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A Fellow Traveller: The Opening of an Archive for Secondary Analysis

Jette Kofoed with Rachel Thomson

I was invited into this study as a fellow traveller. I opened the archive with a dedicated intention to grasp what was going on in this particular research project. I had been part of the advisory board, and had participated in seminars and group sessions. On these occasions, I had previously seen parts of the data so I felt myself familiar with the ideas, 'takes' and overall findings of the project. I had a hunch of what to find (Berriman & Thomson 2015). Hence, it was with confidence that I accessed the archive. There are a number of similarities between this project and my own research: we share thoughts, inspirations and are on the same wavelength when reading each other's publications. Both projects focus on children and youth's digital lives and on how to develop adequate methodologies to study this issue. I expected myself to flow into the data, and to find new aspects of what I already knew from my own research. I expected to absorb myself in what I like best: diving into data.

So, I opened the archive and there I met a puzzling alteration of the researcher I am used to being. I found myself *unknowing*. I was not able to make sense of the data. At first, I read the notes and the transcriptions meticulously, carefully. But the more I read, the more I realized that I had very little sense of what was happening on the pages and in the interview situations. My reading sped up. I found myself pacing around the archive trying

to make sense of what was there. I could not penetrate into the details of it. It was as if someone had stolen the keys to grasping and deciding what was at stake, a set of analytical keys that I as a pampered researcher am used to possess. Methodological and analytical skills are some of the academic traits I have been trained in over the years, and one of the skills I have taken pride in cultivating. I have taught methods classes for BA students for years; I have dwelled at developing doctoral classes with particular focus on data analysis and research methodologies. And here I was – unable to detect what was at stake. These data weren't even messy; they were just inaccessible to me. Even within the comfort zone of my own field of research, I found myself *unknowing*.

Accessing an archive

In struggling with the misfit between my own expectations and what actually happened when opening up the archive, I found myself crawling back to the data. Not only did I not know the cultural, temporal, spatial setting, neither did I know the landscape of the archive (how long are the interviews? What is the relationality between the interviewees? Who is the interviewer?). The vastness of the archive made it impossible to take it in as a whole. The lack of orientation and free movement became obvious limitations to a fellow traveller entering the archive. I was invited to engage, yet the immediacy of my *unknowing* slowed my engagement in a contradictory movement, because I initially fastened my pace through the archive. I could not access the ethnography of it by entering the website and the multimedia documents. Although interesting and innovative, somehow, the multimedia documents were too organized; it laid out parts of the analysis, but I wanted to enter into the data as a co-researcher. So while enjoying browsing the multimedia on the website, I needed to get back to the data. I needed 'raw' data to access not the researchers who had carried out the research, but the data on children and youth lives as these are transformed by media. Usually, I dislike the notion of 'raw' data, but here it suddenly made sense. A distinction between raw data and notes that I, however, later learned made up a stumbling stone of its own.

A new kind of humility grew out of this meeting between me as a *naked* researcher without contextual knowledge, without the details of the methodology used and without the sensory knowledge of the place and time of the interviews and the archive: what did it smell like? What did the Starbucks phone cover look like? Exactly what colour of pink was the bedcover? What did this colour of pink connote in this particular setting? I was at a loss, and

found myself deprived of a kind of access that I had not even considered a privilege on previous occasions where I was involved in secondary analysis. But indeed the access to informational, political, cultural, social and sensory contextualization had been a privilege that I only understood now that I was left without such access. This proved to be an 'untried methodology', as characterized by Lapping & Bibby (2012), who reflect on methods growing out of a psycho-social conference on 'Knowing- not knowing'. In becoming a fellow traveller in this case, I had to diverge significantly from my previous research practices. It called me in as unknowing, disoriented, affectively disturbed and it urged me to develop unknown skills (Lapping & Bibby 2014).

