Chapter 3

Day Without End

§21 An end to insomnia. The publication in 1869 of the book that the German chemist Oscar Liebreich had decided to dedicate to a description of the merits of chloral hydrate had an effect that neither he, nor his editor, expected: overnight it made the substance famous.[1] This fame became a little awkward as it quickly spread beyond the restricted circles of specialists in chemistry and medicine, to reach a mainstream always on the lookout for new miracle medicines in the fight against its afflictions. One of the most difficult of these battles was with insomnia: for a long time, the only remedies available to sufferers were diets, bloodletting or potions that had more in common with witches' brews.[2] Actual medications were

limited to various kinds of narcotics extracted from plants – the most famous being laudanum, an opium derivative owing its name to Paracelsus who, in the sixteenth century, was amongst the first to engage in experiments on the medical properties of poppies. The problem with laudanum (as with opium in general) was that it was very powerfully addictive, counting many famous figures amongst its victims, including Samuel Taylor Coleridge and Charles Dickens, Thomas De Quincey and Charles Baudelaire.[3] The discovery of chloral hydrate was a godsend: thanks to it, modern medicine finally had a sedative that it could use to combat insomnia without having to worry about fatal side effects – this, at least, was what they thought for a time. It was used massively in psychiatric hospitals to calm the manic 'excitation' of certain patients, and it was also the drug of choice for all those who suffered from an inability to take advantage of the moments of forgetting that would allow them to fall asleep. As was the case with mental illness, these users of chloral hydrate were seeking a kind of calm – a lessening of nervous excitation, a reduction of 'psychomotor agitation' to its absolute minimum. This was not by chance: for many

observers of nocturnal life, there was a direct connection between insomnia and what Kraepelin would later call 'manic-depressive psychosis', as though the former could be considered a symptom of the latter.[4] For a long time, this is what was thought: for moralists and doctors, melancholics – like women, children and libertines – had a problem with the night.[5]

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§22. The price of the night. The good worker sleeps well – for the simple man who has completed his labours by the book, this represents a greater reward than his salary; the victims of insomnia are the others – the slackers, the idle and the indolent. So runs a stereotype common in medical circles, whose origins go back to the dawn of time: sleep is the honest man's rest, and the torment of those whose existence yields to impropriety, of whatever kind. For all those who looked favourably on the development of industrial capitalism, this assessment was something of a principle: what was needed were individuals who slept soundly – so that they could get on with their work unhampered the next day. In *Capital*, published two years before Liebrich's book on

chloral hydrate, Karl Marx called the process in which sleep played a decisive role the 'reproduction of labor power' – its other parameter, which interested him even more, was salary.[6] The night, and the enforced inactivity that went with it, was the price that capitalists were ready to pay in order to extract sufficient surplus value from those working for them during the day – and it had to be paid by the workers as well. Much more than a simple factor that had to be accommodated, the night became a decisive element in the establishment of the capitalist order; it was responsible for its smooth running – or its disorder. But the question was: what night? As Marx demonstrated in the passage in Volume 1 of *Capital* where he described the struggles associated with determining the duration of the working day, the whole question of the surplus value the capitalist extracted from the labour power he drew on depended on time.[7] For there to be surplus value, a time supplementing the time necessary for the simple reproduction of labour power had to be accounted for; it was this 'extra' time, according to Marx, that became central to what capitalism wrested from the worker.[8] By 'extra' time, we should understand: the time for which the capi-

talist did not pay – knowing that it had to be precisely calculated, in order to avoid an excess of 'extra' time becoming, through a lack of night, the time of the workers' exhaustion. Even though he said nothing about it in his treatise, the night was the standard by which the value of work was measured – it was that on which capitalism purported to exercise dominion.

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§23. Ius nocturnis. But the encroachment on the night by the forces of order did not have to wait until the middle of the nineteenth century; however far back you go, it has always been presented as a danger for which the only solution was sleep. Throughout the seventeenth century, for example, Italian and German jurists were equally ingenious in the elaboration of what was called '*ius nocturnis*' (the law of the night) – a law whose principal objective was to try to formalize the extent to which the night was a milieu to be feared.[9] To prove this, they turned to the resemblance between the terms *nox* (night) and *noxa* (harm), implying that there was something in the very fact of the night that was harmful or injurious.[10] In general terms, this association led

