. Jonathan Crary writes that 'the worldwide infrastructure for 24-hour non-stop work and consumption has been in place for at least a decade and a half: the missing ingredient is a human subject shaped to coincide with it more intensively' (2006: 2). One way to create this human subject is through pharmaceutical intervention. Sleep-enhancing drugs are common, while those that suppress its need are more controversial. Modafinil, for example, is an analeptic created for the treatment of narcolepsy and other serious sleep disorders. But it is widely used off-label by people who wish to stay awake for work or recreational purposes. A drug called CX717 is in testing at the moment – it may allow people to stay awake for 36 hours or more and counter the effects of sleep deprivation by tricking the body into thinking it has slept. These developments further emphasize a contemporary desire to control sleep. Notably, current pharmaceutical trends are to minimize sleep. This is a move that is absolutely in line with makeover culture and its ideal citizens who are responsive, aware and, above all, productive. Sleep, along with death, is still

somewhat outside of makeover culture. But there's a cultural tug to bring it into line, to get it to serve the makeover culture paradigm.

Fairytales, science fiction and sleep

The well-known and oft re-worked fairytales 'Snow White' and 'Sleeping Beauty' use deep and extended sleep to enact transformation. The sleeper is incarcerated by her unconsciousness as the world changes around her: it grows and alters, slowly becoming a place where she will be able to reign, a place where she will no longer be powerless. Sleep in these stories is represented as a state of death-like limbo. In 'Sleeping Beauty' Briar-rose is cursed by a vengeful fairy and as a consequence will die on her fifteenth birthday. Luckily, a good fairy comes to the rescue but she is young and not strong enough to completely counteract the curse: she can only lessen it to a hundred-year slumber. So the remedy to death here is stasis. Carolyn Fay writes that in this story:

sleep functions as a border space: neither life nor death, it nevertheless displays characteristics of both. The sleeping princess thus embodies a kind of paradox: she sleeps to preserve her life, but her life such as it is resembles death. (2008: 269)³

The princess's sleeping/deathly state is the central object around which trajectories of change occur. She plays no active role in these transformations yet without her inert body there would be no story. Fay continues, 'the story cannot see into sleep, and thus the hundred years' sleep constitutes a kind of narrative suspension, in addition to a suspension of the princess's life' (2008: 269).

The brothers Grimm collected folktales that tended not to include powerful girls or women. Further, women and girls in the Grimm retellings have less dialogue if they are heroines and more if they are villains (Bottigheimer, 1987: 51–6). If we add this pedagogy (that silent girls are better) to the ones around sleeping princesses, we learn that attractiveness and goodness come through extreme passivity: through being seen and not heard. In these stories the bodies of the sleeping or dead princesses are dwelt upon: their immobility is part of their desirability and becomes fetishized. Elisabeth Bronfen writes that the figure of the immobilized 'dead' woman on display depicts both female sexuality and death, which are 'the two enigmas of western culture' (1992: 99). 'Snow White' is particularly sensual in its evocation of how its princess's 'dead' body is treated: the dwarves 'unlaced her, combed her hair, washed her with water and wine' (Grimm, 1973: 269).

The contradiction of a body that is simultaneously at the heart of (narrative) radical transformation and utterly passive is central to these stories. It makes for a deeply creative and potent mix of power and inactivity. And it is this mix that prompts me to read these stories as texts that, in part, work *against* makeover culture, against the constant imperative to be continually self-improving and self-made. As I show later in this article, this is a paradigm that is well worth feminist attention.

Gender is of course key here. Women who enter zones of unconsciousness become aesthetic objects around which action occurs. When they wake up it is to a reaffirmed established order and a proper embrace of heterosexual domesticity within marriage. In

contrast, in myth, men who enter zones of unconsciousness are waiting to come alive again 'so as to unlock their revolutionary potential' (Deszcz, 2004: 47). For example King Arthur (English), Barbarossa (German), the Golem of Prague (Jewish), sleeping armies of warriors (Welsh) and Jesus (Christian) are all heroes trapped inside forms of enchanted sleep but will rise again and fight to bring drastic change and justice to the world.⁴ It is notable that in contemporary popular culture sleeping heroines continue, in telling after telling, to follow the same pattern of outcast/sleeper/queen while stories of sleeping men waiting to transform the world have slipped into relative invisibility.

