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Episode 62: Rest (March 2016)

Host: David Turner - **DT**

Guests: Holly Pester - **HP** & James Wilkes - **JW**

Transcript edited by Harriet Foyster - 4/05/2017

Conversation:

DT: Hello my name is David Turner and this is episode fourteen of the Lunar Poetry Podcast. Today I'm at the Wellcome Collection in London and I'm joined by doctors Holly Pester and James Wilkes, hello you two, how you doing?

HP: Hello.

JW: Hiya.

DT: Just a quick note this morning we topped five thousand combined views on the Youtube channels so thank you very much to everyone listening. I still can't believe that anyone bothers tuning in but it's really nice so thanks very much! I did say at a poetry reading the other night that it's perfect for anyone that likes poetry and podcasts but if you do then you should get out more because there's more to do in life, but I really appreciate people listening.

[LAUGHTER]

HP: I disagree!

DT: Today's episode will centre around the theme of rest and its starting point will be the residency program Hubbub at the Wellcome Collection which started in October 2014 and runs until July 2016. But before we start talking our guests will introduce themselves. We'll start with Holly.

HP: I am Holly Pester and I'm a poet and a researcher and a collaborator as part of the Hubbub team.

JW: And I'm James Wilkes. I'm also a poet and researcher and I am one of the Hubbub core group here at the Wellcome.

DT: So to begin with I have a quote from the home page of the Hubbub group website that I think sets the tone pretty well for today and that is "the urge to be busy defines modern life." And maybe James you could tell us a bit about what the project is and then we can start a discussion about your roles here.

JW: Yeah sure. Okay so we're a group of researchers from many different disciplines. We've got artists, poets, scientists, psychologists, geographers, historians, sociologists, many others, nearly fifty of us, and we are a project investigating rest and its opposites. So, rest is this term which is actually really hard to define.

One of the ways we want to approach it... Because I think it is something that's really important to people's lives today, one of the ways we are trying to approach it is by looking at its opposites. So, tumult, activity, work, labour, busyness, noise, all these things which in a sense surround that silhouette or empty space which is rest. And so, we're here at the Wellcome Collection for two years, we're in residence on the fifth floor, and we are doing research in all sorts of different fields, producing events, exhibitions, research papers, a whole range of different things.

DT: So Holly how did you become involved with the project?

HP: Through Jamie I think each member of the core group kind of brought a sort of crack team from their discipline and then Jamie brought in a wonderful group of poets, performers, artists and musicians to be part... Be collaborators within the wider network of Hubbub. So I came in as a poet but also as an academic doing academic kind of research into forms of practice-based inquiry and poetics, those kind of things.

And I think that quote you read out, "the urge to be busy..." I think that's really provocative because a lot of what we're doing is... Speaking for myself and I think Jamie as well, is that it's more about a critique of not that urge to be busy but the kind of apparatus that imposes busyness on people and the oppression of busyness more than anything, rather than peoples' impulse to be busy.

DT: I'm sure we can definitely talk about the oppression of busyness! And James how did you...?

JW: So I'd been involved in other projects working with neuroscientists in the past and I was interested in doing some further work in an interdisciplinary context and I met other members of the core group in various ways over the past few years. And then we kind of put together this project specifically to... Because there was this opportunity to bring people together and to really try and think, as Holly said, critically about this topic.

My own interests have been around the relationship between poetry and various kinds of noise, whether that's understood in a kind of linguistic sense or in a performance sense, so yeah the relationship between noise and rest in poetry itself. So, there was a kind of ongoing interest but that's gone in various directions as this project has progressed, not always in ways that I expected actually.

DT: I first met Holly at Kayo Chingonyi's event Sound and Poetry at the ICA in London and... Would it be more appropriate to say that you're both more interested in noise rather than the concept of what sound means to poetry? It seems that the stuff that I've either seen you read or seen online... Is it more about noise?

HP: Yeah, I think noise has been a shared philosophical question between us for a while, we've known each other for a long time as researchers and poets. But I think a voice and the work of the voice, the effort of the voice and all the linguistic information and extra-linguistic information that comes out of voice, so obviously noise and its extra-communicative capacity and the poetics of that, is a real interest, in performance but also in how it's scored and in text, but also in how it kind of... It becomes a tool for investigation, a tool for inquiry.

