

Research School
for Media Studies



**RMeS Summer School:
Disconnected: Media,
Politics, Affect**

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INTRODUCTION.

It is hard to resist the urge to make this essay an auto ethnographic account of our relationship to the politics of disconnection. 'Our' is a word chosen carefully, because even though auto ethnography implies the individual 'I', disconnection affects us all, perhaps more so now than ever. For the context of this essay - or perhaps as a disclaimer, this paper will not be written in a traditional academic format. I admit to you, reader, that I am tired. I do not wish to emulate a style that does not resonate at this stage of my degree, written in August after just completing a two-and-a-half-month long project for a different course. Instead, I invite you to join in with something more personable, perhaps we both may rest through the process of this paper.

The structure I employ here may be broken into three acts; the first looks at our present within the online sphere and subsequent discourse. Terms such as Brain Rot and Cognitive Decay which seemed to have taken over the genre of content that may be found online, typically through short form such as Instagram Reels and TikTok, but has a knock-on effect to television and film. The second act examines our response to this, slowness as a method through film movements such as slow cinema, taking a particular interest in Abbas Kiarostami's installation film, *Five* (2003).¹ This segment leads into hope, using Tricia Hersey's *Rest is Resistance* manifesto as the framework for this analysis in conjunction with slow cinema,² as well as anecdotes from my time and conversations with my peers at the Netherlands National Research

¹ Abbas, Kiarostami., *Five*, DCP, Colour, 4:3, (NKH Asian Film Festival, 2003).

² Tricia, Hersey., *Rest is Resistance: A Manifesto*, (New York: Little Brown Spark, 2022).

School for Media Studies (RMeS) Summer School held at Radboud University, Nijmegen.³

To start in true cinematic fashion, I would like to set the scene of the Summer School. The event was two days (as opposed to the typical three) on the 25th and 26th June 2026. We started our morning with coffee in the reception area, students looking slightly uncomfortable as they gathered. We were mostly strangers, from different campuses across the Netherlands and all coming from different disciplines. We exchanged polite small talk as we all had one thing in common: the interest in the disconnection of our world, whether that be socially or politically. Together, we attend three keynotes' speeches and three workshops, completed with lunch and dinner breaks; students are encouraged to socialise during our 'downtime', we went for drinks at the close of the intense two days, finally switching off from being academics and instead opting to be ourselves. We separate the two facets to avoid this disconnect between each other and find things in common.

My interest lies within film, specifically Michel Ciment's 'cinema of slowness'; long takes, poetic imagery, narratives without plot.⁴ Disconnect is not just relevant to the common life but is reflected in the media we make and engage with, what we ought to share with each other but decide against.⁵ Slow cinema remedies this somewhat as a quiet act of rebellion, encouraging

³ RMeS Summer School, *Disconnected: Media, Politics, Affect*, (Nijmegen: Radboud University, 2026). <https://www.rmes.nl/rmes-summer-school-disconnected-media-politics-affect/>

⁴ Michel, Ciment., *The State of Cinema*, Oral Delivery, (San Francisco International Film Festival, 2003), Blog Post by Harry, Tuttle in, *Unspoken Cinema*, 2006. <https://unspokencinema.blogspot.com/2006/10/state-of-cinema-m-ciment.html>

⁵ Hanna, Arendt., *Chapter 2: The Public and the Private Realm* in, *The Human Condition*, 2nd ed, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958), pp. 52.

spectators to linger in unmanipulated time.⁶ The aim of this paper is to contribute this rebellion, without offering a solution.

ACT ONE – EXHAUSTION.