However sleeping men are not absent from popular culture. They are indeed abundant in a different genre – science fiction. These sleeping heroes are not waiting for a moment when they will reassert themselves. Rather, it is *while they sleep* that they become superheroes, it is *within unconsciousness* that they become the centres of and the perpetrators of action. Sleep is not represented as a state that the narrative must work around but as a place *inside* which much of the action happens – here we do 'see into sleep'. Science fiction often characterizes sleep as active rather than passive and indeed as transportative: a portal to other worlds, other ways of being. *Minority Report*, *Inception*, *The Matrix*, *Avatar* and *Source Code* all represent sleep as a state through which alternate realities can be entered and in which vigorous engagement occurs. In these films the (mostly male) protagonists become heroic while sleeping, using their bodies and intellects in extraordinary ways. While these stories rely, like 'Snow White' and 'Sleeping Beauty', on a sleeping protagonist, the male protagonists *do* and *achieve* during unconsciousness.⁵

Characters in *Inception* (dir. Nolan, 2010) use sleep and dreaming to enact espionage. In this film control over the self while sleeping is paramount. Cobb says to Saito: 'I know the tricks, and I can teach them to your subconscious so that even when you're asleep, your guard is never down.' In *The Matrix* (dir. Wachowski and Wachowski, 1999) characters move between layered, parallel worlds – in one of them, the matrix itself, everyone is asleep. When Neo moves away from the matrix for the first time, waking up in the 'real' world, he asks 'Why do my eyes hurt?' and Morpheus replies 'You've never used them before.' Despite this, it is only in the matrix that extraordinary feats can be achieved – dodging bullets and jumping huge heights for example. In *Avatar* (dir. Cameron, 2009) cryosleep is a hibernation brought about by freezing in which sleepers – just like Briar-rose – don't age and don't require food or water. There is, however, a crucial difference between the cryosleep that the hero Jake experiences and that of Briar-rose: Jake's sleep transports him to another place, Pandora. Like the protagonists in *Inception* and *The Matrix*, he leaves his 'meat' body behind while his 'true self' lives and acts in a different place.⁶

So while these science fiction films rely, like 'Snow White' and 'Sleeping Beauty', on a sleeping protagonist, what the protagonists *do* during unconsciousness is very different. They perform in sleep, and their functioning is enhanced and more skilled than in their waking lives. Sleep is mastered in these texts by being re-cast as a site of action. Further, within somnambulance protagonists are augmented with extra-human powers. I suggest that this *doing*, this action, combat and endeavour even within the cocoon of sleep, is emblematic of our contemporary moment and there are echoes of it everywhere, in both fiction and non-fiction. Science fiction indicates a cultural desire – that is also

apparent in non-fiction and news media (Seale et al., 2007) – to control sleep: to recast it from a state over which we have little power into a mode of being that can be deployed to further our careers and develop our active, waking, working selves.

‘You’re safe here’: prisoners and sleepers

We know that for every trend there is a counter-trend, for every cultural imperative there are sub- and shadow cultures that exist in opposition to and in tandem with it, creatively engaging and resisting simultaneously (Hodge and Kress, 1988). Below I examine two pieces of contemporary culture that make strong negative commentary about makeover culture by engaging with the notion of sleep. The first is Australian director Julia Leigh’s film *Sleeping Beauty*, the second is German artist Philipp Lachenmann’s video *SHU (Blue Hour Lullaby)*.

Sleepers

Most feminist retellings of ‘Sleeping Beauty’ focus on reworking the narrative to afford the heroine *more* agency, to awaken her to the feminist motto, ‘We can do anything.’ But Julia Leigh’s film does the opposite. The central character, Lucy, is a university student in Sydney who works in a number of menial and badly paid part-time jobs. She drifts along, letting men in a bar toss a coin to decide who she will sleep with, spending her rent money on cocaine, seeming to care little for her own safety or wellbeing.

The film opens with Lucy being paid to be a medical test subject. As a scientist inserts a tube down her throat she gags repeatedly, attempting to open her gullet to facilitate the violation. So from the first scene this (loose) adaptation of ‘Sleeping Beauty’ shows its heroine being *wilfully passive*, concentrating intently in order not to vomit, in order to ingest what would normally be rejected. The money Lucy receives for this test is, I suggest, payment for a form of *radical hospitality*. This is a hospitality that requires deliberate and conscious passivity. The labouring body here is valuable for what it can contain and hold rather than what it can do. When we think of passivity as undesirable, even as toxic, it is worth remembering that capacity can be about the ability to hold (containment) as well as about action, and that ‘mere’ vessels have power. Zoë Sofia, in an important article that examines the ‘unobtrusive technics of containers and containment’ (2000: 198) writes that ‘The container is a structurally necessary but frequently unacknowledged pre-condition of becoming’ (2000: 188).

