

I
Can't
Sleep

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I CAN'T SLEEP

Stuck

Yesterday I was there again, I had about thirty pages left before I finished reading a big book¹ that I always said I had read even though it wasn't quite true, although I had read two thirds of it over the course of several sessions. We all do that, don't we? But this time, the whole world was stuck, I told myself that it was now or never. I had three or four hundred pages left, it was perfect, I had the time to get started and to let it last long enough, let it stabilize, or at least I had the evenings, after a succession of household and logistical tasks. Once started, I still had to find the solution to a problem. Reading big books is uncomfortable and difficult. And sleep is not kind to me, I need a thousand rituals to fall asleep, of which a certain bodily comfort is one. It's not that I don't like this book, in fact I really do like it, I mean I wouldn't say I love it, but I do like it very much. It's just that it makes my hands numb when I hold it for too long, it weighs on my plexus when I put it down. There is always a moment when my demon wakes up and forces me to leave it on the pile of books waiting for me: my personal hell,² or rather purgatory,

1. Roberto Bolaño, *The Savage Detectives* [1998], trans. Natasha Wimmer (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 2007).

2. Translator's note: "Hell," or *l'enfer* in French, refers to the restricted section of the French library in which works that are considered obscene are stocked. Researchers can access these works with special permissions.

books that I love very much but that don't match with my rituals.³

This book, however, has the consistency of my nocturnal readings, the ones that prepare me for sleep. But since sleep is unkind to me, I absolutely need, and I mean absolutely need, to read to fall asleep, even when exhausted, even after a night of insomnia, even when jetlagged, even after love, even when drunk, even when satiated, even when ill, even when under the influence, always, always, always. At least a few lines, a few pages. And when sleep eludes me, in the dark, I open a book again and resume the ritual. It's bad enough as it is, but what's worse is that I can't read just anything. I can't be stupefied by just any prose (because it is always prose) that falls into my lap, so whenever I have to go somewhere, I have to carry a stack of books like others carry a stack of pharmacy boxes. I've done that too, but that was before, now I don't need a pharmacopoeia, instead I take a very large, thick cloth bag full of books. I can assure you, it's heavy. I've never been able to bring myself to cut down, to compile them all into a single object, an iPad, or an e-reader, a portable bookcase.⁴

3. At home, these stacks multiply. Especially the ones devoted to these daytime readings that are almost always fragmentary, chopped, and discontinuous, and thus always uninterrupted. The books are always there and ready for me, and I am potentially, but rather rarely, always ready for them. Sometimes I remove one and replace it when it has fulfilled its function, which was not necessarily to be read. They form the landscape of my interests and they sustain me. Right now, on two coffee tables set up in the living room, one finds (I'm only giving the date of their initial publication): Victor Klemperer, *Language of the Third Reich: LTI, Lingua Tertii Imperii* (1957); Tiphaine Samoyault, *Traduction et violence* (2020); Jérôme Baschet, *Adieux au capitalisme* (2016); Achille Mbembe, *Brutalisme* (2020); Susan Sontag, *Illness as Metaphor and AIDS and Its Metaphors* (2001); Roland Barthes, *The Preparation of the Novel* (2010); and a bilingual edition of Shakespeare's tragedies (*Titus Andronicus, Romeo and Juliet, Julius Caesar, Hamlet, Othello*). That's the first table. On the second: Vinciane Despret, *Au bonheur des morts, récits de ceux qui restent* (2015); Felix Denk and Sven von Thülen, *Der Klang der Familie: Berlin, Techno and the Fall of the Wall* (2014); Romain Huet, *Le vertige de l'émeute* (2019); Franz Kafka, *Diaries (1910–1923)*; James C. Scott, *Against the Grain: A Deep History of the Earliest State* (2018); Nathalie Quintane, *Les années 10* (2014).

4. There is one history of portable libraries that I recommend. You will find it in Enrique Vila-Matas, *A Brief History of Portable Literature* [1985], trans. Anne McLean and Thomas Bunstead (New York: New Directions, 2015).

That's for daytime, when the screens invade us, but not for nighttime, not for sleep. No.

