

Soft Effort

There's one sound the data processor really likes to listen to when he's on deadlines at work. It lowers his anxiety, plus, it channels his concentration. He finds the sound on Youtube, it's titled: Factory White Noise Loop 10 Hours Flow Production For The Ears ~ Relax, Study, Meditate. He's unaware what the sound is exactly, but his guess is that it could involve some sort of large-scale drilling or sawing operation. He imagines toothed blades cutting through stuff. The stuff is beyond a doubt solid yet it stands no chance against the strength of the machinery. He finds the regularity of the blades to be oddly satisfying, they never miss the beat.

The question whether the sound has been recorded inside some real-life factory or arranged out of thin air on GarageBand is, to be frank, irrelevant to the data processor. He couldn't tell the difference between the two anyway, he has never been inside a real-life factory before, none exist around where he lives. All he knows is that there's something about that sound that magically morphs him, as he thinks of it, into a maker of this world. The factory track puts the matrix inside his screen on hold, he instead processes matter. Scrolling down on an Excel spreadsheet is like a thousand assembly lines moving in unison. A mouse click is like the blow of a heavy iron hammer on a beaming sword blade inside some obscure forge.

You can see here how the data processor blends his blurry notions about Fordism, its serial semi-automated mode of production, with the medieval-themed workshops and stone-eating blacksmiths he often comes across when playing *The Legend of Zelda*. Again, specifics about manual labor are a blur to him, they remain in the abstract, he just lumps everything about it into one chimeric one-man band. Manual labor is only mythology to him, that's all it can be. Still, he invokes it when he's on the job, it moves him through the day to picture himself stretching and sweating.

The data processor was hired at his firm for what he was told are soft skills. He has, according to the human resources personnel, two core soft skills: adaptability and dependability. He thinks there's a nice ring to these designations. They announce someone operational, always on the move, ready for any kind of glitch in the system. Yet he feels his skills were labelled wrong. His opinion is that the word soft puts a shadow on the word skill. A skill should be, were he to be consulted, the opposite of soft. If the data processor had to venture a metaphor, a skill should come close to how a tool is: resistant, maybe even a little challenging for the user to use, like a heavy iron hammer.

He must confess, the tools he employs at the office, they're lightyears away from a heavy iron hammer. Everyone calls them softwares, that's revelatory enough. Also, they self-solve the flaws inside his computer too much, the data processor thinks that's akin to bootlicking. A long time ago, a worker wrote this sentence in her factory diary, here in its French original because some of its parts resist the English translation: *Je jouis de faire un travail dur, qui «ne va pas»*. The machine the worker was on that day had a heavy defect. Incessant interruptions and tricky fixings were a bliss to her, a change from the usual drill. The data processor sure wishes for a similar sort of relief.

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