

Introduction

Felicity Callard, Kimberley Staines and James Wilkes

Abstract In this introduction, editors Felicity Callard, Kimberley Staines and James Wilkes describe the problem of rest – a ubiquitous concept whose presence or absence affects people, in different ways, everywhere. Depending on whether one is working clinically, historically, artistically, scientifically or through political and economic analysis, ‘rest’ has many looks and feels. The complexities of investigating such a phenomenon gave rise to Hubbub, the project out of which this edited book emerged. The editors describe how the book draws on research and practice undertaken during Hubbub’s two-year residency in The Hub at Wellcome Collection. They outline the book’s organizing structure, which groups the work of social scientists, scientists, humanities scholars, artists and broadcasters by scale of investigation, into minds, bodies and practices.

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Rest is a ubiquitous concept. Its presence or absence, its qualities and how it functions affect everyone, everywhere. Defining rest is problematic:

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both its meaning and what it looks and feels like are affected by many and various socio-political, economic and cultural factors. Our struggles with and against rest are deeply personal: some of us seek to find it, interpreting that desire as a need for peace and stillness, while others find themselves forced to take rest without desiring to, entering into a strange circumstance in which others perceive their ‘rest’ entirely differently from how they perceive it themselves.

To counter the difficulty of defining rest, we have looked elsewhere to see what might constitute ‘restlessness’, or ‘unrest’ – the opposites of rest, if you will. Key areas have emerged: work and activity, noise and sound, mental restiveness and tumult. But what happens if these opposites are sometimes deemed restful by those who experience them? Can interpretations of rest and unrest be universal? And what is it that we are actually *doing* when we’re resting? These are not idle speculations: rest brings with it serious questions about public health and wellbeing, about the conditions under which rest, work and activity can be considered restorative or pathological, for which social groups and at which historical times.

Consistently, we have found the boundary of what constitutes rest to shift and reshape, according to who is doing the investigating. The phenomenon of rest, in light of its complex physiological, clinical, political-economic and aesthetic properties, demands an interdisciplinary investigation which can challenge commonly held assumptions. It was from such a demand that Hubbub was born.

Hubbub is a research project consisting of a network of researchers and practitioners operating in the fields of mental health, the neurosciences, the arts, humanities, social sciences and public engagement. We collaborate to unpick, remake and transform what is meant by rest and its opposites. The group made a successful bid for Wellcome Trust funding in early 2014, receiving the inaugural Hub Award, a £1 million grant funding a two-year residency in The Hub. This is a new, purpose-built space on the fifth floor of Wellcome Collection, in the heart of London, designed to facilitate and support collaborative interdisciplinary research. Written at the end of our two-year residency, this book gathers a selection of short essays from Hubbub collaborators, describing aspects of our research into rest as it has happened so far. *The Restless Compendium* aims, in teasing out the ambiguity and complexity of rest, to prompt thought by opening up perspectives that might not ordinarily

be considered directly related to this theme, and to open up pathways for further conversations.

The book is organized into three sections: Minds, Bodies and Practices. This division does not imply any categorical separation between these three; rather, it identifies a shared centre of gravity for the essays within each section, allowing readers to better navigate shared thematics. For example, while many of the essays grouped under ‘Minds’ also deal with the body or with cultural practices, we have chosen to group them according to their common focus on thoughts, interiority and subjective experiences.

This structure allows us to organize the book by scales of enquiry rather than discipline, expertise or historical period, moving from the subjective and personal to the interpersonal and culturally embedded. There are moments within this trajectory where individual essays collapse or interrupt this rule-of-thumb, but this method of grouping allows us to fulfil an interdisciplinary imperative of bringing multiple approaches and discourses into juxtaposition, rendering visible their sometimes covert connections. It allows us to set practice-based research alongside more traditional modes of scholarly enquiry, to create a hybrid space in which to address some of the topics that have exercised us over the last two years.

Nevertheless, we are aware that one reader’s bracing variety is another’s hopeless muddle, and we have thought carefully about how to keep this compendium on the right side of chaos, and how to create tools for readers seeking to follow themes across the book. One such tool, we hope, is this introduction, which draws out salient threads across the sections. Another tool is the further reading many contributors have provided to close their essays – pointers to those who want to investigate particular issues in greater depth. A third is the abstract immediately preceding each chapter, which provides a *précis* not only of chapter content but of how the work emerged from the wider collaborative Hubbub project. A fourth lies within the body of the essays themselves, where points of particular resonance are picked out with cross-references to other chapters in the compendium.

‘Minds’ focuses on subjective, inner experiences. The topic of mind wandering has been a focus of interest for Hubbub, as a state which is neither properly active (in the sense of directed and controlled) nor properly at rest (given the intense activity that states like daydreaming engender).

Three chapters in this section approach this topic from differing historical perspectives, ranging from medieval Christian writings (Chap. 3) to modern accounts in the human sciences and in fiction (Chaps. 4 and 5). They examine how daydreaming intersects with contemporary neuroscientific concepts such as the default mode network (Chap. 2) and describe descriptive experience sampling (DES), a psychological method for obtaining rich phenomenological data about inner experience (Chap. 6). The linguistic aspect of mind wandering is further explored when DES is used to examine the relationship between language, experience and attention in poetry (Chap. 7). The significance of language in structuring subjective experiences of rest also informs Chap. 8, which presents initial findings from The Rest Test, our global survey which asked participants questions on their resting habits and subjective responses to rest, as well as deploying psychological scales.

