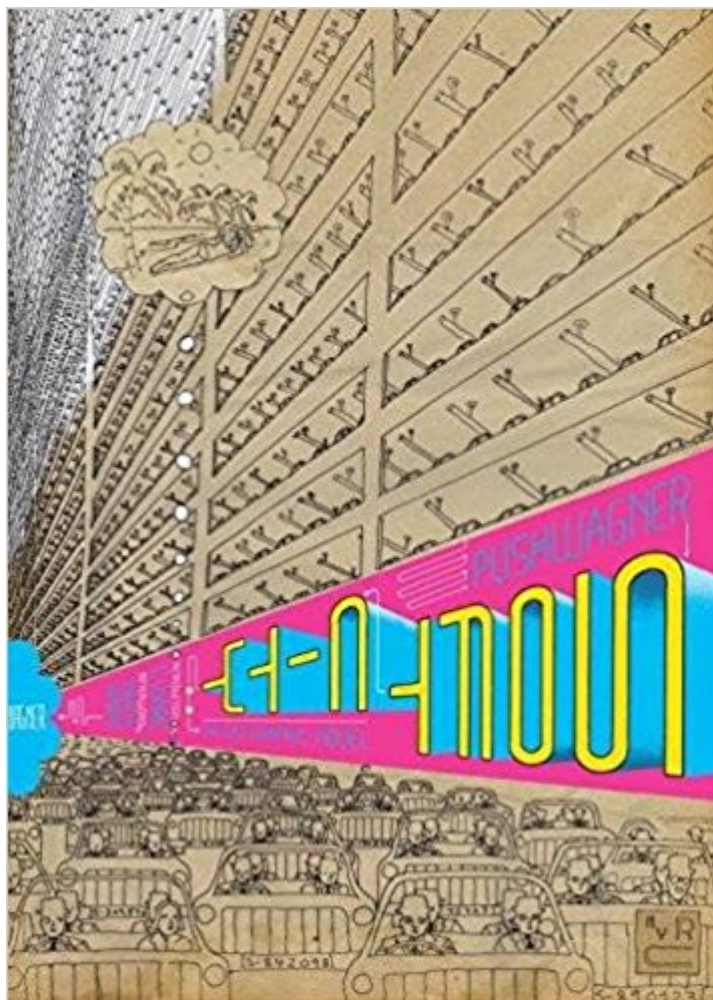


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# Soft City: The Lost Graphic Novel



## Synopsis

The legendary Norwegian pop artist Pushwagner's scathing comics masterpiece is lost for decades, and never before published in the U.S. is an epic vision of a single day in a world gone wrong: a brightly smiling, disturbingly familiar dystopia of towering skyscrapers, omnipresent surveillance, and endless distant war. "CLEAN BOMB THE HAPPY-HAPPY WAY," blares the morning paper. "Heil Hilton!" barks an overlord on the news. Welcome to Soft City. Now don't be late for work.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"Created by the Norwegian artist Hariton Pushwagner between 1969 and 1975, then unseen for decades, the astonishing cartoon treatise SOFT CITY has finally arrived in the United States. Its oversize pages depict city life as an identity-annihilating, cookie-cutter horror, observed by a baby named Bingo." — Douglas Wolk, The New York Times Book Review "This lost work, now published in an oversize hardback edition, comes as an aesthetic revelation...Echoing Ulysses in its one-day structure, and Kafka in its humorous yet cutting condemnation of bureaucratic systems, this book sweeps up the reader in vast yet minimalist panoramas emphasizing the visual monotony of tasks such as going to work and buying one's daily bread...this book will delight fans of experimental and visually lush graphic novels." — Publishers Weekly, starred review "Soft City is Norwegian pop artist Pushwagner's frenetic, prophetic masterpiece|breathtaking and damning in equal measure." — Sean Rogers,

The *Globe and Mail* "Soft City is a compelling storehouse of midcentury anxieties. Even if these anxieties are no longer quite the same— if we now inhabit a world in which the absence of work is more terrifying than its overbearing presence— there is still value to Pushwagner's vision. Soft City turned an era's apprehensions into art." — Brad Prager, *Los Angeles Review of Books* "The images are simple, but there's something seething behind them, perhaps the passion of an artist possessed of true vision. Fans of indie books and art lovers will embrace this as a masterpiece.

— Tom Batten, *Library Journal* "Pushwagner completes the subversive complex of his work, upending and overturning his readers with both the verbal and the visual. As a result, *Soft City* is as sumptuous as it is overwhelming: a vision of things to come that is more frightening for what it tells us about the world we already live in.

— Shea Hennum, *A.V. Club* "Pushwagner built *Soft City* on repetition, and repetition is Pushwagner's genius. On its surface, the comic shows an impersonal day in the life of the inhabitants of *Soft City*, a dense, highly regimented metropolis, but beneath, Pushwagner's opus reads like a dream casting back at a horrible, cold reality.

— Hayden Bennett, *Art in America* "Another remarkable rescue by the *New York Review Comics* | One of the best representations of urban alienation in comic form, with soft and liquid lines serving as metaphors of the conformism that creeps under the skin of modern man.

— Just Indie Comics "One of the more unusual and remarkable stories in the history of comics.