them to consider it self-evident that carrying out an objectionable act nocturnally was a punishable proclivity – or, in any case, that it constituted an aggravating factor with respect to the act in question. This aggravation may go so far as to justify the killing of the aggressor, when they benefitted from their victim's vigilance being reduced to nothing by sleep – or it could allow the automatic assumption of premeditation.[11] The most curious thing, however, was not so much the insistence on the juridical implications of the passage from day to night, but the way in which this insistence was based on the presentation of the latter as the site of all danger, from which you should protect yourself at any price. With the jurists of *ius nocturnis*, we are not witnessing the juridical discovery of the nocturnal milieu, but its establishment as an ecology of harm – an ecology that, the jurists did not fail to highlight, was full of monsters.[12] This elevation of the night to the level of the natural preserve of malevolent spirits certainly had precedents – but the insistence with which this almost evil dimension was hammered home suggested that something else was in play. And this something else was nothing less than the invasion of the night by the forces of order – the

increasingly assured desire to turn it into a territory yielding to sovereign power in the same way as the day, whereas, previously, it had continued to elude it. For too long, the night had meant a vague space, where festivity and a certain notion of rest were protected from the gaze of masters and proprietors; this obscurity now had to be conquered.[13]

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§24. What enlightenment really is. Paris was the first city to decide on the installation of a modern system of public lighting; in 1667, the new Lieutenant General of the police, Gabriel Nicolas de la Reynie, decreed that every part of the street should be illuminated by a fixed lantern.[14] This was his first act following his appointment to his new position by Jean-Baptiste Colbert, and it inaugurated both modern policing and the nocturnal administration of the city – as though the two were in the end the same thing. It is true that it was initially only a matter of double wick candles, protected from bad weather by a simple windbreak – and not a sophisticated grid of gas streetlights giving off light through a thin window pane, as in the nineteenth century. But

this did not stop la Reynie celebrating victory over the Parisian night with a medal, struck in 1669, on which the following motto could be read: '*urbis securitas et nitor*' ('the security and probity of the town').[15] La Reynie's idea was indeed to clean the city streets, in every sense of the term – which is to say, get rid of everything that made it an unclean, insalubrious city, that was dangerous and difficult to control, above all when its roads were emptied of people. For him, ensuring the city's security meant ensuring that the night was no longer a stretch of time escaping his authority, and therefore, by extension, the king's; the night too must recognize the full extent of the sovereignty of power. *The citizen had to be seen to sleep* – that, in the end, was the desire la Reynie nurtured; the citizens should shut themselves away in their houses, and the officers of his police should be able to verify this without being fooled by those who lived in the shadows. If the night was to remain a place for rebuilding strength, which made diurnal activities possible, it had to do so in full light – the very light that historians would retrospectively make the herald of the century it illuminated. The Enlightenment was nothing but the introduction of day where,

until then, it had been unable to shine its light; its method presented no surprises: Enlightenment was the police plus urban illumination. Before putting an end to political or religious 'obscurantism', you first had to put an end to physical obscurity; this is what la Reynie undertook with a zeal that everyone applauded, and that kept him in post for thirty years, even though he could have been removed at any time.[16]

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§25. A trip to Webster Hall. Chloral hydrate's success at the end of the nineteenth century could be interpreted as the success of a conception of the night subjected to the law-enforcement idea that saw it as the place for rebuilding strength – and so as the criterion of the moral division between the good and the bad worker. But it goes without saying that this conception could not have avoided generating its contrary, and that the simultaneous invention of night policing and public lighting made other ways of filling the time possible – ways which left a lot to be desired. In 1886, the opening in New York of Webster Hall, the first modern nightclub, indicated the direction in which things were heading:

towards the reinvention of the orgy in the age of electric lighting and the player piano.[17] While the old taverns maintained a relationship with the night that was that of any domestic dwelling, nightclubs saw themselves as beacons across the darkness, without at any time feeling the obligation to abjure. In other words, the appearance of the nightclub signified the appearance of a way of appropriating the nocturnal world which aimed at evading the police – or rather, turning them to its advantage, given that they were supposed to have cleared the darkness of any danger. The reason for the long wait between the time when the first lanterns were installed in the cities and the opening of the first nightclub was that public lighting lacked the intensity and effectiveness that only the transition to electricity could achieve. The use of coal gas, then natural gas, at the beginning of the nineteenth century, had already made urban illumination easier – but it was the general introduction of electricity in the 1880s that completed the conquest of the night, transforming it into a place for life comparable to any other.[18] It was to this life that the nightclub bore witness – a life which, if you looked closely, had the appearance of a slightly contorted

simulacrum, seen in the sweating faces of dancers who had drunk a little too much. In the case of Webster Hall, we should add that the faces were often those of workers and militant leftists, who went there to hold meetings, trade-union rallies or fundraisers for cooperatives.[19] Not only was the invention of the nightclub the invention of a modern form of excess, it also implied the invention of a modern form of politics, whose relationship with the existing order was, to say the least, critical.

