

Cartography of Naps



A couple years ago, before I took my qualifying exams, something I prepared for by reading very quickly and then taking a lot of naps, I was on the phone with my stepmother, a well-regarded art historian whose focus is on 19th-century American landscape painting. We were talking about our respective projects. I was trying to read everything I could about life writing. She was, she said, putting together a proposal for a project about naps.

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I remember where I was standing. In the parking lot of the Walgreens on the corner of Stuart and Shattuck in Berkeley.

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—Oh like what about naps?

Sort of a historical reading, a new cartography.

—Cartography of naps?

Well not a cartography of maps, no, that would be redundant.

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—Wait are you doing a project about NAPS?

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Maps. With an M like Mother.

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And then maybe a year later or two years later or something, Jonathan Solomon was like hey why don't you write something for *Forty-Five* and I was like fine but can it be about naps and he was like yes and I was like okay fine. And then the deadline came along and— All I wanted to do is take a nap.

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What I'm trying to do here is make a text like Roland Barthes made texts, texts you could climb aboard.¹ Except, shit, that's Wolfgang Iser who said that, I've always remembered it to be in 1971 though the citation says 1972.² Although this is also plural, a sign, approachable, not an object (following Barthes). The thing about studying/ learning/reading/absorbing for qualifying exams—which is why I read Barthes, and Iser—is that the filing system can get kind of corrupted by either mishearing—like naps for maps, for instance, which is the only reason this text I'm trying to get you to climb aboard exists—or by mis-filing, by trying to memorize one scholar and then accidentally memorizing another.

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Probably my entire career has been because of some sort of mishearing or mis-filing. When I first started architecture school, which is where I met Jonathan Solomon, I really probably shouldn't have been starting architecture school. I didn't know how to draw and my hands were too clumsy for

models—I don't have good hand-eye coordination but I do have persistence and task completion and so I worked what felt like 20,000 times harder than everyone else and my projects looked like totally incomprehensible garbage and come to think of it (though obviously that's how it was going to go) the last studio project I did was a bed for naps.

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And everyone was really nice about it but clearly all I'd done was thread some wire through some egg crate mattresses and made this kind of totally horrible looking pile of egg crate mattress and wire and I'm pretty sure I stabbed myself while putting it together and also probably stabbed the professors who very nicely tried to pick up the object and tried to take a nap.

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I also needed a nap during the crit but this was the Adderall era so I know that I swallowed Adderall to stay awake all night enough to finish threading the wire through the mattress and then right before I went up I did some Adderall rails. My memories of the end of architecture school are of (literally) sweet post-nasal drip and a touch of blue snot. Blue and red and white, very patriotic, as my friend Emily (not her real name) used to call it.

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So architecture school was a combination of naps and drugs and accidental naps. Or like the time I slept after being awake in the studio for 72 hours and then my friend Nick (not his real name) woke me up and I begged him, desperately, for ten more minutes even though I had told him, like Odysseus, not to let me sleep even if I begged for it.

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There's a kind of tired that comes only after you've let yourself succumb to sleeping for ten minutes after being up for 72 hours that is unsurvivable.

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Hence Adderall. Hence whatever.

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And so then I moved to NYC and then my soul took a nap for four years while I wrote about architecture and learned about how it's done—publicists, trips, etc. My dissertation now is about the origins of that then. The future of a past that was different from the past I thought I was living the future of in my own past.

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And then I couldn't take anymore naps so I quit it with the Adderall and the whatever and then I moved to Portland and published a book and then another book and then—I was like OK let's go back to school.

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Where naps were nowhere on the agenda.

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Instead it was like reading to have a reading contest with yourself.

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My first week of grad school I said I wanted to read everything.

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My second week of grad school I went into the library and saw how many books there were JUST ABOUT HENRY JAMES and I cried because I would never be able to read all of the books and know everything.

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That's when I had to take my first nap. Just the effort of accepting that I would never read everything was enough to push me over an edge.

When I teach my students at UC Berkeley I almost always show them a video of fainting goats. If you haven't seen any of the many fainting goat videos, these are goats that get so excited when they get startled that they faint. I show this to my students because I feel like that's what happens with them—they get so excited (freaked out/startled/worried/terrified) about their work that they almost faint.

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I used to fall asleep the minute anything got too exciting.

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Now I fall asleep when I look at the archives for my dissertation.³ I fall asleep when I think about Douglas Haskell.

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I have some light form of Derridean Archive Fever.⁴

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It took me thirteen years to be able to go back to Derrida after the way the French deconstructivist was introduced to me in architecture school. There was a professor who was famous and sort of still is famous and he would read Derrida to us every Friday morning. The seminar was scheduled for Friday mornings because everyone at school went out on Thursday and Saturday nights (only the hardcore among us also went out on a Friday), and so having a Friday morning seminar was a way of weeding out all the students who would otherwise be sleeping.

