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## Video Article

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**VIDEO ARTICLE**

## **Embodiment and Social Distancing: Performances**

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A collection of five video essays on embodiment and social distancing, with a focus on performances. ELLEN KRESS, "Rest is Resistance: Embodied Reflections of the Retraction Period in the Creative Process" (00:10): This video essay contemplates the role that rest performs in my own creativity, connecting the labor movement, technology and the radical act of restorative rest. LASSE MOURITZEN AND KRISTINE SAMSON, "Pandemic Encounters" (05:34): As social distance became a daily routine, urban lives changed into sites of strange encounters, negotiating proximity and presence anew. JOSIAH PEARSALL, "I All Occur Within Arm's Reach" (10:24): This video performance from April and May 2020 explores my embodied position in an isolated and constrained world; my world exists within the frame of a desk and a computer. SHABARI RAO, "Nothing to Show" (15:45): We are constantly redrawing and rediscovering our sense of self through feedback (intended and unintended) that we receive through physically sharing space with different people in a variety of environments. With social distancing, that range of environments is severely and suddenly restricted. What happens to my sense of self in these circumstances? How do I know who I am? What do I have to show the world and my self to confirm my sense of self? CHARLOTTA RUTH, "What is liveness and what can it be?" (19:59): Rethinking Alfred Schütz's essay "On multiple realities" for online to offline existence.

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**Keywords:** social distancing; rest; urban lives; domestic space; embodied practice; sense of self; Alfred Schütz; online existence

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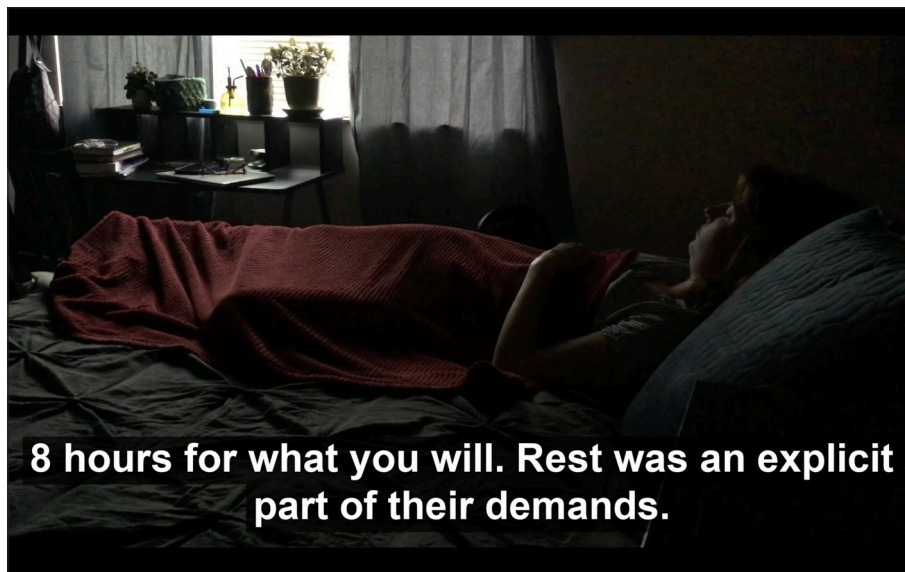
## VIDEO ARTICLE

Available to view here: <https://doi.org/10.16995/jer.65>.

Available for download here: <https://doi.org/10.16995/jer.65.s1>.

## VIDEO ARTICLE TRANSCRIPT

[00:10]



### **Rest is Resistance: Embodied Reflections of the Retraction Period in the Creative Process**

Ellen Kress

Dept. of Theatre Arts

University of Oregon

This video essay contemplates the role that rest performs in my own creativity, connecting the labor movement, technology, and the radical act of restorative rest.

About two months into stay-at-home orders here in the United States, I received some bad news. Not life-threatening, but bad enough to add to the anxiety of what had by that time become the new normal in this pandemic.

Immediately, I was compelled to take a nap. It was as if my brain, while dealing with a low-level of grief and overwhelm from this pandemic at large, needed a moment of reset when faced with a new emotional and psychic trauma.

With all the new stressors, and adjusted responsibilities in the new quarantine world, I do have to say one gift I have been given is a new surreal sleep schedule, accompanied by vibrant technicolor dreams.

Touch is nearly as technicolor in these dreams as the visuals, electrifying, spine-tingling and the simple act of holding hands becomes an intimate act of trust. In rest, my body tells me what it needs and deeply desires.

Like in dance and gesture, the body extends to its apex and requires a retraction before beginning a new move. However, we globally find ourselves at a moment of maximum extension, with no built-in structure for retraction and reflection. Why must we be “productive” at all times of the day?

This pandemic affects us all at different levels. I am incredibly privileged to be able to work from home, with a bedroom of my own, and distributed responsibilities in the house I share. As an eloquent metaphor, author Damien Barr sums this best on Twitter, “We are not all in the same boat. We are all in the same storm. Some are on super-yachts. Some have just the one oar.”