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§26. Politics of excitation. For a long time, nocturnal social life had been a private life – one enjoyed by those whose dwellings had reception rooms and gardens to contain the excesses reserved for holders of a pass. The invention of the nightclub represented a kind of proletarian response to the private hoarding of celebration – a way of returning celebration to its public nature, always involving more guests than appeared on the lists drawn up by the lady of the house. The authorities made no mistake here: when they determined what kind of space nightclubs represented, they decided to consider them 'public spaces', which

is to say spaces in which specific rules regarding security and decency should apply.[20] Since the night had been domesticated, new activities should of course be permitted – but on condition that they did not exceed the narrow framework of what the existing order was prepared to accept; if the orgy was to be permitted, it had to be contained. We know that the first nightclubs were meeting places for proletarian workers – this desire to limit any excesses that might occur in the clubs was also a desire to limit the possible reasons for these excesses. Along with those produced by alcohol, dance and the vagaries of human relations, we should include those implying a political form of excitation – the contamination of minds by the forces of scandal, and their transformation into demands for social justice. The nightclub, as a place of communal excess, represented an environment that was conducive to the circulation of all kinds of affects, which could just as well produce a brawl over a sexual escapade or lay the foundations of a general strike. This was part and parcel of the new dangers created by the policing of the night: while it was impossible to raise further the spectre of demons and spirits hostile to the good sleep-

ers, it was perfectly possible to make them think that they had materialized in new bodies. These bodies constituted what the demographer Louis Chevalier in 1958 termed the 'dangerous classes' – who were also, precisely, the 'labouring classes': a labour force – in the service of a capitalist proprietor – from whom revenue was extracted.[21] 'The security and probity' of the city, of which La Reynie boasted, had not removed the need for nocturnal monsters; the club became their zoo.

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§27. Here is to Mickey Finn. The inversion of the restorative night into a disturbing night is illustrated by another paradoxical oddity, brought about by a particular use of a substance that was supposed to produce restorative sleep – namely, chloral hydrate. Among the possibilities opened by von Liebig's invention, there was one that did not escape the attention of the petty crims: the fact that its sedative powers grew exponentially when it was mixed with alcohol.[22] This cocktail apparently offered interesting possibilities for those hoping to rob, without too much effort, the night birds who had been foolish enough to let it be known that their pockets were deep.

One of them became so famous for his use of the mixture that it was named after him: Mickey Finn – the manager of the Lone Star Saloon in Chicago, who was accused in 1903 of drugging his wealthy clients so as to relieve them of their money, before dumping them in a nearby alleyway. When they awoke the following morning, plucked and suffering from a terrible headache, the victims of the robbery did not remember a thing; the Mickey Finn offered the double advantage of bringing on sleep and encouraging a very useful amnesia.[23] At least according to urban myth – there is no document establishing formally that Finn engaged in this activity, nor that the name of the drink came from this practice, nor even that this name referred to such a mixture. On the other hand, it has been established that the practice of drugging individuals in bars in order to extract their riches more easily was known, in the United States, from 1869 – just before the discovery of chloral hydrate's sedative properties.[24] Rather than being the reward of the honest man, sleep became a place where new threats lurked – threats that you could do nothing about since, by definition, you were not there to notice them. From supplying being's means of

recovery, it became the means of its obliteration – or at least of its enslavement to hostile forces that never stopped trying to assail it, and that only the authorities, on a good day, were able to contain. Whether the urban myth was true or not, refraining from frequenting establishments where events of the type caused by the ingestion of a Mickey Finn might occur was an elementary precaution – despite everything, the night was still seedy.

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§28. 21st-century working man. Sleep was ambivalent, considered both as something in which good citizens could indulge unreservedly, protected as they were by the vigilance of the forces of order – and as something that still had to pay its dues to the forces of the night. On the one hand, the night had been integrated into the territory under the authority of state forces; on the other, it still had in it a vestige of danger that was enough to warn sensible people from taking the risk – since you never really knew what to expect. The history of the night in the twentieth century was continually pulled between the two terms of this false alternative, as can be seen in the