Lucy answers an ad in the student paper and begins working as a silver service waitress. She wears lingerie at intimate dinner parties, earning much more money. Soon she is invited to begin performing a different and even more lucrative kind of hospitality – she will enter a drug-induced state of unconsciousness and her sleeping body will be offered to visitors at an exclusive brothel.

The men who purchase time with the sleeping object that is Lucy’s body are much older than her and each suffers because of his age. Despite wealth and status the customers are shown as vulnerable, and the Madam’s repeated phrase ‘You’re safe here, there’s no shame here, nobody can see you’ tells us that they live in spaces of fear and of loss. Leigh displays them completely nude, their ageing bodies and flaccid penises in stark

contrast to Lucy's unblemished youth. One is a widower who just wants to go to sleep next to Lucy, one is mourning his lost virility – he acts out with verbal violence and by ashing his cigarette in her ear – and one looks strong but turns out to be so weak he cannot even hold up her tiny body.

The actor playing Lucy, Emily Browning, has said that in order to play the sleep scenes she entered a meditative state. Certainly in the scene with the third man she is dropped and slips off the bed so convincingly that audiences gasp, fearing that her neck might break. This is extraordinary acting on Browning's part, and yet she literally does nothing. It is a sort of 'anti-acting' that mirrors how the character Lucy continually gives away or simply refuses to possess any agency.

Cressida Heyes (2014) has written an extraordinary article about falling asleep in a conference and mishearing the phrase 'Foucault's ethics of aesthetics' for 'Foucault's ethics of *anaesthetics*'. This mishearing, anaesthetics instead of aesthetics, led Heyes to think about feminism and *doing*, about the oppressive imperatives that feminists and indeed many women feel to be ceaselessly active, and about the lure (and perhaps benefits) of an anaesthetized existence. She proposes that modes of being that embrace passivity, even failure, in the forms of giving up, shutting down, or just stopping, have the potential to be re-understood as feminist (non)activities:

withdrawing one's consent, withdrawing from the labour of being a docile body, rejecting the terms of one's own exploitation by refusing to be a subject at all – these are alternative ways of saying no. Transgression is not the only relationship one can have to a norm. (2014:)

There is no transgression in what Lucy does, because she doesn't *do* anything. Her relationship to the norm of work and aspiration is to take, literally, any job offered. Her relationship to being an active sexual agent is to give away that agency. She doesn't refuse to be a docile body, as Heyes suggests, but rather makes herself *only* docile body: taking the labouring self to its extreme. It is this that makes her character strangely powerful, especially while sleeping.

Lucy's body is nearly always centre-screen or in the foreground, and the lighting is designed to make it almost luminescent. This body is not closed, cut off from the viewer and the world by sleep, but rather is *opened* and made into a radically hospitable space because of being unconscious. In traditional feminist terms it is a tragic and failed body, a body that needs rescuing. But as Judith Halberstam writes:

where failure certainly comes accompanied by a host of negative affects, such as disappointment, disillusionment, and despair, it also provides the opportunity to use these negative affects to poke holes in the toxic positivity of contemporary thinking. (2011: 3)

We might then see Lucy's drugged and unconscious body as one that is silently, passively, subversive. It enacts a radical hospitality – close to what Derrida calls an 'unconditional hospitality' (2000: 77) – by being open to anything, by becoming a body that exists only for the purposes of others. This inert, floppy, agency-less figure is powerful because of its difference, because of the point it makes about freedom and a letting-go of will.

The film is not about feminist awakening, rather about feminist disengagement in the face of impossible makeover modes of being that demand ceaseless engagement with no possibility of finitude. It profoundly addresses the power of passivity, the power of not caring, the power of doing nothing. It can be read as a queering or feminizing of makeover sensibilities; it helps us to think about failure and a lack of care as passive resistance, about how a giving away of agency might be somehow positive, and how an absence of the will to strive or succeed in any traditional way might help us to redefine ways in which value is conceived.

Prisoners

Desert, twilight. In the distance, a low-slung building. As night descends the structure gradually illuminates with golden spotlights and stars begin to appear in the sky.

At first, the video reminds us of the tiny film that appears at the start of every Disney movie: Sleeping Beauty's castle lighting up with fireworks. But those are not stars in the sky and this is not a castle. The stars are digitally manipulated videos of planes in holding patterns over international airports in Las Vegas, Los Angeles, Philadelphia, Frankfurt, London and New York. I like to imagine that the corporate businessman from the television advertisement is lying asleep in one of them. Far below him, the enchanted-looking building is actually a Security Housing Unit (SHU), a maximum-security solitary confinement prison. Lachenmann's video condenses a 24-hour day-night cycle into 12 minutes. Nature, the sun and moonlight, and the desert wind, continue to live and move around the inert body of the building. As Carolyn Fay writes about Sleeping Beauty's castle, 'when the trees, brambles, and thorns grow up around the chateau ... it is as though the narrative sews itself up' (2008: 269). Stasis, hibernation, a living death are expressed by what happens around them. Lachenmann also shows the prisoners' living death by expressing what happens around the SHU.

