

Consumer society and the 24/7 universe

Sociedade de consumo e o universo 24/7

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CRARY, Jonathan.

24/7: Late Capitalism and the ends of sleep.

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ABSTRACT

In the book *24/7: Late capitalism and the ends of sleep*, Jonathan Crary presents several examples to discuss the interferences of the capitalism and technological development on the humankind. The intense relationship with gadgets, the submission to the labor logic and the speed of productivity, as well as the man's devotion to material consumption are highlighted by the author as collateral effects of the neoliberal globalization. The 24/7 universe defended by Crary surrounds our lives and binds us to a restless reality.

Keywords: Capitalism, consumer society, 24/7 universe

RESUMO

Em *24/7: Capitalismo tardio e os fins do sono*, Jonathan Crary ilustra em diversas situações as interferências do capitalismo e dos avanços tecnológicos sobre a humanidade. As intensas relações com os dispositivos eletrônicos, a submissão ao trabalho e ao ritmo produtivo acelerado, bem como a devoção ao consumo material são apontadas pelo autor como efeitos colaterais da globalização neoliberal. O universo 24/7, defende Crary, cerca nossas vidas e nos aprisiona em uma realidade sem descanso.

Palavras-chave: Capitalismo, sociedade de consumo, universo 24/7

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ACCORDING TO JONATHAN CRARY (2014: 24), “within the globalist neoliberal paradigm, sleeping is for losers”. From this excerpt, one can visualize the book’s scope: economy and globalization guide the debate about production logics and consumption practices, as well as about their consequences to humans and the environment.

Professor and Arts Critic, Crary teaches at Columbia University, in New York, since 1989. He has become known for his books *Observer Techniques: vision and modernity in the XIX century* (1990; published in Brazil in 2012) and *Perception Suspensions: attention, spectacle and modern culture* (2000; Brazilian Edition in 2013). His production mostly focuses on themes related to contemporary art, observing, mainly, the action of the human eye in various levels. The author published, in 2013, *24/7 – Late Capitalism and the ends of sleep*, which was translated into Portuguese the following year.

In this book, the author talks about the various situations where the history of mankind has given in to transformations that arose from the capitalist, technological universe. Realistic and concerned, the author pinpoints sleep as the last stance that limits us from a consumption, work and socialization routine. According to his thesis, we are surrounded by a 24/7 universe: a life where production is continuous and the market is, mostly due to technologies, available for exchanges without pauses or rests.

Organized in four chapters, the book presents, in the first, situations that describe how society has, with time and the advances of scientific research, found ways of promoting long work and physical effort journeys. Projects with war soldiers, for example, trained combatants to stay in action for days without any sleep. In the capitalist routine 24/7, medicine against sleep and other strategies to accelerate body activity have brought to the forefront the adoption of this lifestyle, that has, as its underlying principle, continuous functioning.

Crory points out that the 24/7 environment can have costly consequences for individuals and the planet. The transformation of cities in veritable shopping centers and the demands for machine-like performances ignores the frailty of our human condition. Besides promoting ecological catastrophes, the consumption of products, services, images and news overloads mind and body. To the 24/7 logics, “sleep is an interruption, without any concessions, on the capitalism robbery of our time” (Ibid.:20). We may mercantilize our needs, desires and friendship relationships. Sleep, however, remains incongruously – non-colonized.

In the second chapter, we get to understand how the 24/7 life rhythm may be oppressive. With an unlimited activity offer, the experience of 24/7 in our social or personal time can be oppressive. With an unlimited offer of activities, our social or personal time may be depleted by innumerable solicitations.

Our visibility is weakened and homogenized in face of accelerated, and redundant, information flows. We suffer from the reduction of mental abilities and often forget facts that overlap our intense mediatic agenda. Contents and products are subjected to the logics of programmed obsolescence. In the quest for amelioration, or for substitution, we have transformed our consumption habits in the face of novelty simulations.

Mostly with the consumption of technological equipment, such as tablets and smartphones, the short time of usage of each model eliminates familiarity with the device, and thus renders its activity facilitating function to lose ground for the continuous learning and manipulating of the object. Ephemerality and decadence mark the ownership of such products. However, the contemporary demand for a continuous personal administration values the sensation of being up to date and to pertain to the digital universe. Routine experiences are now founded on the on-line equivalents: “the main conductor thread are the electronic merchandise and media services, through which all experience is filtered, recorded, or built”, claims Crary (Ibid.: 67).

The third chapter talks about the moment of the arrival of electricity and the changes that stemmed from it to the work world. Time reorganization, the breakdown of cyclical agriculture barriers, and consequently, the implantation of scales and uninterrupted operations have modified production systems. With such a restructuring, information communication and circulation have become more intense and quicker. Daily life has become permeated by discipline, control and consumption habits built and destined to spectacular sharing. In the 24/7 universe, we must forget anonymity and remain visible. We have moved on to, without any option – to manage and model ourselves.

Communication ubiquity transforms itself into business. To Crary, (Ibid.: 85) “attention economy dissolves the separation between professional and personal, between entertainment and information, surpassed by a compulsory communication functionality inherent and inescapably 24/7”. The massive television diffusion has imposed inclusion criteria, and the spectator condition has sparked a behavioral similarity characteristic of a control agenda. Destabilizing axes such as public-private, television comes to the forefront of other institutions, such as schools. Its sedentary effect has long since stopped respecting the traditional sleep routines – and, how we have witnessed today – a growing number of channels has begun to produce contents without nightly pauses. After that, the personal computer. After that, the various smart devices. Old and new functionalities are synthesized and made available, leaving us more entranced by and dependent on technology.

The last chapter presents some film examples meant to elucidate the reflections about imagination, illusion and the dream world. By associating spaces

and contents where internal systems gain exteriority – such as cinema and dream interpretation theories – Crary highlights the importance of networked relationships: “there is no way to ignore how much the internet and digital communications have become an engine relentless of financialization and marketization in a growing number of spheres of individual and social lives” (Ibid.: 109).. While being participants of this digital market flow, we tend to compare ourselves to the merchandize and to chase our optimization. Digital environments reconfigure the individual, who then results on a mix of consumer and product for consumption. Mass culture and the spectacularization of our lives demands the building of varied identities for each distinct spaces we log on to, as “extensions of ourselves” (Ibid.: 114).

This aspect brings out the possibility that the conquest of happiness may not be directly linked to the acquisition of material goods, but to the shared relationships in groups and corroborated by the collective experience. The author finishes the book by defending the usage of electronic media for actions that happen and are developed off-line. On the contrary, they will show themselves to be in vain. He also brings out again the affective connection that one establishes with others while sleeping: “sleep is one of the few remaining experiences, where, whether we are aware or not, we abandon ourselves in the care of others” (Ibid.: 134).

The book is thus, a mesh of arguments that describe the 24/7 thesis, capitalism, consumption, work, sleep, mediated experience, dependence, internet, submission and control, may be listed as keywords as the theory posed by Crary. By the end of the work, the reader might conclude that their daily acts are ruled by a wider system that they cannot be free of, by, as much as possible, they might try to defend themselves, if they so wish. The hegemony of the Capitalist system is presented by Crary through daily life situations, so that everybody may visualize its presence and acting. With the defense of the thesis, we realize that, mainly through technologies, we are drawn to and guided by the 24/7 logics, and this may serve as a true warning. ■

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