Short form content attempts to be the death of cinema. Fine, perhaps that is dramatic, though it seems the equilibrium has shifted toward instant gratification, particularly within algorithmic online spaces (which is most of them). In a symposium earlier on in the year also hosted by RMeS, students attended talks surrounding Brain Rot and Cognitive Decay, which linked to a genre of short form content as opposed to the structure of the content itself.⁷ Oxford University Press defines Brain Rot as *‘(T)he supposed deterioration of a person’s mental or intellectual state, especially viewed as the result of overconsumption of material (now particularly online content) considered to be trivial or unchallenging.’*⁸ This definition, which transcends the originally colloquial tone into an official identification, references only the ‘trivial’ genre, the *type* of content consumed and its effects. My interest lies with a formalist approach, comparing a spectator response to an over-abundance versus an under-abundance; the happy middle between these variables is for the individual to determine. Looking at a brief context of new

⁶ Jonathan, Crary., *Chapter 3 in, 24/7: Late Capitalism and the Ends of Sleep*, (London: Verso, 2013), pp. 52-53.

⁷ RMeS Masterclass, *Brain Rot and the Aesthetics of Cognitive Decay*, Oral Delivery, (University of Amsterdam, VOX-POP, 2026). <https://www.rmes.nl/rmes-masterclass-brain-rot-and-the-aesthetics-of-cognitive-decay/>

⁸ Oxford University Press, 2024. <https://corp.oup.com/news/brain-rot-named-oxford-word-of-the-year-2024/>

media resistance provided by Trine Syversten in the introduction of her (and contributors) text: *The Digital Backlash and the Paradoxes of Disconnection*, and consolidated through a lecture as part of the Summer School. She identifies a glacial movement of 'digital backlash', with people (mostly working adults) demanding a 'right to disconnect' from the constant demand of availability associated with being online.⁹ Downtime cannot be considered downtime when emails, updated stories and the weather can be checked with only a few taps on a screen. According to Syversten, offices in Sweden have implemented 'digital dead zones', places where workers are able to get away from the online world while working.¹⁰ To recount a similar instance; my academic advisor and I went to the British Library in Kings Cross for a coffee, when my company produced his laptop, the barista came over to politely remind him that this was a digital free-zone and laptops were not permitted - phones, though, were okay if they were on silent. Many more examples of these exist; though the introduction of them within office and traditional working spaces are a new phenomenon. Resistance to media may be broken down simply to a few components: the defence of traditional values and authority, being regarded as an instrument of change that may cause 'threat'. From an outsider's perspective, the image created is one of moral panic - irrational and extreme, thus delegitimising the resistance tactics.¹¹ On the example I provided from the British Library, resistance

⁹ Kristoffer, Albris and Karin, Fast and Faltin, Karlsen and Anne, Kaun and Stine, Lomborg and Trine, Syversten., *Introduction in, The Digital Backlash and the Paradoxes of Disconnection*, (Sweden: Nordicom, 2024).

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Trine, Syversten., *Keynote 2: Digital Disconnection, the Attention Economy, and the Paradoxes of Self-Regulation, RMeS Summer School 2026: Disconnected: Media, Politics, Affect*, Oral Delivery (Nijmegen: Radboud University, 2026).

attempts such as the no-laptops-but-a-phone-is-fine appears as shallow, half-hearted, and even following a trend that was probably traced back to a viral TikTok...The cognitive framework is difficult to resist. While attending keynote speakers, students would go on their phone, check their emails, see what electives to apply for the next academic year. I was no exception to this; a lecturer would mention something which would make me think about a task that needed to be completed on my device. I am not snitching nor judging, we are in the same sinking ship. It is exhausting, online burnout is imminent. But the world is changing...

ACT TWO – SLOWNESS.

Where media resistance becomes most relevant, at least from a filmic perspective, is through the ‘attention economy’; the commodification of how individuals spend their time on the screens, how they entice and how they are kept locked into devices through ‘(T)hrough gamification techniques: likes, badges, rewards, timelines, etc.’.¹² The aim is distraction, entertainment, and a way to switch-off from the working world onto something that requires little activation. However, a main consequence of this is a limited attention span. The population struggle to sit through entire feature length films without respite from them.¹³ Slow cinema acts as a response to this, despite the many case studies being centred around

¹² Trine, Syvertsen., *Introduction: Do We Have A Problem? In, Digital Detox: The Politics of Disconnecting*, (United Kingdom: Emerald Publishing, 2020), pp. 6.

¹³ Ibid, pp. 5.