So before any departure, but also before choosing a book, one must project the consistency of the night readings by opening several volumes, testing them during the day, which is sometimes misleading. I have experience, but I still sometimes fail. The dosage is subtle, and moreover it changes slightly with time, with my time and that which surrounds and forms me. I generally know what I reserve for daytime readings: discontinuity and staccato, speed. I don't need excitement to fall asleep; we all know that one last line before going to sleep has never worked. But once you get rid of staccato and discontinuity, you're not much further along. So when I test, it's first a matter of words and wording. It has to be consistent, it has to be resistant, I have to be able to lean on it and keep my balance, not to go through it too quickly or abruptly, not to get caught, but not to be jolted, either. The wording must lead to reverie, and a gradual slide into sleep. I then mentally switch from the standing position to the lying position. There are so many beloved books that I can't read at night. Duras, for example: it's not possible, too staccato. Shakespeare: too much dialogue, too much discontinuity, too much strangeness. No essays of course, the limit is *Tristes Tropiques*, with its consistent sentences. It can't be too much fun either, like Quintane, I love Quintane but I can't fall asleep with it, or with Rabelais or Sterne, either, as I'm sure you can imagine. I can't do it, and it's even worse when the writing fades away to leave more room for storytelling,⁵ when hypnosis tries to hide its tricks,

5. In France, efforts to theorize "storytelling" have given way to a high-flying debate between an apocalyptic Left (Christian Salmon *Storytelling: Bewitching the Modern Mind* [2008], trans. David Macey [London: Verso, 2010]) and a Left of empowerment and hope (Yves Citton, *Mythocratie: Storytelling et imaginaire de gauche* [Paris: La Découverte, 2010]). Sorry to my international readers, but as a typical Good French Intellectual, the only debates that I care to weigh in on are those happening between different branches of what remains of the Left.

or when I'm in front of what feels like a televisual flow: that doesn't work either. And that's it.

Sometimes the consistency is perfect, it's almost miraculous. When I was younger, and I regret that it doesn't happen to me anymore, I used to read a lot of this one French author, super high-class style, Nobel Prize and all, long sentences, present participles in spades, hyper highbrow. I don't even know if people still read him. At that time, not so long ago, he was quite a cult among the young readers that we were. A Nobel effect perhaps, which must have lasted twenty years, if the work of this one author is any example. After that, it goes out of date.⁶ So I read him day and night. By day, I was frantically scribbling notes and remarks;⁷ by night, I'd slip into his work so easily that I'd end up dreaming about it.⁸ It's not a metaphor, those were my actual dreams.

I would dream the next part of it, I would fall asleep until the book fell out of my hands and woke me up and I could, just for a brief moment, compare the prose in the book with what my dream had made of it. It was really miraculous, I think it marked the beginning of something, a miracle or maybe a curse, I don't know, because from then on I understood that nothing distinguishes fiction from life; that nothing in our lives exists that is not filtered by

6. To understand literary temporality, one should read all of Pascale Casanova's works, in particular, "The Literary Greenwich Meridian: Some Thoughts on the Temporal Forms of Literary Belief," *Field Day Review*, no. 4 (2008); or *The World Republic of Letters* [1999], trans. Malcolm DeBevoise (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005). To understand literary spatiality, one should still read all of Pascale Casanova, for example *Kafka, Angry Poet* [2011], trans. Chris Turner (Kolkata: Seagull Books, 2015). And finally, to remember that literary criticism, like other human and social sciences, is a combat sport, one must really, but really, read all of Pascale Casanova. To her, from whom I have learned so much, I dedicate this short text.

7. Especially in *Histoire* or *Les Géorgiques*, which I was writing a master's thesis on. Claude Simon: *Histoire* (Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1967); and *Les Géorgiques* (Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1981).

8. Especially his final books, *Le Jardin des plantes* and *The Trolley*. Claude Simon: *Le Jardin des plantes* (Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1997); and *The Trolley* [2001], trans. Richard Howard (New York: New Press, 2004).

the fictions that surround and produce us. I also felt, without understanding it, and this is surely the most essential, that we communicate through dreams, and that this is what attached us not to the world, but to the multiplicity of worlds.⁹ While everything else kept us away from it. I began to see insomnia as a form of illness for those who could no longer communicate with the multiplicity of worlds other than through fictional machines. You will have noticed, moreover, that a lot of films feature these fictional matrices, these sorts of vortexes, where dreams are connected. Generally it's quite frightening, we often see a hybrid between spongy masses and metals, between light signals and organic heat.¹⁰ Can you see it? Who would really want to be trapped in that?

