

# R E S T

## AS RESISTANCE



A GUIDE BOOK FOR ACTIVISTS

Dani Pierson  
GWST 491  
UBC Okanagan

"I WORK,  
I LOVE,  
I REST,  
I SEE  
AND  
LEARN"

- AUDRE LORDE 128

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# ABOUT

This booklet is a guide for activists and students invested in social justice's often emotionally exhausting work. This piece will take you through some brief theorizations of the concept of rest as resistance and introduce ways to prioritize rest for yourself and your community. Black feminists and activists like Audre Lorde and Tricia Hersey have deeply influenced this guide. The approach I have taken in this guidebook is reflective. I work through how I have thought about and enacted rest in my life in hopes of bringing guidance for others attempting to do the same. This reflection comes from my place as a queer Indigenous person and settler. My identity has impacted my ability to rest and how other people understand my rest.

We start this guide by understanding how capitalism denies us rest and how restoring rest is an act of political resistance. We will then work through what I mean when I ask us to restore rest. The restoration of rest needs to be a collective project. So, I encourage you to think about how your privileges may allow you more space for resting and how you can use those privileges to share rest. Finally, we will end with prompts and suggestions for rest practices to bring this work into your life.









# REST HAS BEEN DENIED



As you will see as you read through this guidebook, capitalism is the main villain denying our right to rest. This is because capitalism demands exceptionally high production levels - and this demand is ever increasing. Our breaks become timed and calculated to procure optimal production levels. As a result, we are put on schedules that don't align with how our bodies feel. Jenny Odell explains that neoliberal capitalism has introduced a certain economic instability for working people that insist all hours of the day be "potentially monetizable hours that are sometimes not even restricted to our time zones or our sleep cycles" (15). Jonathan

Crary explains, though, that sleep itself poses a deep problem to the logic of capitalism (13). Sleep is a necessity. It limits production - it limits possible monetizable time (ibid.). So, at some point in the day, we will have to sleep. The capitalist system attempts to limit our rest, though, as they see no benefit to it - as Crary states, "time for human rest and regeneration is now simply too expensive to be structurally possible within contemporary capitalism" (15). So, we are asked to work "without pause, without limits" (Crary 10). Simultaneously, the rest we do get to have cannot be careless because of the

environment of capitalism. Crary explains that capitalism has created an environment of constant vigilance and sleeplessness because of the oppressive and horrific human rights injustices (19). We do not feel safe or secure, so we cannot rest.

Our rest is also constrained by the morals that are attached to rest through capitalist logic (Vostal 41-42). Speed, acceleration, and accumulation are marked with success and prestige, whereas slowness or rest is linked to failure and represents bad moral character (ibid). We judge people for taking breaks, slowing down, or prioritizing rest. Capitalist logic trains us to consider those who do not work without limits as selfish and lazy. I think this is especially true for Black people, Indigenous peoples, and people of colour. White people are likely to enact racist logic to accuse non-white people of poor work ethic. This is evidenced through Brown-Iannuzzi et al.'s study that found Americans were less supportive of welfare policies because they saw these policies as supporting Black people, who they are more likely to view as lazy (1162). It is

also seen through the stereotype that paints Indigenous peoples as lazy without recognizing the colonial policies that have created unstable jobs and precarious economic positions for Indigenous peoples (Taylor-Neu et al. 74). We are always under the threat of this logic.

Under capitalism, our value is intimately linked to our production and work ethic. With all that capitalism demands from us, you may be starting to see how rest is an act of resistance. When capitalism demands us to give our whole being over – our days, our bodies, our minds – taking time to rest on our own terms is rejecting the notion that capitalism owns us. For us Indigenous folks, and perhaps other non-white people, it rejects the assertion that our value comes from attaining western colonial measures of success.



# Rest *is* Resistance

What do I mean when I say  
rest *is* resistance?