European New Wave filmmakers from 1960s-1980s, such as Jean Luc Godard, Chantal Akerman and Béla Tarr. Trends are cyclical, are they not? The case study I wish to examine is Abbas Kiarostami's 2003 installation film, *Five*; comprising of five long takes. Kiarostami comments on the film's unsociable structure; '*I can confidently say that you would not miss anything if you had a short nap.... I declare that you can nap during this film.*'¹⁴ Quite the controversial statement! What differentiates this film, and slow cinema in general is its emphasis on spectatorship. Directors such as Chantal Ackerman and Jean Luc Godard (the latter not being considered a slow cinema director, though I include him here due to his utilisation of the long take), typically aim to activate the spectators, separating film form elements and allowing spectators to fuse the fragments.¹⁵ Kiarostami conducts an opposite approach, emphasising an under-abundance of mise-en-scene. In other words, he provides rest within a digital world; a 'sleeping spectator'.¹⁶ Though the structure is the opposite, the effect here is one of passivity in the same vein of short-form content. The formal execution of it though, is one of real-time, not manipulated for the purpose of gratification and/or dopamine hits. There is little catharsis by the very design of slow cinema, spectators are meant to sit with their boredom, drift and then come back without the fear of missing out in a meditative process. Slow cinema captures a documentative element to our real-world, with its main

¹⁴ Abbas, Kiarostami, cited in Justin, Remes., *The Sleeping Spectator: Non-Human Aesthetics in Abbas Kiarostami's Five: Dedicated to Ozu*, in Tiago, de Luca and Nuno, Barradas Jorge (eds.), *Slow Cinema*, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2016), pp. 235.

¹⁵ Bertolt, Brecht., John, Willett (ed.), *The Modern Theatre is the Epic Theatre in Brecht on Theatre*, (London: Methuen, 1964), first published 1930, pp.37-38.

¹⁶ Remes., *The Sleeping Spectator: Non-Human Aesthetics in Abbas Kiarostami's Five*, in, de Luca and Barradas Jorge (eds.), *Slow Cinema*, (Edinburgh University Press, 2016).

convention being naturalistic time – the long take. How Kiarostami uses this is perhaps more extreme than other filmmakers, with each take averaging about eighteen minutes in length. He hopes, first and foremost, to capture chance, although this is a slight farce. The piece of driftwood in take one had a small explosive device in it programmed to be set off at a desired time. The ducks in take four were lured with food to create a choreography of entering and exiting the frame in a pendulum interval.¹⁷ The environment was no less manipulated in this film as an influencer manipulates their daily Get Ready With Me's. In the case of *Five*, the director becomes an observer as much as the spectators are; '*the author disappears; there is no longer a director*'.¹⁸ However, one cannot forget a director is present through the shaky videographic filming style. The contrast in authorship between slow cinema spectatorship and short-form content consumption is evident. Kiarostami seeks to give us back time through the structure of under-abundance and continuity. Our time, once again, becomes our own. The true author role is left to us.

¹⁷ Abbas, Kiarostami., *Around Five*, DCP, Colour, 4:3, (Iran: NKH, 2005).

¹⁸ Jonathan, Romney., *Five, Sight and Sound*, no issue number listed, (BFI Film Forever, June 2005).
<http://old.bfi.org.uk/sightandsound/review/2397>

ACT THREE - HOPE.

Professor Syvertsen and I decided to leave the screening of Spike Jonze's *Her* (2013) early.¹⁹ We stayed for the introduction, but both realised that we had seen this film so many times that we could quote it. We snuck out of LUX cinema so as not to disturb anyone, and I walked her back to her hotel. As stated in my introduction, much of what I gained from the RMeS Summer School was gained through simple conversation; the subject matter of this essay was no exception, hence my film approach. On this walk, we discussed the world of academia, burnout, evolving writing styles that do not reflect our conviction as people. I admitted to her that I did not feel I was as good of a writer as I used to be and find myself pandering to the demands of criteria. She admitted the same. After an intense walk (which was interrupted slightly due to our need of Google Maps to put us back on the correct path), we concluded that we are too hard on ourselves, that professors, PhD's, students, are in desperate need of rest. I mention this more so from the online perspective of this paper, rather than the demands from academic institutions themselves; however, the cycle cannot be ignored.

