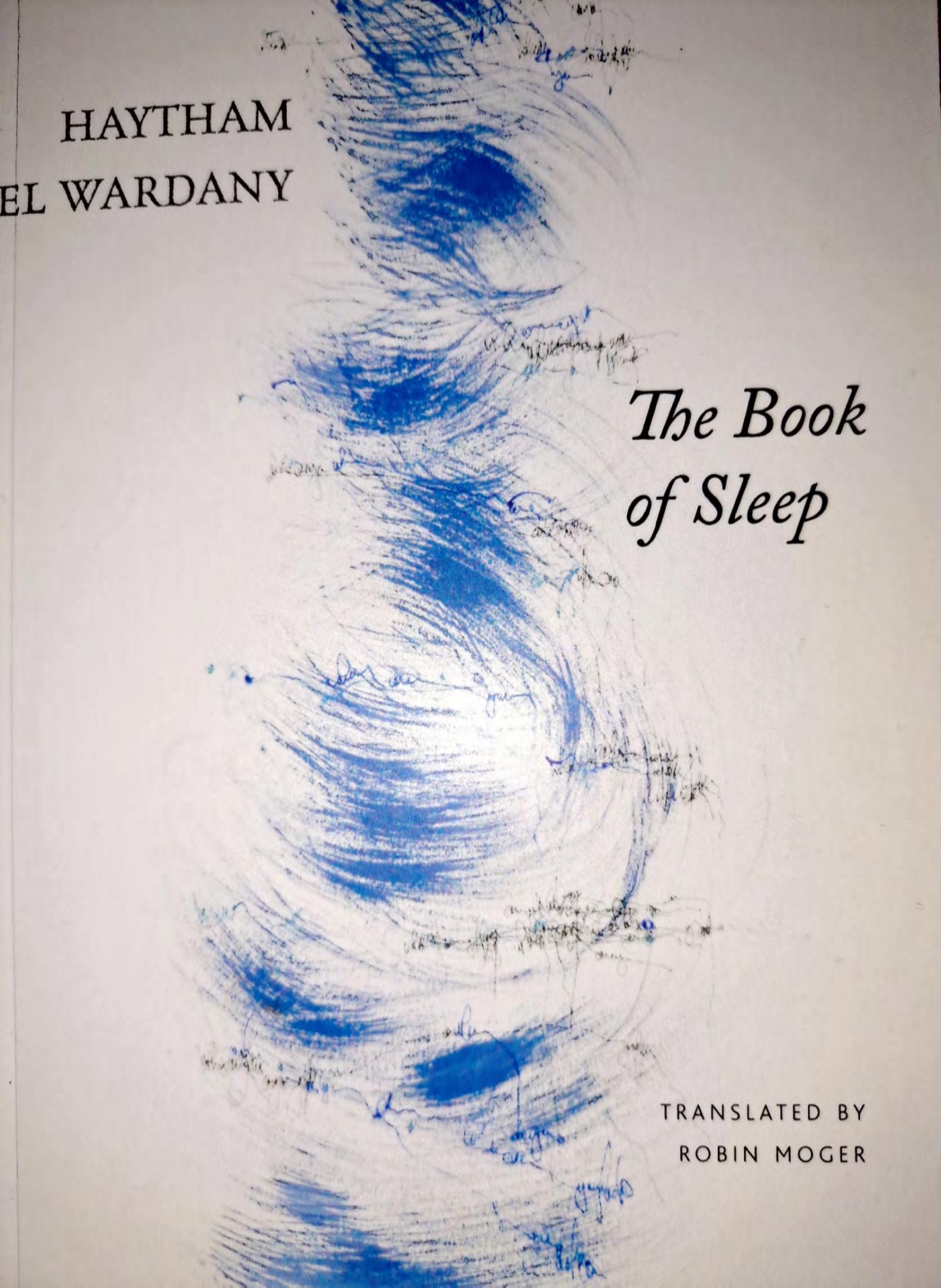
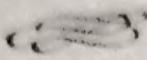