As we already discussed, prioritizing and protecting rest rejects the production demands of the colonial capitalist system. So, any form of rest is doing this. This resistance becomes especially relevant for people engaged in social justice.

Important work comes from activist organizing and direct political action – but this takes a toll on our spirits, psyches, and souls. This work requires that we rest and recover. But activist spaces also struggle to prioritize rest. Activists face burnout from the emotional labour they take on and the discrimination they face from outside and inside activist circles (Gorski 2-4). With this in mind, rest needs to be a central part of activist spaces.

Davidson Mhonde and Hingle assert that





"rest is not a passive agreement to oppressive institutions, but it is an act of freedom that acknowledges the need to spiritually, mentally, and physically recover" (337). This recovery is not just a refuelling, though – through prioritizing the community, we reaffirm the value we have in being 'unproductive.' Community, leisure, and pleasure are just as powerful as rallies and marches. Recognizing that we have value outside of capitalist morals gives us power. So, when we rest, whether by ourselves or in community, we resist capitalism's attempts to commodify our bodies (Khanmalek and Rhodes 53).



"I THINK THAT  
"DOING NOTHING"  
– IN THE SENSE OF  
REFUSING  
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AND STOPPING TO  
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AN ACTIVE  
PROCESS OF  
LISTENING THAT  
SEEKS OUT THE  
EFFECTS OF  
RACIAL  
ENVIRONMENTAL,  
AND ECONOMIC  
INJUSTICE AND  
BRINGS ABOUT  
REAL CHANGE"

- JENNY ODELL 22



# RESTORING REST

Now that we know that capitalism is denying us the right to rest, how do we restore it? It is an excellent question with a complicated answer. The first thing that comes up for me is the need to confront the privilege of rest. As Jenny Odell notes, there is an inherent privilege in prioritizing rest (12). Right now, you have to have economic security, stable housing, a job with reliable, predictable, and manageable hours, the social positioning to be viewed as "resting" rather than lazy, enough support to delegate household care work, and more. So, there are very real barriers to rest, and I do not mean to reduce that. However, as Odell

writes, "just because this right is denied to many people doesn't make it any less of a right or any less important" (12). When we understand the privilege of rest, we can understand how it is an issue that we must tackle collectively. We must share the burden of rest work so that all may benefit (Davidson Mhonde and Hingle 337). When we have more privilege or more access to rest, it becomes our job to protect the rest of others.

This responsibility leads me to my next concern: how do we centre non-exploitative rest? To me, this means not overwhelming others by trying to relieve

ourselves. Networks of care are essential to restoring rest, but these networks must be balanced. As an Indigenous person, people often ask me to review anything and everything that pertains to Indigenous peoples. They want me to tell them they are doing everything right instead of critically questioning their place in colonialism. If they have done something wrong, they want me to absolve them of their guilt. As G. Michelle Collins-Sibley puts it, "[I am] not a subject, but an object; not a friend or an ally but an accessory, a mirror in which we should be able to see reflected our own better selves, best selves, nonracist selves, nonsexist selves" (83). As a student and someone who was submerged in the limitless capitalist work ethic, I have felt like I have to take this work on. And as a white person, I, too, have asked non-white folks to do this same thing for me without realizing what I was asking for. We can't ask others to take on the labour of teaching stuff they never asked to teach.

When thinking of non-exploitative rest, I also think of the ways capitalism has

co-opted rest practices and commodified them. The most obvious example of this is yoga - the neoliberal western world constructs it as a luxury commodity through high-priced classes and retreats and the accessories 'needed' to engage in the practice (Antony 8). Moreover, this popular understanding of yoga appropriates and disconnects yoga from its roots in Hinduism for often racist reasons (Antony 9). Therefore, to uncritically engage in yoga without considering how capitalism has morphed it into a classist and racist structure is an exploitative practice of rest. Instead, we have to think of creative ways to make it a more welcoming practice - like making it more financially accessible or recentering Hinduism.