Students/professors/technicians go to campus and complete their days work (a lot of which requires a laptop, phone and internet connection), the work is completed and often digitised, we go home and continue with outstanding work online while completing domestic obligations; we are exhausted, we go onto social media as a buffer between us and the real-world. This is the simplified cycle, my day looks slightly different, and I am sure yours does

¹⁹ Spike, Jonze., *Her*, Digital, Colour, 1.85:1, (United States: Warner Brothers, 2013).

too, but the point still stands. Social media apps will use ‘symbolic displays of agency’ to keep you on, with the promise of tailoring your algorithm and choosing only essential cookies.²⁰ I doubt the difference made, but perhaps I am a cynic.

Now more than ever, slow cinema provides a beacon of hope; the invitation of uninterrupted rest. As stated in Act One of this paper, short form content through its very structure is built on over-abundance, noise and distraction. The aim of it is to keep you online or ‘on-life’ as a composite term.²¹ Slow cinema encourages boredom, not as something to be endured, but a neutral truth of our world. If one wishes to be a sleeping spectator, do so, you may need it! Shame and guilt surrounds this notion of admittance of needing rest; even the sentiment I started this paper with felt better suited for a diary entry (which I do not have the time to keep) rather than an academic paper. Tricia Hersey puts our minds at ease; *‘(M)ay we have space to navigate our lives from a liberated rest state. May all of culture slow down. May we rest together.’*²² In her response to the ceaseless demands of the world, she resists through true rest and encourages us all to do the same. For many of us, our version of rest is a break; a coffee in the Radboud University foyer to give us energy to keep moving, or the standard minimum wage twenty minutes for lunch which is spent scrolling mindlessly on social media, a “power nap” so we may work more efficiently after it. This is not true rest, but an energy optimising tactic. Hersey’s *Nap Ministry* works in conjunction

²⁰ Anna, Watkins Fisher., *Keynote 3: Never Not On: On the Designing out of the Off Switch*, RMeS Summer School 2026: *Disconnected: Media, Politics, Affect*, Oral Delivery, (Nijmegen: Radboud University, 2026).

²¹ Ibid.

²² Tricia, Hersey., *Introduction in, Rest is Resistance: A Manifesto*, (New York: Little Brown Spark, 2022), pp.9.

to slow cinema.²³ Through her restful philosophy, she seems to provide permission (as that is what we need now), deeming rest not as a luxury or something to be commodified, but as a fundamental part of being.²⁴ This mirrors my own philosophy surrounding cinema, with the continuous online demands and short form content providing relief being a direct reflection of grind culture. The consequence of the relief we seek through short form content leading to our eventual cognitive decay – Brain Rot. In the introduction of her book *Rest is Resistance*, Hersey provides us with anecdotes from her grandmother and her moments of rest during her commute, she ‘watched the movement of the trees’ out of a bus window.²⁵ I can't help but think of D.W Griffith stating the true essence of cinema being ‘leaves moving through the trees’,²⁶ or Jean Epstein’s ‘soul’ of cinema being a ‘breeze of emotion’.²⁷ Semiotically speaking, the fluidity of wind as a temporal representation is important here. I complete a similar practice on my Eurostar journeys from London to Amsterdam. When applied to slow cinema, the restful relationship we have to it as illustrated in *Five*, with Kiarostami granting us the ability to nap through his films – to claim time to use as we see fit. I suppose I ought to say thank you to them.

²³ Tricia Hersey., *The Nap Ministry, We Will Rest! The Art of Escape*, (The Hatchette Book Group, 2024). <https://thenapministry.wordpress.com/author/thenapministry/>

²⁴ Hersey., *Rest is Resistance*, (2022), pp. 19.

²⁵ Ibid, pp. 20.

²⁶ D. W. Griffith, in Joyce E. Jesionowski., *Basic Shot in*, *Thinking in Pictures: Dramatic Structure in D. W. Griffith's Biograph Films*, (California: University of California Press, 1989). pp. 32.