HAYTHAM
EL WARDANY



*The Book
of Sleep*

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INTRODUCTION

The sleeper's heartbeat can be timed and brainwaves plotted. Sleep can be reframed, portrayed as a psychological stage on which the tragedy of Oedipus plays out night after night. Scientific experiments might dissect phenomenal sleep and theories pick through it but sleep itself stays out of reach. It inhabits a distant, darkened corner. It participates in reality from afar, with no desire to come closer. Those who are closer cannot understand what this means, that reality can be participated in from afar. They see it as no more than stark contradiction and work incessantly to keep sleep present in their waking, which is when they look at it, brushing aside the right it reasserts each night to be present in absence. Sleep requires this work, then, because only work makes the effort to reach out and touch sleep's faint trace without trying to make it present or to convert it into an object of inquiry. Work does not seek to quantify sleep or dissect it; it wants to go to it, to visit it in the distant place where it is found. And just as sleep hands itself to work, so work gives itself to sleep, each proceeding towards the other like head meeting pillow. Because work needs sleep. Initially, work appears on the horizon as a distant possibility. The writer bends its way,

trying to reach it and make it real. It becomes more unattainable. The writer persists, striving to bring it into the light. It recedes further. The tighter the grip of the force which seeks to shape it, the more impossible work becomes, and so the writer perseveres, unpicking the problems that confront him until weariness fells him and he is overcome by sleep—and at last, the potentiality of work is renewed. Only when the writer surrenders himself to sleep and the force which grips work is broken does work become possible once again. Before, work was only an image of that force; now it can return to itself. Work does not want to be made, it wants to happen, and in order to happen it must find a space for itself on the margins of the force that shaped it. Work seeks sleep because sleep is open to contradiction, to de-partition, and it can be at once present and absent, manifest and hidden, at the centre and on the fringe. Sleep and work need one another. The first wants something which it can approach without waking it, the second wants something which can forget it, and make it possible once again.

The Reassured

Sometimes, the social space ceases to be an arena for negotiation and conflict, a forum for exchange and dialogue, and another, hidden aspect of the social experience emerges. Shared silence. Sleep on public transport and in public squares, in lecture halls or at work, is a twofold rejection of the social act because it takes place, not in our private bedrooms, but at the very heart of traditional sites of social interaction. The sleeper at work steps away from their work; the sleeper on public transport stops watching the roadside advertisements; the sleeper in the public square abstains from engagement. Sleep taps the public sphere with its wand and transforms it from a place of mediation and competition into one of silence and absence. Silence and absence are no longer a private matter but a collective act. Yet in its social dereliction, sleep does not make the public sphere into a place of detachment and indifference but one—how strange!—of confidence and reassurance. At the very heart of the social disruption which sleep effects, can be discerned a renewed faith in the other. One without any identifiable cause. The sleeper in public places does not bargain or compete with the other, he does not form alliances or engage. He places

himself in his hands. Lays bare before him his weakness, his insignificance, his ineffectuality. Sleep in public, then, is a declaration of faith in the other, and the other in question, the other next to whom the sleeper sleeps with such assurance, is not one person but a whole community of the unknown: strangers who are there by chance; a community whose members the sleeper has no desire to know. Reassured by their collective presence, he allows himself to become, like them, a stranger.