I have to acknowledge that this idea of rest as radical practice is not new. Hundreds of thousands of workers in the United States went on strike barely 100 years before this moment to demand an 8-hour work day. “8 hours for work, 8 hours for rest, 8 hours for what you will.”

Workers knew then the retraction period was a necessary part of being a whole person. Even more alarming, we have bypassed the body on the factory floor and replaced that work with 24/7 intellectual demands through email, digital notifications, remote work, and in some cases stringing multiple jobs together to stay afloat in this storm.

As I write/film/edit this piece, I rub my tired eyes. I don't even realize, after 6 hours + of staring at screens how even my optic nerves deserve radicalizing rest. Technology devised to optimize output and "productivity" emits blue light that disrupts our rest cycles, and our circadian rhythms. Even when our computers and second monitors are put away, the cell phone is ever available late into the night.

The tension is that I rely on these screens and that poisonous blue light to not only complete work, but for leisure activities, and as a lifeline of responsible social connection. Even in leisure time, capitalism's need for productivity disrupts your profound need for rest by co-opting your brain with technology that disrupts the very physiology of your body's natural rest rhythms.

Given this moment of 24/7 demands on our output, Rest has become nothing short of revolutionary. Many performance art projects exist that integrate rest as part and parcel of the process, even privileging the retraction period over extension. The Nap Ministry was founded in 2016 by Tricia Hersey and is a Black-led organization that examines the liberating power of naps specifically through an anti-racist lens.

Hersey says on her website, "We engage with the power of performance art, site-specific installations, and community organizing to install sacred and safe spaces for the community to rest together. We facilitate immersive workshops and curate performance art that examines rest as a radical tool for community healing. We believe rest is a form of resistance and name sleep deprivation as a racial and social justice issue."

In this pandemic we have also been given a moment of reflection and Rest, that, if we fight hard enough for it, can accompany us into a new world where the refractory period holds as much weight and importance as the productive period of our work.

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Barr, Damian. Tweet. 05 May 2020.

[https://twitter.com/Damian\\_Barr/status/1252626152604270593](https://twitter.com/Damian_Barr/status/1252626152604270593).

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<https://thenapministry.wordpress.com>. Accessed 30 May 2020.

Ellen Kress is a PhD candidate at the University of Oregon, studying embodiment and the voice as it relates to audience cognition.

[05:37]



## **Pandemic Encounters**

As social distance became a daily routine, urban lives changed into sites of strange encounters, negotiating proximity and presence anew



Strange, these uncanny and joyful moments  
socially distanced and restrained  
searching for intimacy  
presence and companions  
with this pandemic body

The city is a place of encounters  
affective encounters between bodies  
but the habitual is disrupted  
it turns everyday life into strange encounters  
and reformulate urban desires

Desire and affective longing are leaking  
into a search to find companions  
where presence and closeness are allowed  
associated with pleasure and care  
and not considered an individual or societal threat

but where will these companions lead us?  
into leaning and inhabiting new ways of care and kin?  
convince us to venture into the wild?  
or bring them into further domestication and exploitation?

Where will we go from here?

Pandemic Encounters

Lasse Mouritzen is an art-based researcher and curator based in Copenhagen,  
Denmark

Kristine Samson is an urbanist and associate professor at Roskilde University,  
Denmark

[10:26]



## I All Occur Within Arm's Reach

THEY

I

THEY ALL

WITHIN ARM'S

I ALL OCCUR WITHIN ARM'S REACH

a video performance  
of the world that can be seen  
from Hyacinth Avenue  
Baton Rouge, Louisiana, USA  
May 2020

by Josiah Pearsall

*Did she the play discover fish*  
*See you amazing challenge striking Can*

[sung]

*Did she the play discover fish*  
*See you amazing challenge striking Can*

*Did she the play discover fish*  
*See you amazing challenge striking Can*

*Did she the play discover fish*  
*See you amazing challenge striking Can*

*Importance month most be this*  
*I discover reach*  
*month play arm's desk*

*Importance month most be this*  
*I discover reach*  
*month play arm's desk*

[sung]

*Did she the play discover fish*  
*See you amazing challenge striking Can*

I occur

I within

the within the

the desk the

amazing I

most the arm's occur

reach the discover

this past be month

of importance

"I All Occur Within Arm's Reach"

Josiah Pearsall

This video performance from April and May 2020 explores my embodied position in an isolated and constrained world; the images and text were found within the frame of a desk and a computer.

text (using words taken from Facebook posts)

arranged and spoken,

music composed and performed

& all images recorded and edited

by Josiah Pearsall

Josiah Pearsall blends his experience in physical theatre, dance, and puppetry, along with his experience living in three continents, to explore and expand difference.