Speaking of making rest accessible, we also have to ensure that we centre rest for everyone, not just ourselves! The restoration of rest depends on a collective effort to protect rest (Crary 28). Networks of care can be life-sustaining (Vaccaro and Mena 361), so finding ways to rest with community is central to restoring rest. The sociality of





rest kept coming up for me while I was doing research. Implicit in many of the articles was how we rely on others for our rest and how we help others rest. As I have completed this project, I realized the most meaningful acts of rest were the collective acts of care. The day my grandma washed my hair, the day my roommate helped me clean my room. Moments spent sharing stories around kitchen tables. Time spent crafting together. When I noticed how significant these acts of care were to my ability to rest, I began to prioritize conversations of care with my friends and family. Having intentional conversations about care allows us to recognize and voice the areas where we need help and where we can help others. When I think about accepting and offering care, I think of Audre Lorde's statement where she says, "I am not ashamed to let my friends know I need their collective spirit" (118). When we think back to Filip Vostal's argument that resting is linked to bad moral character, part of restoring collective rest is removing the shame that we sometimes attach to receiving help.



Finally, when we think about disrupting the shame attached to rest, we should also consider why we are resting. If you follow the Nap Ministry on Instagram or Twitter, you may be used to Tricia Hersey's reminders that "we are not resting to recharge so we can do more. We are simply just resting. We are resting because it's our divine and human right. It's not connected to more output" (@TheNapMinistry).

When we approach rest through a shame framework, we may feel like we have to earn it. Or we may feel that our rest has to produce something - a different outlook, a better work ethic, a new idea. Instead, what I want to encourage is rest for rest's sake. I want to challenge the capitalist culture that asks us always to be present and productive. As Jenny Odell says, "there is nothing to be admired about being constantly connected, constantly potentially productive from the second you open your eyes in the morning - and in my opinion, no one accept this, not now, not ever" (18).



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# THE STRUGGLE TO REST

One thing that has become very clear to me as I work through this idea of rest as resistance is that it is very challenging to actually centre rest. As explained in previous sections, neoliberalism demands us to work at a certain speed - to exist at a certain speed. This demand even erodes the time we do spend resting; as Crary states, the number of people who wake up to check their phones at night is growing (13). We know that we are exhausted. We know that we are exhausted. We know

that we can't sustain this speed.

But it is so hard to step outside of these demands. There is only so much we can do as individuals to prioritize rest while we exist within neoliberalism. And our work is important! It may provide routine, passion, motivation, and economic stability. The struggle, then, is in the balance. I grew up with parents who instilled the importance of working hard. You take on extra work. You finish what you started. You don't stop until it's done. You show your

dedication, and you will be rewarded. I have a great work ethic because of this. I put my whole being into the work that I do. But I am terrible at resting.

Eventually, this demand catches up to you. You can only exist for so long in perpetual exhaustion before something has to give. If you push it off long enough, your body will force you to take a break. I get it, though. Stress is unavoidable, especially for multiply marginalized folks. As Audre Lorde says, "it's nonsense, however, to believe that any Black woman who is living an informed life in america can possibly abolish stress totally from her life without becoming psychically deaf, mute, and blind" (119). This statement can be extended to many of us, but it weights us down differently according to our

social positioning. It is Lorde's "A Burst of Light: Living with Cancer" that has shown me the necessity of balancing work and care. In these journals, it is clear that her work motivates her to keep going, but care (especially collective care) sustains her.

Altheria Caldera echoes this idea with a reminder that "meaningful work and self-care are not antithetical principles" (716). This is something that chronically ill and disabled people know, intimately. In "Crippling the Apocalypse", Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha explains that there is a slowness that is not optional for disabled people in this balance of work and care (2). This slowness makes room for taking care of oneself and others while still doing important work (ibid). This slowness is where we need to begin.