The Delicacy of Radicalism

Bodies which travel through public places are bodies on alert; a measure of tension flows through them, allowing them to engage with their surroundings and take appropriate action. Radical acts in the public space require bodies which are tenser still, still more primed to confront dangers that may cross their path, for these are bodies which have entered into open conflict with authority, with the aim of reshaping the space. Among all the many kinds of radical act, occupation is uniquely, profoundly complex. On the one hand, it is the most extreme expression of the protest movement and its moment of greatest peril because it takes the initiative, fashioning a new reality by taking over the public space. On the other hand, it can only be fully realized by a second act of extreme, almost antithetical, vulnerability, which is the act of sleeping in the site of occupation. Sleeping while occupying is the true heart of occupation, the essence which all are seeking, and any occupation where the occupiers do not bed down in their place of protest cannot be relied on. This is why there is permanent conflict around attempts to prevent the occupiers going to sleep, because it is when they manage this that the protest becomes an occupation with

political consequences. The radical act of occupation, with the clear risk it carries, is truly radical only when it sets itself aside and in its place advances apathy, an act that critiques the very principle of action. This is sleep. It is in this apathy, and nowhere else, that the power to merge public and private resides—to make the public private and the private public—and so achieve the purpose of the occupation. The radical body, tense and primed, sprawls and unwinds. Abandoning its defences, it exposes its weakness and vulnerability, and as these two qualities replicate and accumulate across the group, as weariness and pain associate and bare themselves before the eyes of all, sleep is transformed into a source of strength and a means for change. The sleepers in an open-ended occupation are no longer individuals in a battle but, lying together side by side, they become instead the brokers of a new reality, their dreams the language of this reality whose code they seek to crack.

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Waste

History does not wait for the sleepers to wake. It is written by the waking, and only them. After all, what in all the hours of sleep is so worth recording that the history books should take it into account? Surplus hours, useless and unproductive. But these hours do not wither and fade as a surplus should. Night on night their numbers swell, become a great host. Yet a host quite unlike any other, because no matter how numerous, these hours never acquire any mass worth mentioning, nor presence. They are forever hovering in the background: ineffectual, ignored, a neglected excess that everyone knows about and no one speaks of. The years pass and sleep endures, a fine dust strewn over the pages of history, perhaps clumping here in the form of a dream, or as a vision there, but otherwise kept outside the lines, a soul which haunts everything which has not been written. In the face of this neglect, sleep offers a response: repetition. Like all essentially real things, sleep knocks the ball back night after night, creating from repetition a law. Every evening it returns to us with all its passivity and insignificance and failure, and restates its insistence on unending futility, reaffirms its affiliation with all the griefs of the past.

Expelled from history, sleep neither advances nor retreats, it does not produce and it does not accumulate, and yet, despite this, it is the line beyond which progress's arrow cannot pass. What can man-in-history possibly do, confronted by this daily waste? What can he do with all these hours of sleep? Can he cut them down? Forget them the moment he wakes? Press them down, one on top of the other, into a flaky pastry he then eats? Wander through them like autumn leaves? Abandon himself to them? What can he do?

Zero Point

Does sleep precede waking or does it follow? Is waking born from sleep or does it die there? Is sleep the condition for waking or vice versa? The question of primacy seeks an origin for what follows it, a zero point from which all things begin. But what if there was no such point? What if sleep and wakefulness were not a pair of states which pass in succession through us, one springing from the other, but two intertwined bodily experiences? One experience in other words, in which the self is barricaded into the body and the body is one object among many others in the world. And then another, in which the body hides no self inside it but maintains instead a permanent openness through which it becomes one with the world. In this picture, sleeping and waking are not associated through alternation, nor do they take place separately: they pulse simultaneously through a single body, a body formed of continuous and interpenetrating experiences which will never reach a conclusion as long as the body remains alive. Experiences the body never stops entering into and never knows where in this world they will lead.

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Who Is the Sleeper?

A limb severed from the whole? A single self? A small group at rest? Those who are awake never stop belonging to a social body, even when spatial or temporal absence separates them from the body's other limbs. The traveller, for instance, remains part of the group he left behind, no matter how long or far his journey takes him. And the same with the sleeper who, despite his absence in sleep, also never stops being part of the social body. The difference between the waking and the sleeper is that the former tends to preserve his social body and reaffirm its boundaries, while the latter moves to blur the body, to muddy its purity by opening it to others. The absent individual is not a hole in an ordered social body but rather a line along whose length the whole body moves, propelled by its connections with strange bodies towards inarticulacy. And the sleeper's dreams are the moment of this propulsion, in which one body is opened to others—they are inarticulate babblings, at once personal, social and political; they are the collision of multiple desires, of clashing streams that run in all directions. Each sleeper is an inarticulate social body, a city broken free of its map, its districts and streets run together, fit not for habitation but perpetual displacement.

