
A pillow for collective dormancy

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I arrived at global dis:connect as an artist fellow in the fall of 2025. Being an artist and academic, I often find myself operating between these two worlds: one is more open to process, play and experimentation, and the other is usually more precise and well-planned. While I had already been asked – and had sent off – by mid-summer the title of the presentation I was to give at gd:c in November, I was not sure what exactly I would want to present to my colleagues in Munich. Should I have continued my ongoing garden project, which I had been running with my students at the Berlin University of the Arts (UdK) for the last four years, or should I have used the limited time available to enter a new domain and work on something else?

First, a little background on my practice: I am an artist with a background in performance art and community art practices. My work often involves collaborations with various groups of people – artists and non-artists – as well as my students. I have also been teaching art for almost twenty years, the last eight of which have been in Berlin. As a member of UdK's teaching faculty, I started a garden project in 2021 together with my students, called the other garden.

the other garden resulted from several personal and collective experiences. First, I am the only non-European instructor in my faculty and sometimes find myself on the wrong side of the language barrier. Second, there is a lack of diversity and inclusivity programs for newcomers like me. Finally, our building lacks a café or social space for the students and staff.

After battling some bureaucracy, we set up the garden, where my students and I are growing non-native wild plants (weeds), which are othered in the anthropocentric plant hierarchy. It soon became both a garden behind our faculty building located on Mierendorffstraße and a classroom and community space for us. There, we began to hold our classes, organise artist talks, cook, eat, experiment with art and talk about otherness – both within and among humans as well as non-human beings. In only a few years, this little area has become a much larger community than I imagined, with now over a hundred students who have experienced being part of it.

Yet, when I arrived in Munich, I did not know what a green city I would find, nor was I exactly aware of the location of gd:c. Walking in the mornings from the English Garden to my office, looking outside from my desk during the day onto the Maximilian Park, I felt surrounded by a much larger green environment and was able to take more time to notice its changes day by day. One of my initial ideas was to see if I could start another garden, perhaps in the backyard of the gd:c building. But soon after arriving in Munich, I realised that there would neither be enough time nor the right moment during my six-month stay in the city.

I also noticed that it was already October, and the turn of the season was obvious in the city's flora. The weather was starting to get chilly; trees were shedding their leaves, and the colors were turning crimson, then yellow and brown. There was a sense of slowing down and stillness, almost like the preparation we humans do before going to bed: getting rid of heavy clothes, cleaning up and getting ready to quiet down. It was clearly not the right time to start a garden.

I began to spend longer moments just observing the park's edge from my desk, tracing the slow color changes of the trees. Jenny Odell calls this kind of attentiveness 'doing nothing': not idleness, but radical presence. 'To do nothing is to hold yourself still', she writes, 'so that you can perceive what is actually there'.¹ In those moments, I was not inactive. I was practicing a different form of engagement, like the trees, one that did not seek to produce or prove, but simply to be.

Wintering

Around the same time, I started reading *Wintering: The Power of Rest and Retreat in Difficult Times* by Katherine May.² It was inspiring to read both May's personal story of wintering in life as a metaphor for difficult times, as well as her research on strategies

1 Jenny Odell, *How to Do Nothing: Resisting the Attention Economy* (Brooklyn: Melville House, 2019), 11.

2 Katherine May, *Wintering: The Power of Rest and Retreat in Difficult Times* (New York: Riverhead Books, 2020).



and rituals of coping with cold weather in other geographies and of her own experiments with it, especially with the cold sea in winter. May discovered swimming, or cold dipping, as a way of making peace with the harshness of the winter. This ongoing experiment generated its own community of like-minded friends and new acquaintances who celebrated the winter instead of recoiling from it.

We were not necessarily in the winter months yet, but we were moving toward them. The trees were clearly preparing for their own wintering cycle, recognising their need for rest and retreat. It was the human-made homes, offices and buildings that separated us from this both by protecting us from the coming cold and by disconnecting us from what was happening around us. The daily rhythm of looking at computer screens, preparing another paper or talk and the self-induced pressure to write was constant. Academia does not have time for wintering. We were used to – and even willing – to continue producing without making time for rest.