DT: And in terms of this project, obviously, it's interdisciplinary, working with others is obviously encouraged in this project. But in terms of being poets in this larger project are you pretty much left to your own devices or is everybody given a rough brief of what is trying to be achieved or...?

JW: I mean it would be interesting to see what Holly thinks and whether this tallies with her experience because I think one of the things we try to do is actually... So, so often

there's this pressure to produce, you know the sort of context around which, or in which, poetry usually happens is "okay there's a performance coming up," or there's an invitation to contribute to a magazine or something, so there's a deadline. You know "here's the work, you get on with it" and you make something.

And for a long-time I found that... Well, increasingly I found that that model is really difficult to work with for me, I work quite slowly, and what we wanted to do with this project was really to set up a scenario where there's a bit of space and to say to people "this time that you have on the project is not necessarily geared to making something, it's time to do research, it's time to think, time to try things out, time to experiment." And the idea of experiment is really important.

It's something which I think allows people to come together from many different kind of backgrounds, disciplines and to say "we're going to try something out here." So, the idea is that there's this time to experiment and we hope that people will make things out of that and people of course often do. But by not saying... I mean obviously, there are dates and things that we want to produce things on, but I think the ethos that certainly I'm trying to work with is getting away from that a little bit and saying "this is a time to try things out."

We hope things will come out of it, but a failed experiment, or rather an experiment that fails is not a failed experiment because it's a trying, it's an essaying, it's an exploration and if you don't get what you thought you would get out of it this time, well that's useful too. That's the kind of attitude we're trying to develop. I don't know if your experience...?

HP: Yeah, I think there's been a great deal of freedom of not having to produce work on demand because that would be... That wouldn't go at all with this idea of critiquing busyness or critiquing... Because I feel like even though there is a sort of environment of academic research we are also moving away from that...

In academia, as well, it's kind of like producing research constantly to a quota and to weird levels of impact that don't really make sense to anybody. So, I think yeah just having space to do some really slow thinking and conversations and sharing your ideas in an informal, anecdotal context... That's been one of the most important aspects of the project actually that there's no pressure on output.

DT: I was just scribbling some notes but I think you made that point quite nicely there, it seems quite apt that there isn't pressure to meet traditional targets because I suppose the question of what it means to be productive is similar to what it means to be busy, and these traditional views of what we hold, and it does put a lot of pressure on people, doesn't it? Because we don't all work in that way. Not everyone... All our minds are different and our work patterns are different and if we're all put in boxes and expected to perform and be productive in the same way then people will fall out of that very quickly, won't they?

HP: Exactly. And it just services the economy of what you're doing without any sense of how it's, not benefiting, but how it's kind of serving a wider question, it's fuelling this never-ending need for poetry as if there is one, you know it's more about...

JW: It's really hard though. I think it's really hard to battle it on a kind of psychic level. I certainly feel like there's a deeply pernicious, individuating, individualistic kind of thing going on which is all about, you know, if you're more productive you're more visible you're more... In this kind of micro-economy, I think. And I think it does, as you were suggesting, tend to at least make it harder to think about an ethics or a generosity of poetry, like how can poetry be something generous? How can it be something which exists between people?

HP: And properly critical as well.

JW: Yeah, definitely. And there's this thing... The idea of productivity and poetry is a particularly strange one really because I think of poetry as this effort sink. You put so much effort... It takes, for me anyway, so much effort to actually produce this stuff. And then reading it is so hard and requires so much time.

I want to be able to give that time willingly and freely to another person or another collective of people or whatever it might be and to say "I'm going to read your work, I'm going to do this because this is something I want to do" and it's something I think is... It's about a good life is to be able to spend that time with someone's words or expression or whatever you want to call it, with someone's creative production. But that's hard and it goes against that sense of always being on, I think.

DT: Yes. And how is the project being assessed? I just want to talk about the mechanics of being on a residency like this because I think a lot of people would be wondering what the hell is going on here. You know how does this work?

