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Abstract:

In this post qualitative work of research fiction, the narrator chronicles a series of understandings of the personal and social functions of bedsprings. A fictional tale is used to present theory as situated and taken to logical extremes. The author uses a journal entry format to follow a series of conceptualizations of an unreliable narrator, conceptualizations that double back to disrupt the narrator's sense of self and society. The object of the mattress is seen as an actor in its own right. Somewhere at the intersection of the desire for the mattress and its repeated physical construction, meaning and material are blurred.

Sealy Springs

2/14/94

I was reading the newspaper and saw a story from the national wire. It stated, hungry with implication, that the female owner of an ape was having her pet removed after it was found that she had taken to sleeping with the beast in the same bed, "under the covers" - lest the reader miss the sordid complaint unsaid. Immediately I was reminded of Jeremy, a good friend from my same small town, who had occasionally confided in me some of the more lurid and ridiculous thoughts that occurred to him in the course of his seemingly never-ending shifts at the mattress factory. Of course the details he mentioned went unmentioned in the paper, but it was an odd enough, um, fantasy, that it caught my attention. The similarity, that is.

3/23

My inquiries to the police of Westfield were met at first with bemusement, and then disgust. No details have been forthcoming. My requests to see the mattress, or at least to get the name of the manufacturer, and if possible the make and serial number, always get the response about there being enough sickos asking about this case. I doubt the sickos are asking about the mattress but I guess they have their own reasons. Or maybe the sickos is just me, calling different people involved in the case who had already shaken their heads together, over a lunch-bag and out of a mouth half-filled with sandwich, about this guy, you won't believe this, people now-a-days.

So my evidence remains elusive, the details of a private matter only hinted out in the public page. And yet, my curiosity is piqued.

4/2

I am allergic to down. Yesterday, I awoke - almost, and fell back and again. And then I re-called the familiarity of this feeling. Was it mono? (I had that in high school.) No. A feather pillow. I bet. Get up. I must get up. And upon winning the struggle with myself, like my grandma's story about saving the kids from the gas leak, I examined and sure enough.

The mattress spring saves us from this hazy, dreamlike, cloudy existence of rolling into each other in the center. What was it after all that propelled our civilization beyond the featherbed to the spring? I hardly need go into some leftist theories of repression to explain the efficient irony of the factory production of bed-springs.

4/24

It is the mattress, after all, that is the symbol of the terrible and private and illicit made public. The dirty one, stained and half folded, leaning against the fence in the alley. The one your friend told you of, in the abandoned house as you drove by. The ones thrown on a dusty floor in the crack-house or squeaking in the whore-house or circular - radiating out a public industry of photographic pulp. The public imagining of what goes on in private. And so you might be able to imagine, what the reverse effects might be. That is, of a public place where the product is destined for the private.

This is where those stories are installed you see, manufactured.

Deep within the coils produced at the Sealy Springs Corporation is the oily residue of the other half of half-conscious factory workers. Workers enter a state of haze (not unlike that soft state produced by laying on down) while cutting exact lengths of hard steel, and then, attaching and wrapping the cold interior back into something soft. Some might say that these traded breaths, repeated motions are paid for with a paycheck, and that the lusts and longings are thereby annulled.

But here is what I have discovered. These dreams seep back. The debt of desire, the lack of life, forms an undercurrent.

5/13

Now, considering the numerous springs put into each bed, it would be hard to pin down a particular spring as being one which Jeremy had produced. Even if I could have gotten a serial number or even a year and a manufacturer, still it would be only circumstantial. I considered a more pro-active approach, one in which I interviewed factory workers and tracked their mattress dreams and springs throughout their lifetimes. But of course, mattresses have a way of outlasting us all. And the one thrown out by the garbage might very well make it back into circulation. Grandma's mattress is given to someone who helped you move her to the home, and then left to the girlfriend, who now has a location unknown. So quite obviously another approach was going to have to be taken. Yet I remain convinced that Jeremy had somehow twisted a genotype of dreams into coils.

[I remained stuck on this problem for a few weeks, and then as happens, other things came to the fore.]

