THE COMMUNE OF
NIGHTMARES

The Commune of Nightmares is an ambiguous idea, speculative theory, an *idée fixe*. On one hand it refers to the very real nightmare – or nightmarish reality – that we inhabit: necro-capitalism, the 'Anthropocene', global ecocide, war, racism, patriarchy, generalised injustice…. One could imagine a community of people that constitutes itself simply by being aware of the nightmarish quality of this reality – not ignoring, justifying, enforcing or promoting it.

On the other hand, the fact that everybody dreams, hints at another conception of the communal: We all have nightmares. It's a generic definition of being human, an involuntary community of nightly terrors and bad dreams that takes different shapes according to gender, ethnicity and socioeconomic class.

The Commune of Nightmares unfolds between these two poles, traversing dream and waking world, figurative and literal meaning, the social and the personal. It has nothing to do with reductive notions of collectivity or community, it does not come with a fixed theory. Freud's *Interpretation of Dreams* does not apply to *The Commune of Nightmares*, it sneers at Jungian archetypes. The community at work here, always already unworking itself, can best be described with Jean-Luc Nancy's concept of *Being Singular Plural*: Being as necessarily and approximately communal since the singular can only become in its relation to the plurality of the others. It establishes a queer connectivity in which the distance between individuals is prerequisite for relation and vice versa:

"Everything, then, passes between us. This 'between', as its name implies, has neither a consistency nor continuity of its own. It does not lead from one to the other; it constitutes no connective tissue, no cement, no bridge. […] That which does not maintain its distance from the 'between' is only immanence collapsed in on itself and deprived of meaning." (Nancy 2000, p. 5).

An inevitable connection between singular individuals that nonetheless requires distances, gaps and intervals for plurality/community to unfold.
Nancy equates the notion of a community that strives for immanence without distance as a 'work of death' akin to the *Volksgemeinschaft* or fascist forms of the communal. What Nancy strives for is an ontology that operates beyond and below the dichotomy of subject and object, an ontology wherein every articulation of *being* is essentially one of *being with*. The social form of this ontology could be grasped as potential communism: "It is here […] that the communionless communism of singular beings takes place […]" (Nancy 1991, p. 72 f.f.).

How can we grasp these singular beings, what is their 'ontological shape', and how do they interact? An answer to this problem might be found in the more radical fringes of contemporary neuroscience that challenge those traditional notions of the self that rely on tacit metaphysical concepts like the 'soul'. Thomas Metzinger challenges these notions when he writes:

"It is the invariance of bodily self-awareness, of agency, and autobiographical memory which constitutes the conscious experience of an enduring self. The conceptual reification of what actually is a very unstable and episodic process is then reiterated by the phenomenological fallacy pervading almost all folk-psychological and a large portion of philosophical discourse on self-consciousness. But it is even phenomenologically false: we are not things, but processes." (Metzinger 2004, p. 325).

These processual selves are necessarily dependent on each other. What constitutes a process is change, it relies on the plurality of the others as producers of variance. The processes that constitute *us* are indivisibly singular but at the same time totally relying on the plural. When all of us are more processes than things, then these processes are intertwined. It is from this fabric or entanglement that discourse, thinking and creativity emerge. In the realm of the written word, Nancy dubbed this process *literary communism*:

"[...] It is because there is community – unworked always, and resisting at the heart of every collectivity and every individual – [...] that there exists the exingency of 'literary communism'. And this means: thinking, the practice of sharing of voices and of an articulation according to which there is no singularity but that exposed in common, and no community but that offered to the limit of singularities." (Nancy 1991, p. 72 f.f.).

There is an irreducible communism at work in all that is social – and therefor economic and political. Even the most basic functions of quotidian capitalism depend on it. One of the irreducible factors of 'being with' is having needs and desires, without which nobody would be compelled to buy or sell anything. Society is not the same as community, but it depends on residues of the communal to survive.

'Literary communism' can be taken as a chiffre for cultural production in its entirety. All texts, songs and works of art emerge from the entanglements of the singular-plural. Every artifact of creativity is always already a reworking of something that has happened before, an appropriation, an infringement of copyright. The situationist *détournement* is 'literary communism' from a different angle. As McKenzie Wark writes:

"Détournement [...] refers to the practice of taking all of past culture and knowledge to be a commons, as always and already belonging to all of us. [...] the collective labor of unmaking from below the language of those above [...]. When drawn into the practice of everyday life, ideas dissolve into their constituent parts, the bits of language, which are articulated in new and surprising forms. This is détournement at work, the molecular labor of making and remaking sense in given situations." (Wark 2016, p. 13 f.).