JW: Yeah, with good reason. So, I think the funder, the Wellcome Trust who funded the project, what they did was they created this working space and they created a grant at the same time and our group were the first group to get that grant. So, the grant is there to allow us to work and the whole thing is thought of as an experiment. So obviously in order to get it we had to put together a proposal in which we talked about the things we'd investigate and the ways in which we'd do it and the sort of things we'd produce.

We're not existing in some kind of... Outside the dominant structures of funding that exist in academia or the para-academic world. But I think there's a lot more freedom in this particular grant than there would be in other grants to allow things to evolve and to allow things to change as they go along and that's created a space of, I think, relative freedom and relative autonomy which is, particularly in the current landscape, really really refreshing.

DT: I think actually I'd like to... Maybe we should return to this idea of what it is to be productive. Because I think there's a lot of pressure on any artists to be seen to be producing work especially if you live in a... If your practice is the kind that relies on funding. Very much so all you seem to be doing with your life is trying to prove your worth, your productivity and what that money is being used towards.

But when Holly and I first met we discussed this idea that there's a danger of rest becoming a corporate tool to aid productivity, and what it means to rest and how, perhaps, we're being told to rest but for somebody else's benefit now, often.

HP: Yeah yeah, and I think these kind of discourses of rest that are creeping up, they're just about keeping the body or keeping the subject in the state of work. You're either at work or you're recuperating in order to go back to work to be more efficient and productive. I think there is a corporatization of the idea of what rest is, and of what daydreaming is and of what sleep is. Yeah and how our relation to capital is increasingly creeping into those unwaged hours. So that was something that I particularly wanted to make a research question... A sort of trouble point that I wanted to think out through.

We've talked a lot about daydreaming in an opposition to mind wandering and stuff like that. I've been thinking about lots of things, I've been thinking about posture and the embodied experience of rest and how we take our work home with us in our backbones and our shoulders and how we end up being kind of articulated, not just in our imaginary space but in that kind of embodied, material way as well, how it recreates us constantly as work subjects. So, thinking about how the body and language can become a sort of protest to that as well, and how poetry can seek out those forms of protest to those impositions of becoming more and more a constant work subject.

JW: I think, just to add to that, I think that creativity is a term which has been completely incorporated as a tool of business and industry. It's an imperative, right? To be creative in your work for capital. And in that kind of context I think it's particularly important to think how poetry might provide a point against that, and on the back of that almost or in parallel with that there's... This fantasy emerges of endless rest and the possibility that you might be a really creative person if only you could relax.

And it's almost creativity as a spa experience which is horrific! So, I've been kind of thinking about... I haven't been thinking about but I've actually been... Ended up making stuff in really squeezed moments. And I think... You sent a link to that really interesting article which has completely gone out of my head but it was about the way in which the idea of a novel, for example, is almost obscene today, the idea of the time to read and write a novel being... Here I'm just flaming novelists which is not my intention!

[LAUGHTER]

JW: But I thought it was a very provocative, interesting piece to read. I can't remember. Maybe I can look it up.

HP: That sounds really interesting.

JW: But this squeezed making, really, the idea that actually it's enough... I mean I'm struggling with huge lack of sleep at the moment with a small baby in our household and the idea that you might just have a few moments in which to write something down, or to make something, I think is actually something that's worth exploring, there's something good about that.

DT: Yeah. And it's your baby, right? You haven't just got a random baby.

[LAUGHTER]

DT: It's really interesting, this idea of creativity being sold to people as some sort of spa experience because I can remember when I started writing again properly... I moved away from visual arts and moved towards writing again a couple of years ago, and people said "oh that must be really nice for you." I was like "what?! What are you talking about? It's horrible! I don't have enough time and when I do I hate myself for it." But no it's... There's another point to it isn't there, that if you're not making the time to be creative you're somehow failing as well.

We've all got busy lives, it's an odd concept to be told that it's something to aim for. It's something you should do if you want to, and we should all be allowed to prioritize our lives and make more time for it if that's what we want. But to be sold the idea of a creative life is odd. I mean if you look at the Arts jobs website it's amazing how many of the creative jobs are bookkeeping jobs, but because you're doing it for an arts charity it's somehow part of a creative...

JW: You just get paid less!

