

*We have
found in the
ashes what
we lost in
the fire.*

Kate Genever

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Introduction

We have found in the ashes what we lost in the fire is an ongoing research project that explores 'creative rest'.

It was catalysed by conversations with fellow artists about being weary, and how we repair ourselves after demanding times. All of us described using our *sideways brain*¹ in a form of *creative restorative rest*. We understood this as an experimental, sensory rich, not-knowing-yet approach, with outcomes, if any, not intended for sharing.

These early explorations deepened during a residency at Metal Peterborough (for the *Strong Bonds for a Fragile Planet* programme, which took 'Radical Intimacy' by Sophie K. Rosa as inspiration). For which I invited artists and creative thinkers into longer discussions and convivial gatherings (one led in collaboration with Danica Maier). These social events, held over food, encouraged guests to freely engage in dialogue². *There was no formal agenda or predefined outcomes, instead the focus was on sharing, connection, and being in each other's company*³.

What follows is one result of this work. A fiction, using transcriptions and comments from all involved. My intention is to bring together a form of conversation, albeit one step removed, where connections, disjunctions, interpretations and narratives are created. And offer you the reader a sense of the wide-ranging, generous and rigorous discussions that took place. Through this text an attempt is made to interrogate and define creative restorative rest. No solid conclusion is drawn. Rather a series of ideas are revealed, considered and a set of unifying values discovered.

To accompany this 'conversation' a double-sided broadsheet poster is included which offers fragments or glimpses of this creative rest made manifest. I sourced images to illustrate the experiences described, others were supplied by those involved.

¹ Amanda Phillips – in conversation

² On Dialogue. David Bohm: *a group space of sustained communication, without agenda, with suspension of own assumptions, with introspection and a heightened sense of attention - a kind of deep listening.*

³ Danica Maier. *Sal Salo(o)n*: An audience of Twelve*. A Dinner led by Danica Maier in collaboration with Kate Genever at Metal, Peterborough. Saturday, 10th February 2024.

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Part 1 – Creative restorative rest: What it's not.

Kate Genever [KG]: I've done a lot of talking and reading and I've come to know the type of rest I'm exploring is not...

1. The essential stuff we all need like sleep, baths, no screen time, walks in nature....?
2. Being stagnant or doing nothing.
3. Puzzles or colouring-in books. Both have an inherent creativity, such as choice of picture or the colour of the pens, even the enjoyment of the sound of the felt tip on the paper. It's not these because they are focused on predetermined outcomes and notions of distraction.
4. Only for the privileged.
5. Intentional process-led making.
6. Expensive hobbies or bombastic retreats or commodified mindfulness. These are about consuming "wellness" rather than focusing is on being well? Octavia H Butler says *We must find the rest of what we need within ourselves, in one another.*⁴

Is there any more?

Tiffany Arnston [TA]: I'm thinking about the Romans. We know Roman culture forms the foundations of Western civilization, embedding associations within society today. The notion of lounging around being fed grapes by a slave, doesn't feel aspirational, more so discomfoting. This depiction of rest is exclusive and exploitative. It is not 'my' rest, it makes me feel guilty about rest, and also that rest isn't for me... I get that these feelings are somewhat in conflict.

⁴ Octavia H. Butler: The Parable of the Sower

KG: Of course there's an ongoing impact of slavery or colonialism on black and brown communities and how rest is perceived or taken by them? ⁵

TA: So another must be: Rest enabled by the oppressing of others?

KG: Yes.

Hayley Harrison [HH]: Maybe also there's... It is not completion? It is not target driven. It doesn't need to be witnessed, but there is a 'doing'. Which for me means that creative restorative rest has at its heart the generation of open-ended experiences that offer repair and relief?

TA: Yes. I think we are raised to think binary outcomes are what we should be seeking, to 'make sense' of things. Yet creative restorative rest has more threads, colours and ways of manifesting. It's not fixed.

Laura Mabutt [LM]: So making that's not about an end product?

Matt Jagger [MJ]: My creative restorative rest happens in a gallery, I love to visit them and get so many ideas from seeing work.

KG: So creative restorative rest is also about looking and feeding the eyes of our minds?

MJ: Yes, that is what feeds me, things always come when I see work whether it's a technical idea or a visual thing.

Gill Adams [GA]: I agree it's about letting light enter. I have a machine that you put over your eyes and it vibrates and flashes colours and dots, it calms my brain. It looks like you're flying through the universe. Other times I just sit and stare and let my brain go where it wants. I go somewhere I don't know where I go. Often I come round and it's dark and I've been staring for hours and I feel really awake. Daydreaming some might say.

Bettina Furnee [BF]: I guess I also do a lot of daydreaming around my projects, and mulling things over.

Pearl Anderson [PA]: Ha, it makes me remember, when I knitted, just for fun, I used to fly in my head, I'd fly all over the world.

Julie Moosburg [JM]: When I'm modelling, I'm waiting, enjoying nothing else other than watching. I see things that no one ever sees. I daydream and just free wheel, I watch the light and the texture of a wall. It's amazing what you can learn in this state. It's a way of being in the world. You are not paying attention in a typical way but you are absorbing. I am receptive. We don't realise how important this mode is to be in. I'm in that mode and everyone is drawing or teaching or worrying about something. I'm looking at them and what's in front of me, the dynamics and how personalities are coping. I might be looking at the white wall and how it reflects light say compared to the black spare. I'm interested in how we never give ourselves time to do this type of looking. I've got space to observe. Stillness and time is afforded to me.