In any case, if my dream was chasing the book I was reading, then I'm sorry, and you can say what you want, but literature (fiction, dreams, magic, religion, whatever) is not separate from the world and life. That's it, I'm back, as usual: I'm already responding to the criticisms that I haven't been given yet but that I'm so often given and that I'm sure I'll be given again if I end up getting through this. I am always being told: You should be making better use out of what you have. You, who knows your classics, your moderns, your contemporaries, couldn't you use all of that to say something, for once, about the world, about politics, about the current crises, about how we're actually experiencing things or how we should be experiencing them. Instead of rehashing your old mystical, illuminated tales of dreams that communicate. As if we haven't had enough of your old stories. The world around us deserves that you dedicate yourself entirely to its

9. Philippe Descola, *La Composition des mondes: Entretiens avec Pierre Charbonnier* (Paris: Flammarion, 2014).

10. Recent examples of excellent specimens: the third season of the series *Westworld* and the first season of *Devs*. The Wachowskis' *Matrix* trilogy (1999, 2003) has produced a dominant imaginary.

analysis. Don't you have anything better to do with your state-subsidized life?¹¹

Yes, yes I know, I even think I tried at one time or another, but I can't do it, I'm sorry, I can't do it, I don't know how to do it; I tried and believe it or not, when I was dreaming of the sequel to the Nobel Prize books, I was also dreaming of being a philosopher, a philosopher who expresses himself in the public sphere, and who is admired for his ideas, a pop star of thought.¹² Except that the one who I idolized, the one who made me an intellectual worker, always shunned and despised both the spotlight and spontaneous reflection. Although there were still his books, fantastic, so inspiring. The ones written with his schizoanalyst coauthor,¹³ those are what made me, I owe them almost everything, along with cold wave, rave parties, frater-sorority, and love. It's funny, I hadn't understood at the time that the power of those books was formal, not really textual, even if their speed, their inventiveness, were also on the scale of the word and the sentence. They had a power that was more than form, even; it was a power of echo, of repetition, of arrangement and resonance, and I didn't understand, until recently, that that is the only thing I have inherited from them (certainly not the power, but, more modestly, the manner), that this is the

11. Dear international reader, in case you come from the worldwide academic market, you might be interested to know that a university professor in France is paid by the state, and is theoretically a civil servant for life. Of course, there has been talk of putting an end to a system that is not very conducive to the liberalization of the academic market. As I write these lines, in the summer of 2020, while gatherings of more than ten people are forbidden and everyone is on vacation, the government is forcing the passage of a law for the "modernization" of higher education and research that is supposed to put an end to this French anomaly. Before the lockdown, the university community as a whole was marching in protest of this bill.

12. Of course, I didn't know it at the time, but I was dreaming of becoming a Judith Butler, Achille Mbembe, Paul B. Preciado, or Donna Haraway.

13. Deleuzo-Guattarianism, or maybe we should call it Guattaro-Deleuzianism, has been deployed in four essential books. Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari: *L'Anti-Édipe: Capitalisme et schizophrénie 1* (Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1972); *Kafka, pour une littérature mineure* (Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1975); *Mille plateaux: Capitalisme et schizophrénie 2* (Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1980); *Qu'est-ce que la philosophie?* (Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1991).

thing I can claim. In what we perceive, some things repeat themselves, while others are different.¹⁴ Making this record, putting it to music, is finally what I have dedicated my life to so far.