DT: Yeah you just get paid less than if you worked in a normal accountancy company. Maybe you get a couple of tickets for things, but you definitely get asked to work longer hours I think as well.

JW: But I think there's a very interesting thing there which is about the role of administration in making, in creative practice.

HP: We talk about that a lot.

JW: Yeah, we do. But it's an interesting thing.

HP: E-mail.

JW: It's Holly's great hatred. I mean it's something that I would definitely share but maybe I have just a higher tolerance level! But the bookkeeping... I mean bookkeeping and poetry is an odd combination but you see so many things... Yeah, it's often unacknowledged that that is part of what it means today, as you were saying, you know if you make a living out of some form of artistic practice, well how are you going to make it?

Are you going to work around it, teaching, or doing some form of other work? Are you going to be applying for grants? Are you going to be trying to make work which in some respect appeals to a paying public? The economics of it are always there.

DT: Since starting the podcast I seem to have just become my own PA. I'm just emailing on this iPad constantly. Anyway, I'll go on about that too much, we'd better change the subject! I mean you mentioned it quickly there, I was going to ask you do you both feel like you get enough rest?

HP: I mean having talked about the lovely wide open space with this project I'm doing it in between two other jobs, but I mean I'm a single, childless person. I guess it's relative, isn't it? But what counts as rest? I don't know what counts as... I mean for me it's a space where I... It could be a quite passive thing, to be rested. But I think it's a moment where you get to, I don't know, think in more dissenting, more rebellious ways.

Where you get to be... Where you get to situate yourself a little bit outside the apparatus that you are stuck in, in a normal way. So, I don't know, they're always quite cramped spaces as well, almost necessarily so for the dangerous way you get to think in those spaces. They're cramped and stolen and fugitive. I'm a really good sleeper. It's this skill I have, I could go to sleep right now and it would be lovely, and you could just carry on. Is that what you meant?!

DT: Yeah, because my follow up question was then going to be what is rest, for you, personally? You know because it must be different... I don't personally feel like sleep is very restful.

HP: Well no it's not, I mean Blanchot talks about the 'other night' that you have while you're asleep where it's actually just full of panic and alarm and activity and this other you is having all these traumatic, terrifying or brilliant or weird experiences. So, sleep itself... It's difficult to think about it as a rest.

JW: And we excluded it from this project actually, partially because you could talk about anything, rest could spread until it encompasses everything so sleep is just one place we've gone "we're not looking at sleep."

DT: Yeah.

HP: Yeah, I agree.

JW: I find that question really hard to answer. I've been thinking about it for two years and I haven't yet come up with a good answer. What does rest mean to me? I mean in some ways it's the most banal, vanilla things like going for a walk. So, I really feel like I ought to have something that's better than that, but I actually don't.

HP: But I think it's a moment where you're not being sponsored or paid or, I don't know, something that's outside, which is so difficult when you do lots of things and maybe you're precariously employed or self-employed, it's really difficult to know what an unwaged moment. But they seem to be... I think walking and stuff like that... I think you should be alright about your walks, that's okay it counts as rest.

DT: Definitely go on more walks. It always strikes me as unfortunate, a lot of people who are striving to be writers in any way... It seems to be the best way to ruin all of your holidays in life because you never get a chance. But that doesn't mean that your own practice can't be restful. It's just this idea that we carry, because quite often people are working one or two other jobs to pay rent and stuff.

In the times when you might imagine you should be resting maybe you're working on your artistic practice. So, so far, we've talked about this idea of what is to be productive and how we rest and what rest means to you. How did these ideas inform your writing before you came onto the project? Was this a part of the way you wrote or the things you thought about?

JW: I was exploring the role of noise in composition, in the process of composing poetry. So, I was interested in ideas from contemporary music but I was less interested in actually noise as you might understand it. Just to backtrack a second... So, the thing about noise is it's basically a category, and you can put anything in that box. And the point at which you twist and you turn the dial and you say "that's noise, that's sound," and you can do that anywhere and all sorts of things get chucked into that box called noise.

