

UN_REST

Practices of rest in performing arts in social contexts, mediation and education

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Future and crisis and contemporaries

With the beginning of 2023 we were continuously surrounded and approached by multiple intertwined phenomena identified as ‘crises’ that urged joint action: the aftermath of the global Covid-19 pandemic; increased social division in terms of right-wing extremism and populism; the growing unequal distribution of prosperity; the immensity of the worldwide rise in the number of people forced to seek refuge; the ongoing Russian invasion of Ukraine; and the challenges of finding effective responses to the multifaceted implications of climate change—just to name a few (cf. Demirović 2013, Hruschka 2021, Tagesschau 2022, United Nations 2022). What unites the designated constellations of these crises is the expression and problematization of an incapacity to re_actadequately. This account can notably be linked to an enhanced complexity due to extensive interconnectedness on the one hand, as well as to a significant degree of disconnection due to a lack of dialogue and reciprocal resonance on the other hand (cf. Arendt 1992: 272ff, Braidotti 2021, Bröckling 2007, Feist/Geden 2023, Haraway 2018, Rosa 2016). Against this backdrop, addressing the various constellations and aspects of crisis is negotiated on different levels of society. Also, from the standpoint of performative arts, its mediation and in the context of

referring educational institutions, the question of how to respond arises and is concretely invoked with this anthology (cf. Bünger et al. 2021, Eschment et al. 2020, PAC n.d.). Which approach can we take from the perspective of art and education, two societal arenas that have no wider political decision-making power?

In this article I will not try to find solutions or answers for the described crisis scenarios. Instead, I employ the description of crisis due to constricted agency and a lack of relationality as a thematic background associated with urgency and restlessness. The associated urgency becomes the jumping-off point for shifting my perception from a limited decision-making power of the fields of art and education to their potential as possible areas of (collective) experimentation (cf. Peters 2013). The associated restlessness inspires me to engage with 'practices of rest'. In that, I am interested in a possible political dimension of rest, rejecting the idea of rest as 'the opposite of action' or something more or less equivalent to 'doing nothing'. At the same time, I am interested in a dimension deviating from a primarily psychological or spiritual context of "mindfulness" (cf. Marlatt/Kristeller 1999). My interest is to explore 'practices of rest', interrogating the idea of rest as (political) acting and its entanglements with aspects of un_productivity and un_availability. How can practices of rest insofar inspire current accounts of performing arts in social contexts, corresponding mediation and education?

To start my research, I will outline two examples of practices of rest that indicate what I am interested in: projects vaguely located in_between the frames of aesthetic, political/activist, and social/community-orientated practices, simultaneously reproducing and transcending these social scales, thereby reflecting and addressing societal complexity. Then, I will address the idea of "action" with Hannah Arendt, engaging the discrimination of a public and private sphere. Afterwards, I will merge the insights I gained from both lines of thinking, also building on the Arendt-related work of Judith Butler. Thereafter, I will apply my findings to the context of performing arts, their mediation and the referring educational frames before I draw a final conclusion.

Approaching practices of rest and un_availability and un_productivity

I write from a white, able-bodied, queer and academically educated perspective. My perceptions, interests and decisions are influenced by the privileging and marginalizing experiences associated with these positions. My perspective is, therefore, essentially situated and necessarily fluid. In this article, I draw on the work of Tricia Hersey and Raquel Meseguer Zafe. With “The Nap Ministry” and “A Crash Course in Cloudspotting”, both artists base their work on their individual horizons of experience, interrogating and crafting ensuing dimensions of intersubjectivity and collectivity.