⁵ Jamila Pereira. <https://grownmag.com/global-voices/how-can-we-preserve-our-hobbies-from-hustle-culture/>

Jeffery Choi [JC]: Yes the quiet time.

KG: So another important one is: Not a full space or time filled with noise – and I mean life noise?

JC: Yes, there is a lack of little moments of quietness.

Jeni Cairns [JCa]: In quiet times my ‘rest and recoup making’ seems to involve switching my mind off and doing something repetitive like sowing or weeding or baking or gathering plants to turn into tea or medicine of some kind. A couple of winters ago I spent the whole winter embroidering all the holes in my jumper and getting more creative as it went. I bloody love that jumper now and it wasn't work but it was creative.

Danica Maier [DM]: It's like my small sketchbooks which are about the activity and process of being with a place, space, and moment focused on the process of drawing and mark making. They allow for a stop, a moment of focused thought. They do enable the flow state and relaxation of the minds thoughts. Sometimes this stops the thoughts or sometimes just allows the thoughts to freely flow without too much attention or attachment to them. The resulting's drawings are a document of the moment and for me can take me back to that place, moment, and mind set/thoughts occurring during the processes.

Melissa Peirce Murray [MPM]: I'm using drawing like a meditation or daily disciplines, and the restricted time/design. Kate you shared something before about setting boundaries to create freedom – *Boundaries create the container within which your yes is authentic.*

KG: Yes that's a beautiful quote by Adrienne Maree Brown⁶

Soraya Smithson [SS]: I am trying to stop between tasks, to sit quietly and do nothing even if only for a few moments at a time. These moments of *rest* where I wait, I try to calm my brain, to not think, to tune out of the erratic noise in my head. That is the *rest* I need to develop, moments of stoppage. I like Melissa's practice of drawing every morning and now adding snippets of text into that *rest* time.

KG: So is having boundaries or is stoppage important for a creative restorative thing or is it a Not? So it's not forced imaging for a job or project?

JM: The freedom of a creative experimental life room allows for it to be restorative. But there are some boundaries, say ten minutes say for testing wobbling, that brings it back from the vastness of totally being in not knowing. In those moments you don't think about what pose might come out. The concentration is holding you somewhere. There's no space for thinking as you are focused and in concentration. It's not about pose, it's a thing that's in the moment. The hand won't steady you, the concentration is steadying you. Sight anchors you.

KG: Julie I love how you talk about life modelling and the boundaries you have in that too? Is this then part of the “it's not” list? Creative Restorative Rest is not boundary less?

⁶ Adrienne Maree Brown. Pleasure Activism: The politics of feeling good.

JM: Yes for me yes, the boundaries within in which freedom happens is right. These short times offer an escape.

HH: Rest for me is the temporary freedom of commitments, and escape from 'to do' and 'should be doing' lists

JCa: I used to be terrified to switch off or stop working as if I would lose it and not get it back, so I would push myself to my limits until I got burned out and had to rest. Now I make sure to put rest and playful creative stuff as a priority and I tend not to get to burn out anymore. Which feels more balanced. It has taken practice and facing up to my habits , adrenaline chasing and fears of laziness and failure but it's been worth it for happiness and balance.

SS: I have been trying to learn to congratulate myself on what I have done not punish myself for what I have not managed to do or still has to be done. Pleasure in the everyday that is the rest I want to re-find.

LM: Stopping isn't good for me, you know stopping when you're in the middle of a project or commission? Instead, it sends me even further into tiredness. And then you have to ramp yourself up again it becomes more exhausting.

KG: This is the - not doing nothing - one.

Katie Smith [KS]: I've got one, it's not about passive consuming. My clients often turn up at the first session and say I want you to give me strategies or can you fix my problems? They are so passive. I know that even if I told them it won't help because at this stage they are consuming therapy because someone has told them they need it. They think they can just turn up and get fixed. There's something in here about the difference between consumer and creator that's important. This is like the 'wellbeing' being offered to people in all sorts of places, it might help to distract, but it won't solve the problem. Because we have to find out for ourselves what we need, we have to embrace the spiritual side of creativity, as in find our spirit and get active with it.

KG: We need to get curious about ourselves, open ourselves up? Become receptive to synchronicity, work in not knowing? Which reminds me of a thing I heard about therapy... that we are not going to gain success, until we become curious about ourselves. Curious and creativity feels like the same thing. A person who just turns up wanting answers is not curious or creative?

KS: Like someone with a hobby or a pastime. We get pleasure from these. Some people come to therapy as a past time.

KG: A past time – to pass time. So creative restorative rest is not to just pass time?

Amanda Phillips [AP]: Yes and I'm glad you said 'mindfulness nonsense' at the start. Because there is a lot and it's beginning to feel calcified, it's becoming policy and legislated. It's about power, how one can use language to define something and make it so. I always want a thing to exceed language. At work I get a lot of emails about 'wellbeing' opportunities that feel like an appropriation and commodification of nature and things around human being-ness. They make me want to maintain a large sense of criticality.

KG: So it's not owned or a product, a thing to sell or buy?

