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Tonight, Let's Not Talk about Work

In contemporary urban societies, the night is identified with entertainment and the relaxation of the social norms that apply by day. We spend the day in a display of disciplined behavior: arrive on time, comply, deliver, participate, concentrate, start, finish. The night permits relaxation, arriving late, leaving at any time, celebrating, dancing, drinking alcohol, seeking out sexual encounters, talking about everything and nothing, dispersing, forgetting the daily grind and work, leaving our worries behind.

The separation of day-work/night-entertainment is not always observed. Daytime work bleeds over into the night and invades nocturnal entertainment. Around this day-night dichotomy—at times undesirable, at times functional, and at others even enjoyable—firmly entrenched, lasting nocturnal cultures have evolved, in which, from

time to time, we all partake. It is to those cultures that I dedicate this article. I deal with them not only as a particularity of nocturnal socialization but as an approach to constructing a relevant field of study to understand the workings of certain economic activities and the functional mechanics of day and night and work and play in contemporary cities.

Contact between daytime work and nocturnal entertainment occurs in different dimensions and with different objectives and outcomes. We see nocturnal entertainment first as a source of inspiration for creative endeavor. It is familiar terrain for anyone knowledgeable about the visual arts; cabarets, nightclubs, brothels, dance halls, casinos, and other venues for nocturnal entertainment have been a source of inspiration, whether for realistic works that portray and document the nocturnal cultures that thrive there, or to inspire artists to produce different interpretations and depictions of social nightlife. Henri de

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Toulouse-Lautrec is, of course, the best known example due to his series of paintings done at the Moulin Rouge in Paris. Numerous examples also exist of artistic work inspired in nocturnal socialization throughout modern and contemporary history; each reader will assuredly have in their memory some image of such depictions. The visual arts are only one example of nightlife as creative inspiration, but many more can be found in other, widely divergent areas of creative endeavor, such as fashion, architecture, advertising, and, of course, literature.

Another cultural expression of the nocturnal that links daytime work to nighttime entertainment are awards ceremonies, which communities in various fields hold for their members. Periodic recognition for performance by companies and workers is a practice that permeates numerous economic and non-economic activities, but the nocturnal and public celebratory practice of bestowing awards is dominant in cultural and the creative industries. Awards ceremonies of the film, music, theater, and gastronomic industries, to mention some of the most visible, draw the attention of those who are directly involved in those industries, but also of their consumers, who will attend the ceremonies as a guide for their likings. Awards ceremonies are prolonged into the night with private parties attended by the award recipients and their inner circles, which, however private they may be, allow them to be observed so they can be narrated and photographed by the specialized press, which will report the details of the night's proceedings the next day.

Professional communities pertaining to a given occupation or type of work tend to frequent certain kinds of night spots. Journalists, politicians, artists, models, musicians, writers, academics, intellectuals, and businesspeople, to mention a few professions, tend to prefer places that offer socially relaxed settings. Such spaces for gathering emerge without an explicit agreement and are formed and made known in social circles and eventually give a place its characteristic flavor and subsequent reputation for attracting a certain type of person. Such places tend to be unstable, because professional communities are constantly moving, finding and building new nocturnal homes. Those out of touch realize that where "everyone" used to go, now there is "no one." Social places for professional communities, in some cases, have a specific timeframe; for example, they go only one day a week or there is a circuit of places that are "in" or where you can find

members of your circle on different days of the week. On this temporal plane there are clubs where a given professional community can be found only one night a week, while the other nights they are frequented by night owls with completely different profiles. Also, a person visiting a restaurant, bar, or nightclub may not detect the presence of a specific professional community that has assembled there unnoticed. The reasons why professional communities gather in certain night spots are numerous: the most obvious are that members may learn through the grapevine what is happening in their professional circle and who is doing what, where, and with whom. They find out about leaks and tidbits of gossip that are not only amusing but professionally useful. Not only can informal access to information about colleagues be advantageous, the mere fact of knowing which establishment one's peers are frequenting confers a kind of reputation in the workplace.

Other nocturnal practices of cultural and creative industries involve inauguration ceremonies for events and new product launches. In Hollywood, it continues to be a tradition to hold film premieres at night, in a single theater, with floodlights, a red carpet, and a parade of leading actors and guests. In Mexico City, plays premiere with a single performance closed to the public, for members of the performing arts world only: journalists, actors, directors. Galleries open new exhibits by offering wine or mezcal for groups of guests to celebrate the featured painter. At their openings, galleries offer a Hopperian view from the street, in which the outer darkness, like in the painting *Nighthawks* (1942), contrasts with the bright interior lighting. Publishing firms, particularly small and independent ones, increasingly choose to launch new books in bars and nightclubs, or transform small bookshops into temporary bars, where writers and readers mingle among wine and books. Nocturnal launches lend importance and visibility to the beginnings of a literary career or cultural enterprise, as well as to new products.

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nocturnal culture of daytime work. Some interesting anthropological essays have been written on the subject, revealing the complexity of these rites and their meaning for organizations and employees. Michael Rosen, a social anthropologist, observes that at Christmas parties, the utilitarian and hierarchical relationships that regulate day-to-day working life are transposed onto the context of nocturnal entertainment, and consequently encourage the relaxation of the behavioral standards and acceptance of hierarchy that undergird a company's internal structure. This exceptional situation creates a rite in which labor relations are symbolically transformed into a community united by a sense of friendship that transcends the terms of employment and the differentiated compensation participants receive, which define their position in the organization. The practices of eating, drinking, dancing, and conversations among personnel from different areas and organizational levels are part not only of an entrenched custom, but of a symbolic process of adhesion and social commitment to a working community. At the same time, the ritual of the Christmas party helps perpetuate such hierarchies and adhesion to one's employment in ways that go beyond monetary compensation.

The episode of the series *The Office* entitled "The Dinner Party" offers an ironic portrayal of another deep-seated practice in the convergence of work culture and use of nocturnal entertainment. When Michael Scott invites his favorite employees to his home for dinner it triggers a series of events that underscore the tension between the

intimacy of a domestic environment and the utilitarian social relationships of the workplace. The episode plays with this rite, showing the forced courtesy and comradery of the dinner guests, the revealing of hidden personality traits of the boss and his wife, and a disastrous ending with the portrayal of a family fight and the arrival of the police. Even without this kind of drama, dinner with one's boss from the office has multiple meanings and is a means toward various work-related ends. From the outset, an invitation to the domestic space at night has overtones of intimacy, proximity, and commitment between the organizer and the guests, three categories which, linked to labor relations, carry a specific weight that is by no means negligible for any worker. A party with the boss sends implicit messages not only for the guests, but also for those who are not invited or are left off the list only on that occasion. This nocturnal-occupational rite may be one of the most formalized and coded of those we have described thus far. If the reader Googles "dinner with the boss" in their preferred language, they will get an endless list of websites offering practical advice on what to say, what not to say, what gifts to bring, how long to stay, and how to dress for a dinner with the boss. Some of their titles seem taken straight from the series *The Office*: "Company dinners: how to swallow the bitter pill of having dinner with your boss and making it more fun," or "Tips on etiquette and protocol for a dinner with your boss," or, my personal favorite, "11 mistakes to avoid at dinner with your boss." Recommendation number one: "Don't talk about work that night." ■■■

Further Reading

Rosen, Michael (1988), "You Asked for It: Christmas at the Bosses' Expense," *Journal of Management Studies* vol. 25, no. 5: 463-480, doi: 10.1111/j.1467-6486.1988.tb00710.x



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