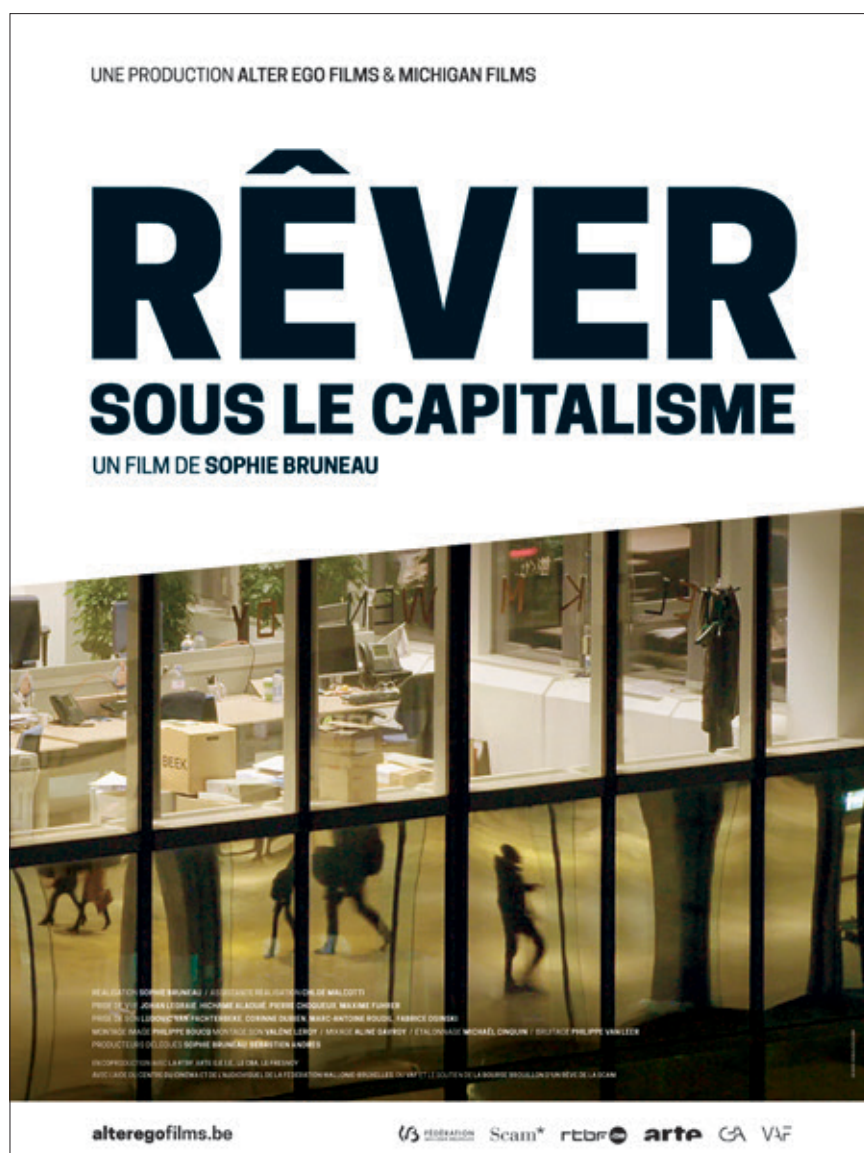


When our work follows us into our dreams... or rather our nightmares

Attempts to improve working conditions apply unusual or even surprising approaches. This remarkable film, created by a film director in collaboration with doctors and workers, utilises dreams to express the inhumanity of capitalism.

Marianne De Troyer

Labour sociologist and ergonomist



The DVD of *Rêver sous le capitalisme* (*Dreaming Under Capitalism*) came out on 15 May 2019 and can be ordered by email: info@alteregofilms.be

Sophie Bruneau, a Belgian filmmaker and anthropologist, has crafted an uncompromising documentary – *Dreaming Under Capitalism*, Belgium, 2017 – which explores workers' dreams of suffering at work.

A huge source of inspiration for the project was the work of Charlotte Beradt (1901-1986), an opponent of Hitler's regime who – between 1933 and 1939 – recorded and collected the dreams of 300 German citizens living under the Third Reich, convinced that people living under different political regimes have different dreams.

During an initial period of reflection, Sophie Bruneau thought about what kind of insights an approach of this kind might provide in the neoliberal capitalist world of today, and whether dreams could be used as historical source material.

After considering the idea in more detail, the filmmaker – decided to make a documentary reclaiming the unconscious or the dream world as an anthropological and social basis for talking about the world of work and what goes on there. In doing so, she explored similar territory to a book published recently by the sociologist Bernard Lahire – *L'interprétation sociologique des rêves* (The Sociological Interpretation of Dreams) – in which he explains why the social sciences should examine dreams in greater detail and establish a link between them and individuals' social experiences, since in his opinion (and contrary to Freud's views), the socially structured unconscious is not made up solely of our repressed experiences.

Before making the film, Sophie Bruneau developed a robust methodology: meetings with doctors working in Belgian medical centres who told her about the dreams reported to them by workers, collection of source material in cooperation with trade unionists, psychologists and support networks for burned-out workers and – last but not least – meetings with the workers themselves, after winning their trust and persuading them to disclose a very private aspect of their psychological make-up and unconscious.

Although the men and women in the film differ in terms of their age (between 40 and 60), professional backgrounds and social classes, they have one thing in common – a talent for describing and interpreting their

It is impossible to remain indifferent or unaffected by what is happening on screen during the film. The causal link between the dreams and the managerial practices which gave rise to them is clearly painful.

Dream: female worker, private sector

"Over and over again, I found myself having the same dream – a dream in which I could hear the 'beep beep' of the till which I used to operate. And sometimes, when I heard the 'beep beep' in my dream, I would wake up in the middle of the night and be genuinely unable to work out where the noise was coming from, and it would take me a while to realise that it was the 'beep beep' of the till.

It was the sound I'd hear all day long, from 8 or 8.30 in the morning when the shop opened, sometimes until as late as 7.30 or 8 in the evening, 'beep beep', all day long... And it wasn't even 'beep beep', in fact, it was 'beep beep beep', because you had to be super fast, at least 30 items a minute...

If all you heard was 'beep beep', that meant that the checkout operator wasn't working fast enough or doing a good enough job. It needed to be 'beep beep beep', with lots of items being scanned and lots of shoppers being served – which was good news for the operator and good news for the shop owner. So the beeps were an easy way to tell whether someone was doing a good job or not."

Dream: former private sector worker, currently unemployed

"I often have this dream on a Sunday night, which is when my stress levels are generally highest. I'm back working alongside the team where I used to work, and I'm sitting at my usual place, but all of a sudden, at the end of the month, when I ask for my pay, I no longer exist.

I ask the accounting department to add me back on the list, but I get a flat no in return. So I return to my team and find myself wandering around like a lost soul, not knowing whether I'm going to be paid at the end of the month, but working anyway – giving up the best of myself without getting anything in return. I feel like a ghost, I feel like I'm there, doing my job, but that I don't exist. And things are always the same in this dream, I'm always begging to be paid at the end of the month. It's like I'm a volunteer who slogs away but has to rely on the dole to survive.

What I find most stressful is that I always find myself preoccupied at the end of the dream with the thought that, when they add me back on the payroll list, when I receive all the back-paid wages, I'll need to pay back all the dole I've received – it's almost like an obsession.

When I wake up, I'm still half in a trance, and I start asking myself questions about why I'm here at all."