AP: It's about the connectivity that exists in the world, in the broadest sense. Where all of what is possible presents itself simultaneously. Where we recognise the links between us and plants and nature and cars and buildings.. everything as sentient. This is what I understand as a sensorium, to be enraptured. There are times when you choose to notice this and this is where I find rest.

KG: It's not fragmentation, disassociation - it's about recognising ourselves as part of a whole. And welcoming in all that that brings?

AP: Yes. It's a state of being and becoming. Where we sit with the uncomfortable and all that is possible. And we engage and be present with all the knowledges a human being has and can't speak of including intuition.

Part 2 – Why are we weary?

AP: Firstly this leads me to think about artists? It makes me feel nervous to stereotype artists, but it would be true to say in my life experience there are certain people whose energies are in patterns of connection - meaning they make connections between things that could be described as A typical. It's not just artists and scientists are there too, and perhaps some farmers! Whatever, we are talking about its active in them, its curiosity. If you are a curious person there is very little off curiosity. It's difficult to tune curiosity out. Someone said to me "Thinking can become a habit", criticality is very important part of my life. Thinking about thinking, thinking about everything all the time. In Brian Masumi's book Thought in the Act he talks about "thinking making/making thinking". I'm going to use it for artists and that circularity is what I understand creative practice to be about. And that creative curiosity practice can be anything.. whittling, doodling....and it's part of habit of being for some people and it's exhausting.

Andrew Bracey [AB]: I was exhausted when I got Long-Covid. I just couldn't do anything. I didn't create anything for six months. But there came a point where the doing nothing was not helpful. On the advice of my amazingly supportive doctor, I started drawing for five minutes every day, something I'm still doing. I draw multiple lines of one colour, which I then change the colour of each day and they slowly link up into a network of triangles. When all the lines were filled to make triangles I started a new sheet of paper. I am now over eight months into this daily practice. I did not do this for art purposes but for self-care, essentially to keep me sane when lack of energy meant that everything I did was energy-sapping and everything from making tea to having a shower to reading to talking all left me exhausted. I became so frustrated and I was so thankful that my doctor took a holistic attitude to care and saw that I needed something creative in my life to hold on to stop a spiral descent into frustration and despair with my situation. It did not seem so then, but doing the drawings helped bring purpose back to my life when it felt like everything I did exhausted me. I learnt how to rest through the fatigue of being ill as beforehand I had to always be doing something and keeping myself busy; I can now appreciate the importance of just breathing and being here and now, in a world that is increasingly busy busy busy...to sit each day for five minutes and just draw coloured lines feels across between luxury and something slight, but is actual vital in my current life.

KS: My relationship to making activities has changed too. In the past I found them helpful, those quiet moments when your sewing for example and you can reflect, the getting in a flow state, the joy of making. But I've had to abandon all art making. I was exhausted and needed space to think about what I was doing. I'd started a large project but I had to stop it because the partners were so bad, their ethics and approach was wrong. I was treated badly. It was so stressful and it made me question everything. I made a T shirt for myself that said: "Abandon all art, major rethink in process". Not making has been really helpful. I've had to completely step away. It's been an opportunity to replenish and find resource in whatever that needed to be. I've re-evaluated the sources of my stress and oppression. I was oppressed by the system. The writing of bids and getting no return, the toll of social practices....

KG: Fair wages, dignified conditions.. Bread and roses?

KS: Yes. So thinking 'what I needed' was a response, to rest in movement, have gratitude, have space and time to feel like I'm treating my body in the right way so new ideas can come. Through this I have come to know deep rest happens now when I connect to my subconscious. Connect to the stuff that's outside of my awareness by giving it an opportunity to let it bubble up. When I was exhausted or if my mind was full of work problems I couldn't step into this space of letting things come from within. I think to accept rest is hard. I felt an external pressure to make, because if I wasn't making I couldn't call myself an artists, just a therapist. But I've resisted, I need space and to replenish.

AB: What has been palpable in this research Kate, was that we were not asked to 'do as artists': no surveys, no preparations needed, no workshop to deliver, no sense of ticking off pre-ordained objectives, no audience engagement activities or measurements, no evaluation to fill in, no justifications, no forms, no admin or bureaucracy, no meetings beforehand...to reiterate, a sense of being valued and to feel the value in and of others.

LM: I definitely agree, the system around being an artist can drain your energy. Having the ideas at the start, is where it's creative, after that you give so much away in support of the work, and a focus on an end product. But learning something new is energising

But I also have Long-Covid and came to understand how experimenting with materials is better than doing nothing. It's the being busy with your hands, doing things that get your brain going. Doing nothing makes you feel more tired. Through the Long Covid I learned new ways to function and these have been useful.. being creative, is feeding myself. I'm doing something for myself. Taking time to learn new skills, ideas or anything really is like filling myself with new energy, that I can then let back out into new or continued work. I like to experiment as I go along doing creative activities that are stimulating. Using materials, having ideas, and getting involved in good conversations, all things that don't HAVE to go anywhere or lead to anything.... but of course inevitably they do, and sometimes they lead to the best things. Embracing the potential of new materials and ideas gives me energy. You think you're spent and then in working with something new or learning a new process a creative spark happens and you are excited and alive again. I love making when you don't know where it might lead. I don't have the fear to risk when I'm making something. Exciting things or ideas might happen totally unexpectedly and these give me more ideas and more energy. It gives me a boost.