Who Is the Sleeper?

A limb severed from the whole? A single self? A small group at rest? If sleep is the clearest manifestation of individual agency—an act that admits of no outside participation in its performance—then the essence of sleep, without which it must remain incomplete, is the self discarding its self. Which is to say that in its most organic act, the act closest to its own will, the self does not turn in on itself but voluntarily casts off its agency, as though it may only attain itself by leaving its self. Maybe this is why we need sleep, in order to apprehend that our selves are a small group of which the self is just a part. Here, within the state of sleep, we understand just how impoverished this question is, of whether the sleeper is an individual apart or part of a collective: it is the question of a waking state which looks out at the world from the cave of the self. What the state of sleep proposes is that there is no individual as distinct from a group, and no group made up of individuals. There are only groups. There are big groups and little groups, human groups regulated by authority, groups which humans share with the dead, and trees. Through the act of sleep, which brings the self out of itself, the sleeper becomes a small, permanently open

community, a group without a fixed centre. And here, even if it never ends up joining the ranks of a larger group, the individual is no abstract mathematical coordinate but a single group astir, in a state of action.

Who Is the Sleeper?

A limb severed from the whole? A single self? A small group at rest? At the heart of every group is a wound which will not heal, its pain renewed each time some part of it falls away. Yet always the group will take the side of what remains visible, will privilege the living over the dead and place its hope in the future: the hope that the wound will heal with time. The group sees in itself a history of renewal and development, averting its gaze from a parallel history of loss and disconnection. But sleep does not look away; it turns to face this parallel history head on and, impelled by the catastrophe of loss, is drawn to what is visible no longer. The eye of the sleeper is fixed on the departed; all he sees of the community to which he belongs is the absent part, the cracks and breaks which spread and widen day after day. The group to which the sleeper belongs is a lost group, marching towards the open wound. It is not cohesion that holds them together, nor looking forward, but a weakness, a looking backward. Sleep does not seek to bring ease to this wound buried in the heart of every group. It wants only to approach it.

I was given the job of following up reports that Bashar Al Assad was stepping down. The news came out of the blue, late one night before my shift was over, and my boss called me up from home and told me to get on it. But I had used a new format for the coverage. He explained what the format was to be: small boxes laid out in columns like the obituary page, and in each box I should place a new picture and write the next section of text. New names for each. He told me that the initial boxes should contain (naturally) the names of ministers, followed by editors (his name among them, naturally) and then the rest, and he asked me produce a draft layout of the text with the names and pictures that were to accompany it. An hour at the most, I said, then sat in my office, watching images of Assad's departure on TV, the same way I'd watched the recent departures of all the other presidents. Assad was wearing a black overcoat, standing on a flight of steps leading up a plane, and you could hardly make him out in the darkness, broken by the occasional flash. I was thinking hard about the text I had to write, about the order of the names which were to accompany the report, about which pictures would go in which box. Maybe I should just take