I found myself stuck with the data and left without the sensory remembering of the interview situation that you draw upon when rereading your own data. I did not have the excess of information that spills over in ethnographies where you conducted the fieldwork yourself as, for instance, described by Hammersley and Atkinson (1983), and as demonstrated throughout anthropological literature (Emerson et al. 2011; Hastrup 2010; Hasse 2011; Fog Olwig & Gulløv 2003; Staunæs & Kofoed 2015; Winther 2013; 2015). I must have missed the chapters on secondary analysis and how to immerse myself into data that I had not participated in producing. Doing fieldwork is an embodied enterprise (Pink et al. 2016; Okely 2007; Davies & Spencer 2010) as is also data-analysis (Thomson et al. 2012; Staunæs & Kofoed 2015). So when doing fieldwork, my body is an integral part of orienting myself in the field, amongst the children and youth and in their social media landscape. Usually, I am there with the young people, sharing a perspective and closeness that allows me to co-observe their mediatized landscape. In this case, I knew neither the landscape nor the everyday settings; nor did I know the landscape of the archive, so I stumbled over voids.

Voids of knowledge

I have engaged in reading data produced by fellow researchers before. But I had overlooked the fact that, on prior occasions, the researcher who had carried out the research had always been accessible to me. S/he has been present to open the archive; mostly (I realized in this new process of opening a new archive on my own) in contextualizing the ethnography: who said this? How did she look? Blond? White? Asian? What is the context of this particular school in East London/in western Oslo/in Perth? What does it smell like? How do I (not) find my way? What are the politics around working class housing in Oslo/Copenhagen/Sussex/Adelaide? How does working class housing

actually look? What does the countryside look like?) The access to this kind of contextual knowledge prevented me from meeting *what I didn't know*.

When attempting to open this archive I realized that it couldn't be opened by force, but I needed to coax my way in. I needed to open myself to the archive, rather than the other way around. In so doing, voids of knowledge presented themselves to me, not least the question of how to handle them. Was I, as a fellow traveller, allowed to fill out the void? What if the knowledge I lacked proved essential in understanding the case? These questions arise because I was engaged in co-analysis, I was not merely *reading* the data or reading someone else's analysis. Was I free to interpret the void, and if so, how does this differ from fabrication of data?

Let me offer an example. When reading part of the archive, I met Jasmine. I know her age, but not her colour of skin, not her hair, not the way she dresses or carries her child. I met Megan, who lives in 'a large old rustic country house'. Obviously, this note presents a lot of in-depth cultural and social knowledge, but I am unaware of the detail of a large old rustic country houses in the UK? What do such houses look like when not situated in Denmark? All that surfaces as relevant when reading these notes were the details I didn't know. Do they wear school uniforms? Do they bring lunch boxes? What does a 'CBA' mood entail? Voids of knowledge displayed themselves. Am I as a fellow traveller capable of filling the voids that emerge in the meeting of myself and the archive? The cultural knowledge of Copenhagen that I take for granted? Let me dwell on this by introducing an example.

Some years ago, I was engaged with a group of researchers who carried out secondary analysis on data that only one person in the group had produced. The study was UK-based. Part of the data consisted of interviews with young people about their dreams of a future. One of the participants dreamt of 'going up North'. Unaware of specific differences between a UK and a Danish setting, I assumed that 'up North' referred to going either to the northernmost part of Norway or to Greenland. As it turned out, the young girl dreamt of going to university in Newcastle. Of course, my ignorance and immediate interpretation got the cultural and social setting all wrong. But could I potentially have suggested an interpretation (not of the North as such, but of the dreaming) that could either have added, say, affective layers to what my colleagues already knew or have added questions that would have allowed the analysis to deepen beyond what we take for granted in the settings in which we feel at home? In that case, we did not pursue the promises of fellow travellers in any systematic way, but only allowed the embarrassing ignorance on my part to help us pursue more descriptive details of why 'the North' presented itself as an appealing option for this young girl. In hindsight, this void of knowledge carried the potential for more than added *descriptions*, but possibly also entry points