Here are institutionalized and disciplined lives at their most extreme – lives effectively ended by the mightiest marriage of sovereign and panoptical powers. The people inside this enchanted-looking building are held in isolation, confined to windowless cells for more than 22 hours a day. They have minimal human contact and no access to work, recreation or education – in other words, they have no opportunity for rehabilitation. Their confinement is purely about punishment. Prisoners in this facility endure conditions that Amnesty International calls torture, and that a United States court has declared 'may press the outer bounds of what most humans can psychologically tolerate' (cited in Abramsky and Fellner, 2003: 151). In other words, they go mad. In some ways it's a madness that mirrors the dementia that people with FFI suffer: their psychosis, brought on by extreme and prolonged deprivation of the senses – by a symbolically enforced sleep – has a similar effect to having no sleep at all. And, in contrast, Lachenmann shows us the starry lives of global citizens, high above in the floating, planes, for whom passivity is abhorrent. *SHU* shows how failure is punished with *more* failure, in the form of enforced removal from makeover culture. Lachenmann, in showing us the horror of this mode of punishment simultaneously represents it as enticing and enchanted. Thus failure

is intertwined with the possibility of letting go, softening, withdrawing, no longer striving, and somehow being at peace.

As in Leigh's film there's a disturbing hospitable body here – it is not human but concrete. Cars and trucks enter and leave it, like breathing tubes, but the body itself remains still. The video's merging of sleep and death is reminiscent of lines from Jean-Luc Nancy's brilliant and poetic *The Fall of Sleep* (2009):

Like death, sleep, for the body stretches out alone there, is alone outstretched. Outstretched alone, there, a here like nowhere. Nowhere else but a weighty body cast down, laid out, left on the ground. Like sleep, death: body deposed. (2009: 41)

Leigh's film and Lachenmann's video deal with subjects who occupy the dark spaces of makeover culture: a young woman, aware that her youthful body probably constitutes the most power she will ever hold, carelessly sells it off. The non-citizen inmates of an inhumane prison are forced into a suspended animation that is the antithesis of the society they have supposedly wronged. Both works explore spaces of stasis and hollowness and express the anti-matter of makeover culture's imperative to continually develop and enact self improvement. They show how a culture that sees passivity as toxic is impossible to sustain without a dark side. Further, they demonstrate how a state of sleep may respond to or address sensibilities that value *doing* above *being*. They deal with subjects in the shadows of cultures that privilege socially ridiculous concepts like self-actualization and dysfunctional philosophies like 'Anybody Can be President'. Leigh and Lachenmann demonstrate the complex and symbiotic relationships between passivity and action, between failure and success, between seeking power and switching off.

Embracing failure

The reading I am conducting here is part of an emerging feminist and queer mode of analysis that theorizes an 'anti-makeover' turn in radical ways. Judith Halberstam, for example, has written about how failure and amnesia can be creative:

failing, losing, forgetting, unmaking, undoing, unbecoming, not knowing may in fact offer more creative, more cooperative, more surprising ways of being in the world. Failing is something queers do and have always done exceptionally well; for queers failure can be a style, to cite Quentin Crisp, or a way of life, to cite Foucault, and it can stand in contrast to the grim scenarios of success that depend upon 'trying and trying again'. (2011: 2)

And Cressida Heyes suggests, in her radical examination of anaesthesia as a feminist option, that if we choose 'to withdraw from an experience of pain ... we open the possibility of withdrawing from at least part of the economy of pain and pleasure that keeps disciplinary society functioning' (2014).

