

Filoxenia dream

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FILOXENIA DREAM

Benedikt Bock

During a walk in my future neighbourhood I come across a small shop, a one-man enterprise — a mattress manufacturer. The shop is called GREEK STROM. Strom as an abbreviation for στρώμα (stróma) which means mattress. I immediately appreciate the triviality of the shop's naming the moment I see it. Soon I need to buy a mattress, and I already know: this will be the place.

The trivial moment lasts only for a second. How can I ignore «Strom»? In German «Strom» is the word for «electricity» and also «stream». It describes fluid matter, flowing particles moving in one direction like a major river, or electricity. GREEK STREAM? GREEK ELECTRICITY? Anyway, both are great identities for a mattress shop. But why GREEK? I'm already in Greece, so why is it important to tell me again? It appears that Greece might be the origin of production. But how I understand it, in this case «Greek» points more to a certain way of fabrication. It says that this is a place where mattresses are fabricated in a certain Greek manner or technique. That might be true. But pointing to fabrication in this way doesn't mean that mattresses are the only thing that are being fabricated here. False statements and fake text is fabricated, GREEK STROM is a story made up to persuade people to buy, one could say. I think to fabricate a false statement is bad, but the fabrication of meaning never seems fake. A fabricated story still is a story, no?

This is the beginning of a story.

I decide to have a look inside the shop. A middle-aged man comes forward and asks me how he could help. The shape of his back shows that he has already lifted many mattresses from here to there in his life. He has pearls of sweat on his forehead and he calls himself the mattress maker.

I start talking with him. The mattress maker offers the mattresses according to the customers' requirements and he explains that, above all, it's the size of the mattress that determines the pricing and there are certain models that differ in hardness and materials used. The body would always be a structure of spiral springs.

Every mattress type in standard size, single or double, has a standard price, he explains. For every ten centimeters you want to add in width, the price increases by ten Euros. «Fuck!» I think, «This is real Preisgestaltung». I love that German word, it means «pricing composition». Ten for ten is a completely balanced composition. But I can tell that in the outside world people might feel offended by this logic.

«What a random pricing», someone could think. «Wrong, absolutely wrong! Far too simple and a shadowy concept, ten for ten, the world of numbers is far more complex, even though it sounds good. There is no way to simplify like that. I'm not an idiot!», this person ponders. «There are economic rules we have to follow and this pricing obviously doesn't make sense. Also it's an

insolence to just set fantasy prices like that. Where should this come from? What magical formula is behind this?»

I can clearly hear this person talking...

But I can clearly hear myself answering: «sorry, but I don't want explanations of numbers, I want written truths. It's very important to acknowledge the logic of trivialities and to respect the banal and philistine. The world is full of numbers already, don't you think?»

Beside the pricing another curious detail has caught my eye. I'd never thought that there still is mattresses with a spiral spring body and I immediately find the image of a spiral spring very tempting.

It has a starting point and then it moves in spiral circles around itself till spring. For the duration of the circling there is no rule nor time set. Clocklessness till spring. Spring as a personal discovery, a realisation.

I	spiral spring
You	spiral spring
He/She/It	spiral springs
We	spiral spring
You	spiral spring
They	spiral spring

And indeed, when I enter that shop on this particular day it's the beginning of May; a warm month of the year. Spring. I am suspicious. Not because of the weather, but of the idea to maybe buy a mattress. I never bought a mattress myself before. A strange feeling of growing up, a kind of future suspiciousness and angst comes with it.

In the shop to my left and right, the very first things I see, are mattresses standing vertically, packed in thick transparent plastic with a GREEK STROM logo repetitively printed in red, in a stretched marker typeface. I imagine some German person, more likely from the south of the country, saying GREEK STROM. I'm really hearing it. The «G» of Greek would sound more like a «K» and then you would have «Kreek Strom», which would be phonetically similar to «Creek Strom». A creek — a tiny river — the very opposite of a «Strom» — the big stream.

Every big «Strom» begins somewhere as a spring and it spiral springs its way

into a creek
into a little river
into a river
into a stream
into the sea.

The German mispronunciation of Greek, «creek», does make total sense now. «Greek» the origin of fabrication, «Creek» the origin of the story. And in the context of the clumsy German-English pronunciation, again, there is another phonetic oddity to do with «creek». In German «Creek» would be spelled K R I E G which means nothing less than «war».

Krieg Strom.
Creek Stream.
War Electricity.

The pleasant warmth of spring suddenly gets cold. Fears, confusion and my initial feeling of suspicion take over and control my brain.

Brain Strom.
Brain Storm.

The force taking over has a face. It's an epiphany of Athena, the goddess of wisdom, craft and war. She appears as the origin, the creek and the Krieg, and blows my mind into a «strom». Trivial streams of wisdom running into the clocklessness of the realisation. Manufactured mattresses, fabricated madnesses, crafted badnesses of war. Civilized storm troops hunting native peaceful thoughts upstream. I can't locate a bright shining light as the epiphany, the origin of all this is around me, surrounds me, the goddess is a «Greek Strom». Strom of unconsciousness, trapped somewhere in the «spiral spring» between pre-real and reality. No thought, no idea, no confidence, no time. The war is storming between Athena and my German «creeks», I don't have the «craft» (German «Kraft» = power) to run, to resist, to find shelter. Completely overrun by the big «stream» of possible futures, not able to fabricate the mattress in front of me into truth or fake, into reality or dream. No actual selling strategies here, but me, spelled by a simple mattress.