Recently, as we were stuck together, and the talkative people had little choice but to multiply their hysterical speeches until it got to be deafening, on the networks reappeared, as sometimes happens, a bit of a video of the philosopher — of course, I've been talking about Gilles Deleuze. He was talking about art and resistance, talking about cinema and ideas, talking about control societies, talking about the difference between creation and communication, talking about information as a transmission of slogans,¹⁵ it really was so powerful, deep, and illuminating about what was happening that it crushed all the other talk, all of the biggest and most futile chatter in the history of humankind.¹⁶ But above all, the speech was carried by this voice, a voice that was already fragile and yet strong and supremely free, free especially of the notes that his eyes almost never refer to. Even speaking without notes he resists playing the star, giving a show. As a result, I watched the *Abécédaire* again.¹⁷ This is so much what we intellectual workers should have taken as an example. Instead, it is almost the opposite that has happened: institutionalization, power, personal branding. You get it.

14. Gilles Deleuze, *Différence et répétition* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1968).

15. Go here, it will make you feel better: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2OyuMJMrCRw&t=1826>.

16. And this is coming from me, who has elsewhere taken a very positive view of what I named the contemporary "brouhaha," and the contemporary as brouhaha. Yet here I was dreaming of silence. Lionel Ruffel, *Brouhaha: Worlds of the Contemporary* [2016], trans. Raymond McKenzie (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2018).

17. *L'Abécédaire de Gilles Deleuze* is a film produced by Pierre-André Boutang, composed of interviews between Deleuze and his former student Claire Parnet. I discovered that you can access it without leaving your home, via a channel that even seems legal. Just follow this link: <https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLiR8NqajHNPbaX2rBoA2z6IPGpU0IPIS2>.

Scarlett and Adam

So I told you, I tried and I can't do it. And if I can't do it, it's probably because I don't believe in it. Now, it's too bad, I'm too old, I'm not going to try anymore, I'm hopeless. I must be one of the last romantics, seeing echoes and correspondances,¹⁸ it's the only explanation I can see. And I believe in it, so I'm holding on, I'm digging, even if I'm getting farther and farther away, I'm digging, I'm digging and I believe more and more. It's like the gold rush: a prospector gradually moves away from the group and finds himself completely isolated, and from Robinsonade to Robinsonade he eventually finds that he's not so badly off, he realizes that it wasn't gold he was looking for but something more elusive, which doesn't really have a name, like a wave that undulates, like "the clouds—the clouds that pass—yonder—the wonderful clouds."¹⁹ So I dig and, even though it's my own grave that I'm digging, I believe in it more and more.

For example, with this story of day and night readings, and subsequently that of sleep, believe it or not, I have the impression that I have never thought about a subject that's as philosophical, as political, or as contemporary.²⁰ Because we all sleep, don't we? It doesn't matter whether you fall asleep at the snap of a finger or with fear in your stomach. Or whether you fall asleep overcome by anguish, or happy

18. Charles Baudelaire, "Correspondances," in *Les Fleurs du mal* (Paris: Auguste Poulet-Malassis, 1857).

19. Charles Baudelaire, "L'étranger," in *Le Spleen de Paris* (1869), accessed September 30, 2020, <https://fr.wikisource.org/wiki/L'Étranger>.

20. For the section that follows, and for many other things, I acknowledge my great debt to Bernard Stiegler. Especially for the development and deployment of the pharmakon concept that he takes up from Derrida who himself was reading Plato. The pharmakon is a remedy, a poison, and a scapegoat; every technique and therefore every medium is a pharmakon. It is difficult to refer to a single book in such an abundant bibliography whose books, moreover, are constantly revisiting, enriching and responding to one another. For those who have never read this work, a good introduction to the pharmakon can be found in Bernard Stiegler, *What Makes Life Worth Living: On Pharmacology* [2010], trans. Daniel Ross (Cambridge: Polity, 2013). In the summer of 2020, we learned of his passing. So I dedicate this text to him as well.

as a baby, or hypnotized by letters, images, or sounds. Of course, in the absolute it does matter, but not for what I am talking about now.

