

To Have My Rest and Eat It Too

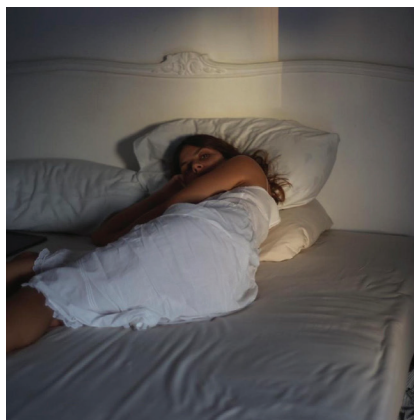
Maayan Goldman
Tel Aviv University



TO HAVE MY REST AND EAT IT TOO



MAYAN TOLEDANO



MAYAN TOLEDANO

1.

A thoughtful friend had once texted me the following birthday wish: “Maayan, may you finally rest, undisturbed by anyone or anything, all the while having everyone, and everything, at an arm’s reach. Just in case.”

She sees me as I am, I knew. An aspiring hermit who is very, very tired but also very, very needy. Her wish for me reflected my own: to reject the world, yet never renounce the little it offers, nor the vastness I secretly still hunger for.

Is this asking too much?



MAYA ROO



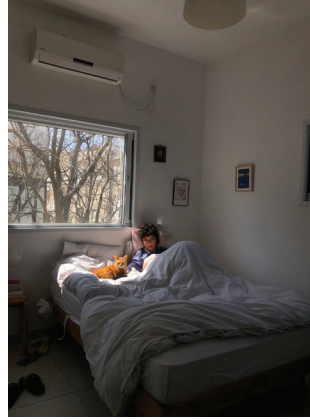
MAYA ROO

2.

If true rest is a moment free of tenacious attachments and our acting upon them, which I think it is, I may as well never relax.



MAYA ROO



MARGALIT OREN

3.

Lately, I had noticed my tendency to categorize theories and practices into two schools, then pendulate between them, emotionally and epistemologically. On the one hand, there are the ethics of easy, minimal contentment¹ suggesting I need only open my clenched fist,² lean back, do less, and ask for less. This approach proposes I free myself from productivity's demands but also from radicalizing my resistance to them.³ On the other hand, there are philosophies that emphasize my intense, irrational, sometimes harmful attachments and the objects they cluster around, pointing out how they may be the most palpable thing I have (it is almost a negative having, but still).⁴

Of course, the first approach's haiku-like, non-instrumental aesthetic is lovely and alluring to me, and it has been my antidote for the extreme economic and political circumstances in which I live as well as some of the more delusional, grandiose aspects of my personality. Yet it is the second approach that accurately reflects my lived experience of always wanting a little something more, never quite possessing the mental and physical powers for acting out on it.

¹ As in Anne-Lise François' understanding of an ethos she finds in certain works of romantic literature and poetry, works she describes as "making nothing." See *Open Secrets: The Literature of Uncounted Experience* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008).

² Or so my wise Vipassana insight meditation teacher had suggested.

³ Again François, looking for a mode that is "free from work" but doesn't turn passivity into some notion of resistance.

⁴ Relating to objects we desire as clusters of promises is the late Lauren Berlant's suggestion, most elaborated on in her book *Cruel Optimism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011). It was also used in Sara Ahmed's writing, especially *The Promise of Happiness* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010). Of course, psychoanalysis, both theoretical (as in the contemporary writings of Adam Phillips or in the work of our intimidating fathers, Freud and Lacan) as well as practical—at least in my own experience as a patient—is a tradition that takes our attachments seriously.



ODELIA ARNOLD



AMIT BERLOWITZ

4.

For years, I've been hoarding online images of women resting. Women and girls, some of whom I know and love, doing nothing, moving nothing, retiring, receding and staring into their phones. What a delicious combination it is of subtracting and adding! To withdraw from the overzealous world outside while staying fully submerged in an excess of its materiality (laptops, lovers, lounging pets; beddings, babies, books, and bowls; home décor and power cords; remote controls and heaps of clothes); to appear momentarily removed from the economy of action and traction, yet at the same time, document ourselves doing so and post it on Instagram.



MAYA ROO



RONI DORON

5.