— Rob Clough, *High-Low* "Soft City is broad and booming. The pages are often very impressive in the way they evoke a sense of the past.

— Joe McCulloch, *The Comics Journal* "It's an absolute masterpiece of comics, and looks as if it was drawn yesterday.... It uses the medium of comics to express something profound and complicated.... The book was a revelation to me, and trumps pretty much every underground comic published in America at the same time.

— Chris Ware "Pushwagner's *Soft City*, the graphic novel, is as feverish as a nightmare acid trip.

— The Guardian "Its rediscovery and rescue...confirm how timely and timeless *Soft City* was, and still is. Prepare to be astonished.

— Paul Gravett, author of *1001 Comics You Must Read Before You Die*

Hariton Pushwagner (Terje Brofos) was born in Oslo, Norway, in 1940. He studied at the School of Arts and Crafts and the Norwegian National Academy of Fine Arts. After graduating in 1966, he

became a set painter for Norwegian state television, and in 1968 began collaborating with the Norwegian author Axel Jensen on a series of graphic novels and illustrations. In 1969, he started work on *Soft City*, which was completed in 1975 but then lost; it was rediscovered in Oslo in 2002. The original art for *Soft City* was exhibited both in the 2008 Berlin Biennial for Contemporary Art and the Sydney Biennial. Pushwagner's work has been displayed in galleries and museums all over the world, including in New York, Berlin, Sydney, Paris, and London. Chris Ware is the author of *Jimmy Corrigan: The Smartest Kid on Earth* and *Building Stories*, which was deemed a Top Ten Fiction Book of the Year by The New York Times and Time magazine. A contributor to The New Yorker, his work has been exhibited at the MoCa Los Angeles, the MCA Chicago, and the Whitney Museum of American Art. Martin Herbert is associate editor of ArtReview and a regular contributor to Artforum, frieze, and Art Monthly. His monograph *Mark Wallinger* was published in 2011.

While we've learned to be wary of "forgotten treasures" in popular art, sometimes there's a good reason they were forgotten, after all! there's no fear of that with this stunning, fittingly oversized book. *Soft City* is the future seen from our recent past, extrapolating a uniform life for all in a uniform world of uniform work, a simple yet detailed vision of all-encompassing, soul-destroying banality. Now, one of the positive blurbs for this book states, "Even if these anxieties are no longer quite the same if we now inhabit a world in which the absence of work is more terrifying than its overbearing presence there is still value to Pushwagner's vision." This may be true ... but either way, work & its necessity, with its domination & crushing of the human soul, remains true as well. And of course there's more to it than that. Work is merely the outward expression of a state of mind, the endless treadmill of consumption without satisfaction, where the illusion of constant innovation in a million shiny digital ways blinds consumers to the unchanging nature of their existence. In this deeper aspect, "*Soft City*" is frighteningly up-to-date whether we've got work or not, it's what determines our lives & substitutes for genuine meaning this need for More, always More, that never gets us anywhere except closer to the end of an unlived life. Urgently recommended!

Hariton Pushwagner was born in Norway in 1940. He worked on this between 1969 and 1975. It was lost for the next 27 years, and then rediscovered in Oslo in 2002 and shown to the world in Berlin in 2008. The term graphic novel doesn't entirely fit here, as there are very few words and almost no dialogue throughout the story. Mr. Pushwagner depicts a single day in the life of

contemporary man in a random, nameless city. A young child wakes up first, then his parents awaken at seven and prepare for the day. Breakfast, the paper, a dizzying commute, he works, she shops, he commutes home, dinner, tv, and lights out. The only glimmer of individual humanity is from the child's perspective, but that will clearly be driven out of him from the repetitive, machine-like life that the late-20th century provides. In brilliant introductory and afterword essays, both Chris Ware and Martin Herbert provide excellent analysis and insight. Both compare the work to 1984, while Ware also mentions A Brave New World. The book by Huxley is a more apt comparison, as the humans in Pushwagner's book have no idea that they are enslaved, because they have a car, tv and pills. There are also elements of 1999's The Matrix present. All products are made by Soft Inc., which illustrates both the drabness of commercialism but also the end desire of companies (to have a complete monopoly). All the penciling is good, but the commute sequence is both dazzling and devastating. This is an ideal book to give to a recent college graduate. You could give it to a MBA graduate, but it is already too late for them.

fun. bizarre. not for everyone.

Soft City is a fascinating piece of graphical storytelling. The book depicts a day of the life for the identical citizens of Soft City, in a future where everything is assembly line and the populace all follow the same routine. In many ways, it feels like a possible future from the movie Brazil with a bit of 1984 mixed in. Visually, it is both simplistic and layered. The illustrations themselves are rough and minimal, but the cumulative effect is an ominous sterility and a hell borne of repetition. It's an engrossing example of storytelling from both a visual and thematic standpoint.

Got here faster than I thought! The only problem was the top of the spine / binding (?) was a little bent. Other than that, I have no complaints!

This is a crude punch in the gut - but it's impact doesn't get much higher. As social satire, it's not very smart.

An amazing day-in-the-life story of families living identical lives in Soft City. If you are considering buying this I urge you take the chance. You'll be lending this book out for years!

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