# PRACTICING REST



The following pages will have prompts, activities, and examples of different forms of rest. They are small practices of rest that you could slip into your daily routine. They can be done by yourself, or you could do them with other people. They won't require big investments of time or money. They are baby steps to restoring rest. These practices aren't supposed to make you more productive. They are a radical reclamation of time. It is rejecting the commodification of your body.

Listen to your body. Rest when you need to.

Remember! Restoring rest works best when done collectively. If you carve out time for yourself, but never others, you will never create a space where your rest is respected. Similarly, if you always let others rest, but never yourself, you will always be taken advantage of. It does not make you a better person, it makes you exhausted.

# PROGRESSIVE MUSCLE RELAXATION

This exercise is a favourite of mine. My therapist taught it to me as a method of bringing myself down when I begin to feel anxious. You get deep into your body as you focus on breath and muscle tensing. A recent study found that progressive muscle relaxation therapy significantly reduced short term symptoms of burnout in nurses (Rahmayanti et al. 50). There are many podcasts and YouTube videos that take you through progressive muscle relaxations, but I have also provided a guide inspired by Anxiety Canada's guide to work through by yourself.

Begin sitting or laying down in a quiet, comfortable space. Take five slow breaths.

Scan your body for where you are holding tension. Take another breath, and as you slowly release, imagine the tension leave your body.

Let your breath return to normal and focus your attention on your feet. Tense your feet and hold for five seconds. Notice how the tension feels.

Take a deep breath in and as you breathe out, let tension flow out. Let your breath return to normal.

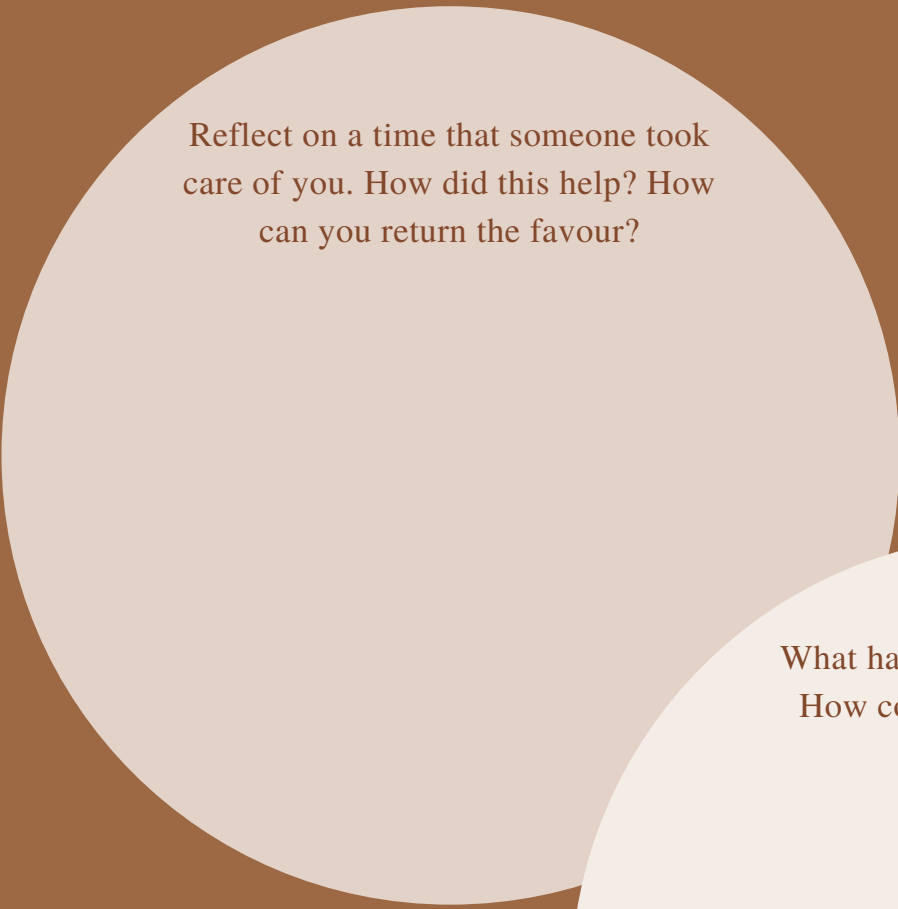
Slowly work up your body, tensing and relaxing each muscle while taking breaks to breath. Pay attention to the areas that feel the most tense and imagine sending your breath to that area.