Tricia Hersey’s “Nap Ministry”

Hersey’s work includes performance art, writing, activism and theology. Her multilayered practice also ranges from activities as a “teaching artist, archivist assistant, community activist, and arts integrated curriculum developer” (Hersey n.d. a) in the educational sector, the cultural branch as well as civil society facilities. As such, she is committed to the “teachings of somatics, womanism, womanist theology, Black Liberation Theology, Afrofuturism, and her ancestors” (ibid.). In 2016, Hersey founded “The Nap Ministry” subsequently to her performance “Transfiguration” with which she investigated the topics of “reparations, resistance, Black Liberation Theology, and the spiritual practice of rest, and how it can be used as a direct line to our ancestors.” (Hersey n.d. b) Working on “Transfiguration” she developed “the frameworks, manifesto, tenets, and rest practices” that are now the texture of “The Nap Ministry” as an “organization of multitudes” (ibid.). The aim is to “create sacred spaces where the liberatory, restorative and disruptive power of rest can take hold” (ibid.) so that, again and again, temporary communities of rest emerge and dissolve. The idea is to thereby “collectively deprogram, decolonize, and unravel ourselves from the wreckage of capitalism and white supremacy” (ibid.). The book “Rest is Resistance” is the corresponding manifesto. Opening with the phrase “I hope you

are reading this while laying down!” (Hersey 2022), Hersey essentially brings four “tenets of the Nap Ministry” forward: “1. Rest is a form of resistance because it disrupts and pushes back against capitalism and white supremacy. 2. Our bodies are a site of liberation. 3. Naps provide a portal to imagine, invent, and heal. 4. Our DreamSpace has been stolen and we want it back. We will reclaim it via rest.” (ibid.: 13)

Raquel Mesequer Zafe’s “Dreams of Resting Spaces and a Resting Network”

Raquel Mesequer Zafe “acknowledges ‘crip’ as a tool in her artistic process, and ‘rest’ as a creative impulse” (MAYK n.d.). In her work “A Crash Course in Cloudspotting”, (ibid.) she distinctively addresses rest in relation to space. The performative and installational work is motivated by her reflections on the restraints and possibilities she is meeting with her own invisible disability: “I felt relieved to realise I am able, but I am also disabled by a built environment and vertical culture that is simply not designed for me (which is why I identify as a Cloudspotter, my euphemism for the fatigue and horizontal needs of someone with chronic pain).” (Mesequer Zafe 2017) On Disabilityarts.online she draws initiative from the description of “a fellow C[l]oudspotter [sic!]” (ibid.) that “there is literally no where I can go to socialise when I am in a flare up: all social activities involve sitting down, and it is just too painful. So I am confined to lying down at home or in other people’s homes.” (ibid.) She then asks: “Wouldn’t it be neat if there were resting spaces around the city, we could use as pit stops or places to socialise? A network of public spaces that welcome horizontality which we could use to map our days travelling through our cities?”. With this idea she invited people to contribute to a research on “how people with invisible disabilities rest and how they use their public spaces” (ibid.). In this context, she developed “A Crash Course in Cloudspotting” as “an intimate audio journey exploring the depths of human connection and the subversive act of lying down” (Mesequer Zafe 2017) combined with “a gentle choreography of lights, activated in the space by patterns of rest we so rarely see” based on “over

250 stories from people living with invisible disabilities and chronic illnesses” (ibid.).

Deploying the policies of slowing down and adjourning as well as the occupation of (public) space and the formation of new common spaces, the outlined practices involve ‘time’ and ‘space’ as two crucial dimensions of conceptualizing rest. Where Hersey chiefly eludes the hegemonial narratives of white supremacy and capitalism (without generating yet another enclosed counter-narrative but rather relying on decentral dynamics of the multitude), Merseguer Zafe most notably shifts and opens our perception of shared space and the practices finding realization in situ. In both cases, the respective bodies are rendered inaccessible for the societally scheduled operations, paces and modes of activity, enacting a (collective) sense of unavailability. As a result, both disrupt and question hegemonial procedures and rhythms that guide how we move along and inhabit space(s). Thus, the accentuated unavailability emanates into a collective refusal to sustain dominant societal narratives, which I want to comprehend as a form of unproductivity. While Hersey contradicts ‘grind culture’ by tracing it back to capitalist dynamics and the structures of white supremacy, Merseguer Zafe’s project engages a crip perspective, interfering with a dominant ableist view with the aim of making marginalized practices perceptible and dissolving social isolation. Hence, both approaches to rest are substantially informed by the situated and shared knowledge of crip and BIPoC experiences, thereby challenging our hegemonial perceptions and conceptions of space, time, communality and community (c.f. Castro Varela/Dhawan 2015, Davis 2013, Haraway 2018, Winker/Degele 2009). Both can be essentially understood as practices that offer strategies of reciprocal awareness and provide occasions to ally and assemble as forms of getting in touch. Here lies the potential to effectively shift and expand our visions of discursive and material limitations and peripheries (c.f. Ahmed 2006).

