Scattered Diaries: Biographical dialogues on the ethnographic imagination, friendship, and popular music research

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This chapter is a playful exploration of one of the distinctive tools within ethnography: the diary. This diary is not a linear documentation of events, but an imperfect retrospective, a scattered dialogue between two friends and research collaborators – Asya and Shane. We aim to reflect, in a new and personal style, on the biographical aspects of doing popular music ethnography, teaching and research through working together. We tell a story about an academic friendship. There are two broad theoretical frameworks to this critical dialogue which derives firstly, from C. Wright Mills' (1959: 216) *The Sociological Imagination*, which suggests "you must learn to use your life experience in your intellectual work." Secondly, from Les Back's (2016) *Academic Diary*, whereby we chronicle our engagements through dates, but these dates are not presented in a chronological narrative but are scattered under the weight of pressure and rhythm. We do not offer a self-help guide to the academy or a saucy intro to ethnography, it is a highly personalised account which dips in and out of theoretical language because this is what we do in the academy. We seek to question our relationship, how and why it developed with a focus on biography, subjectivity, and emotionality. Asya and Shane first met as undergraduate student and lecturer, then were PhD researcher and doctoral supervisor, co-lecturers, and then subsequently to become joint co-authors in writing academic studies and holding musical events. This chapter builds on the key characteristic of our collaboration in less conventional ways. It gives voice to personal experience through the metaphor of an academic journey which moves from the personal to the cultural and back again. Our working relationships have been dynamic and intimate. The glue that has kept us together consists of trust and surprise operating on the principle of accepting ideas 'out of the blue'.

Navigating stories of personal and shared lived experience through autoethnography as a method enables both theorising and the everyday to get mixed up. Throughout this chapter, the subjective writing the self allows for revealing the reflections through which meaning is made. Our method of autoethnography is to tell stories. It is influenced by a range of studies by authors including Arthur Bochner and Carolyn Ellis (2016) and can be found within the early work of Jane Addams (1910) and also Malinowski (1926). Trying to capture the spark

between the writer and the reader, for us the purpose of using autoethnography is to make sense of experience - personal, social, cultural. While autoethnography is centred on the I, it is always more than I. The chapter describes how we have both produced entered academia in different periods, under different conditions, but our commitment to ethnography remains the same based on reflexivity and integrity (Chang 2008: 148).

Shane – September 1997: Teaching popular music

I started teaching popular music at Canterbury Christ Church University in 1997. At first, I tried to 'pass it off' as the Sociology of Popular Music because it was part of a degree programme of Social Sciences. But in 2000 with Brian Ingram, we set up a Media and Cultural Studies degree programme where the module Popular Music and Popular Culture had a new home. Teaching Popular Music in the late 1990s was on the edge, there were few cultural studies resources. I knew the work of John Shepherd, Philip Tagg and especially Simon Frith's (1978) *The Sociology of Rock*. Standing above this work and appearing sort of scary was work from the Frankfurt School and Adorno. However, when I did my PhD, I was able to attend a module taught by two key Marxists Philip Corrigan and John Hayes. They introduced me to Adorno through the book *Aesthetics and Politics* (1977) exploring the debates between Bloch, Lukacs, Brecht, Benjamin, and Adorno. It is here that you learn of the closeness between Adorno and Benjamin rather than the stereotype of putting them at odds with one another. Using Adorno and Benjamin to teach popular music made it political, conflictual and revolutionary. Thus, classes were inspired by theory, passion, commitment, and screening of music and seeing its potential for critical theory in both objective and subjective worlds. I think this is what inspired Asya on the module. She found a home to critically explore music from Bulgaria and the cultural context within the changing post-communist world. When teaching Asya on the Popular Music module alongside other students I found myself wanting to give the students the chance of listening to music. The pleasure of music appreciation. Yet, this also opened the personal subjective side of music and emotion to provoke protest, to celebrate or to cry as your feelings and responses change and surrender. I was often moved myself by emotion in the classroom and this was possibly picked up by the students. Learning can be most effective with the emotional imagination. It was here that I found Asya to be a student who wanted to get inside the issues and then turn them upside down. Her spirit of enquiry was absorbing and as a teacher you wanted to push her further.

Asya – Autumn 2008-to date. Meeting Shane: the unforeseen academic rock star

Sometime during my first year, Shane came in to deliver a lecture on ethnography. There he was: energetic, jumpy, absolutely devoted to his passion about the subject he was talking about. An electrifying experience, I felt like I was at a gig with some excellent audience participation opportunities. It was contagious. I found myself reading about ethnography, doing my first interviews with ethnographic ideals in mind. One of Shane's PhD students at the time, Gemma Commane, did some weekly seminars with us, the freshers, and she must have been very used to my enthusiasm responding to her questions and provocations. Only 6 or 7 years later we were to find ourselves as colleagues at the same university – Birmingham City.

