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Amitesh Grover

Written by **Dipanita Nath** | New Delhi | Posted: November 24, 2014 12:19 am | Updated: November 24, 2014 12:20 am

Do you sleep every day? Well, I am going to ask you to sleep differently tonight and let's talk about it tomorrow," Amitesh Grover, one of India's foremost performance art makers, will tell the audience of his latest project, "Downtime". Grover's latest work explores the contours of sleep, a bodily function considered as essential as breathing and yet impossible to celebrate while it is happening.

Whoever could have thought that sleeping was an art form? William Shakespeare? He sang its praises in beautiful poetry (“Sleep that knits up the raveled sleeve of care...”). Italian renaissance artist Michelangelo had commented on sleep and death through a marble sculpture of a woman slumbering mournfully on a tombstone in Florence, titled Night. American pop art idol Andy Warhol turned to sleep when he filmed poet John Giorno snoozing and, in 2004, a film showing David Beckham catching his forty winks attracted long lines of fans at the National Portrait Gallery in London.

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“ ***We have not slept for eight hours a night for most part of human history. People used to sleep in two stages in the medieval times; they used to go to bed at 7.30 or 8, get up at 12, do stuff, then go back to sleep at 2 o’clock and get up at 5.30*** ”

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Nonetheless, the power of sleep in firing up creative passions has few instances. A few years ago, Mumbai actor Rehan Engineer had stayed up all night in Delhi reading from a book as a dormitory full of people dozed on and off to his voice. Grover’s concept, in keeping with his previous performances that involve regular people, often connected digitally across continents and time zones, investigates what sleep says about present-day society.

At Delhi’s National School of Drama, Grover looks fittingly drowsy as he talks about co-creating

***do stuff, then go back
to sleep at 2 o'clock
and get up at 5.30*** ”

“Downtime” with German
artiste Frank Oberhäuser.
Excerpts from an
interview:

It's anti-theatre

I have to say that sleeping is the most anti-theatre, anti-performance human activity that could ever be because, for any kind of performance, you have either to witness it or to be doing it. The first big challenge was how to make a performance project around sleeping. The second and more personal reason is that my relationship with places changes if I sleep there. The first time I spent a night in school, it changed my relationship with the building and how I looked at the school the next morning. The third challenge was that each one of us is an expert on sleeping because we perform it every night. That's a lot of knowledge out there which is not catalogued. There is no documentation of questions such as, how was I put to sleep when I was a child?

Broken rhythm

As we started to research with sleep historians, doctors and therapists, one thing became clear. We have not slept for eight hours a night for most part of human history. People used to sleep in two stages in the medieval times; they used to go to bed at 7.30 or 8, get up at 12, do stuff, then go back to sleep at 2 o'clock and get up at 5.30. This eight-hour sleeping time is an industrialised, regimented way of sleeping, which a lot of sleep doctors claim is not natural.

rest in anger

Rest in anger

In a trans national contemporary world, there are people who should be sleeping but are working for another country that has woken up. Sleep is becoming this last human

impediment in the way of global capitalism. Global capitalism would very much like for human beings to give up sleeping because that's the time we are consuming less than slowed down if we were awake. Is sleep, then, the last radical protest we have left against the big machinery of capitalism? Is doing nothing a kind of protest?

strange bedrooms

Strange bedrooms

The first part of "Downtime" is Sleep Surfing, in which we explore sleep and private property. Sleep wasn't always a private activity. The concept of bedroom and sleeping alone or away from public eye is a 19th century phenomena. If you sign up for this, you will be given an address, greeted by the host and given a series of instructions on how to perform the host's sleep in his or her sleeping place. Then, get up the next morning and report back to "Downtime" about how this experience was.

doze of economics

Doze of economics

In Delhi, we discovered there is a sleep mafia, an organised, local group of men who take over the public spaces vacated at various places in the city. They fill these with beds and mattresses every night, and rent these out at rates ranging from Rs 20 to Rs 50. In an hour-long Sleep Walk through Old Delhi, we have invited one such entrepreneur to take audiences through his little enterprise and explain the economy behind it, where is he coming from and what the challenges are, of sleeping in Delhi without shelter or money.

bedtime stories

Bedtime stories

The third segment is Sleep Hotel, in which we construct a virtual hotel with 12 beds, which people can book for the

night, with each bed corresponding to another in Berlin. The people who book these beds get a sleeping kit and in each kit has a set of tasks that need to be performed around sleeping.
real actors

Real actors

It's been ages since I did conventional theatre. As an artistic practice, ordinary people are much better actors than actors themselves. The 21st century understanding of theatre is that we are performing through our lives. I hope "Downtime" makes people think in a different way about sleeping and change the way they sleep.

The performance will be held in Delhi from November 29 to December 7. To register, contact; downtime.post@gmail.com and 9810497027. Last day to register is November 25. Entry is free

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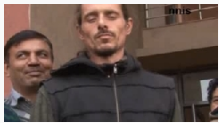
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