The private and the public realms and the marginalization of rest as non-political

From the evolved hegemony-informed perspective on ‘time’ and ‘space’, I would like to touch on Hannah Arendt’s concept of “action”. I will not go deeply into the terminology here but will pick out single aspects that inform my reflections. In “The Human Condition” (1992), Arendt employs the antique idea of a public sphere imbued with political freedom in contrast to a private realm of reproductive seclusion. Two grounding principles for Arendt’s thinking are the precondition of natality, which indicates the capacity to make new beginnings, and the presumption of plurality, constituting reciprocal perception and processuality (cf. Arendt 1992: 17f, 215ff, 224 ff, 293ff, Rebentisch 2022, Weyl 2016: 177–179, 183f). The public realm is thought of as a ‘space of appearance’ where people are perceived by each other, exposed to one another, mutually related and, by that, empowered to act—in opposition to the characterization of reproductive and consumerism-related activities as self-related and lonely (cf. Arendt 1992: 27ff, 216ff, 232ff, Weyl 2016: 184–186). Drawing from that Arendt differentiates three primary human activities: “labor”, “work” and “action” (cf. Arendt 1992: 14ff, 76ff, 124ff, 164ff). Labor is attributed to the private sphere, comprising activities of self-preservation on a biological level; the notion of work refers to activities that produce lasting objects and is considered to be merely in an intermediary position; action builds on these two providing activities but is defined by the dimension of freedom in opposition to necessity and is assigned to the public realm (cf. *ibid.*: 14ff, 27ff, 104, 112, 216, 258).^{1[1]} Drawing a distinction, action is here detached from necessity or productiveness and bound to the appearance in the presence of others (public realm). Labor

1 Because the contrasting of labor and work was repeatedly criticized as inconsistent, I won’t plunge into the precise lines of critique in terms of her definitions since I rather want to introduce her perspective as a basic point of reference for the following examination of practices of rest (cf. Geisen 2011: 274, Spittler 2016: 30).

and work are featured as re_productive and solitary activities (private realm).

While Arendt critically postulates a transitional historic process in which the modern era has manifested a hegemonial status of labor (cf. Arendt 1992: 38, 244ff, 287ff, 312ff), I want to shift the focus from Arendt's discriminations to contemporary positions in the discourse on work/labor, regarding capitalist enforcements of productivity and availability (cf. Bücken 2022, Daum 2020, Haus Bartleby 2015, Hersey 2022). In this context, rest and recreation can be described as marginalized and as primarily understood as instrumental practices to restore the workforce (cf. Bücken 2022, Hersey 2022). This is demonstrated by the marginalization of public or openly accessible space dedicated to rest and/or autonomous utilization (cf. Hersey 2022, Meseguer Zafe 2017): In public space, infrastructural settings like parks, yards and other open spaces can on the one hand be understood as exceptions to the general privatization of rest. But at the same time, they must be acknowledged as remains that are genealogically aligned to exclusive aristocratic and bourgeois fields of activities without common access (cf. Schwarz 2015). Moreover, such recovery-orientated infrastructures can be ascribed to the context of social arrangements that evolved responding to socio-economic deprivation during industrialization—and are consequently linked to work-oriented practices of recovery (cf. *ibid.*). Rest can insofar be considered as tightly connected with the economic sphere ('labor' and 'work'), ultimately facilitating providing/(re-)producing. I therefore argue that, contemporarily, rest is dominantly assigned to the realm of the private, discursively as well as in a material sense on the level of corporal practices (e.g. sleeping, pausing, abiding) and corresponding physical arrangements (cf. Hersey 2022, Meseguer Zafe 2017). In addition to space, this account also addresses the dimension of time, which is notified by the thematization of spare time and "time poverty" in contemporary socio-political and socio-scientific debates on social injustice, precarious employment or care work (cf. Bücken 2022; Whillans/West 2022). From this theoretically informed notion of 'action', I want to draw our attention in the next part to un_productive entanglements concerning the categories of 'time' and 'space'.