So let's start from here: we all fall asleep at one time or another. Sleep connects worlds, animal and plant species, it connects times and eras. It also distinguishes them, because we don't all fall asleep in the same way, and there are certainly one or several contemporary conditions of falling asleep. Depending on places and times, we fall asleep differently and sleep takes on different implications.²¹ So find me anything that's more philosophical or more political, that's more essential, in a sense. Of course, there are reproduction and food, but I wouldn't know what to say about those, whereas sleep, for better or for worse, is my specialty. As a literary theorist and as an insomniac, the two being neither totally interchangeable, nor totally distinct.²²

But I can see very well that a literary theorist who talks about sleep is not the sexiest thing in the world. If you're a cinephile that veers towards recent releases, then when you put sleep and reading in the same sentence, you start drifting, and you find yourself in a bedroom in Brooklyn. At the back of the room, there's a bed. Then on either side of that bed are the bodies of Adam Driver and Scarlett Johansson, both absorbed by the book they're holding in their hands, and even though they're both super sexy, frankly, it's not really a dream to read in bed if it's going to separate couples, pushing them to prefer the isolation of reading to the warmth

21. If only there were a Foucauldian history of sleep.

22. Pierre Pachet, *La Force de dormir* (Paris: Gallimard, 1988). My apologies to you, international reader, for all of my obscure French references. If you find equivalents in any language or lingua franca, do not hesitate to send them to me at lionel.ruffel@univ-paris8.fr. Thank you. That way you can do as Geoff and Jacob did who, once they received my letter, directed me to Matthew Fuller's remarkable book, *How to Sleep: The Art, Biology and Culture of Unconsciousness* (London: Bloomsbury, 2018). Luckily they didn't make me read it before, I think if they had, I would never have written my tortuous fantasy. And if in the previous note I wrote that a Foucauldian history of sleep was missing, now that I've read Fuller's book, I don't think so. And—surprise, surprise—this contemporary investigation of sleep is neither a history nor Foucauldian. But it is exciting, you have to read it!

of embracing bodies.²³ And if you're more of a classic movie buff, you know that this will all be screened in Paris, with Antoine Doinel and Christine, who produced the original scene that was the cover image for the 1970 film *Bed and Board*.²⁴

And it's true that in these scenes, that's all we see: the isolation of unembodied bodies that read, incapable of tasting the pleasures of the flesh, hellishly conventional, I mean, petty bourgeois. Think, instead, of all the hot scenes that take place in beds, with naked and muscular bodies panting, twirling, filled with intensity, enjoying without restraint. Think of all the crime scenes that take place in bedrooms, where drug dealers exchange their merchandise for money with big shots and suddenly, *pam! pam!* it goes wrong and it's a massacre. Think of all the scenes of espionage, voyeuristic or ultra-technological, think of the scenes in hotel rooms, which open up all kinds of fantasies, think of all those conspiracies that are born in bedrooms, against all that, frankly, Scarlett and Adam in their pajamas and their bourgeois comfort doesn't make you dream.

And yet these scenes exist, they are many, I would even say that there are more of these reading-in-bed scenes than there are of the scenes where we fall asleep in front of the TV, slumped in a sofa. I've always found the scenes of falling asleep in front of the TV very interesting, especially the choice of show that the character's watching. As an aside, if I had to do it all over again, I would devote my scholarly life to studying the movies shown in the movies, it must be super relaxing. So these scenes of couples reading in bed, if they exist to the extent that we could devote several doctoral theses to them, then they must tell us something. In the beginning we are distracted, we see objects, clothes, decoration, bodies that are nonathletic and constrained by reading, which arouses quite a bit of contempt. We also see

23. *Marriage Story*, a film by Noah Baumbach, 2019, streaming on Netflix.

24. François Truffaut, *Domicile conjugal*, a film from 1970.

what looks like a lack of communication, at least if we define communication as talking or hugging. While these scenes might be similar to those of reproduction or eating, it is in them and only them that we see testimonies of what might be the most essential to us: falling asleep, and doing so by relying on an artifact, here a book, but it could be something else, a screen for example, so that the fear stops and the reverie begins.²⁵

A Night Hunt

But back to the point. I told you that when I was younger there was that miracle that made me dream about the books I used to read. Unfortunately, that miracle is no longer happening. It's like the first high, you always chase after it, but you know it's never coming back. Now I understand, I don't look for intensity so much,²⁶ on the contrary, I run away from it, I keep it for the daytime readings, the ones that keep me awake. The thickness of the wording, the consistency, that's what I am looking for, that's what reassures me. The subject, the period, the style itself doesn't matter, only this thickness, this consistency that resists me without stopping and that welcomes and envelops me. You have to get to know and meet what the prince of modern poets used to call, always a little ironically, well, you never know if it is ironic or not, but still, he talked about the "lyrical movements of the soul," the "undulations of reverie," the "sudden jolts of consciousness."²⁷ And I have the impression that reading at night, before going to sleep, this neurotic and modern ritual of

25. We could call these artifacts screens. Like their ancestors, the screens that stood in front of chimneys, they filter out the excessive heat that otherwise consumes us.