Ruth Sprague [RS]: Experimenting has played a huge part after Pat's death in 2011. At each stage I was working just for me, to learn how to move from all consuming raw grief to a gentler place where I can carry my grief and yet move towards embracing life. Recently I've used my wedding dress, which was deeply moving and restorative: the evenings of unpicking and remembering our wedding, the accepting that the dress could never be put back together to create the same dress, the conscious selection of vibrant colours changing the fabric from joyous ritual to gladsome living, the shift from a garment worn to a garment that could be worn often - all these things bring healing.

None of the creative grief work I have done was initially for anyone's benefit except my own.

KG: Its interesting you all bring recovery into this, not just from weariness, but Long Covid but also grief. I wonder are we all experiencing the aftereffects of a loss and then putting ourselves back together with what we know brings the feeling of relief?

Thomas Robinson [TR]: Yes, in some ways. On the 1st February we got given notice on the space that we run. 21 days to vacate the premises - an ex-retail unit on a pedestrianised high street in the centre of Hull. After working on the project for a couple of years voluntarily and unendingly. Putting down really bad boundaries and helpless to firm them up. Having them eroded again and again. Wave after wave. Repeat business. The news came as a relief. A weight was lifted. It was chilling - the way I felt. I wasn't aware I was looking for rest. But it was looking for me.

Bruce Asbestos [BA]: Relief yes! I was exhausted from the year of production and I was just facing into an uncertain time with a few big projects forever delayed. I didn't really over think it, I just made some drawings with felt tips and A4 paper, I just wanted to produce a few things that didn't really require any thought, cash or conviction. I was also streaming video games at the time, it was sort of a way of framing something creative but with zero expectations.

Math Jagger [MJ]: Everything I do I'm looking at how it could become a finished print. Everything I make and how our business runs is based on a commercial model. We are always looking at how to earn money.

Amanda Rigby [AR]: That's like my practice too. I largely get paid to create for clients and don't get paid or have patrons for my own personal work. I wonder if this may sometimes lead me to feel that my practice is less important and that client artistic aims are more important. I certainly dedicate the largest part of my energy and time to client work, and create for myself with whatever's left.

KG: It sounds like a tough balance?

AR: I feel frustrated.

MJ: I try some small things to see what comes, but still I will be looking at how convert them into a product, I guess I focus on that and it can create a barrier as I don't relax into the play, I can't afford to as I keep asking myself "What am I achieving?"

TA: I think the expectations of self, others, clients, customers to make a thing that's perfect is why I'm weary. When I'm in this headspace I am not being true to myself. The value of the work becomes less about me than others people engagement, their approval. This is a constant struggle. It's a learnt behaviour I'm trying to shake off, and it comes from my years of making sure there's no grime, that everything this is shiny, everything it's a good story, that everyone is happy and everyone's buying stuff and making money. It's a one way story of success, its commercial and the capitalist system.

KG: Is there is a feeling of loss in there somewhere, in why we need this creative rest time? As in you've lost yourself.

TA: Now I'm embracing the gritty. For a long time I was emulating other people. My dad! I always knew I didn't want to be in brands and marketing, I wanted to be making. I kept telling myself it was a type of making. I put all this effort in to be successful and he was proud. It was a hectic life. And I normalised the pace that wasn't natural, it was a distraction and we made money. Our culture encourages this. He thought there was no alternative, rather it was a way of life. But being someone I wasn't made me sick. When I was in hospital my hands were burning to make. I started to sew paper to make a vessel.

KG: That's a powerful metaphor?

TA: My father uses his manic energy to create success. He leans into his mania. He has no boundaries about how it's contained. But I am working on a relationship with making and being well. My aim is to do both. My breakdown. A mid- life crisis of sorts offered me an opportunity to learn, and do things differently. How to create pleasure for self and others.

KG: I recognise some of your Dad's way of being, of keeping going. But unlike him I do get to the edge. When I get like that I sit quietly and make small pencil drawings. Drawings of things I like, but in high details so I have to focus in. Life noise goes because I'm really having to look. In that

time I let thoughts come and go, in many ways I'm doing a repetitive task but I find this deeply restorative. I put myself and my brain back together in these drawings.

Caroline Wending [CW]: That resonates for me. Rest lies in drawing for me even if I have a fight with the drawing, it always brings some rest. Drawing can be the beginning and the way to communicate part of a project. It is also a chance to find ideas, new ideas. It is a resourceful practice. I wonder if we all experience rest and take moments of rest much more than we think. Rest might be seen too much as the opposite of labour, Could we consider rest as the steam for labour? Rest might be something artist do well, not always acknowledging it?

KG: Rest as the steam of labour... Ha that's interesting. I'm more inclined to think of it as the idling machine, still working, but letting things settle?

SS: My tendency is to keep myself busy, to always having something on the go in my studio, domestically, administratively. I seem to fear down time, which I perceive as unproductive time. The result is no reflection of what I am doing or what has been done and archived nor enjoyment, just the next thing on the 'to do' list.

Mark Richards [MR]: I've recently been re-engaging with my practice and allowing myself to play. I think Matisse said *You'll find inspiration in the making* and he's right. Yes it gives pleasure – and I sort of see it as self-care. It's all linked to giving yourself permission to prioritise how you spend your time. And that has meant for me a letting go and stepping away. I left the UK a year ago and moved to Portugal. I left a very demanding job, a level of income and the support system to do this. We are worse off financially but my quality of life has grown exponentially. It's massive, but I had to do it.