9/2

An occasional thought about a method of proof yielded no results and I passed off the thoughts as a true-to-me-but-no-one-else sort of conspiracy theory. Recently though, the issue has come back to my mind for whatever reason. Perhaps the ridiculousness of the dreams I have been having. Or, more likely, because today when I was changing the sheets I noticed on the box springs the label Sealy Springs. And this is a mattress and box that came from lord-knows-where. We bought the little retreat furnished. It occurred to me that the approach was not holding me back, rather, my theory was flawed. I have insisted on a one-to-one correspondence. Instead, what I now conjure is each of the millions of mattresses as machines. Each one part of a conversion process, giving in and giving back, breathing in and breathing out, absorbing and releasing private acts into public thought, public thoughts into private acts. Like the air through the little metal-grommetted vents on the sides of the mattress, a breathing apparatus, a bellows powered by the rhythms and rolls of the unsuspecting.

Breathing those thoughts back in, a new iteration, the genotype and phenotype of public and private thought combine to produce ever more carnal acts bounding on the 8 gauge coil of a Sealy spring.

10/2

The mattress is a device through which our personal desires are laundered and aired, so as to not reflect back onto me in particular. The mattress wraps personal action in a public comfort. It foregrounds the give. Springs compress. Air whooshes out the sides. The release valve is tapped. Collectively, we exhale with the mattresses. To own a mattress is to reassure oneself. We share a dream, a delusion, an alibi.

10/5

Do I mean that the springs work to facilitate our blindness? If the concealment of half of the process is the alibi, what of the other half? Why does the spring return to form, to status?

How does a spring work, anyway? What magic causes it to spring back? Where is that energy hidden, stored, produced?

Maybe the mattress is not the cause of illicit dreams. Maybe instead its purpose is to conceal the intercourse of public and private desire in padded fabric. Satin covering hides the coitus of public desire pushing back to private acts, and of private acts pushing into public desire. Each action and reaction is contained within an opaque soft white box. The springs work hidden by our own blindness yet betrayed by the occasional muffled squeak. The standardized form to which it restores conceals the interaction as if it is one way, as if desire is stable and inherent and common and shared, a static and nonchalant object on which to throw the coats.

10/25

Today I drove the truck past the old rotting wood pile with a box spring leaning up against it. All that is left is the rusting steel frame springs. The covering and wood tack boards are gone.

I took an old chain I salvaged from my grandpa's barn and hooked the frame onto the back bumper. I oriented the box spring so the length was in line with the truck, this allowed the many strips of steel sticking out of the bottom to be at a right angle to the road, like a bunch of small bulldozer blades - or those multi-blade razors. I threw some old wet logs on top. The springs bounced a little and settled down with the new load. I strapped the weight on with bungees. We drove up and down the two-track road to the cabin a few times. Every once in a while the boxsprings would shit out a big

bunch of wet leaves. In general though, it worked pretty well. The ridge between the two tracks was worn down a little with each pass, distributed to the ruts, flattened.

The weight pushes down through the springs. The springs absorb abrupt changes from the ground below. The iron blades push the sand out to the lower areas. The road is restored.

I unclip the ends of the chain, pull the ends through the iron frame, and throw the old box spring back on to the old rotting wood pile. Until next spring.

11/22

Here came my newest epiphany. The mattresses, like the springs within each, operate as a distributed system. Each one adjusts, responds, reacts, to the circumstance distributed. As an array of compression and accommodation, each spring reacts within the larger context.

11/24

One mattress does not produce one dream, just as one spring does not erase one rut. The combined action, multiple forces, downward and forward, yield a sideways redistribution of the ground plane, a re-institution of the status quo in order for it to continue. Weight of impact and friction build up a small forward scraping, a collection of ridged climax (missed), pulled against the horizontal bars, sliding, granule by granule, to lower ground producing a more level path of even resistance. The mattress machine idealizes a road. Not only idealizes, but manifests, through multiple aspiring iterations of squishy springs. The mattress repairs, reproduces, the pathways that degrade through use.

12/2

A mattress suspends bodies. A building floats on dirt; a boat floats in water. The level of displacement and balance is a function of the resistance of the plane compared to the amount of force and its distribution. If the ice begins to break, lay down, distribute the force.

Thus, the array of springs variably absorb the pressure points of the body. A knee or an elbow, under weight of the body, sink until, along with other contours, you float. Connections between the springs distribute the forces horizontally, sharing forces to produce a topography without holes or sharp ridges between those absorbing and not absorbing.

And so, the web of mattresses works the same, only at a larger scale.

Author note:

This article was inspired by the work of Borges (1998) that theorizes through fiction. Such work can be considered research through the broad definition of “post qualitative research” offered by St. Pierre (2011). The idea of an object as actor is presented in Latour (2005). The concept of objects working together to form a plane of desire is based on the work of Deleuze & Guattari (1987).

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