When you have worked through all areas of your body (your legs, torso, arms, head) or feel ready to end, take five more deep breaths.


Begin waking your body up by wiggling your toes and fingers. Adjust your body in any way that feels good.

# JOURNALING

Ground yourself by writing or drawing. I have listed some prompts below to get started. They centre joy, care, and reflection. I find it helpful to put a container around my journaling - either time or space. So, these prompts are contained by space.



Reflect on a time that someone took care of you. How did this help? How can you return the favour?



What has brought you joy today?  
How could you share that joy?

# NOTICING

This exercise is inspired by the chapter "Exercises in Attention" from Jenny Odell's book *How to Do Nothing*. In this chapter, Odell notes how paying attention to the place she lived and worked on gave her moments of relief from the demands of capitalism and allowed her to reflect on her perceived reality (120). Her noticing, she mentions, is reflective of bioregionalism (which is very similar to some Indigenous land relations) (122). It will also utilize Odell's tool of listening as a way to slow down (8-9). I am going to ask you a series of questions about the land you are inhabiting. I want you to spend time with the land and listen to it. This exercise is also reflective of Zoe Todd's chapter "Tidal" where she attempts to listen and learn from the relations of the land she is on. She charts its history without speaking for the land. That is what we are going to do here.

Find a place to sit and listen to your environment. It does not need to be "pristine" or peaceful. I invite you to acknowledge the people of whose land you are on. If you do not know, [native-land.ca](http://native-land.ca) is a great tool.

Listen to the sounds around you and feel any sensation that comes up.

Who is here? Who isn't here? When I say who, I mean the people, the animals, the weather, the plants. I mean all the human and more-than-human beings.

What noises do you hear? Who are they from?

What other worlds are present in this space? Bee hives? Ant hills?

What is above you? What is below you?

What is touching you in this space?

What is grounding you in this space?

Think about these questions again but replace the "you" with another being.



# FEEL YOUR FEELINGS

This is another favourite I learnt from my therapist. This activity asks you to take a moment to work through your feelings and validate them. This is something I often do by myself and with others. It is based on resources from [MentalHealthFoundations.ca](https://www.mentalhealthfoundations.ca)

Let's start by describing how your body feels. Do you feel warm? Hot? Shaky? Tense? Where?

Now, name the emotion. It can be as simple as "I feel sad."

Now we are going to validate it. Instead of excusing the emotion, we are going to explain why we may feel that way.

Here are some prompts:

I feel \_\_\_\_ and this makes sense because ...

This is a difficult feeling because ...

Next, let's think about what this emotion needs from us. Does it need comfort? A boundary? A confidence boost?

Finally, meet this need and provide any extra support you can.

# BE WITH OTHERS

The final thing I will leave you with is a reminder that being with others is a radical act of rest. A commitment to be unproductive together - in whatever capacity that may look like - can be a welcome relief to the demands of our world. As Jennifer Alzate González puts it, we need activist spaces that value the silly selfies and collective care as much as the marching and organizing (12).

Make dinner for each other. Allow yourselves to get off topic for a while. Help each other do the mundane tasks you hate. Make weird crafts with whatever supplies you have. Just be together.

We rely on one another to rest peacefully. Through learning, teaching, sharing, growing, reflecting in community, you are building a space that protects one another. And this protection allows to rest. ☐



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THANKS  
FOR  
READING!

NOW GO TAKE A NAP.

REST AS RESISTANCE