for new *analytical* foci. Entering into the archive of the Everyday Childhoods project reminds me that there might be not-knowings of the secondary analyst that are worth allowing back into formative analysis. This recollection spurs an awareness of the relationality of primary and secondary analysis. Obviously, the researcher who carried out the fieldwork has privileged access to details and cultural, social, material and affective contexts of, in this case, the children and youth. But does the privilege of fieldwork translate into privileged positions in analysis? Of course, I cannot, as a secondary analyst, say much with certainty. But perhaps the voids of knowledge revealed to me during this travel hint at an analytical option, which could be worth pursuing, namely, the *promise held in slow-motioning* processes of inquiry, the *hesitancy* embedded in meeting what I so obviously do not know and theorizing of new questions: who guards the knowledge production? Does the responsible fieldworker in all cases carry more weight than a secondary analyst? What if the not-knowing carries potential for spurring new analysis?

Without a body

In traversing the archive, it became clear how a lack of embodiment prevents me from intuitively grasping what is at stake. The absence of my meeting 'real people', and only narrated versions of their being, is at the core. I am a fieldworker in the habit of meeting people. In this case, I meet a mediated and narrated group of youth. Not only are 'they' merely present in the archive as documentation, but my presence in the archive is invisible. I could pace around, make noise, annoy them – it wouldn't leave a trace. I could as well not have been there. So the senses that I am used to make use of when doing fieldwork are out of sync with the current enterprise of entering the archive. The records of fieldwork encounters documented in the archive required presence and immediacy on the part of both the young participants and the researchers. The liveliness of the fieldwork has been processed into transcriptions and documentation. The sense of fieldwork and the sense of youth and of social media that I have cultivated are not of much use. Quite the contrary, I need to find the liveliness of these youths in a similar way to a historian accessing an archive of texts. From the archive, the presence of the subjects emerges. Doing fieldwork is a multisensory experience, accessing an archive, however, privileges the sense of the eye. I can read the texts; initially, I cannot smell them, feel them or hear them. But gradually, in the intersection of my own unknowing, my disabled body and the texts, I start allowing the privileged eye to spur more senses. Presumably, much like a historian at work in territory that is unknown to the fieldworker.

Flowing movement

Gradually, I entered into a *flow of movement* (Jørgensen, in prep) between knowing *my own research* on cyberbullying, social media and digital youth lives, and *embedding* myself into researcher considerations and concerns that were not my own, but which served as entry points into the archive. And, finally peeking into data where bits and pieces of mediated youth life became intelligible to me.

What happened? My route involved an initial preoccupation with the researchers' notes on how they carried out the ethnography. Even though I was not particularly interested in this, I realized that I could not access the data directly but needed to go through the notes of a researcher whom I didn't even know. So I paved my way through unknown researchers' notes on their fieldwork. In that process, I became intimate in a strange *one way relationship* with the researcher who had been present in the field. I forced myself into a new doubling of him/her without having any idea of who 'Ester' would be. 'Ester' and 'Sara' became fellow travellers, fieldworkers in the midst of ethnography with all the fears, anxieties, joys and awkwardness that I know so well. I latched myself onto unknown colleagues and forced my way into data that would not otherwise open itself up to me. I needed proximity to the unknown researcher who authored the notes. I was walking in someone else's footsteps and the pace of my moving in being 'on foot' gradually opened the archive to me.