Challenging paradigms of the private and un_productivity and un_availability

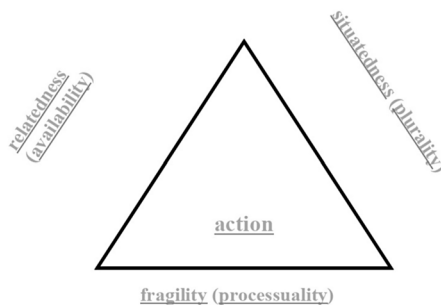
The introduced practices of rest artistically address collective structures of time and space. By that they traverse a one-dimensional affiliation of rest to the private and its characterization as detached from ‘acting’ respectively socio-political relevance. On the theoretical level, Judith Butler’s thinking, referring to central aspects of Arendt’s argumentation but enhancing it, is interesting here: Butler especially draws our attention to the fact that “[w]e cannot act without supports, and yet we must struggle for the supports that allow us to act or, indeed, that are essential components of our action” (Butler 2015: 72). Hence, Butler dissents a rigid dichotomy between the public and private sphere, also highlighting reciprocal dynamics of conditionality and freedom, of (re-)producing and acting (cf. *ibid.*: 71, Tassin 2011). With this practically and theoretically induced idea of rather permeable, intertwined relations of private and public spaces, I turn again to the presented practices of rest, asking how their qualities outlined before can thereupon be (re-)contextualized. Firstly, I conceptualized rest as unproductive in the sense of not serving the binding ideal of industriousness or work diligence. Consequently, it must also not be instrumentally subordinated to the restoration and maintenance of the workforce. By that, two pervasive contemporary narratives are refused.² The (physical) unavailability that is on the one hand devised (regarding those narratives), is on the other hand necessarily inversed in the Arendtian mode of action by explicitly making oneself accessible for the perception of others. This is enacted via remaining in public space while resting aside from designated spots, exceeding presumed durations of resting, as well as shaping formations of collective resting in common/public spaces. Here, Butler can be employed again, stating:

2 In this context, it is interesting to take a look at Arendt’s term of “ideology” (cf. Arendt 1986, Weyl 2016: 178).

No one body establishes the space of appearance, but this action, this performative exercise, happens only 'between' bodies, in a space that constitutes the gap between my own body and another's. In this way, my body does not act alone when it acts politically. Indeed, the action emerges from the 'between', a spatial figure for a relation that both binds and differentiates (Butler 2015: 77).

The depicted facet of 'relatedness' in the context of the examined practices of rest can then be regarded as a quality of action dissolving an inelastic definition of public space. This definition of action can be amplified by the indicated 'situatedness' in the portrayed practices, drawing from Arendt's depiction of plurality as vital (cf. Arendt 1992: 16ff, Butler 2015: 75f, Haraway 1995, Langenick et al. 2022, Rebentisch 2022: 33f). A further quality that can be traced and adjoined is a fragility of—in both cases—decentral, multitudinal frames. These are based on the ephemerality of enacting communalities, emphasizing contingency and processuality as Arendt also does (cf. Arendt 1992: 16ff, Rebentisch 2022: 33f, 43).

Figure 1: Conceptualization of action with Arendt, Butler, Hersey and Meseguer Zafé.



Ensuing this deliberation inspired by the theoretical positions of Arendt and Butler as well as the practical contexts initiated by Hersey and Meseguer Zafé, I comprehend rest as a potential form of (politically

relevant) action. This addresses a dimension of rest to be differentiated from a merely biological, reproductive or work-related instrumental practice—a dimension defined by the qualities of action. For my following reflections on implications for performing arts in social contexts and their mediation as well as corresponding educational settings, I will also build on the itemized qualities of relatedness, situatedness and fragility.