Many things led to the decision, during Covid I asked myself "Is this it?" I also recognised I was on a career path that was moving me further from making. And I was all wrapped up in what is essentially capitalism. I genuinely don't think I could have done this in the UK – I would still be asked to be part of things, I would still be focused on having a job, a way of living. But also practically we couldn't have afforded what we have now. It would have never happened. The change had to be big, at scale, to completely reimagine.

I didn't want to get to 80 and think what if? I didn't want to live with regrets. It's a cliché, but you are only here once. I decided I'm not going to wait until I retire. So I guess I have abandoned everything to find space. Space to live differently, to find myself, to reconnect with a practice. I've embraced a type of risk, I've had to trust that things will work out, use my creative brain in a different way.

DG: I've also actively chosen to step away from working as an organisational lead in the arts sector. It was time for me to leave for several reasons, I was totally exhausted of dealing with bureaucracy but also I needed to make space. I didn't want people thinking, I was standing in the way of a younger person with lived experience who could bring in artists with different perspectives from mine. It right this happens. So in some sense it's also political. Since I finished amongst other things I've been reading a climbing book and the person writing it is talking about his friend who when he's emotionally and physically stressed out from climbing does this thing called Feed the Rat⁷. Which is basically slobbering about and eating pizza. Of course he is still thinking about climbing but he is having time off. I guess that's perhaps some of what I'm doing.

⁷ Al Alvarez: Feeding the Rat. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Feeding_The_Rat

I'm feeding my rat. But instead of thinking of climbing I'm listening to a lot of music. I'm partly being unproductive, but there are things still going on. We are constantly being asked to think about productivity in relation to unproductivity. As if unproductivity is of no use. Somehow we're led to think putting time into things that don't lead to anything is wrong. But it's ok for scientists? Scientists don't worry about letting things come why should artists?

KG: I guess in science there's a belief that their experiments might save lives? Art has a different purpose and is not in theory about saving lives?

DG: I've just been reading about Guy Debord – the Situationist and how being totally dissipated was his preferred way of being. He regarded his way of being as political - in total opposition to everything he regarded as proper and productive.

KG: So you're saying these experimental, feed the rat, unproductive productive spaces are totally radical and essential. Counter to the dominant narrative.

DG: No one else went as far as Guy Debord but his level of commitment did significantly contribute to the changes in 1968.

KG: I'm thinking the KLF burning a million pounds relates here.. but maybe that's for another conversation?....

TA: I think there's something in here about living simpler.

KG: perhaps we are weary because we are being fed ideas of rest that don't actually suit us. Like Debord, he reacted, or perhaps proactively created an alternative. So knowingly or unknowingly artists/makers/creative thinkers can access a type of rest that's a counterpoint to the commercial for wellbeing culture.

Which makes me think we haven't addressed directly why we are weary, some of us have spoken about our jobs and end of commissions. Mark's spoken about being part of the capitalist system, David of bureaucracy, Andrew and Laura about Long-Covid. Is this true for all of us or is there other things? I've written down as we speak a list... I like a list!

- Poor practices and bureaucratic nonsense with the art world/system.
- A lack of trust and imagination for those we work with and for.
- The capitalist system and its demands to compete.
- The historic and ongoing impacts of power and privilege.
- Isolation.
- Illness
- Emotional and domestic labours.
- Misogyny both overt and internalised.

Any more?

JC: Is there something about having to *work as an artist* versus *living as an artist*?

AR: This week I have been lecturing on art vs commerce and asking students to interrogate their relationship with money and how it affects their work. Whilst they all agreed that they would continue to make work with or without payment, they also felt very strongly that to be paid for

work is essential and not a luxury. An interesting dichotomy which led onto them considering the dynamics set in motion by their personal art / commerce relationship.

KG: I'm adding money - lack of or struggle for or perhaps it's not money but our relationship to it... and ha we come back to the KLF!

AP: I get a sense of exhaustion connected to things about the global highway, the digital communications, social media. I watch on the bus extraordinary thumb action. That feels draining.

Madhu Mantipatrani [MM]: At the meal it was so nice to be listened to. No one listens to me at home. I've got teenagers. It's also been so nice to be cared for and not have to clear up!

KG: So having no time or capacity needs adding to the list?

AP: Yes, this leads me to think about artists or curious people. And how do we make choices to be less curious, less in focus, off intensity for a bit? To be off timetable as it were? Some people - like my Mum who's given drugs for it - want break the cycle, to find, locate, identify, enjoy different possibilities; to become distracted or find distraction?

Part 3: What is creative restorative rest?

Jack Wilkin: [JW]: Kate your dinners and residency re-emphasises the need of spaces for creatives and curious people to hear one another out, share ideas, and pick up connections and threads that interest. To be part of a space where barriers and conventions imposed can be examined, subverted, parodied or dismantled has been a privilege. The importance of space and time to create, without predetermined outcome, and the importance of gathering to create moments of connection and solidarity, to rejuvenate and nourish are not to be underestimated. It's made us at Metal consider how we can rework our commissions or residencies to make time for creative restorative rest. We are also interested to think on how artists can find those tools or moments of connection with other artists to process their findings, work, or mental load? Your work not only showed that such spaces are needed, but allowed people the opportunity to come together, without the pressure of having to 'do' something or to have the answers. This comes at a pivotal moment as Metal looks at how best to provide spaces for artists, especially at a time of burnout in our ever-increasing precarious world.