After my encounter with Athena I walk further into the shop. A wooden vitrine with a glass on top presents three different models of mattresses. The models are not the size to sleep on, they are handy versions of the originals. They are not fully closed by the very top layer, they are cut open so that you can look into the mattresses' body. You can study the layers of meat around the spiral spring bones.

The first layer would be a beige webbing of fine straws. A kind of fabric mat, maybe as thick as a thumb. The next layer is also strawish-type, but more brown in color. Then a layer of a synthetic fabric is placed on top of the natural materials. The amount and material would depend on the model you choose.

The vitrine makes me feel as if I were standing in a museum looking at some excavated objects from the first humans on our planet. Back then people would sleep on rocky ground, maybe in caves. The evolution of fabricating a bed, a mattress, would start with covering the hard ground with comfortable materials like straw, moss or leaves. Seemingly nothing really has changed. I like the idea of sleeping on a rural object of tradition, it feels safe.

It is obvious that this mattress' production is very old fashioned, it is definitely not up-to-date, a poor tradition, and I also know that there are many scientifically approved synthetic materials available which are highly ergonomic. But sleep isn't synthetic, it's syntax.

II

Some time passes after my first encounter with «Greek Strom». Buying a bed is now more urgent and I return to the shop, this time with the strong determination to purchase.

I'm standing in the middle of the shop, to my left there is another room stuffed with old-fashioned furniture and a single bed. It's a kind of showcase arrangement. You can also look into this room through a big glass front from the street. From outside it seems quite messy, not really inviting. To my right I can peep into a moderately lit office. Not really inviting either. In front of me there is a massive steel object, used as a working table, looking like a huge anvil, resembling a gorilla with a heavily scratched back, and behind this heavy object the mattress maker is standing, carefully stuffing a pillow with synthetic wool. I can't imagine how this steel object ever got into the shop, can't imagine any machine able to lift it. The building must have been constructed around this thing.

The mattress maker leaves the pillow on the table and walks straight up to me. We start to talk.

I'm telling him that I had come here some time ago and that I'm willing to buy today. He responded happily that he can't remember me but that we will definitely find the right kind of mattress for me.

He slowly trots to the vitrine and starts lecturing about the three models on display. Beginning with the left one, explaining the materials, the fabrication and the price, going to the next one explaining the materials, the fabrication and the price, going to the last one, explaining the fabrication, the materials and the price, all very fast, he has done it a thousand times before. I can't really follow, I don't really learn anything specific. I understand that there are different models, I don't want to interrupt him. I enjoy being treated democratically bored.

Then he looks at me with great expectations. I don't really know what to say. I ask him if I could maybe try one of these. He nods, says nothing and motions to me to follow him. We make our way into the messy showroom. I lie down on the bed and it bounces strongly, the bed sheet looks like a used carpet and I feel that the mattress is way too soft.

So I get up and tell him, friendly, that this mattress feels too soft and that I want a mattress that is hard but not too hard. He nods again, saying «Sure!» and proceeds through the showroom to the mattresses standing next to the entrance. He pulls one out with all his power. It's a double bed mattress and

wrapped in plastic. He drags the mattress to the massive table and heaves it up onto the gorilla's back.

«What an absurd idea to use a huge gorilla as a bed drawer», I'm telling myself. By doing so the mattress maker doesn't want to accept any help. Then he makes an inviting gesture to me to go and try.

I climb up the tremendous beast and lie down on the plastic packed surface. The weather is already quite hot on that day and I'm wearing only a shirt and shorts. My skin sticks immediately to the plastic. It doesn't feel comfortable at all. Also being observed by the mattress maker doesn't necessarily help. I try to relax but the conditions around are enforcing the opposite. I feel that the mattress maker is waiting for my feedback. I'm turning to the other side, the side without him. But still — in my mind he is watching me. «Is this the moss you want to sleep on?», I ask myself. «No, it's not.» I turn back to the mattress maker and ask for another model. Maybe a bit harder, but... not too hard.

I'm uncertain and the whole procedure is getting confusing. There is no internet, no promising specifications, no graphics of the ergonomic spine line, no user ratings, no friend who can make recommendations based on experience, nobody to help, except me sticking to the goddess dress doubting everything.

I descend and the mattress maker looks visibly discouraged. He pushes the mattress back to the other ones and grabs another package. The same procedure. He wipes across his fairly haired head, he's already sweating. I'm climbing up again, but this mattress is even softer than the precious one. «Wait, this must be a misunderstanding», I'm thinking. But I figure out that I don't want to tell him and I wait. Luckily he leaves in the direction of the office. A kind of relief, but I'm feeling bad. I believe he knows that he had given me a softer one. I jump down, he comes back from the office room.

I'm telling him that I felt the one before was better for me but I could imagine to have it a little bit harder. He responds that unfortunately he has no harder mattress here, but maybe this week someone else would order a harder model and he could call me then to try it. I'm telling him that I don't want to wait and that I came today with the intention to buy.

He looks sad.

I'm expecting no solution to this situation constructed by my pecky customer's wishes and his negligible supply. The next moment the mattress maker comes up with an idea. He tells me that he wants to show me the catalogue, because he has one model in mind which is just a bit harder than the model I tried. Together we head for the office and he indicates for me to sit.

He takes out a cheap looking brochure. Now he is speaking about Europa and I don't get it at all. «What the fuck is he talking about?» I really don't

understand. I ask if I could hold the catalogue myself to have a closer look, maybe this helps.

On the open pages there are five mattresses presented. The photographs show the mattresses cut open as in the vitrine. They have names and they are depicted from soft to hard:

FILOXENIA

DREAM

COMFORT

EUROPA

HARD