Addressing performing arts and their mediation and the corresponding institutionalized education

The practices of rest employed in the works of Hersey and Meseguer Zafe refuse dominant paradigms of productivity and availability while engaging relatedness, situatedness and fragility. In studying those, I am searching for traces of reverse and traversing that can inspire, reconfigure or broaden current aesthetic and educational practices, for instance, in relation to contemporarily significant difference- and process-oriented approaches (c.f. Bücken 2020/21, Falk et al. 2022, Hentschel 2014, Hinz et al. 2021). For my ensuing reflections, I build on the previously elaborated elements: firstly, the rejection of work-related productivity-narratives that claim extensive mental and corporal availability. Secondly, relatedness (availability), situatedness (plurality) and fragility (processuality) as three dimensions of action. Thirdly, the interrogation of the elements of time and space that informed my perspective on both rest-related artistic works as well as my theoretically inspired reflections. Drawing from these facets, I suggest a conceptualization of practices of resting as embedded and multilayered.

Figure 2: Visualization of practices of rest as embedded and multilayered.



Based on this idea, I suggest the following three elements and correlating questions to research on rest in (one's own) practices of mediation of performing arts as well as referring institutionalized education:

(1) *Breaks:*

When do I/we take breaks? Why? What are possible variations?

How many breaks do I/we take? Why?

How long are the breaks I/we take? Why?

Who decides on the frequency and duration of breaks? How and why?

What qualities apply for operational constancy in taking breaks (in a setting/between settings)? What qualities apply for variation? How can this inform my/our practice and, if applicable, the framing structure(s)?

What are contexts to reflect on this? Where/when does this happen? How much time is spent on this?

Who is part of this reflection? Who isn't? What are possibilities to find variation?

(2) *Mode changes—during and between work and non-work phases:*

What are modes (of time and space) that I/we decidedly or out of routine (re-)produce in my/our practices? How can e.g. horizontality, interruptions as well as slowing down enrich our repertoires?

Are there variations in the intensity of mental/corporal availability during my/our practice(s)? If so, what are their qualities? How can they be focused or diversified? If not, what are the options for switching modes on a trial basis? How can phases of transition between varying modes of availability during working sessions be initiated, framed and moderated? Through which forms can they be anchored as voluntary?

What are dominant and marginalized strategies to initiate and accompany transitions from work to rest and vice versa? What different qualities do they possess?

How can the difference between more and less dominant approaches be addressed? When and how can variations be (helpfully) incorporated?

(3) *Exchange*:

Assuming that I/we do not rest alone—What are occasions, spaces, time frames and rhythms of exchange with (a) colleagues, (b) the people acting in the frameworks I/we initiate or moderate, or (c) other people? Try to answer the following questions in relation to a, b and c:

What variations are there already? What variations could be interesting? What are supporting and challenging conditions of this given or possible exchange? What are the resources I/we can draw on?

Is this exchange a regular/institutionalized part of my/our work? If not, where could time and space for it be added or addressed as a need? If yes, what would help to consolidate or expand this space/time for exchange?

Based on these categories I also propose three concrete settings. The first one derives from the thematization of mode changes and is something I have worked with in the field of performing arts and their mediation together with Katrin Maiwald. In various projects, we established a spot (space) for the people engaging with us in performative research to *withdraw* from a dedicated area of occupation. This spot was in variations labelled as a watching/noticing or pause location. The possibility to move from one field of action to another varying the intensity of mental and physical involvement was optional ('fragility'). The withdrawal from one field is then set equal with the entrance to another area, maybe in combination with a spatial 'reorientation' between standing, sitting or lying.