some of the standard formats we used for events like this and divide the sections between the boxes: 'It is with great happiness and hope that we bring you this long-awaited news; news that will set your minds at ease and restore your faith in a brighter future, brought to you by [the names of the ministers and editors].' Then I noticed that the phone at my elbow was ringing. It was the editor, asking how things were going. Stammering, I said that I was hard at work and the layout was nearly done. As I replaced the receiver, I remembered the news formats that our former editor had trained us to use when this sequence of abdications had first begun and which we'd dropped when the new editor had replaced him. I looked at the screen and saw footage from the intense fighting currently taking place in a neighbourhood of Aleppo, followed by close-ups of Assad's face. He looked tired and confused. It suddenly occurred to me that I had never seen the new editor's face, that the only thing I knew about him was his voice, heard at a distance. And instead of getting to work on the text I'd been asked to write, I started contemplating this new format I had to work with and asking myself if the arrival of new formats and layouts coincided with the arrival of new editors—or was it with the departure of old presidents? Or perhaps the succession of formats was part of the natural order of things? Then the phone rang again. I heard the ring clearly, filling every inch of the air.

Underground

The dividing line between sleep and waking is the inner border of the state. There, power is disrupted and laws dissolve. In sleep, we are no longer law-abiding citizens but members of a clandestine society, a group that maintains an outer semblance of citizenship while within it flees underground. How alike the community we join in sleep is to sleeper cells. Sleeper cells have perceived the fraudulence and impossibility of citizenship and turned it into a facade behind which they can work against the state: cover beneath which they might pass through surveillance systems without arousing suspicion. And so with the sleeper, forever concealing himself in the folds of the state's body, fleeing watchful eyes to where they cannot find him. But the correspondence between sleeper and sleeper cell quickly falls away when it comes to their objectives. When the sleeper cell awakes—as it must, no matter how long it sleeps—the bomb which it has planted at some critical juncture of the state is detonated and its mission is complete. But the sleeper's war with the state abides. It cannot be settled by a fatal blow because it is not motivated by the transfer of power. The sleeper does

not seek to substitute one state for another, he only seeks the blind spots in its body, those holes which have forever slipped out of its control.

A Mixture

To which category does sleep belong? To what really happens, or to what is made to happen? To the world of realities or the world of fiction? If the world of reality addresses questions raised by the present moment in order to formulate a narrative of reality, then this is not a world to which sleep belongs. Sleep protects itself from the present through absence and addresses questions through forgetting. And if the world of fiction works to create alternative realities, to author a hypothetical narrative, then this is not sleep's world either because sleep is incapable of generating any reality, let alone preserving it. Sleep's overextension, its flaccidity, means that what it grasps slips away and makes it impossible to extend the lines of any narrative to their full length. It is the site of narrative interruption and belongs not to the worlds of truth or fiction but to another category altogether: to that of poetry. Poetry is alternative fact, reality in fantasy; realistic narratives become conjectural and hypotheticals are made real. Like the sleeper, poetry is a wanderer between the worlds. It belongs to none. One world passes into the other and, in the course of this interpenetration, the poetic is given off like vapour. Hidden in the folds of the

days, permeating destinies and their embodiments, poetry is released by this entanglement of the true and the fictionalized. Or maybe poetry is the very stuff of history's becoming: the sustained reworking of narratives of truth until they become altered; the never-ending detonation of hypothetical narratives inside reality. Poetry, like history, is the constant mixing of these two categories: the real and the hypothetical.

Starless

Unconsciousness is sleep's corruption, occurring when sleep has failed to free itself both from the binaries of its surroundings and from its assigned function; a brief dousing of consciousness. Industrial capitalism reduced sleep to a function, its task to grant the faltering consciousness a measure of relief. It regulated it as a shift, eight hours long and followed by the shift at the factory. But high capitalism, which no longer produced anything at all, came to regard sleep as a black hole. Sleep was a short swoon, a begrudging hiatus in the flow of uninterrupted communication which had to be quickly shaken off and a rapid return made to a state of contact. And as the attention economy replaces the production economy, consciousness becomes neurotic, turning endlessly about itself and fired by a promise forever unhonoured. How can such a consciousness sleep? It is constantly afraid that it might miss something, that the promise will be honoured in its absence. All it can do is remain alert until it drops into unconsciousness. Capitalism's night grows shorter and shorter until it almost vanishes altogether, and in it sleep is one long coma dispensed in doses.