TA: The safety of that space was important. At the tea we were connected so there was a feeling of assumed familiarity, which made me comfortable to speak freely. The feel of the room, the vibe of the hosts, how the space was curated and the way the space was held...I felt so safe. I was alert but relaxed, paying attention, engaging...it felt like active rest. Creative restorative rest then seems to feed an art-full life and as such is essential for artists and is something that could be solitary or in company, with others?

JW: It's been a joy seeing people come together to be cared for, especially those that often spend their days caring for others. The power of small gestures, such as being cooked for having someone do the dishes. Then the finer details like being presented with a decorated table with place cards all add up to making people feel special and cared for. The power of hospitality and the impact of fun and joy as a welcome and insightful learning point.

Richard Knight [RK]: We have to stick our necks out to be creative and what that takes, how much I value the tribal sense of *communitas*, of being together...and what it takes to lead a creative life, attend to the self yet put bread on the table and keep wolves from the door. How to balance the demands of life. I'm aware I can talk about *awareness* but also feel the pull of the general despair that is out there and the struggle to rise above that...which I guess takes me full circle; I need people to live creatively...I think our potential to share, to commit acts of kindness, without thought to gain or profit in some way, is the best we have. To do this, in spite of everything, is our triumph.

KG: I really love this. To triumph over the shit is to come together and put care, connection and community first. And how these three things if we pay attention to them as sites of struggle will

help us remake the world.⁸ Sophia Rosa says this is at the heart of radical intimacy. The disruption of individualist selfish pursuits

TA: Amen sister. This is what's needed to counteract the individualistic system.

SS: Talking of sisters I do wonder if Sisters are particularly bad at *rest*?

KG: adrienne maree brown has the answer for that: *What is the freedom and accountability that accrues when "sister" is not just a static identity that you have but is something that you do or don't do, with consequences. What happens when I apply that to all of my relationships? What happens if we replace the roles patriarchy has scripted us into actions guided by what we want to create instead?*⁹

It's more talk of space for seeing differently?

MR: I now see there's an alternative way of seeing things that gives you purpose or validation. Our drastic change has allowed me to look and be in a different headspace. It has allowed me to go inwards, Here no one knows who I am, I am in the middle of nowhere, I can't speak the language so I can't say who I am. I can just be. I am a person without baggage. People don't know what I've done and I can reinvent myself. It's like a silent retreat, you're with other people but you are looking inwards, prioritising looking and reflection to find a way to be. I am creating a world and space for myself. Letting myself imagine possibilities. And none of this is exhausting. I acknowledge this work as restorative. I am not separating creative making from my way of life and yes it's joyful. I am not doing creative activities to pass the time. It is all consuming, focused, tiring and concentrated. But I am energised.

KG: Imaging forward. I am really interested in how all the things you speak of are not backward looking, they are not re-imagining, re-generating or rejuvenating spaces. Instead you are generating, imagining, being as they say 'present'.

HH: Yes, rest is growth for me - though there is an initial scan of my internal landscape - 'what just happened - what do I need now?'

KS: I think it's growth by abandoning set ideas, in order to let or make space for something to happen. Abandoning for me is an intentional process of preparation, of stepping back. I am surrendering to creative rest. And this surrendering enables and welcomes in the new.

Kev Fisher [KF]: I found a photo recently by Caroline Small of how each year they soak the Derbyshire well dressing boards in a lake somewhere before they cover them with clay and petals. It sums it all up for me as it made me think how the preparation before making is a form of rest. Preparing is really important for me. I guess you'd call it 'getting ready'.

KG: Like farm yard manure farm. As farmers we spend time and significant resource spreading tonnes of it on the fields after harvest with. We 'work in' this valuable muck, enriching the soil for better yields and restorative purposes. It is central to our farming cycle.

⁸ Sophie K Rosa. Radical Intimacy. Introduction.

⁹ adrienne maree brown quote taken from: <https://apapnet.eu/publications/systring>

TA: *“Fallow time is necessary to grow everything from actual crops to figurative ones, like books and children. To do the work, we need to rest, to read, to reconnect. It is the invisible labor that makes creative life possible”*¹⁰ I’m also thinking about composting. The warmth and liquidity of energy generated, over time biological matter changing form, creating nutrition that feeds future growth.

KS: I know I’m preparing as I don’t yet do anything with the imagery that emerges during the Sound Baths. I’m just keeping a sketchbook to keep the ideas together. I’m really enjoying that I don’t have to make anything or present anything. Instead I’m being presented with these images and ideas and I am holding them until I need to use them.

KG: Sound Baths?

KS: Yes I’ve been going to Sound Bath sessions. It started as a way of accessing deep rest - to experience the vibrations, and be in the company of others, trust in a space trust a process - but I totally surrender and what I’ve noticed is that crazy images come up. Sometimes I can trace these to something I’ve experienced or seen before. But this allows me to make new meaning from them. I am still trying to work it out. But I know that when I allow this creative rest in it’s really powerful. The imagery coming up is in a way guiding me, giving me source materials I might not want to use right now, but will in the future. I am tapping into deep links, become aware and alert. It has blown my mind. It’s the opposite if what I’ve done before. Things might come up or not but I am getting deep rest too.