Some of the things Holly mentioned earlier like extra-linguistic or para-linguistic information about the body, posture... And the kind of stuff I got really interested in it were the "ums" and "ers," the ticks, the sort of infelicities of speech, the kind of messiness, the stuff that actually if you were making a Radio 4 type podcast you would edit out and there's a 'de-umming' thing that they do. So, I got interested in all this other information and thinking about how that might actually be useful for... Like reclaim for poetry... For the kind of practice I'm doing. So, I was doing all sorts of stuff about associative writing or writing in... I went to an anechoic chamber... Then allowing noise through association.

So, using a recording, using a hand-held recorder so I knew exactly where my "ums" and "ers" and stutters and stammers were, bringing that back into the process of writing, so transcribing that, allowing associations to creep in which is a sort of form of linguistic noise rather than that literal verbal noise, and using those to drive the evolution of the work across different iterations. That's the kind of thing I was interested in. I've done less of that in this project, I've got interested in other stuff really, but that was the stuff I was looking at beforehand.

HP: And a lot of shared interest... I was particularly interested in the idea of effort in the voice and what's an efforted object of speech, and how does that signify the body and what it's doing in the conditions it's in or what it's experiencing, and what kind of information effort carries.

So, I was thinking about work song and sea shanties and how the voice mediates work and activity of the body and how it also reaches out to collective voices. And so, there was a kind of obvious link between that sort of research and some of the research I've been doing here which is on lullabies, so that kind of sense of voice and speech performing the labour and the effort of the body and the tensions of the body.

JW: And I think the fact that... I mean as you put it in some of our previous conversations that when you construe a lullaby as a work song that is a really interesting move because it immediately completely flips the idea of rest straight over into economy and effort and work, and that gendered work of childcare.

DT: So these lullabies... It has been a product of the research here hasn't it? This is new work that has developed from being involved with the research.

HP: Definitely. Hubbub and working with the people here was like the laboratory kind of point and I've always been more interested... And this is the kind of way I do research as well and I think this is something Jamie and I have in common, rather than staring... Picking a category like noise or lullabies and rather than staring straight at it and doing some sort of cultural excavation of the artefact of lullabies and really learning about them, doing some sort of ethnographic survey of lullabies, I just wanted to use it as a space for us to have a conversation in that term, in that discourse and use it almost like a kind of a workshop method.

We used to come into this room actually and we'd talk about lullabies very personally, anecdotally, and with research as well and how it crossed over into different research people had been doing. I did do some research into the historical experience and archival research into lullabies. And we'd just make them up and we'd just sing to each other. I'm really interested in the idea of it being the mother's work song. And instead of the object being the farming equipment or the net or the... I can't remember any of the terminology of sea shanties now but, you know, rather than that kind of equipment it's the baby that is being efforted to a different state.

But I was also really interested in what if you take that dynamic away? What if it's not a mother and a baby, what if it's just two bodies? What is that exchange then? What is the gift of it and what is the labour of it? And how does it become a really interesting model for collaboration and improvisation where you're kind of passing different energies back and forth? And it became a really... It was a really generative object to have in the room and just improvise and play and experiment around it as an idea, the lullaby as an idea.

And yeah and then it took off and I started working with other people and putting together some new collaborations with musicians and singers and non-singers. We're always really keen to have the non-expert experience of voice and body as part... As being a critical way to investigate an idea as well, not investigating things through an expertise of it, but through a more everyday experience.

JW: It makes it something genuinely folk, doesn't it?

HP: Yeah, you're right.

JW: I've got a very folk voice, I think.

HP: You've got a really folk voice! Me too.

DT: I think I should buy myself a big segue buzzer because it was never my intention to become a very professional presenter on these things but it would seem natural now that you might read some of these lullabies as we are going to have some readings on the programme.

HP: So these are a couple of poems and, I think for people that I kind of introduce them as lullabies, that might feel to some people like a misrepresentation of what they are, but like I said it's more about using lullabies as a medium through which to think out other things, a relationship with rest and work and how... The bodies experience of those kind of states and how you can, through a collective, through a collaboration, you can work out new gestures for that. So this is a poem called A Rush of Bad Sleep.

[The author has not approved this poem for transcription.]

[00:33:47]

HP: Do you want another one?

DT: Yeah.