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I basically napped with my eyes open.

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I wrote a paper between naps that was about absence as presence in re the World Trade Center. I wrote it in 45 minutes while eating two Easy Macs in the dining room of a house in Pennington that my then-boyfriend was renting with two friends.

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Sometimes I get so excited/freaked out/startled/worried/terrified about my past that I have to fall asleep.

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You know what made me really want to take a nap?

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Ronchamp.

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Le Corbusier's Notre Dame du Haut in Ronchamp, France. I visited when I was twelve, probably, apocryphally (I've told this story before; never written this text before). I'd never seen a building like that, one that swooped like a whale and seemed impossibly structurally sound. And then, the inside, the three light wells and the boxes for windows. I'd looked at pictures of modern architecture but never been inside a building like that, and I felt like I should sit in a pew, which I did, and then felt like there was something magical there, something bigger and greater than me, that I could access if only I stayed still enough.

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So I basically went comatose for twelve years, maybe because it was too much. Too exciting.

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Can you be comatose while you're awake and high-functioning? I could.

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What's the difference between a coma and a nap?

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The internet says a coma is non-responsive sleep and sleep is responsive. So you can wake someone from a nap but you can't wake someone from a coma.

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Sounds about right.

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I was in a coma for twelve years and now I just take naps, little breaks, here and there.

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Cartography of naps, not cartography of maps, even though cartography of maps is completely redundant.

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What does any of this have to do with architecture?

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Once, during the coma years, I was playing trivial pursuit with someone. We filled each of the little wedge spaces with cocaine, and if you got a wedge you could/had to/should snort the whole wedge.

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And then way later, I found out even later that I could have actually been in a coma. Was almost. But that time I was totally awake.

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It's a fucking miracle that I'm alive, you know?

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Anyway, we were posturing to each other, all around the table, and someone said something like "I dare you to write a story about the architecture of Radiohead," and I was like "I WILL DO THAT."

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Obviously I didn't, but there's something in there with the architecture of a song and the architecture of this piece about naps and the architecture of architecture.

Recently, I applied for three jobs. I decided not to nap while writing my letters, and so they were four pages long, single-spaced, totally exuberant, full of chats. Chats and naps and snacks is how my friend Jason tells me we survive.

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I wrote this piece called a Design Patient's Bill of Rights that was all about how I'd been a medical patient and also an architectural one. It was my way of trying not to faint from excitement etc. at what I've "been through" lately.

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My mother wrote me an email that said, and I paraphrase, "stop writing about yourself and start writing about architecture again." I guess she really wanted me to write about buildings?

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So here I am. Writing about buildings.

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There's this whole alarming and pernicious and awful trend going on that's all about self-improvement and achieving and good habits and goals. One of my grad school colleagues sent around a "timeline for graduate school" that included when to start looking for a job and how to do it and what to say and it was really horrifying, so horrifying that I had to take a nap.

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Everything was so categorized and strategic. Like start making friends with x professors before you submit z paper and go to conferences and I am about to fall asleep just thinking about it.

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We have problems in academia and everyone likes to get a bit hysterical about how we have problems but no one ever wants to fix anything. I left academia for eight years and then I came back and then I kept trying to leave again. I think it's because I didn't take enough naps i.e. breaks.

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There's this relentless focus on being productive. Productivity. Publish or perish, etc. And in architecture it's even more confusing because we're supposed to publish or perish stuff about buildings but without looking at buildings—that's a different field, that actually looks at buildings. So we read about towns or streets or psychology or something.

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My first week of grad school I wanted to learn everything I could about the psychology of the interior so I took maybe thirteen books out of the library and tried to read them all. I particularly loved Amos Rapoport.⁵

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Try not to nap through all the shit that happens in the architecture world. Through the professors that show up at a crit and fight with each other instead of talking to the student. Through the other professors that are stuck in some theory. Through the architects that believe that the journalist is there to be a foil for whatever they want to say. Through the others that read to you and then tell you that you're dumb.

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Try not to nap through the fact that still in 2016 women-owned architecture firms are in the strong minority. Here are the ones I can list off the top of my head: Galia Solomonoff; Annabelle Selldorf; Jeanne Gang. Can you list others? Like who? Winka Dubbeldam! Deborah Berke! OK, anyone else?

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Try not to nap through the fact that at UC Berkeley, where I am a graduate student who works with men, there is currently a vivid explosion of a conversation about sexual harassment. And it's been covered up for years!

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If someone told you the things so many of us could tell you, would you think it was harassment?

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(You would. You bet you would.)

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It's so exciting I have to take a nap.

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It's so exciting I've sort of been in a coma.

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This is a cartography of my comas and my naps, of the things in architecture that have pushed me too far to the beyond.