KG: George Saunders said something that make sense here - *don’t be afraid to be confused. Try to remain permanently confused. Anything is possible. Stay open, forever, so open it hurts, and then open up some more, until the day you die, world without end, amen.*¹¹

KS: Yes I have actively set up a space for this, making sure the conditions are right. It feels I am accessing a place beyond my mind in many ways and I know it’s important. Perhaps it’s the collective unconscious?

KG: You mean Carl Jung’s idea or are we back with the KLF?

KS: Definitely both... Either way I feel I connected to bigger ideas that haven’t come from me. I’m tapping into something beyond, to a collective energy. I connect to ideas and feelings. This might be spiritual. Whatever things emerge when you quiet the mind down enough to let them come.

MM: I keep thinking about my own roots in India, the traditions of Yoga Nidra - Nidra meaning sleep, and Dhyanam meaning - paying attention/meditation. These practices are associated with stillness of body and mind - a space to rejuvenate.

KG: I feel we all describing the same something no matter what the method or material used. We are drawing in, drawing down, drawing up. We are trusting our intuition. It comes back to what

¹⁰ Bonnie Tsui: Why we swim.

¹¹ George Saunders - The Braided Megaphone reference in The Marginalian:
<https://www.themarginalian.org/2024/03/11/regret/>

drawing is idea – drawing as a way to reveal our connections with the world of materials, nature and each other. Creative restorative rest is a type of drawing? Drawing from, with and together.

KS: We are also witnessing, noticing things, ourselves, our ideas.

KG: Also I keep coming back to the idea of care or comfort. The type of rest we are describing is a way to comfort ourselves. to self sooth¹² with sensory pleasures. It's a response, when we give ourselves permission to deeply feel and experience the truth of our emotions and body. Some of us are using self-soothing techniques commonly described - laughing, singing, yoga.... Perhaps we could add our creative restorative making to the list. Open ended, exploration, and the welcoming in of sensory pleasures.

AR: Last night I drank a bottle of red wine. Which I don't think I've done for years. I had a very sumptuous me-date, watched a romantic film and ate really tasty food. I've been thinking a lot about contentment and how I'm often 'saving' things (to do with other people?) / not doing them with myself. I think I save my best clothes / cooking / version of myself for special occasions / others.

DG: I like a laugh. I like things that are trivial and light. I like how laughter gives people access to things.. often this is seen as trivial. I don't feel guilty about liking things that aren't intellectually demanding. I get ideas from music, literature, entertainment , film anywhere but art. Every one of these forms is interconnected. So is there such a binary as rest/not rest - everything is in relation to one another? Think about rest in a musical sense. I used to go to the opera more in the past and would enjoy watching the musicians when they are not playing – watching what they are doing. They're still in the music, doing something.

KG: I like this, they are still in the game? Still engaged? A rest that is active like Katie said. A pause when we are really listening to what is arising. It's a time for the brain to simmer.

AP: Simmering¹³ that's the word, when your brain is simmering not boiling. Purpose-full non purpose! If went into theory I think we could reference Lacan and Freud and human beings emergence. How as a child we go from imaginary phase to symbolic to encultured. Creative restorative rest – simmering, could be setting up the conditions to come into a type of imaginary phase. Ooof this might need some thinking, I'm nervous about this, perhaps I'm talking metaphorically. I'm also interested in how this simmering is a type of distraction. The drawing away of the brain from one point to another. A rolling simmer of being and becomingness?

KG: In order to achieve rest we have to notice the boil so we can step into simmer?

AP: All this thinking about simmering has led us to boil!

KG: I'm reminded of several things... Julie's thoughts on how in the life room she's just watching and waiting. Then something I read about waiting for message from satellites in deep space by Jason Farman – how this opens up possibilities. He says things like: *waiting can be fruitful and if we lose it, we will lose how it shapes our social intimacy, the production of knowledge, and*

¹² <https://www.urmc.rochester.edu/behavioral-health-partners/bhp-blog/may-2021/the-science-of-self-soothing.aspx> ¹²

¹³ Simmering: Bubbling gently. To develop a gradual idea. To gestate and ferment.

*practices that depend on the gaps formed by waiting*¹⁴. And finally Andrew said this thing.. the embracing of a not-knowing-yet. He added the yet, which feel really significant. In simmering we are working in the not-knowing-yet.

M: I think the addition of the work “yet” is really important. If we are in not knowing, it’s too vast. Like the landscape in Scotland, it’s huge, but the yet makes it easier to cope with. More manageable, rather than endless.

TA: I love this. The not-yet-knowing feels a way to explore with some sense of boundary created by 'yet', some safety to let imagination venture forth.

AP: I like the risk that’s embedded in cultural practices. You don’t know where it’s going to end, you are vulnerable and scared, but there’s a pleasure in that. It’s a playing and work of a sideways brain.

TA: Like sitting stitching this thing, it’s given me opportunity to play, with no focus on outcome, where dialogue and thoughts come and go. Where how it looks is not about success or failure. An outcome focus shuts down the joy of making, and brings us back to joy. It’s about fucking about with materials!

LM: Yes! Great things come from the freedom inherent in experimenting. But often people can’t understand what the results can be if we are given space to explore. I think it’s seen as frivolous or something for children. People don’t trust that something will always come. Usually, when space is given to talented and dedicated creatives, the best things appear. I feel confident to know this now. How the system in which we work is the opposite of giving you a boost. I would love it if more people would have the confidence to encourage artists to explore and recognise the value of playing and experimenting and how if given space everything expands.