If we have this trove of collective knowledge – a *commons* – that we tab into more or less unconsciously, what do we need any notion of a 'collective subconscious' or archetypes for? An archetype is an unchanging thing, a fixture of 'human nature', a monomyth, a coagulated piece of patriarchal mythology. Conversely, collective knowledge is subject to change, a plane where power and resistance can unfold. History and biography, the personal and the political, entangled in stories and dreams.

The Commune of Nightmares reaches into the waking world. Dreams rework themselves into art and politics. In the words of German playwright Heiner Müller: "The whole point of any artistic endeavour is to chase your dreams. You try to achieve the stringency of your dreams, but you never do, because in a dream everyone is a genius and that's what you are chasing." (Müller 2019, p. 110). Everyone is a genius while dreaming. When everybody is a genius, no one is a genius. What's more: when the self is more of a process than a thing, when cultural production is always already the emergent result of communal uncon-scious/unconscious communism, then what about the artists and their products? In his book *Social Dissonance*, Mattin states that: "[...] the narrative of the self is often promoted in artistic situations through notions of authorship or embodiment, which generally assume the idea of the self as proprietor of its own experience, therefore emphasising a notion of natural experience which takes for granted the forms of selfhood that Metzinger's research undermines." (Mattin 2022, p. 121).

Can we claim authorship of dreams, as property? Alienation and commodification inevitably intersect in the figure of the artist, who in one way or the other is busy promoting themselves/their product/the self. As Mattin writes: "Capitalism needs stable selves in order to sell commodities back to its labourers on the market, but at the same time this stable sense of self is increasingly undermined by the technological saturation of the social." (Mattin 2022, p. 110).

What we deem the most personal, our tastes in music, art and entertainment, is interconnected with the algorithms of corporations. From a historical point of view, the perception of people is not a static matter, it is subject to changes, modulations and recoding. Walter Benjamin once summarized this circumstance in a concentrated form: "[D]uring long periods of history, the mode of human sense perception changes with humanity's entire mode of existence." (Benjamin 1968, p. 222). We dream different things than our grandparents. Did people have monochromatic dreams when cinema and television where black and white, do fascists have fascistic nightmares? Dreamscapes haunted by avatars, bots, and advertisements, nightmares screened by algorithms, waking up startled because everybody unfollowed you, an uncannily smooth looking figure with six fingers and two left hands lurking in the shadows.

Dreams are not removed from the social fabric. Society, politics and the economy permeate dreams and nightmares: the unconscious as an utterly public affair. Dreams are a central metaphor for utopian politics, we call the creeping disaster we inhabit a living nightmare. If reality has nightmarish qualities, what kind of rift is opened by waking up? If nightmares haunt us in our sleep and we wake up to a nightmarish reality, the *Commune Of Nightmares* emerges at the intersections of both dream and the waking world and the singular-plural.

Turning the involuntary *Community of Nightmares* into something conscious and voluntary, becoming the living nightmare of those who turn our lived experiences into one – after all, one is 'allowed to dream'.

On a more personal/technical note: this project started in early 2023. On a couple of occasions I woke up with self-inflicted minor injuries (scratches in the chest, *He Bit His Tongue In His Sleep* etc.). I started working on a couple of songs with the aim to catch something like a generic dreamlike atmosphere. Not referring to dreams as a personal experience (I rarely remember my own dreams), but as a shared social phenomenon. On the sonic level: in the 1990s I used to make noise with a four-track cassette recorder. I dragged these tapes around for years and also accumulated a stash of various used cassettes found on the street (mix tapes, audio diaries etc.). I started cutting these tapes at random, splicing them into loops of varying length and used them as the basis for the songs on *The Commune of Nightmares*. A kind of audio-*cadavre exquis* played with a former version of myself and random strangers. The song titles can be read as the script to a nightmare, hopefully an interesting one.

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Sources:

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A1 *He Bit His Tongue In His Sleep*
A2 *Where Nothing Happens But The Wallpaper*
A3 *She Calls In The Airstrike*
A4 *Behind The Billionaire's Graveyard*

B1 *They Sidestep Extinction*
B2 *Surrounded By The Smell Of Servitude*
B3 *In Nightmares Screened By Algorithms*