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Once, in undergrad, I made a movie for a professor in which I compared Le Corbusier's strict formalism with a situationist *dérive* and my actors—my friends who I'd turned into my actors—thought that I meant to say *drive*.⁶

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This is a cartography of a *dérive* of a map or a nap, and I didn't mean to say *drive*.

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What I'm trying to tell you is that it is hard to be a woman in architecture.

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It is hard to be a woman in grad school.

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And still there is something in the buildings, like in that Ronchamp magic, that just—it keeps me here.

Review

By Dana Koster

In his poem “The Nap Taker,” Shel Silverstein laments: “Yes, all you selfish children, / you think just of yourselves / and don’t care if the nap you take / belongs to someone else.” For me, someone who writes about lack of sleep—both insomnia and early motherhood and the mania-induced decreased need for it—it’s easy to view napping as a sort of aberrant decadence. Something that happens to other people, something childlike and unquestionably positive. After all, how could the opposite of insomnia be anything but great? Which is nonsense, of course, and Eva Hagberg Fisher makes that clear. What she presents us with is a view from the side of the bed where the grass/sheets are not, as I’d assumed, greener. She shows us naps both wanted and unwanted, plots us through her life, its upper boundaries (where sheer excitement forces her to nap) and lower boundaries (where she passes out after a 72-hour drug binge) and makes the case that twelve years of it may actually have been a coma. That maybe she’s been napping with her eyes open. I can’t say that she’s wrong.

Fisher does all of this in a style that is one part poem and one part cartography. There is the fragmentation and repetition here of prose poetry—the storytelling is disjointed, sometimes breaking into one-word paragraphs before jumping, after an asterisk, in time and location to somewhere distant but tangentially-related. These jumps have a logic to them—they make a sort of geographic sense. One can think of the asterisks themselves simultaneously as naps and as locations on the Map of Eva, representing the nap continents (large events) and nap towns (small events) that define her.

Fisher also makes clear that naps are not, as I’d assumed, the opposite of insomnia. Sometimes they are, obviously, but they are also a natural extension of it, a pathology of their own.

Which is to say I don’t think Eva Hagberg Fisher is stealing my naps. But I’m not saying that she’s not stealing them, either.

And maybe that’s okay.

1 Roland Barthes, “From work to text” (1971).

2 Wolfgang Iser, “The Reading Process,” *New Literary History* Vol. 3, No. 2 (Winter 1972): 279–299.

3 Eero Saarinen Collection (MS 593), Manuscripts and Archives, Yale University Library.

4 Jacques Derrida and Eric Prenowitz, “Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression,” in *Diacritics* Vol. 25, No. 2 (Summer 1995): 9–63.

5 Amos Rapoport, *House Form and Culture* (1969).

6 Guy Debord, *Theory of the Dérive* (1956). <http://www.cddc.vt.edu/sionline/si/theory.html>

Biographies

Eva Hagberg Fisher is a writer, critic, scholar, and teacher. Her writing about architecture has appeared in *Metropolis*, *The New York Times*, *T: The New York Times Magazine*, *Wallpaper**, *Wired*, *Loft*, *Dwell*, *Architectural Record*, *Architect*, and more. She is also the author of two well-received books about architecture: *Dark Nostalgia* (2009) and *Nature Framed* (2011). Fisher is currently a Ph.D. candidate in the interdisciplinary Visual and Narrative Culture program at the University of California, Berkeley. Her dissertation focuses on Aline and Eero Saarinen and argues for a revisionist understanding of the roles of publication, public relations, and production in midcentury American architectural practice. Fisher's best-selling short memoir of brain disease and love, *It's All in Your Head*, was selected as one of Amazon's Best Digital Singles of 2013. She has written essays about literature and addiction for *Tin House*, her scar tissue for *Arcade*, and Philip Johnson's oiliness for *Art Lies*. She currently writes a column for Everup about medicine (and feelings) called *How to Go to the Doctor*, and she is working on a book about friendship.

Dana Koster is a poet and photographer based in California's Central Valley. She holds a BA in English from the University of California, Berkeley, and an MFA in Creative Writing (with a concentration in poetry) from Cornell University. From 2011 to 2013, Koster was a Wallace Stegner Fellow in the Creative Writing program at Stanford University. In 2012, she was awarded a Dorothy Sargent Rosenberg Prize "for young poets with unusual promise." Koster has published poetry on sleep pathology in *Clackamas Literary Review*, *THRUSH Poetry Journal*, *Phantom Limb*, and *The Collagist*. Her poems have also appeared in *Bellevue Literary Review*, *EPOCH*, *Indiana Review*, *The Cincinnati Review*, *Muzzle*, and *Southern Humanities Review*, among other important journals, as well as in the book *More Than Soil, More Than Sky: The Modesto Poets* (2011). Her poetry manuscript *Binary Stars* has been a finalist in nine book contests, including the A. Poulin, Jr. Poetry Prize at BOA Editions and, most recently, the Carolina Wren Press Poetry Series.