Maintaining a form of spatial ‘relatedness’ is in opposition to leaving the working space. It was interesting for us to experiment with this tool in continuous projects as well as differing settings. The second proposal I would like to make is a ‘shared resting time-space’ for people who have different roles/tasks in a project, institution or yet another system, e.g. students and tutors, participants and theater pedagogues, researchers and their co-researchers (situatedness). Here the idea would be to regularly deploy a concrete location as well as a concrete time frame with the dedicated invitation of those diverse groups to join for resting. This framework, built on the voluntary co-presence of people in different positions resting together, would express appreciation for the act of resting through its institutionalization. For the Bachelor of Arts in Theater Pedagogy at Zurich University of the Arts, a similarly conceived offer was set up during spring semester 2023: students and tutors were invited to gather for a thirty-minute “TP Break” around 10 am. It can be noted that the offer was hardly used from the student side as well as any faculty members who were not part of the core team. Thus, for the considered setting it might be helpful to coordinate the selection of time and space in a joint process from the perspective of the different roles in order to develop a ‘collaborative basis’ for the ‘action of resting together’. In a way similar to this, my third proposition would be to establish a ‘frequent free time-space’ in the common curriculum or timetable. Again, the provision of a certain space or rather several spaces and an associated time frame are necessary elements. This area of corresponding time and space would then be at the free disposal for all members of the concerned context. I would suggest a commonly accessible framing of this time-space as an invitation to rest, maybe co-presently in parts and partly decentralized. This format appreciates rest as a commonly shared practice via institutionally deployed time and space and explicitly valuing the (possible) diversity of practices. In my view, for all three of my suggested formats as settings/practices in progress the exchange with the people involved is essential. Time and space are important elements to realize practices of rest and support their evolution. Yet, rest can never be imposed, since from a psychological standpoint the individual needs the capacity and self-competence to engage in rest. From the theoretical position taken

here, rest as action must remain non-instrumental, meaning without necessity.

Crisis and rest and prospects

The backdrop of my search was the initial claimed observation of the current multifaceted crises—but for this article I decided not to turn to attempts at solving these. Instead, I used the referring lack of effective action and interconnectedness as a starting point for my investigation of two contexts of practices of rest. I argued that the examples I introduced inspire relationality and nurture communion by evoking motions of allyship and shaping more broadly and diversely accessible sites and practices. Drawing from Arendt's and Butler's lines of thinking, I argued for the possibility to classify certain aspects of 'rest as action'—in distinction to 'doing nothing' as well as psychological or spiritual facets in the context of 'mindfulness'. Building on my investigation, I developed impulses for the practice of performing arts and their mediation as well as the institutionalized education in this field. My conclusions from this are: 1) It is intriguing to illuminate a contemporarily marginalized dimension of *rest* in differentiation from work or labor (productivity/necessity)—carving out forms and facets of connectedness enacted. 2) Rest can and should therefore explicitly be integrated in research and learning processes as a line of 'action', independent from refusing the restoration of productivity—simultaneously resituating these practices while relating to the essential framing knowledge and struggles of the Crip and BIPOC community and inviting people to be involved in that process. 3) This approach can be understood as a continuous research process, experimenting with forms and settings based on the provided qualities of 'relatedness', 'situatedness' and 'fragility'—making rest not a 'helpful instrument' to initiate interconnection and communality, but merely an indicated and ongoing 'active' motion.

Pursuing this line of thinking, it would be also interesting to continue exploring rest as part of artistic and mediating practice, anchoring and questioning it with regard to aesthetic consequences and qualities

on a structural level. This investigation appeals for instance to the course of postdramatic theater as well as contemporary crip performance (c.f. Deck/Umatham 2020, Backhausen et al. 2023). How do practices of rest inform our aesthetics and our conceptions of creating and creativity? How can the exploration of a perspective of rest then nourish our perceptions of differences and interconnectedness? Points of reference for this endeavor could be, for example, Michael Turinsky's perspective of varying rhythms articulated in the context of his project "Precarious Moves" or Sandra Umatham's account on "Theatre without Tardies" (trans. by L.R.), engaging, among others, the framework of relaxed performance (cf. Umatham 2020, Turinsky n.d.). Here, diversity and processuality are fostered, particularly thematizing aesthetics in plurality as a more or less entangled 'side by side' of different approaches and refusing binary either-or-searching.

Pause.

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