The chapters in ‘Bodies’ examine how particular individuals and collectives are called into being and organized around questions of rest and its opposites. Throughout the section, considerable interplay takes place between somatic, mental and social states, as in Chap. 9, which explores attempts to produce relaxation through specific bodily disciplines throughout the twentieth century. In Chap. 10, a parallel historical moment in interwar London is excavated through fiction informed by the archives of the ‘Peckham Experiment’, where bodies were configured around particular ideas of vitality and health. This speaks to a concern about the city and its potential to mutually shape and be shaped by bodies – a concern shared by two chapters (Chaps. 11 and 12) – which think about and gather data on social, rather than individual, bodily rhythms of rest and restlessness. Chapters about lullabies and the practice of drawing (Chaps. 14 and 13) both underline the role of the dynamic body, gendered or abstracted to a pencil point, in producing culture, knowledge or the possibility of resistance. Chapters 15 and 16 take the phenomenon of autonomous sensory meridian response (ASMR), a feeling of tingly relaxation which would seem to be primarily somatic, and consider it from complementary psychological and linguistic perspectives.

‘Practices’ opens up questions of how, why and when certain ways of being or working are construed as appropriately or inappropriately restful. The section begins with an exploration of how the dynamics of rest and lack of rest can be experienced vividly through sound, both in musical composition (Chap. 17) and through building and using devices to measure the noise impact of living under the Heathrow Airport flight

path in London (Chap. 18). The consideration of dynamics moves beyond the sounded to the social in Chap. 19, which describes an experiment ('In The Diary Room') that gathers material on the rhythms and energies of Hubbub's own collaborative work. How social inequality affects both work and rest becomes pressingly visible in Chap. 21, which comprises a dialogue about collaborative work undertaken with men who live in a homeless hostel, and about the impact of government benefits policies on their lives. Politics are equally at play in a consideration of the invisibility of affective and other kinds of labour in the context of our own research project (Chap. 20). Attitudes towards work lead us to contemplate representations of laziness and sloth in literature in Chap. 22, before an artist working to a deadline races to complete work and down tools before Shabbat, the 'day of rest', begins (Chap. 23).

Interconnecting themes can be found between chapters in all three sections. One example we propose is the theme of *experiment*, which would draw together the scientific use of DES and its deployment as an experimental poetic tool (Chaps. 6 and 7 in 'Minds'); critical-creative experiments in artists' practices, ranging from interventions in the genre of the lullaby to engagements with the performance underway in an ASMR role-play (Chaps. 14 and 16 in 'Bodies'); and the experimental assemblages of a stochastic musical composition or the 'In the Diary Room' study, which gathers unscripted video data from the inhabitants of our shared working space (Chaps. 17 and 19 in 'Practices'). Other ways of clustering contributions to the book might be via materials and data, politics, historical periods, disciplines, genres or modes of address. We invite the reader to explore the book, plotting own path through the sections, perhaps inspired by these suggested themes, and hopefully discovering shared themes of own. In doing so, we hope the reader will be exposed to new methodologies and be able to explore how different practices (including musical composition, political activism, literary fiction and scientific experimentation) can allow for different ways of interpreting and interrogating research questions.

Our compendium takes seriously its genre: it comprises condensed representations of larger bodies of research and practice. As such, it functions as a series of snapshots of what we, as Hubbub, have been thinking about and doing, singly and collaboratively, during our residency. Our volume does not attempt to address the full scope of topics, problems, issues and actors that gather around the term rest. Hubbub's experimental make-up encouraged collaborators to develop work in whichever direction they saw

fit. This had the effect of prizing open certain areas of enquiry likely not at the forefront of most people's minds when thinking about rest and its opposites. Our aliveness to serendipity has allowed the terrain of rest on which we have been working to shift in unexpected and, we believe, productive ways. That we have worked as much on mind wandering as we have on mindfulness serves, we hope, to recalibrate some of the normative assumptions that we – and perhaps you – make in relation to what is restful and what is not.

We acknowledge that our tendency to wander down particular alleys rather than others leaves some paths tracked only lightly, or not at all. In many respects, our concerns have been extensive. The Rest Test is a global survey; Hubbub has been preoccupied with ferocious transformations in the governance of worklessness, unemployment and housing; and the tools that collaborators have piloted have the potential to be taken up by a wide variety of actors. But we want, nonetheless, to emphasize our partialness and, in some important respects, our 'provinciality'. That most of our research and practice has emerged from, or been grounded in, a European and North American, and a predominantly monolingual context – with all the grounding assumptions that brings – only serves to spur us, in future work, to disrupt the models, concepts and starting points that we use when thinking about rest. We are acutely aware of the need for additional sociological, anthropological and historical research that would be better able to attend to all the differences that class, ethnicity, geographical and geopolitical location, debility and disability make to the experience, and very definitions, of rest and its opposites.

As our collective work has developed – and as we consider the data from our Rest Test – we have become even more aware of how unevenly rest is distributed, as well as of those voices and bodies that are occluded by dominant discourses about rest and noise. We have also become interested in what happens if one shifts the central premise of this phase of work. In other words, we want to think about the implications of moving away from the sometimes static dyad of rest/opposites of rest, and making that dyad dynamic. Rhythm – like rest – does work physiologically, phenomenologically, clinically and aesthetically, and we anticipate this being a substantial focus of our future work. You might, then, choose to read this compendium as much through attending to its rhythms and dynamics as through looking for, and listening to, the work of noise and silence.

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