In terms of sleep itself, a handful of contemporary theorists are arguing that it needs to be recognized and valued as *non-action*. They note that this approach places sleep at odds with makeover paradigms of continual effort and becoming. Jonathan Crary suggests that

in a world of 24/7 movement and electric brightness sleep is ‘increasingly encroached on and dispersed’ (2006: 13) such that the most important thing it offers – escape from waking life – is threatened. Cultural geographer Paul Harrison suggests that sleep should be valued as ‘a way of touching on the susceptibility and finitude of corporeal existence’ (2009: 987). In other words, sleep offers what makeover culture works against: it is a space in which vulnerability, even defencelessness, are experienced such that we realize that everything must end, even makeover’s ruthless treadmill. As the old song goes:

Death is a long long sleep

Sleep is a short short death

Which softens as it ends life’s grief

Death is a long long sleep. (folksong/round)

In Leigh’s *Sleeping Beauty* the sleeping body becomes a libidinal space of hospitality. The unconscious body becomes a host body, a hospitable space for fantasy, for intimacy, for violence, for narrative (one of the men indulges in a 10-minute monologue while sitting on the side of the bed). There is no transformation for Lucy when she awakes, unless you count the fact that she is richer. Nor is there transformation for the SHU prisoners. If they are ever released they will emerge into a world that has changed dramatically and bypassed them by thirty or forty years.

Conclusion

It is not too dramatic to say that makeover culture aims to eradicate inaction, passivity, and stasis. Nike’s slogan ‘Just Do It.’ – a quintessential call to action for its own sake – epitomizes this. But action can’t exist without inaction and movement needs stasis for its very definition – the ‘negatives’ make the ‘positive’ possible. I suggest that modes of *not doing*, even modes of failure, are as essential to cultural wellbeing as modes of becoming, and I argue that stillness should be understood as powerful. The works analysed here suggest that there is force and energy in failure, pausing, turning backwards, going sideways, being lazy, looking the other way. Perhaps it is time to recognize and even enjoy the values in nodding off, falling asleep, vegging out, not participating. Heyes writes:

the subject of later liberal capitalism is required to exercise his autonomy iteratively, expressing his individuality qua capacity to choose in an interminable series of self-determining moments. (2014)

Interminable self-determination is exhausting. But paradoxically the very antidote to that exhaustion: sleep, passivity, rest, is demonized as antithetical to the makeover project of continually and consciously re-fashioning the self. Sleep then, the state in which conscious work on the self cannot occur, becomes a fetish in makeover culture, a weak

indulgence, and consequently a sign of femininity. We are moving towards a dangerous understanding of sleep as something that must be either eradicated or mastered in order to support the makeover project.

Sleep can be represented as the dark side to an environment where movement and accomplishment are paramount. But what if sleep is the fulcrum that supports all cultures, whether they are about self-making or not? What if it is sleep that everything else we do hinges on? Sleep is anti-rational, anti-action. I posit that sleep needs protecting: that it be treasured as perhaps our last connection to dreamworlds and otherworlds, our last transcendent means of connecting in deep ways to ourselves, to remembering what it is to be human, animal and alive.

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Notes

1. Very little known is about FFI. The first recorded case was in November of 1765 with the death of a physician from a respected Venetian family. His descendants have inherited the disease, which usually takes effect in middle age (so it kicks in after people have reproduced). It has a horrible course over 7 to 18 months during which people suffer increasing insomnia, panic attacks, paranoia and hallucinations. By the time the ability to sleep is completely lost they move quickly into dementia and death.
2. There is a vast medical and scientific literature on sleep. More socio-cultural analyses are needed for their own sake, but also to critically analyse the existing and ongoing scientific and medical findings.
3. Fay's analysis is of a precursor to the Grimms' retelling of the 'Sleeping Beauty' tale, Perrault's 'La Belle au bois dormant'.
4. Rip Van Winkle is one exception, a man who wakes merely to find that his world has improved around him.
5. Of course I am analysing different genres here, making some generalizations about sleeping women and sleeping men that cross the fairytale and science fiction genres. There are men who sleep in fairy tales, and women who sleep and are active within science fiction (Ellen Ripley is a prime example, although she wakes before being active), but they are more rare. My point is that in contemporary popular culture sleep is gendered through passive women like Snow White and active men like Neo.
6. The idea of leaving our 'meat' behind was one popularized in cyberpunk fiction early in the digital era (see Gibson, 1984). While many feminists, phenomenologists and cybertheorists have abandoned this fantasy or shown it to be bogus in an always-embodied world, it persists in various pseudo-scientific forums and in some fiction.

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Filmography

- Avatar* (2009) dir. J Cameron.
- Sleeping Beauty* (2011) dir. J Leigh.
- Inception* (2010) dir. C Nolan.
- The Matrix* (1999) dir. A and L Wachowski.

Author biography

Meredith Jones has published extensively about bodies, gender, media and popular culture. She is best known for her work on cosmetic surgery and she is currently working on a large international project about cosmetic surgery tourism. In 2009 she co-founded the innovative Trunk Book collections, the first of which was HAIR and the second of which was BLOOD. Meredith teaches media and cultural studies, with a focus on digital media, at the University of Technology Sydney.