HP: This is the poem that I think David you and I have had a conversation about... It's called Tell Us How and it was written using the forms from the [DWP], where you would... Benefit claimant forms, and capacity to work forms they're called. I was just really struck by how horrific these forms are and how people are forced to describe their body and thinking about them through lullabies and thinking about permissions to not work and permissions to rest and permissions to be in a state of non-activity. So this is called Tell Us How.

[The author has not approved this poem for transcription.]

[00:36:49]

DT: Thank you very much and I'm sure anyone that's had experience of those bastard forms that would strike a chord then and if you haven't had experience with those forms you're very lucky. There are a lot of really interesting points you made actually before your reading about this idea... My sister spoke a lot about not being... When she had a child, when my niece was born, about not being able to talk about how much work was involved with looking after a baby.

Because as a mother there's a pressure to only speak of the joy that the child brings. Talking about how much hard work it is not denying the joy. It's just being realistic about how it can be very difficult. And yeah, it's just the guilt attached to admitting that there's effort being put in. It's a very difficult subject.

HP: I mean I don't have kids but I had a year of looking after my nephew for one day a week and after those days I've never been so bored and exhausted. How can you be so bored and exhausted at the same time? How can anything be as boring and as physically tiring?

JW: It's the sheer non-stop nature of it that I think is really exhausting and especially in the first few months when you have no idea what is going on. Or like what this little creature needs. You know this thing, really, this very animal creature, like small animal

which obviously has these needs which need to be repetitively met, like every hour if not less. And I mean it's an incredibly... But there's this intensity to that as well. I took a month of leave when he was born and just the intensity of that period was incredible.

There's no day or night, you're just constantly... There's no sense in which the two of you adults can get a shift pattern going because it's just completely... And then you have the physical implications of birth as well, there's all sorts of stuff going on. And yeah it's incredibly intense. But I think all sorts of life experiences bring that and I think maybe... I guess we're talking about lullabies so it's appropriate to bring this topic in. But there are all sorts of life experiences...

DT: Actually I just wanted to... Sorry to interrupt but I just wanted to follow up by saying it was a really interesting point about how it then branched into relationships just between two people, because having lived my whole adult life with bipolar I've had a lot of experience of being quite manic. Looking back on things now with a bit more rationality there have been many occasions where people have basically been singing lullabies to me, not in the traditional sense but to calm me down.

And I've seen it happen with other... I have been in institutions and hospitals but I also have friends with similar issues and I've seen it happen to other people, this bond between... The person singing the lullaby would never complain about having to go through that act because there's a bond between the two people, but it's completely exhausting being the one that's trying to calm the situation and trying to give something. But it's something we do for each other. I didn't mean that we should ever question doing it, that's not the point. It's just that I think there's a very big issue for people that live as carers.

HP: Yes, exactly.

DT: It's giving them an output or somewhere to just go and say "I'm really tired, this situation is really getting me down." Maybe that's what rest is for people, the chance to be honest.

JW: I think that point about care is a really important one. And if you shift... If that becomes the term it's a common ground I think. And care is... When you think about the complete opposite of care it's not even uncaring, it's worse, that society and this government in particular seems to be, well it definitely is, implementing. I think trying to understand the conditions of care and to produce forms of care which are outside that state mandated understanding is really really important.

HP: Exactly. Yeah. When you look at those forms that's just a tiny taste of the sort of violence that bodies experience and people experience in a kind of everyday environment. And so those intimacies, those moments of care and the labour that goes also into those unofficial moments of care I think are really important. And so, I've been having some amazing conversations through lullabies. One of my collaborators, Vera Rodriguez, she's a sex worker activist and she works... She does lots of activism but she does lots of organization and things for sex workers.

I think everything from parties to life drawing classes and singing and this kind of thing, and singing as a means to sort of work with those experiences and those political struggles. But then just as care between lovers, in friendships, in relationships where, you're right, exactly as you say there are these tensions, these exhaustions and these traumas. And then also just the day to day tiredness and how we work to relieve those of each other. So, yeah, I'm totally taken by the idea of lullabies being sung on wards in hospitals. I think that's amazing, actually.

DT: I think maybe this is why this subject has been so interesting for me because I've definitely made a lot of people very tired in the last twenty years, I can be quite tiring! Jamie, have you had any... Have you developed any work as a result, directly, of the project?