First, I rewind from the 'raw' data of transcriptions and move in through the researchers' notes. In and through these notes I stumble over unknown taken for grantedness. These slowly transformed from being obstacles to insights: of researchers' bias, researchers' positioning and cultural and social blindnesses. What at first presented themselves as stumbling stones preventing me from grasping the data, slowly became new access points from where I – not as an individual researcher – but as part of a collectivity of the imagined research team, could reinterpret the data. So rather than a process of smoothly accessing the archive, it became a process of *palimpsesting* (Lather 2007) the archive itself, the data from my own research, cultural and social knowledge of a Scandinavian youth and media field, and researcher subjectification from numerous previous fieldworks and secondary analyses. Through a process of allowing layers of data indirectly to palimpsest, the archive let me in. I was given the key to the archive, but only now found a way in. Not in any direct manner where I in any 1:1 scale could make sense of the archive, but rather in a much more humble way, coaxing the archive open to questions that, on the one hand, were consistent with the overall purpose of the research and, on the other hand, spurred new questions into the data, particularly a question

of temporality. The temporality of research processes (in rewinding, slowing down, paving and palimpsesting) and the temporality of young lives. Let me unfold the latter.

A core question of temporality

In my own research, I have explored how technologically mediated youth communications entail what I have termed 'non-simultaneity' in intensity, in engagement in the ongoing conversation and affective saturation of youth life (Kofoed 2014). This is a core finding in my research on cyberbullying, where non-simultaneous investment in exclusionary practices seems to be an important vehicle in processes of inclusion and exclusions. The fact that the youth are not necessarily engaged – temporally – in the same conversation or dramas at the same time, seemed to spur dramas into more drama, as they have to endure the not knowing of who knows what about an ongoing harassment or evaluation of a specific incident. Moments of intensities thus seem to be tied together in a kind of repetitive rhythm, as I have argued elsewhere (Kofoed & Ringrose 2012; Kofoed & Stenner, 2017). Let me clarify this a bit further. In cases of cyberbullying, as these emerge among youth in school, it seems that no position can be guaranteed stability and permanence. When 13-year-old Nora logs on to Facebook to check her friend Louise's interpretation of what happened during school today, and when the next day Louise can't be sure that Nora has actually read her status update or whether she has been on Facebook, Snapchat or Instagram at all, there is a revelation of non-simultaneity in affective intensity (Kofoed 2014). Nora's reaction to Louise's update might be mediated by others commenting on it. This mediation might lead Nora to think and react differently, in a way that Louise could not understand. I have suggested conceptualizing such tumult in terms of *non-simultaneity of intensity* (Kofoed 2014).

I looked in the archive and couldn't find such non-simultaneity. The lack of obvious non-simultaneity in this archive is not significant in itself. Non-simultaneous practices might be specific to cyberbullying, or it might be spurred by particular research interests. But the interest in temporality and its particularity of non-simultaneity allowed the new awareness of *palimpsesting* to direct my attention to drama. In the archive, Jasmine is quite content with being without her phone for three months and hence without the 'drama', as she expresses it.

She says 'It was so good, like there was no drama, like you didn't have arguments with people, people wouldn't always be able to contact you so you

would like, people would have to like come like and see you face to face to speak to you’.

Researcher Ester: Mmmm.

Jasmine: Life is actually stressful with a mobile phone.

Ester: So why was it, what, what made it better?

Jasmine: I don’t know but it, it was nice.

Ester: And what’s umm, so what’s the drama, what kind of drama happens then?

Jasmine: Like everything like when people start arguing and they, like they’re like, they try and get you involved and they like call your phone or they text you and they’re like ‘isn’t it this?’ and you’re like ‘I don’t wanna get involved’ sort of thing whereas if you’re face to face it’ll be easier to like just deal with ‘cause you can go on forever on your phone.’

Palimpsesting this piece of data with findings from my own data on cyberbullying might suggest that dealing with drama in and through social media as it spurs and hastens the drama known from cyberbullying research could be worth pursuing in this UK-based data on digital youth lives. Not in order to investigate cyberbullying in particular, but in order to investigate if and how dramas are lived in digital lives amongst children and youth in this particular data set. Perhaps mediatized drama is an issue integral to digital youth life, and perhaps the ‘favourite thing methodology’ allows us to know more about mediatized dramas, since many of the youth mention their phone as their favourite thing?