gradual metamorphosis of nightclubs into places of entertainment cleared of any aspect of political agitation. Even in its most decadent period in the 1970s when cocaine fell from the ceiling of Studio 54 in New York, wrapped in little balloons that had to be burst so that the powder could be sniffed, the excitation was already only on the surface. The nightclub had become a place for containing collective excitement – a means of enabling the 'reproduction of labour power', at a time when it had become possible to rely on certain narcotics to facilitate the task. With cocaine, as with speed or MDMA (two kinds of amphetamines), the question remained one of efficacy – the double efficacy of the orgy itself, and then of what enabled you to recover, so that you could throw yourself into it again next time.[25] The place where this can be seen most clearly is the club that was for a time considered the best in the world: the Berghain in Berlin, opened in 2003 by Michael Teufele and Norbert Thormann in an old electricity plant.[26] In the Berghain, the only things that ever happened were dance and sex – two forms of physical exercise performed in the mechanical aura of techno music, with the help of a fistful of synthetic drugs. If, at least,

you were able to convince Sven Marquardt, the most inscrutable bouncer on the planet, that you deserved to enter – which is to say that you deserved to go and work on your relaxation, according to a paradox which nobody seems to have noticed. Where Studio 54 and its emulators (like the Palace, in Paris, at the beginning of the 1980s) were still able to give an illusion of agitation, even if it had become empty, the Berghain no longer makes any pretence: it is nothing but a metaphor for the condition of contemporary labour.

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§29. The post-nycthemeral hypothesis. Modernity's technical and political colonization of the night is inseparable from the development of industrial capitalism, and from the form of sovereignty associated with it; it ultimately turned it into another form of day. In *24/7*, his furious indictment of capitalism's assault on sleep, Jonathon Crary listed the indications that may lead us to believe that this is just a start – and that some are already imagining pushing the borders of the night even farther back.[27] Among the envisaged scenarios, besides those concerning the possibility

of diverting sunlight to banish darkness once and for all, making 24-hour days possible, we find the notion that we could remove the need for sleep. In the same way that during World War II, the German general staff distributed amphetamine derivatives to Wehrmacht soldiers to get them to advance for several days on end without sleeping, specialists in the American army are becoming interested in certain species of bird that hardly sleep at all. As Crary underscores, these investigations are sure to have reverberations – since we know that what is trialled in the military context tends later to be imported into the civil sphere (as happened with the classifications of the *DSM*).[28] What Crary forgot to mention, however, was that these reverberations can already be heard in the beats to which the dancers move in nightclubs, where the goal of many is to enter into a relationship with time oblivious to the succession of days. Like with the German soldiers in World War II, and those of most other armed forces since, chemical substances contribute to the redistribution of the nycthemeral cycle desired by the party-goers – as though that were its fate. *Get out of the cycle*: this is the shared desire of the dancers, the army officers and the capitalist

entrepreneurs; reinvent the cyclical ecology in which the human being has evolved until now, to replace it with another one, shaped to your will. This post-nycthemeral ecology is both the horizon of expectation of a capitalism that seeks to multiply the 'extra time' it extracts from its labour power, and the target of a new market, towards which it has never stopped moving. All time, in the post-nycthemeral age, is destined to become 'extra time' – a time whose only quality is to situate itself beyond that which, in it, does not relate to the obsessional accounting of a pure value, of a value without cost.

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§30. General somnambulism. 'Insomnia' may have seemed like another word for the attempt to escape the nycthemeral cycle – but it referred to the opposite of what the partisans of industrial, then financial, capitalism desired. Insomnia made you ineffective; it implied the opposite of the efficiency that could be expected of workers – which is why research into how to put an end to it went on all through the twentieth century. The model of the relation to the night that was so popular had nothing to do with the

dazed individual whose excitation needed calming; on the contrary, a kind of tutelage of the excitation in question was what was hoped for. A way of incorporating into labour power the excitation demonstrated by individuals had to be found, in the same way as for their intellectual or physical abilities – for which it constituted, in a certain sense, the intensive measure. Instead of the insomniac, the kind of individual populating the post-nycthemeral ecology should show the same traits as those in another category of subjects – also prisoners of their night, but who were able to ensure that it was without effect: depressives. But the depressive's relation to the night, a pure efficacy without consciousness, an anaesthetic efficacy, had a name – a name that the projects for a total conversion of night into day had given a new currency: *somnambulist*. The somnambulist is anyone who transforms sleep into the site of effective action – whatever means are employed to this end, and whatever the consequences, for the subject and for the recipients. Somnambulism marks the reversal of night into day, its transformation into a site of potential exploitation – even into the model of what every day should be, once it has been given over whole-

sale to the principle of efficacy. To dispel the last dangers haunting the night, starting with that of collective agitation, it is the night as such that must be eliminated once and for all – or, failing that, the particular type of habitation associated with it, namely sleep. Since it will remain forever impossible to finish *truly* with the night, it is necessary to work towards the transformation of the sleeper into something else, combining the advantages of sleep with those of waking – which is to say, anaesthesia and efficacy. The somnambulist is the ideal candidate – but not the only one.