Otessa Moshfegh's *My Year of Rest and Relaxation*⁵ evokes a similar image: the young, wealthy, beautiful, and sad woman, lying sleepily in the midst of late-capitalist culture. She is convinced the cure to her despite-having-it-all-type misery lies in a long, deep, drug-induced hibernation. She deems this

⁵ Otessa Moshfegh, *My Year of Rest and Relaxation* (London: Penguin, 2018).

urgent, panicky desire to sleep “self-preservational,” yet it seems some of her other cravings are having a hard time loosening their grip.

Evidence of her unconscious longings keeps emerging:

... popsicle sticks on my pillow, orange and bright green stains on my sheets, half a huge sour pickle, empty bags of barbecue-flavored potato chips, tiny cartons of chocolate milk on the coffee table...
(p. 85)

... tacky lingerie from Victoria’s Secret kept showing up in the mail—frilly fuchsia and lime green thongs... An occasional package from Barney’s... cashmere socks, graphic T-shirts, designer jeans.
(p. 2)

My pubic hair has been waxed off... A good waxing—my skin was neither red nor bumpy. My fingernails... were French-manicured.
(p. 180)

I had dug out my digital camera and sent a bunch of strangers snapshots of my asshole, my nipple, the inside of my mouth. (p. 88)

As she understands it, “while I was sleeping, some superficial part of me was taking aim at a life of beauty and sex appeal” (p. 88). In other words, the part of her wishing to quit the social, material, and temporal apparatus that contributes to her misery is interrupted by an opposing one, clinging to it all. This part craves, beautifies, snacks, lusts, presents itself, and shops.

My hoarded images, it seems, embody a similar dance, but are also unbothered by such a division. In their miniature world, perhaps, there is so little to begin with that nothing ever has to be given up.



MAYA ROO



ANNA LANN

6.

Once Moshfegh's girl figures out the optimal psychiatric drug cocktail, she understands the need for a committed warden to facilitate her detachment. She uses her former ties in the art scene to initiate a contract with provocative shock artist Ping Xi. The artist will paint and videotape her in her sleep, then be free to exhibit his work as he sees fit. In return, he ensures her seclusion and disconnection in her Upper East Side apartment, marking the passing days on her calendar and providing a weekly pepperoni pizza.

Critical and sarcastic as she is of him, their collaboration turns out to be everything she had wished for.

Three months later, she awakes fully rested, feeling “soft,” “calm,” and “free.” She sheds her long blond hair and designer clothes, her furniture and belongings, even her only friend, Reva.⁶ We might say that she has also renounced her strongest attachment—her own image and autonomy of its representation.

She couldn't care less. She got what she wanted.

And so, seemingly following Marie Kondo's philosophy, she gives up all that burdens her: a horrible romantic relationship, a job she doesn't like, and her dead parents' mansion; but keeps only the essentials, which, coincidentally, is what she was already born with: her natural beauty and generational wealth.⁷ Smart!

⁶ Who dies in 9/11, as the book is set in the years 1999–2001.

⁷ Ottessa Moshfegh's anti-heroine's refusal to cut up her social security card, as suggested by Ping Xi, or renounce her other privileges is part of what prevents the novel from aligning with a less complicated fantasy of leaving the material world altogether and thus reproducing the more familiar prototype of the ascetic: the nun.



MAAYAN GOLDMAN



MAYA ROO

7.

But I could never be as untethered as the girl in the book.



LILACH TZIDON



OMER GOLDMAN (BY EYAL ELISHA)

8.

As much as I, too, dream about that one, long, satisfying sleep, in actual fact, I'm terrified of "letting go." Even more so as a result of these strange, tremulous, last couple of years after which, like many others, I'm offered much less autonomous choice in regard to what it is I'm quitting. I seem to be losing people, objects, money, and time. Taking longer stretches in bed or on the couch, yet never feeling rested. This shedding is beautiful. In a way, it is what I searched for, the epitome of my moral and aesthetic view of the world, my ideal of an ever-so-light, unattached existence. But it also hurts me.



SHIR MISHAL



TALI KUSHNIR

9.

Doesn't a highly dependent and somewhat compulsive woman deserve a break, too? What if I want to give nothing up—my extremely cluttered twenty-first-century paraphernalia; ethically questionable online shopping and truly awful TV and literature; my dreams of fulfilling the phantasmatic concept of “potential,” of writing and reaching out of this Tel-Aviv apartment; nor one morsel of what this moment in time has to offer me (even the harmful bits, even all that I absolutely don't need) but still close my eyes for a little while?



SHACHAR GOLDMAN



SHACHAR GOLDMAN

10.