KG: Trust in play. A lot of my work come back to ideas of play – it’s the work of the artist I guess, like Amanda says - to be as child. But it’s more than the activity, it’s the philosophy. I’m really passionate about the Reggio Emilia approach¹⁵, their belief in the *environment as educator, learning through the hundred languages belonging to all human beings...* Where kids and staff are encouraged to explore, observe, question, discuss, hypothesise, represent, and then revisit their observations and hypotheses in order to refine and clarify their understanding.¹⁶ It’s play as a medium, it’s processing as play. Mark said it, Laura you’re saying it, Amanda has said it and it’s what we’ve all alluded to. And of course it’s why we’re exhausted because the system mostly doesn’t encourage, understand, trust, welcome or invest in play as we understand it,... as Reggio understands it¹⁷.... as a space for creative restoration, for being and becoming.

¹⁴ Jason Farman: <https://www.scribd.com/document/692644139/Jason-Farman-Delayed-Response-the-Art-of-Waiting-From-the-Ancient-to-the-Instant-World-Yale-University-Press-2018>

¹⁵ Reggio Emilia Approach: <https://www.reggiochildren.it/en/reggio-emilia-approach/>

¹⁶J.Hewett. Examining the Reggio Emilia Approach to Early Childhood Education . Early Childhood Education Journal.

¹⁷ John-Jacque Rousseau. <https://www.playscotland.org/learn/what-is-play/>

The short version

Creative Restorative Rest is:

- Something active.
- Something that's complex and complicated.
- Something that acknowledges the breaks.¹⁸
- Something akin to play.
- Something about not-knowing-yet.
- Something that lets your brain simmer.
- Something that is constructive.
- Something artists do but often don't discuss or get paid for.
- Something that some people with Long-Covid know.
- Something that uses your *sideways brain*.
- Something that takes time and resources.
- Something that helps you remember who you are.
- *Something that is a means of processing your thoughts, feelings, actions and emotions.*¹⁹
- Something that makes space for new ideas and offers relief.
- Something inherent that we might have lost it or had it taken away?
- Laura Hartley perhaps says it best...*it encourages us to take ourselves away from the need to fix and complete. It requires us to take radical steps. To move beyond the space of wellness, and into the messy, uncomfortable space of feeling what our body has to say to us, what our making has to say to us. Because until we stop running, truly pausing and*

¹⁸ Japanese Kintsugi menders do not deny the impact of an earthquake prone country and argue *the whole concept of repair - returning something to precisely its former state - as a delusion. Instead the damage is embraced as having enormous value, worth and pride. Repair is an act of creation*

¹⁹ Laura Mabutt – in conversation

*listening to what is arising within us, then restorative rest will remain distant. It is a space and seed of renewal.*²⁰

Further reading

Radical intimacy. Sophia K Rosa

<https://www.plutobooks.com/9780745345161/radical-intimacy/>

Restorative Rest. Laura Hartley

<https://www.laurahartley.com/the-art-of-restorative-rest/>

The Creative Act. Rick Rubin

Pleasure Activism – the politics of feeling good. adrienne maree brown
and

<https://onbeing.org/programs/adrienne-maree-brown-we-are-in-a-time-of-new-suns/>

A practical guide to unconscious reasoning. Marcus Coates

<https://maruscoates.co.uk/projects/96-ur-a-practical-guide-to-unconscious-reasoning>

How Can We Preserve Our Hobbies From Hustle Culture? Jamila Pereira

<https://grownmag.com/global-voices/how-can-we-preserve-our-hobbies-from-hustle-culture/>

The Art of Gathering. Priya Parker

<https://www.goodreads.com/en/book/show/37424706>

Hugo Rifkind

²⁰ Laura Hartley. www.laurahartley.com/the-art-of-restorative-rest/

<https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/hugo-rifkind-on-the-luxury-of-repair-zv2zc7x9m>

Jason Farman

<https://www.themarginalian.org/2018/12/17/jason-farman-delayed-response/>

Mount Pleasant Artist Rest Home

<https://www.watfordobserver.co.uk/news/23955846.story-mount-pleasant-artists-rest-home-rickmansworth>

The Nap Ministry by Tricia Hersey

<https://thenapministry.wordpress.com>

and

<https://wellcomecollection.org/events/X2sinRMAAHbq-865>

Joseph Campbell

<https://www.themarginalian.org/2015/04/09/find-your-bliss-joseph-campbell-power-of-myth/>

Thought in the act – passages in the ecology of experience. Erin Manning and Brian Massumi

Work life balance tyranny

<https://www.themarginalian.org/2015/03/11/david-whyte-three-marriages-work-life/>

Tantra Song. Franck Andre Jamme

<https://www.artbook.com/blog-tantra-song-jamme.html>

Athlete rest

<https://www.chkd.org/blog/rest-and-active-recovery--an-important-step-for-all-athletes>

Solitude.

<https://mail.google.com/mail/u/0/?nocheckbrowser#inbox/FMfcgzGwJmGvgDWMtPlvbZZptgdRGrQ>

George Saunders. The Braided Megaphone.

https://www.themarginalian.org/?mc_cid=d30ad2a7a2&mc_eid=3e4ad4b4dc

Reggio