JW: Yeah one of the things I got really interested in was the archives of a health centre which was based in Peckham between the wars and it was called the Pioneer Health Centre, or it's also known as the Peckham Experiment. And the reason I got interested in this, in terms of the relationship to the project, is that it was about creating a space in which people could have some form of self-determination and decide ways in which they wanted to live their lives healthily. So, they provided equipment, for example sports equipment often, or just equipment for leisure activities, and people could self-organize and work out how they wanted to use them.

It was set up by these two doctors Innes Pearse and George Scott Williamson, and one of them, George Scott Williamson, was a theosophist, so he had these esoteric, spiritual, philosophical ideas and the material is just really powerful. It's really, really interesting stuff. Weird, weird stuff. Lots of esoteric ideas about the nature of men and women and how they ought to... What their potentials are, lots of strange metaphors for the ways in which people might live together.

But also, they were doing stuff really practically and pragmatically and people felt their lives to be changed by this experience so I think it's got loads of progressive elements. But also loads of things which are definitely more sinister and today feel like they're turning towards a kind of eugenicists thing and lots of stuff which is just plain weird, which is obviously a gold mine in terms of writing. So, I've been trying to just live with this material and Holly... One of the previous projects she did was looking at archival material and creating work out of I guess being with an archive in a sense?

HP: Yeah.

JW: So I was really taking my lead from her approach really, trying to live with this material and writing short stories, some of which collage directly images or phrases or entire chunks of letters from the archive, other times taking some of the ideas and producing scenarios out of them. So this is an ongoing project that I'm working on and I'm interested in just trying to use, I guess, short fiction, I don't know what to call it, prose? Just prose is probably good enough.

DT: Yeah. I mean I was just about to say something but it was going to make it sound even more pretentious. We're trying to steer clear of too many labels because I don't think

it's actually... For these kinds of discussions, it's not very relevant. Although to put things into context... But it's amazing how pretentious it can now sound by saying "oh I don't care about labels. Because I'm so interested in everything! My work encompasses everything I can't be labelled!" This is going to sound horrendously professional as well but maybe we could take a reading from your latest project?

JW: Yeah, so I'll just read a section of it. This is called So Even the Tree has its Yolk.

[The author has not approved this text for transcription.]

[00:51:27]

DT: Thank you very much. Time's running on a little bit but I'd like to just finish with one topic of discussion and it revolves around a panel discussion which happened as part of one of the events here that Holly was involved with with Claudia Hammond, was it? And the question was what can performance teach us about exhaustion? And I think you're probably both quite qualified to say something about that subject.

HP: I mean that's the question I don't think I even managed to answer in that event. I think it teaches... I don't know I don't think it teaches but what performance tells me about exhaustion is that there is always potential, there's always information in that state and it's not... Exhaustion isn't a metaphor that means an emptying out and the end of it, that's not what it is really, it's just a different state where there is potential and there's a different kind of information that can be produced in that condition. What do you think?

JW: Well as you were talking I was just thinking back to your talk and the way you were using examples of forms of specific performances which drew on exhaustion. But I was thinking actually about... So, other ways of understanding exhaustion, not only as bodily exhaustion, but the idea of bottoming out, that you might exhaust a particular kind of phrase or something and that actually in the doing of it new things come up all the time. And that made me think of the work we've been trying to do with using a particular tool of psychology called Descriptive Experience Sampling.

So, it's a quite simple technology developed by this guy called Russell T. Hurlburt who's a psychologist in the States and involves a beeper, quite an old school kind of beeper that you wear in your ear and you carry it around with you in your life. And it goes off at random points in the day and when the beep goes BEEP, like really quite definite noise, what you're supposed to do is you're supposed to note down what's in your experience just before the beep happened, and then you have this really long interview with him in which a single moment in time is discussed in loads of depth.

And we're really interested in... So, the way to me it relates to exhaustion is that you think that this is a very simple moment where there's probably very little going on in your experience and then you have this interview and you're trying to understand it in as much detail as you can and with as much fidelity to that experience as you can muster.