26. Tristan Garcia, *The Life Intense: A Modern Obsession*, trans. Abigail RayAlexander, Christopher RayAlexander, and Jon Cogburn (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2018).

27. Charles Baudelaire, "Lettre à Arsène Houssaye" (December 20, 1861), accessed September 30, 2020, [https://fr.wikisource.org/wiki/À_Arsène_Houssaye_\(Baudelaire\)](https://fr.wikisource.org/wiki/À_Arsène_Houssaye_(Baudelaire)).

the Western petty bourgeois is one of those privileged fields that should not be neglected. And all the more so, since it connects us—especially those of us who like me, or I should say, in spite of myself, are just as neurotic, modern, petty bourgeois—to other rituals that are neither modern, nor neurotic, nor bourgeois, nor Western. Since these connecting devices are not so many, we shouldn't neglect this field; on the contrary, we should try to explore it.

So I'm exploring it. I realized that I could not, or could no longer, as my mind was occupied with the affairs of the world, make the end of a book coincide with falling asleep. If I have less than thirty pages left, I prefer to postpone reading it until the next day, and then I will do it during the day, which changes a lot. For a few years now, the end of books have been ruined, because often, during the day, I am in a hurry, I am caught up in social and work time, media time as well, not in this time, which is also social, of course, but nevertheless more attentive to the "lyrical movements of the soul," the "undulations of reverie," the "sudden jolts of consciousness" that sleep forms: a more primordial time, so to speak, that struggles against the first one, against the social time, work time, media time, without ever totally defeating it, at least in my case.

So that's what happened to me again. I was heading towards the end of this big novel that I said I'd been reading for several years when I realized that I might finish it before I fell asleep. It gets worse. Feeling the end coming, and doing more than feeling it, because an object like a book has the peculiarity that you literally see the end of it, the sudden jolt to consciousness took precedence over the undulations of reverie, relegated to the background, as if automatically put on hold, and the sudden jolts jolted forward, *hop hop!* are we there yet? is it soon? how much further? how many

more pages? what's going to happen?²⁸ and a different kind of attention was put in place, a regime of alert,²⁹ which is fundamentally that of awakening.

But it is also that of danger or hunting, of predation. Of the proximity to a death that is coming, a violent death, one that doesn't leave you in peace. For the death that is announced, the nonviolent death, sometimes engenders the undulations of reverie.³⁰ I remember seeing an old animal die, and having tried, because I loved him deeply, to feel as close as possible to what he was experiencing, to share it. He no longer had those sudden jolts that so often disturbed him, he slept calmly. A veterinarian told me that he was nevertheless devoured by the disease, and probably overwhelmed by the pain. Sleep helped him to fight fear.

If I have to finish a book, I'm either hunter or prey, my stomach gurgles metaphorically, *crave*,³¹ I'm hyper-conscious, I can't fall asleep. I run after sentences and sentences run after me, *crave*, I have a tendency of compelling the continuation without having read it, of sensing it without discovering it. And that's not possible, the reverie fades before consciousness. And then, there is something else: this excitement that doesn't offer any peace forces me to open another book, and then it is the excitement of a new

28. I was thinking that these jolts have something to do with the invasion of the present by the future, which happens through prediction and preemption. Some have named this invasion as the new and essential characteristic of the contemporary. See Armen Avanessian and Suhail Malik, eds., *The Time Complex: Post-contemporary* (Miami, FL: [NAME], 2016).

29. Dominique Boullier, "Les industries de l'attention: Fidélisation, alerte ou immersion," *Réseaux*, no. 154 (2009/2): 231–246.

