**On writing**

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I’m in the final push of my PhD now, and over the years have developed a little rhythm when it comes to writing. I get up at around 8:30, have my first cup of tea and listen to Radio 4, then – still weirdly with the radio on – put my earplugs in and start writing. I write hard in the mornings, and spend the afternoons reading, planning and ‘blocking’ out text for the next day. There is a lot of tea involved. By five o clock it’s not uncommon to see 6-8 teabags piling up next to the kettle. There is also a lot of bathing. Whenever I am over-agitated, or over-excited, or can’t figure something out I have a bath. On the last day revising my second chapter I had four baths in one day.

I have three quotes stuck up by my desk. One is a comment from George Michael, sage that he is: “everything you do is you, even the lies you tell”. Another is from someone I once overheard, though I can’t remember where or when: “writing is about overcoming your fear”. The third is from my mother, quoting me when I was a little girl. Apparently I used to say “I can’t think of anything I don’t know...I think I must know everything”. I like them because they remind me of the foolishness of perfectionism, and of imagining that my work will represent me in ways which are always under my control. They help me to crack on, which is one of the biggest things I’ve learned in the PhD process.

I have lots of other quotes too, little notes and scribbles and pieces of material. As I went through my data, did reading and started the writing process I threw post-its up in front of my desk, as a sort of stream of consciousness. Every few weeks I take a look at what I’ve thrown up, organise them in little piles, try to spot themes and organise them into bits of my dissertation. It’s amazing how often I write the same thing down, again and again and again... thinking each time that I’ve had a new idea. I used to think this was absent mindedness, but I’ve come to realise that because these are the same ideas found from different routes, they are actually a means for me to connect my material, with theory, other ethnographies and my own writing.

I’ve been very, very blessed in having a supervisor who understands how good emerging writing needs to be at different stages in the game. I look back at some of the pieces I gave her now and am astonished at how delicately she managed to foster my confidence whilst guiding me away from some truly dreadful lines of enquiry. The process of getting feedback on work has sometimes been difficult, and it’s been interesting how some of the people in the department who thought my work was particularly awful have now become key discussants for me. There was one faculty member who took particular exception to my writing, and we now joke that he is my ‘worst case scenario’ reader. It still turns my stomach and itches my skin to give work to people, especially early work, given to people I don’t know very well. But as time has gone on I’ve found ways to cope with the discomfort – baths, tea, Radio 4, my friends and family, and the experience that this too shall pass. The sting of criticism and the nausea of confusion will pass; as will the excitement of generating something new. Strangely then, whilst the PhD has been a process of seeing through a project with a long life-span, it has also been a process of learning to live, and to write, in the now.