Fig. 1
**A gd:c autumn (Işıl Eğrikavuk,
November 2024)**



But what if resting, I thought, just like dormancy in the plant world, is not absence but a different kind of presence: a quiet form of survival, preparation and transformation? As Robin Wall Kimmerer suggests in *Braiding Sweetgrass*, plants model a wisdom of rest and regeneration, teaching us to honour cycles and recognise the value of dormancy.³ In the garden, dormancy is never a failure or inactivity. It is a pause that makes growth possible, it is a surrender to the season that honours time, energy and environmental rhythm. Trees do not resist winter; they embrace it, slowing their metabolism, conserving energy, drawing inward. Their apparent stillness holds unseen labor, the storing of sugars, the thickening of bark, the quiet preparation for what's to come. In contrast, the institutional calendar asks us to bypass these organic pauses, rather to produce in all seasons as if the soil never needed to remain uncultivated. But perhaps, like the trees, we humans too need seasons of dormancy. Not to disappear, but to process, to

Fig. 2 – 5
An experiment in photography and research (Işıl Eğrikavuk, November 2024)

3 Robin Wall Kimmerer, *Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge and the Teachings of Plants* (Minneapolis: Milkweed Editions, 2013).

replenish, to wait with intention. In that sense, wintering is not just metaphor, it's an ecological imperative.

A Common Dormancy Experience

With those thoughts in mind, I started to imagine a collective experience of dormancy – or rather, an invitation to it. A cultural motif appeared in my thoughts, originating from my country, Turkey, where newlyweds are presented with a two-person pillow upon marriage. There is also a saying that reflects the object: *Bir yastıkta kocayın*, which means 'May you age on the same pillow together'. I began sketching what a pillow for my academic community might be like. A tall pillow of several meters, where we could rest our heads together for a moment and doze off in the building where we work. How could we connect to one another while disconnecting from our work?

I started toying with the idea. First, I took a German-size pillow from the house where I was staying. German pillows are notorious among foreigners for their size – usually 80x80 cm. I went outside into our garden and began to fill it with fallen leaves from the horse chestnut trees. I wanted to put dried leaves in this pillow to create some form of commonality between our tree-kin and our dormancy experiences. To sleep while being accompanied by living organisms – to be closer to the outside, beyond our walls.

After making my first pillow and filling it with leaves, I started photographing myself in the office building, sleeping in different places: at my desk, on the stairs, in the kitchen, under the Einstein painting in our foyer...

By mid-November, as my talk was approaching, I decided to really make a giant pillow, which I could fill together with my colleagues as a performance. After some searching, I found a Turkish tailor who agreed to sew my two-meter-long pillow from old bed linens. Together we made the pillow.

On the next page you can see images from our collective pillow-filling and leaf-picking performance, which we executed at the end of my talk and to which I invited my colleagues and guests. Before we did that, I showed them a video of myself sleeping on my first pillow in the gd:c backyard, for which I also wrote this text:

Dear you,

Good morning. Good night. Good morning. Wake up. Are you awake?

How did you sleep last night? Was it a deep sleep, or did you wake up in the middle of the night?

Do you dream? What was your last dream?



Fig. 6 – 9

**A Collective Dormancy Experience,
performance by Işıl Eğrikavuk and
participants, gd:c, (Işıl Eğrikavuk,
November 2024)**

The leaves are falling down. I can see them falling one by one from the window of my office.

Sometimes I hear machines collecting the leaves, making the streets all clean and tidy for us humans.

When I went foraging a few weeks ago, our guide told us that dropping their leaves is like emptying their guts for the trees. They become lighter and calmer, ready to rest.

We have a maple tree here in the garden, and a couple of beech trees.

My plant-identifying app tells me we have a Turkish hazelnut, but I don't believe its 58% accuracy.

It stands on its own, and I mostly worry about it being alone.

I keep waking up in the middle of the night these days.

Between 4–6 a.m. is a half-dormant time for my body.

I try to meditate, but can't fall back asleep. On those days, my eyes close and my head becomes heavy – sometimes hard to carry.

What's a garden when it is dormant?

When life simply shifts underground and we, the outsiders, can't see much happening?

What happens when the work of being a plant becomes invisible – its activity slowing down, yet continuing in other forms?

What happens when a tree is quietly resting? Is resting a detour, when one is paused, storing for the next day, month, or coming season?

Dear you, do you ever feel dormant?

When was your last dormancy?

Dear you, do you want a rest?

What if we rested together – communally, like trees?

Dear you, can we connect with one another through being dormant, with our different forms, bodies, and lengths of rest?

Dormancy as Resistance

To be dormant is not to disappear. It is to resist the demand to constantly produce, to perform alertness, to stay visible. In a world and an academy that celebrates speed, output and accumulation, choosing to slow down is a quiet act of rebellion. Dormancy is resistance to timelines that don't fit our bodies, to institutional rhythms that forget we are made of cycles, not straight lines. Like the plants in our garden, like the trees outside the gd:c offices, we too need time to retreat, to shed, to lie fallow. The giant pillow we filled together was not only a resting place; it was a proposition, a shared pause, an embodied refusal. A collective reminder that rest, disconnectivity and absence is presence. It is care. It is preparation. It is political.

Bibliography

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