There is a certain internet lineage these resting Instagram figures partake in, one Moshfegh's novel seems to celebrate as well as solidify: a virtual girl representation prevalent online in the last decade, collecting as many fans as it does critique and contempt. It can be partially traced back to Audrey Wollen's 2014 sad girl theory,⁸ to the phone-gazing “lazy girl,”⁹ to the increasing identification

⁸ “A limited spectrum of activism excludes a whole history of girls who have used their sorrow and their self-destruction to disrupt systems of domination. Girls' sadness... is a way of reclaiming agency over our bodies, identities, and lives.” Hannah Williams, “The Reign of the Internet Sad Girl Is Over—And That's a Good Thing,” *Medium*, August 24, 2017, <https://medium.com/the-establishment/the-reign-of-the-internet-sad-girl-is-over-and-thats-a-good-thing-eb6316f590d9>.

⁹ “Lazy Girl speaks to how we'd all like to put forward less effort. But at the same time, to the extent that these articles continue to exist, we will always believe it takes a large amount of effort to be acceptable.” Casey Johnston, “How Did the 'Lazy Girl' Take Over the Internet?” *The Cut*, February 4, 2016, <https://www.thecut.com/2016/02/how-did-the-lazy-girl-take-over-the-internet.html>.

with introversion (Pilates for shy girls!),¹⁰ to sloth memes,¹¹ to antisocial, mental health-centered humor accounts,¹² to sad girl makeup and weird girl's aesthetic, and sleepy girl's mocktails on TikTok.

In dialogue with all of these, but also standing on their own, the resting women photos suggest a negotiation, perhaps reconciliation, between doing and non-doing, between buying into it and quitting all of it.¹³ More than that (or actually less than that), they do so playfully and undramatically. Unlike Moshfegh's sleeping girl, they don't seem to represent a visceral battle of opposing parts reaching in different directions. There is also much less at stake for them—no concept of internal liberation, no rebirth. Instead, they recline between the soothing notion of freedom from work (though not the work of self-representation) and the less comforting one of eternal, restless seeking. But they aren't necessarily torn between them.



LILACH TZIDON



CHEN GOLDMAN

11.

I know these images are also, in themselves, another object for me to hold onto. I save, as to never lose them. I repost, as to appropriate them, make them my own. I “like,” my warm phone almost touching my face, to feel as if there is still a realm in which I am physically close to my sisters and friends. Scrolling, I can almost sense a taste in the roof of my mouth and sides of my tongue—is it sweet? Umami? Savory? I only know I am consuming them, for sure. Snacking

¹⁰ Callie Jardine, “25 Min Pilates Workout for Unmotivated Days,” *25 Min Lazy Girl Workout*, video, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MDTLDzDzmR4>.

¹¹ Rohan Pandya, “50+ Hilarious Sloth Memes to Brighten Your Day,” *Don't Get Serious*, September 14, 2021, <https://dontgetserious.com/sloth-memes/>.

¹² Accounts such as “My therapist says,” with memes like, “When you find out your normal daily lifestyle is called ‘quarantine.’”

¹³ Of course, we're already familiar with the comfortable coexistence of recovery and commerce, of pulling out and leaning in. We call it self care. But in the case of these photographs, I believe they embody a woman who is less inclined to buy a concept so aggressively sold to her (anything else—sure, she'll take it). For her, it isn't so much about purchasing the products that will allow her perfect rest, but about resting among them, at ease with them, to a degree at least. What choice does she have?

on them and licking my fingers.¹⁴ Whatever it is I'm doing, it is probably the opposite of renouncing, of withdrawing, of letting go.



SAPIR BACHAR



MAAYAN GOLDMAN

12.

Sadly, I don't believe getting lost in Instagram searches is any type of rest. I can't lie to myself about that.

On the other hand, it *is* a mode of existence closely aligned with what is easily handed to me by life as it currently is; a specific mode that is very much in sync with the bit of powers I *do* have. Couldn't this be repose of some kind? Perhaps, right now, the only kind? An honest kind, I want to say, but that would be saying too much, for smallness (1080 by 1080 pixels) is this rest's inherent feature. As easy as it is to achieve—as little as it grants me.



RONI DORON



SHIR MISHAL

A

¹⁴ I think of a snack as a small bite and experience of something that current common sense tells me is an impossibility. Feeling good when eating something most definitely bad for me. Spending money I don't have on something that won't and can't sustain me, but believing I am momentarily nourished as I do so.