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## Tolerating the Dream

Blade Ducote, Louisiana State University, US

In the animated sitcom *Futurama*, we get the chance to observe ideology seep its way into the dreams of individuals. Fry, the show's protagonist, is startled out of a dream in which advertisers present to him an underwear commercial. But, the underwear are no ordinary underwear; they are quite literally the briefs of your dreams, displayed just out of reach. When Fry makes an attempt in the waking world to obtain the mythical undies, the department store selling them outright denies Fry's credit card. Fry's inability to purchase the *Lightspeed Briefs* instills a dark humor about his misgivings with regards to consumerism and the distance his desires maintain from being grasped. The dejection that ensues is humorous because dreams and desires structure our reality. By leaving Fry without any way to touch his desire in the real world, the false reality constructs itself and structures his world; with the latent craving just beneath the surface Fry keeps striving to attain them. I would like to cross-reference a moment in Žižek's essay "The Sublime Object of Ideology" where he breaks

down a dream in which a man flies into consciousness to avoid his own dark desires. Both dreams are relevant to the discussion on desire because both dreams involve a man running into the waking world to escape what resides latently in his mind.

Žižek recalls a dream of a man with an extremely ill child. The dream places the man in a scenario where he faces his child—now deceased in the dream—and experiences the guilt wrapped up in the child's death. Lacan develops an interpretation where the man awakens to “escape the Real of his desire” to elude the terrors of facing the guilt the father feels over the loss of his son (Žižek 2008: 45). Because the unconscious desire “is more terrifying than so-called external reality itself,” the dreamer is thrown into consciousness to distance himself from the treachery of his subconscious and to “maintain his blindness” (Žižek 2008: 45). Rather than create elaborate dream layers to cover up the latent desire of his mind and remain in the dream-state, the man escapes the dream entirely to find solace in the real world. The dream becomes a “fantasy-construction which serves as a support for our ‘reality’” by forming the waking world around the desires hidden deep in our minds (Žižek 2008: 45). If we cannot escape our desires in our dreams, we rush into the real world to hold dominion over those desires.

### **Dream-vertisement...?**

Fry's subconscious traps him in a nightmare that diminishes his mental and emotional stability with nothing to alleviate his stress; he is in class in his underwear being ridiculed before a test by his professor. The dream leaves Fry as the victim of ridicule with no answer to his problems. At this moment, the anxiety of the situation evolves to be nearly impossible to manage. However, the dream provides Fry salvation from the scenario in the form of *Lightspeed Briefs*. The dream advertisement sets Fry up to develop a dependency on an object; supposedly, this object, the underwear, can ameliorate any of your anxieties and release you from ridicule. The dream gives Fry a way out of his dissatisfaction after putting Fry in a demeaning position, which only exacerbates the need Fry feels to get ahold of those underwear. The dream, structured as an advertisement, guides individuals towards the *Lightspeed Briefs* so that they will be able to clearly see the benefits of the commodity being pushed in their face. The

dream manifests a desire latent in the mind and articulates a possible way of achieving said desire. Not only is the dreamer told he needs it, but he is utterly dejected by not possessing it, which generates an intense desire to remove himself from the trauma as a whole. Before shooting him back into the waking world, the dream itself sustains Fry's sleep state for long enough to show him the benefits of owning *Lightspeed Briefs* and then, only then, does it further separate the desire from its actualization in Fry's waking.

Fry comes to face his "Lacanian Real," which is the reality of his desires. To escape the Lacanian Real, Fry seeks shelter in the waking world, a place, a "reality," where he can actually possess *Lightspeed Briefs* and, by the construction of social relations, appear "cool" to those also sharing the social space. These desires manifest themselves in a way that furthers Fry's pursuit of them. If someone has a desire they feel must be met, they will persist in working towards that desire until it is satisfied. However, once satisfied, the desires themselves evaporate. For instance, if I had a desire to feel "cool," I would no longer feel the need to be "cool" since I already achieved it. But sometimes the desire never leaves because the fear of not being "cool" prolongs the struggle to achieve and maintain that kernel of "coolness."

This is exemplified perfectly in the struggles of Sisyphus, a Greek myth in which a man is punished to perpetually push a boulder up a hill only to have it tumble back down to the bottom, to its starting point. Just as Sisyphus arrives at the crest of the hill, immediately as he grasps his desires, he loses it all and must reset. This is the perpetual striving of desire, the tease we live for in our daily lives. Fry, constantly facing his inability to achieve those badass underwear, fuels his life with the craving he has for an object. But the barrier between working for the underwear and the ascertaining of the underwear must remain to properly structure reality and our desires. If the two overlap, the desire and the achieving of it, then they both disintegrate.

What is most unique about Fry's dream is the implementation of a commodity directly into the human's inner-most desires. The answers to Fry's prayers lay hidden inside the fashionable underwear the dream tells him he needs to be accepted. The entire dream structures itself around Fry's craving to be the man wearing *Lightspeed Briefs* so he can reap the benefits of owning them. When the dream doesn't provide Fry with the release he craves, he goes into the real world to find release by actually

purchasing the briefs. However, he is denied. The clerk informs him the store does not accept the method of payment Fry wants to use and Fry finds that even the waking life distances him from his desires. But the failure to have the underwear does not end the desire; no, the desire stands more ready than ever. Being pushed away from his dreams even in his consciousness saddens Fry, but in no way ends his pining.

### **Desires, Dreams, and Commodity**

Žižek states: “‘Reality’ is a fantasy-construction which enables us to mask the Real of our desire” (Žižek 2008: 45). The dream, the fantasy-construction, exists as a display of our latent cravings. While sleeping, our dreams help to “support for our ‘reality’ itself” in the way it portrays our desires. If our desires appear more tangible, we are more likely to pursue them in the real world; if we can obtain our desires, if they are *too* tangible, then the desire dies with ascertaining it. In this way, our dreams are an “‘illusion’ which structures our effective, real social relations” (Žižek 2008: 45). We look to the manufactured “reality” as relief from the desires we cannot obtain. Rather than address these desires, we break from them entirely and separate ourselves from the dream by reassuring ourselves “it was just a dream.” By announcing that the horror faced is only a dream, we are “blinding ourselves to the fact that in our everyday, wakening reality we are *nothing but a consciousness of this dream*” (Žižek 2008: 48). Ideology is structured similarly by offering a social reality where individuals can escape from their desire.

What *Futurama* does with the dream epitomizes the ideology’s hold over us in the consumerist society we live in. The dream, like ideology, exists only to maintain the pursuit of desires. Fry’s dream and the dream of the burning child both manifest a desire that we cannot sustain alone in the mind, so the solution is to flee. Both the father and Fry find momentary solace in the initial waking moments only to be thrown back into the throes of desire when their cravings manifest themselves in the real world with absolutely no salvation; the son is still dead, and Fry still can’t buy those damned underwear.

But the underwear adds a commodity to the mix that supplements Fry’s craving for acceptance making the possibility of obtaining them that much more real. By making

the desire closer to actualization, the pursuit of the underwear is fueled. The dream advertisement tells Fry that not only are the underwear of his dreams in existence, but that he can buy them. Consumerism lives and thrives off of the desires of the population, which it manipulates to perpetuate the buying and selling of goods. The more control consumerism has over its subjects, the more powerful consumerism becomes. Advertising agencies and promotional campaigns exist for the sole purpose of manufacturing ideology that abuses the population's desires because the more people want, the more the companies get. Even when they cannot cover your inability to ascertain the objects of your desire, ideology and the dream compels you to at least try.

## **References**

Žižek, S. (2008) *The Sublime Object of Ideology*, London: Verso.