²⁷ Jean, Epstein., trans. Stuart, Liebman., *Magnification and Other Writings*, Vol.3, (Massachusetts: The MIT Journal 1977), First Published 1921, pp. 9. https://www.scribd.com/document/771616885/259188132-Jean-Epstein-Magnification#google_vignette

CONCLUSION.

Slowness within the filmic world acts less of an antidote for constant connectivity but provides us a healthier relief, encouraging boredom, rest, fluidity and the awareness of the passing of time. The politics of the online (and its offered remedies of mindfulness apps) are indicative of a wider systemic issue, one based on the demands of availability in our working world. This paper was not a direct commentary of capitalism and white supremacy (these two facets typically go together) but rather a holistic observation about our relationship to the digital world. The shadow of capitalism looms over the themes of this essay. If I am to once again use this as a confessional – stop me if it becomes too naval gazing – The RMeS Summer School recontextualised a lot of information we already know. We know that we spend too much time behind a screen. We know that we work too hard and for too long. We know that we are burning out, but we also know that we do not have time for that right now, so we will reschedule it on our iPhone calendar for another time. Slow cinema provides solace, that something can be both digital and quiet. We are disconnected from each other and ourselves despite being led to believe otherwise through the overabundance of social media choices and the content they offer collectively.

In a workshop led by Professor Liedeke Plate, we pulled up chairs in a circle, did the standard procedure of stating our name, and listed three adjectives on how we were feeling, whether that being in the present moment or our

general relationship to the world.²⁸ Mine were ‘cynical but optimistic’. Within this workshop we also shared our ways of rest; where we think our characteristics of working too hard come from interpersonally and systemically. The moderator, Dr. Jeroen Boom, called himself a ‘brain on a stick’ which resonated with how I, and many others were feeling – disembodied, fragmented. Food becomes a reward system for when you have done a hard day’s work, your sleep must be earned, your to-do list never to be deferred. The workshop turned into a sharing circle, students slowly started putting their notebooks away, not wishing to write anything down and distract themselves from the conversations that we were having. This was our first time *really* meeting each other, no one was keen to optimise the time that we had in this workshop, we merely experienced it for what it was. Slow cinema, or even the black box of the cinema experience itself, works in the same vein. It functions off its own temporality, phones must be put on silent, turned off, placed on do-not-disturb, put away.²⁹ This workshop, as well as the small conversations I was lucky enough to partake in, provided the most amount of hope. Slow cinema is the tangible embodiment of a more abstract concept of disconnection and exhaustion. Its formal conventions of long takes, poetics, emphasis on landscape, lack of narrative, etc., provides spectators an opportunity of grounding. Through its under-abundance, the films are kind. They do not demand attention, And in the extreme case of *Five*, you are even permitted to have a nap! Slow cinema,

²⁸ Liedeke Plate., *Workshop 3: Exhaustion: Time to Res(is)t*, RMeS Summer School, *Disconnected: Media, Politics, Affect*, Oral Delivery, (Nijmegen: Radboud University, 2026).

²⁹ Minh, Nguyen., *Slow Cinema: Taking Our Time // For An Overthrow of Horology*, Issue. 9, (The Seen: Chicago's International Journal of Contemporary & Modern Art, 2019). <https://theseenjournal.org/slow-cinema/>

as stated, was around longer than the new media digital backlash, though through its context of modernism and the common life, a commentary on the fast-moving world has always been present. Sometimes I feel sadness that the world has not changed, people still fear the structures of the digital world ever since its integration and yet only symptom treating through TikTok, Instagram Reels, YouTube Shorts (pick your poison), provide short term relief for generations of overworked and exhausted people. Though in these conversations, through the anecdotes I have shared in this paper, there is hope. Yes, I swapped Instagram handles with my peers and was jokingly berated for not having LinkedIn. Then, we put our phones away and commented on the wine we like, swapped interests and hobbies outside of academia - we had nowhere we needed to be and our work for the Summer School had been completed. Put a camera in the corner and press record and you have a great slow film right there. If only I could find the time to make it...

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