[15:45]



## Nothing to Show

Abstract

We are constantly redrawing and rediscovering our sense of self through feedback (intended and unintended) that we receive through physically sharing space with different people in a variety of environments.

With social distancing, that range of environments is severely and suddenly restricted.

What happens to my sense of self in these circumstances?

How do I know who I am?

What do I have to show the world and my self to confirm my sense of self?

Day after day, I encounter an unfamiliar version of myself. Slow. Nothing to show. In a studio, on the street, working hard, the world that I inhabited shaped me and showed me who I was. Now that world has changed. And I have to encounter this unfamiliar sense of self day after day. With nothing to show.

[singing]

By Shabari Rao

concept, performance, camera, edit

[www.shabarirao.com](http://www.shabarirao.com)

Shabari Rao is an independent artist, educator and researcher based in Bangalore, India; whose work focuses on the relationship between body, performance, and learning.

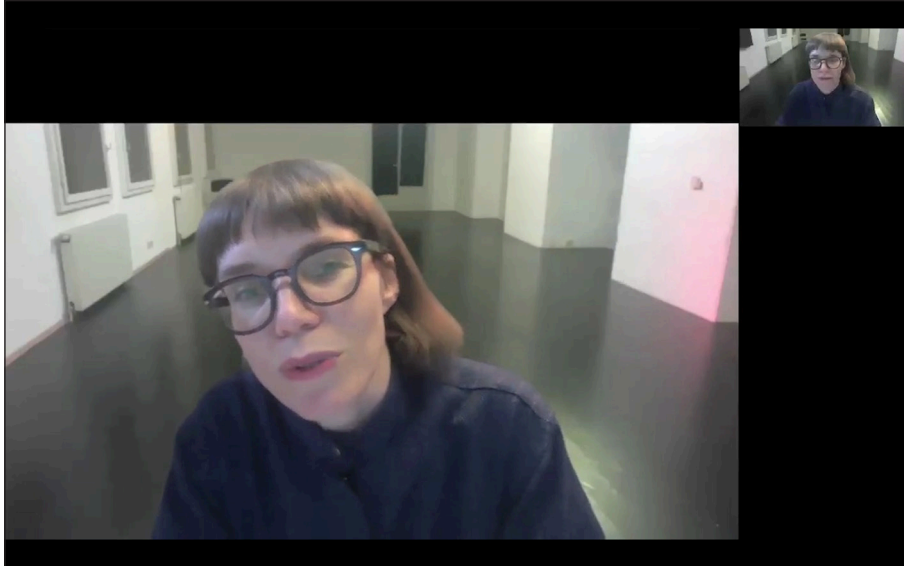
Special thanks to

Rajesh Mehar

Navya Sah

Bindhumalini Narayanaswamy

[20:00]



### **What is liveness and what can it be?**

Rethinking Alfred Schütz's essay "On multiple realities" for online to offline existence.

[Computer voice:]

This meeting is being recorded.

[Charlotta Ruth:]

When speaking about liveness in online environments we automatically tend to think of live broadcasts. But actually, inside media and communication studies, liveness is also used to describe the quality of something appearing live even though it's not. Liveness in this case is the result of successfully applying reality effects. Which give the mediated material an authentic touch through reproducing the aesthetics of live events.

META LIVENESS, Charlotta Ruth 2015

A few years ago I developed a concept to be able to grasp what is phenomenologically happening when you experience the friction between your real life experience and the digital perspective.

*an "I" who has an experience and the "me" who is being observed by the "I"*

Alfred Schütz, 1945

An "I" who has an experience and the "me" who is being observed by the "I."

What we are potentially experiencing inside video streams is that these two perspectives that used to belong to time now are collided in time; we are both experiencing and observing ourselves experiencing at the same time. And reflecting back on an act breaks the liveness or what Schütz called the vivid present. Instead, according to Schütz, the observation of an experience transforms it to a series of performed acts. And if I transpose this logic to how we nowadays live and distribute our presence through digital media, ranging between selfie-postings during holidays or video-conferences that we all participate in... we can recognize that situations nowadays are often both experiences and acts. We are observing ourselves performing our experiences.

What if I don't allow myself to fake digital nativeness?

I would instead like to make the weird, new, so-called normal, tangible. I would like you to feel the gap between the online and the offline. I think there is potential for strange, very lively encounters exactly there. The borders of that space, for me, is very similar to the border between the imaginary and the real and the remembered and the reality to come. Let's go there!

The content of this video is an excerpt from the PhD in arts research project 'Choreographic Contingencies for on- and offline', conducted by Charlotta Ruth at Zentrum Fokus Forschung, University of Applied Arts Vienna.

#### SOUND

Old Film Static Projector ASMR: youtube 2012 found; 18.05.20 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lwmu-HDb9cl>

Cocktail, composition Johannes Burström. Music composed for the participatory works Bildfang and Treasure Hunting Charlotta Ruth 2016.

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## Competing Interests

The authors have no competing interests to declare.

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