

2

**SLEEP STATE
MIS—
PERCEPTION**

Ginny Cook

Ginny Cook

MY EYELIDS LEAK LIGHT. I lie down to sleep, I close my eyes, and there is light. I press them harder, the darkness deepens, and my head aches. If I relax again, the light is back. Sometimes it's streaky and faint and fixed, like the light leaks one sees in negatives, created from holes in a camera's bellows. Other times it moves slowly, worm-like. Unfixable.

×

I've been trying to make photographs about not sleeping. There are two versions. In one version there are a lot of blurred, amorphous shapes. Some images are more defined, contain more visual information, harder edges; others are quite simple.

Some photographs have no words in them. In the second version there are words. Words for sleep—synonyms that tell the story of trying to get to sleep, rather than the state of sleeping.

×

Sleep state misperception (also known as paradoxical insomnia, pseudo-insomnia, or subjective insomnia) refers to the condition in which an individual loses the ability to differentiate between wakefulness and sleep. This individual might report being awake all night, while those around her would record heavy snoring and deep breathing. The psychological profile of many paradoxical insomniacs is marked by rumination and poor coping mechanisms.

×

The darkness of my room and the darkness behind my closed lids are different shades of black. The shade inside is too warm. Too much red in the black. I open and close my eyes again, hoping to refresh the colors. Hours go by trying to match the blacks.

×

I set up my view camera and aim the lens outside my window. I need to get closer but my tripod is too large and my lens does not zoom. The tripod's legs hit the wall. I am under the dark cloth, eyes pressed to the glass, trying to force the camera into focus. I want both the inside and the outside at once. But I must settle on soft focus or move, reframe. Stuck still.

×

Hypnagogia is the experience of the transitional state from wakefulness to sleep. It marks the onset of sleep, when experiences such as lucid dreaming, sleep paralysis, and hallucinations can occur. It is a time of pre-dreaming, half-dreaming, threshold consciousness. But what happens when the transition doesn't happen? How long can one be half-awake?

×

A hypnagogic jerk is the involuntary muscle twitch that occurs as the body's muscles relax toward sleep. It occurs more often amongst children and sleep-deprived adults and is said to possibly be a vestigial reflex from when humans usually slept in trees. The more tired one is, the more often the sleep starts occur. The body jumps, arrested by a lingering need to save itself from falling.

×

I replay a scene from earlier, with two new endings:

I walk to the nearby grocery store, buy eggs, and return home. As I walk by, each house unfolds like a banker's box, walls folding down, collapsing in. The rows of houses become cardboard heaps, ready for the garbage truck.

I walk to the nearby grocery store, buy eggs, and return home again. As I walk by, the houses become rows of shiny Donald Judd cubes. My eyes have to airbrush them a darker grey. The sun sets, and I cannot tell what is house and what is sky.

×

There are tricks to getting there and staying there. There's a national foundation just for this. Think of something specific, they say. Think of nothing. Stick to a schedule. Develop rituals. Your bed is your sanctuary. Drink valerian tea.

×

I pick up my film from the lab, and the negatives are blank. Black. After all that effort, how can there be nothing there at all?

×

I've been in the darkroom all day making prints. I am tired and start fumbling around in the almost-darkness, spilling chemistry, dropping scissors, hitting my head on the enlarger. The urge to keep going is so strong; I don't know when to stop. Just one more print and then I can leave. Over and over again. Finally, I forget to expose the paper to light and slip the sheet right into the developer without realizing my mistake. It feels like hours as I wait for the image to appear. It never does.

×

Try not to see anything there. Empty out, they say. Install blackout shades. Feel light as air. Count backwards from 100. Say goodnight to each limb, slowly.

×

I move toward abstraction. The only way to say goodbye to images.