30. And it does this for those who rest, as well as for those who pass. For more on this, see Vinciane Despret, *Au bonheur des morts: Récits de ceux qui restent* (Paris: La Découverte, 2015).

31. This word comes to me in English in the middle of what was written as a French text because of, or rather thanks to, the musician Léonie Pernet, who made it the title of one of her albums. I really like the mixes she produces from political and social news. See <https://soundcloud.com/leonie-pernet>.

beginning that seizes my nervous system.³² It can work when you have planned it, when you've scheduled in the day to start a book at night, but you never know if the wording will work for your undulations, so it's risky, if you're in full jolt you have the double risk of the end, then the beginning. If we want to undulate, if we want to move lyrically in order to fall asleep, we must always read in the middle, never leave the middle of the fictional matrix. This is another lesson from the wonderful Scheherazade that I like to talk about so often.³³ Faced with her predator, this hungry tiger that only thinks of devouring his prey and getting it over with, she offers him the infinity of the narrative read aloud. There will be many endings, but the end never coincides with the dawn that the king's deranged mind has instituted as the moment of sleep, satiated by sex, revenge, and violence. She makes reading something other than a hunt, she hypnotizes, she undulates the reverie that soothes and puts you to sleep. About myself, about my own life, I learn every day from Scheherazade. And even if I don't put anyone at mortal risk, I sometimes wish she were there by my side, to curl me up in the middle of the hypnotic womb, where dreams communicate. Then I'd fall asleep.

A Dark Prince

But now I've talked about the prince, so his music keeps running through my head, and I couldn't find peace without playing it. It won't last all night, but like an old hit heard on the radio in the morning,³⁴ that's all I can hear now. It's not even off-topic, I can allow myself this discrepancy, because

32. On this subject, I really should take the time to re-read Jean-Marie Schaeffer, *Why Fiction?* [1999], trans. Dorrit Cohn (Lincoln: Nebraska University Press, 2010).

33. Notably in Lionel Ruffel, *Trompe-la-mort* (Paris: Verdier, 2019).

34. Peter Szendy, *Hits: Philosophy in the Jukebox* [2008], trans. Will Bishop (New York: Fordham University Press, 2012).

when he evoked the sudden jolts, the movements, the undulations, he understood that the world, at least the world he knew and described, the modern and capitalist world, had finished with sleep, that it had become insomniac, in a state of permanent wakefulness, of hunting and predation. Of course, we're still sleeping, but as I've read elsewhere,³⁵ sleep has been overtaken and it's already lost. We no longer sleep what an earlier version of this dark prince imagined to be "the sleep of the beasts."³⁶ His *Flowers of Evil* made him famous, but he knows that this monument was the last of a bygone era, that the correspondences were for before, when we still, even if less and less, communicated through dreams. So he changes; not everything, but he changes radically to favor wakefulness over sleep.

He wrote a very brief text, which reads as luminous, dazzling even, now that we no longer know how to sleep. Whether it could be read as all that or not when we were entering the insomniac pandemic, I don't know. It is addressed to a man whom he calls "my dear friend," although it is hard to see what kind of friendship could unite the dark prince who has dedicated his life to the spending of life,³⁷ and the cultural entrepreneur who has dedicated his to the accumulation of wealth through the press, literature, theater, culture, and real estate projects, all of which are almost interchangeable.³⁸ But this "friend" runs *La Presse*, a major daily newspaper where the prince would like to place his new project, prose poems. So go for "friend," and even "dear friend," especially when talking to someone who weighs so much financially.

35. Jonathan Crary, *24/7: Late Capitalism and the Ends of Sleep* (London: Verso, 2013). Along with the works of Bernard Stiegler, it is this book by Jonathan Crary that has had the greatest influence on this text.

36. Gérard de Nerval, "Le Christ aux oliviers," in *Les Chimères* (Paris: Michel Lévy Frères, 1856), 295–297.

37. Georges Bataille, *La Notion de dépense* (Paris: Lignes, 2011).

38. This interchangeability is evident in another work by Jonathan Crary, *Suspensions of Perception: Attention, Spectacle, and Modern Culture* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2000).