An affective confession

A close colleague of mine witnessed a conversation some years ago in the corridors at my university. I was full of excitement readying myself for new fieldwork. A colleague responded that she was done with fieldwork and thrilled to know that her students would carry out the field work she had set up. Obviously we took two different paths in regards to ethnographic research – she rejoiced in not going ‘out there’ herself, I rejoiced in *being* the fieldworker. A third colleague overheard this conversation and kindly, but firmly noted: ‘You will never be the head of any research project as long as you insist on doing the dirty work yourself!’. This exchange encouraged me to think through my attachments to the sensory experience of being in the field. To me, it wouldn’t work if I cut off the actual fieldwork from the rest of the research process. My dedication lies with the production of empirical data,

in involving my researcher body and sensory abilities in the fieldwork as part and parcel of the research process. The meeting point in the corridor distilled my understanding of different researcher subjectifications and academic strategies, operating as a turning point in my academic self-perception: I do prefer absorbing myself in fieldwork, allowing this exact scholarly activity to continuously be at the core of my academic life. Not something I am free to leave behind as I become more senior.

This particular incident and the insights cultivated from this recast itself when first hastening around the archive and later, when 'slow-motioning' my moves: the sensory aspects of academic agency *are* integral to my becoming and maintaining an academic life. My preference for meta-theoretical informed empirical research is not unique, but is shared by many, and by some described as being *possessed by data* (Thomson 2014). I share this possession – in making sense of the particularities of Snapchat and Facebook; in traversing these and other social media and in meeting and sensing the youth who hook up and who exclude each other.

This recollection throws new light on the issue of opening an unknown archive. Obviously, the paths into an archive are intertwined with others who walk the path. As established, I am a multisensory researcher who needs to saturate herself in the field. So, initially I clung to the researcher's notes as an intermediary between the unknowing associated with my own researcher body and the scholar actually present in the field. And hence, I tried to access the field – not through the field, – but in and through the stand-in-researcher who became my access-point. Through the notes, I paved my way into a blurred – and growing – understanding of Jasmine, Megan, Nathan and others. I grasped the opportunity to get a grip on what their digital lives were like, through an imagined doubling of the positioning of the researcher that was somehow impersonal and yet the very body whose senses allowed me to become part of it. *Impersonal* because I don't know whom the name covers for, yet I needed a person situated like myself in the field to *impersonate* me and through whose writing allowed my sensory vocabularies to evolve. An adequate strategy seemed to evolve: in traversing different kinds of data, I inscribed myself as an avatar via the researcher('s notes). I began by observing her/his notes, and this allowed me to co-observe the interview-situations and to enter further into the archive.

Leaving the archive

The Everyday Childhoods project addresses how media is transforming children's everyday lives. The archive turned out to *transform* my researcher

subject into a different affective attuned researcher. I had to pause myself, surf my way through the different parts of the archive, allowing not knowing to surface and spur me, pause again, rewind and finally find an access point. This could be termed a *reparative* research methodology. *Reparative*, in the sense that 'the reparative reader helps himself again, and again' as Eve Sedgwick points out in her book on affect (Sedgwick 2003: 150). In being bereaved of my usual access to the field, I needed to help myself again, and again. In so doing, a vocabulary of *hesitancy*, *not knowing*, *slow motioning*, *palimpsesting* and *avatar* surfaced. In pointing this out, the project of secondary analysis and fellow travelling is not cast aside as insufficient or invalid but, on the contrary, it is repaired as fertile ground for cultivating new kinds of questions: how far North did she travel? What are her desires? Does ethnicity expose itself in transcripts? Does intensity? And not least: What promises do voids of knowledge hold.

In traversing this archive, I ended up amongst many imaginary minds thinking together in palimpsesting data, affects, researchers' notes and previous findings. Indeed, it ended up being many minds thinking together.