And you end up realizing that these moments which you think are nothing are actually, in a sense, inexhaustible. So, we're both, I think, interested in trying to work with that very meagre material and realizing that things are never exhausted because especially... And going back to performance, in the moment of listening to a poetry reading for example, you're always gathering way more than is just being read to you.

JW: And we actually did a little thing... We did a little experiment, didn't we? Where we had a poetry reading and we all beeped at certain points in the reading and then afterwards did the interview the three of three of us together.

HP: And even when I was reading poetry it turned out I was miles away thinking about something completely different! Just having a completely different experience. I can see the link to tiredness because I kind of always... Deliberately, but I don't know if it's deliberate or not... I write poetry that is difficult to read and it puts a lot of pressure on breathing and enunciation and focus and it is tiring to do.

I mean it's tiring to speak in public really. It's tiring to do those poems. I'm interested in that kind of extra-linguistic experience you start to have when all the oxygen is going to your head from all the rapid breathing and you're nervous so your blood pressure is going a bit weird and that's definitely not a nothing, that's loads of stuff, that's loads more happening to when you weren't tired and you were quite relaxed.

DT: There's a strong link between... A couple of episodes ago some friends of mine Nathan Penlington and Sarah Lester both tried to recreate George Perec's An Attempt at Exhausting a Place in Paris. They did it on the fortieth anniversary in Hackney in East London, and the critical part of the title is 'an attempt' because of course you can't exhaust even a small square in any town or city, there's too much. The whole process is a realization that there's too much going on and you can't experience it all.

And maybe what it's trying to highlight in a way is that if you're attempting to do that you're going to exhaust yourself, you're not going to exhaust the space. The only thing that's going to be exhausted is going to be your time, your energy levels or your patience. But I very much agree with Holly about performance. When I read live I deliberately do things to make things difficult for myself because I find I drift off very easily, and I drift off from my own work really quickly because I'm very bored of my own thoughts in terms of reading.

I don't know I find it very hard to revisit something that I may have spent a lot time writing because I don't necessarily want to look at it anymore. You know once it's on paper I'm quite happy for it to go away. But being involved in putting on live events I've entered this agreement with people that we are all going to share our work and it would be a bit weird if I wasn't doing as well.

HP: I think the idea of the experiment is what it comes back to, it being an experiment, and that's why I'm just so excited about this archive and the stuff Jamie's doing with it, this kind of strange, historical attempt to experiment, in experimental health and stuff. But you're, kind of, recuperating it into an experimental text and this putting things at stake...

Performance is always putting your body at stake at some point and putting your voice at stake. And that as a sort of a mechanism for practice is really important I think.

DT: I think we might have to finish there because the time is running on. But have either of you got anything coming up that you want to plug or mention? Any events?

HP: Have I?

JW: I don't know?

HP: Come on, that big thing!

JW: The big thing yes.

[LAUGHTER]

HP: I mean Jamie and I are working on a book of essays about all this, and stuff on the Peckham Experiment and stuff on lullabies. We're going to try and write a sort of manifesto of lullabies aren't we? And there's work on the Peckham Experiment, so in the maybe long-term future that book will appear.

DT: So do you have any blogs or where would people be able to follow the progress? Or where will things be announced?

JW: Hubbubresearch.org is the Hubbub one, and we do actually have an exhibition which will showcase a lot of work from the project and that is going to be at the Mile End Art Pavilion throughout October. There's no information about that out yet because it's a while away and we haven't got round to putting that out, but it's going to happen then and there.

DT: So the podcast Twitter feed is Silent_Tongue and I will be retweeting and letting people know, I'll be following this anyway so once stuff's announced I'll be re-Tweeting so you can follow our Twitter feed as well. And you both are on Twitter, I can put those links into the description box below the video. Thank you very much Holly Pester and James Wilkes.

HP: Thank you.

JW: Thank you.

DT: Check out the hubbubresearch.org for more information about the project. It's quite vast, there's a lot going on.

JW: We're on Twitter as well @hubbubgroup.

DT: And Hubbub Group is on Twitter as well. So, there's a huge amount going on, different disciplines and different artists and scientists and it's pretty vast. Check it out because I can't tell you anything about it! Thank you very much guys, cheers.

JW: Thank you.

End of transcript.