In my second year, Shane took on the centre stage. He was teaching my favourite module – Popular Music. I remember it started at 9 am, which was seen as "early", according to UK university timetables (ask your East European counterparts what early really is, guys). So, here I was, with my best friend Elina, walking into a typical 9 am poplar music lecture, and there was Shane – playing "Higher than the Sun" from Primal Scream's *Screamadelica* (1991) on the turntable he used to bring into the lecture room, and enacting being in a trance. Then talking about drugs, and music, tripping, illegal raves, and all things mysterious and wonderful. This was just one of those mornings. But every lecture was so memorable, I can even still list all the topics we covered, all the artists we listened to, because this was not schooling this was… the academic equivalent of Woodstock, or something. I hated the breaks we had during this lecture, and I hated it ending, as well: and now I know that it was indeed this module that determined my future. Yes, I played music, but I never wanted to go to music school or to Conservatoire although I did have such options. In fact, this was what I wanted to do, be critical about music, understand why it matters in people's lives, and I wanted, if possible, to inspire others, like Shane did.

In my second year I also wrote a dissertation proposal that was pretty much solely consisting of key words used in Shane's lectures so that I, without a doubt, end up with him as my supervisor. I guess I'd learnt the keyword game already. So, in my third year, he helped me shape my ideas that were ultimately to become the basis of my future career. He also led a module called Youth Studies that year: the natural continuation of Popular Music. A module that was politically and theoretically charged, one that informed my understanding of critical frameworks and helped me place popular music within a much wider context.

Sometime during this final year Shane asked me if I'd thought about doing a PhD. I asked, "what is a PhD?" Ha. I didn't realise how philosophical my question was at the time, just making sure I understand the abbreviation correctly. Turns out a PhD is a process of rigorous exploration of something you love, why it matters, and, ultimately, of who you are in relation to that "something".

During my PhD at Canterbury Christ Church, I continued my path of enthusiasm, also known as trying to do too many things at the same time. As it turns out, that is another important academic skill, should've put it on my CV earlier. I found myself co-teaching with Shane as well as other of my old lecturers. I felt like the warm-up act to a famous artist at a major festival. But he was one of them "headliners" to never ever make you feel like an inferior: in fact, the most significant thing I learnt from Shane is that every successful intellectual relationship is about exchanging ideas, about conversation, about support and not dominating. I also found out that a dude could be truly empowering feminist which gave me a great sense of confidence about the future.

Shane – July 2013: The death of popular music

Universities are highly valued sought-after places to attend, study, research and get employment. To be inside one takes incredible effort and commitment. I can remember a student asking Asya and I in the classroom: "how can you get to be a teacher doing popular music and ethnography, this is the stuff of dreams?' There is a multiplicity of answers to this question. My explanation normally centred on my experience working in the music industry and achieving a PhD on youth cultures and music, neither of which were easy to get access to and do.

Within the academy all achievements are marked by struggle. July 2013 was the last year that my Popular Music and Popular Culture module was delivered. It had been a highly successful module with many students undertaking it each year, I brought experienced people from industry to deliver a few sessions which were also popular with staff. To cut a long story short, due to management decisions linked to so-called 'employability' the module ended. I had the opportunity of moving some of the module to Music Department, but the change of institutional location to teach popular music reflected a wider struggle against Cultural Studies.

I was annoyed at the removal of Popular Music from the undergraduate programme because it was a successful pathway to PhD research from Popular Music to Youth Cultures on to doctoral studies. Asya was one the of my PhD students who came through this route

among others. In an act of collective resistance my PhD research students wrote a letter of protest to the Senior Management of the department. They argued that the link between the two modules (Popular Music and Youth Cultures) had a track record in recruiting PhD students to the department. However, the protest had no impact and popular music was removed as a year two option.

The reason offered by senior managers was students did not find subsequent work in the music industry. The Popular Music module was a knowledge driven experience, which enhanced student's critical interpretation, independence and capabilities focused on production and consumption within a key creative industry (Brown, Hesketh and Williams 2003). Employability had been misapplied to my module, which empowered student self-determination and confidence.

I reflected on Dorothy Smith's (2005) *Institutional Ethnography* which gives priority to the subjects of research to preserve participants feelings and their sense of humanity but of course universities are institutions, you soon learn you are a cog in Max Weber's (1930) 'iron cage': an object for change or removal. When trying to do creative work related to popular music and ethnography it is essential not to take your finger off the pulse at any time because you can be removed or devalued. Never forget that Universities are places of contestation, career building and self-interest which in many ways are the antithesis of ethnography.

Shane – From primary to secondary school 1960s to 1970s

Here the aim is to capture what Saidya Hartman (2019: xiii) calls 'the sensory experience' through 'making music personal' as Bartleet and Ellis (2016) describe it. This section shows moments in personal history with popular music which are carried and shared - as acts of evocation into future experiences. I have been collecting records since I was at primary school where I also used to read the *NME* and *Melody Maker*, instead of *Shoot* or *Goal* which I read before. One of my first records was *Voodoo Child* by the Jimi Hendrix Experience (1970). I still have it, mint condition. It has seen many different record players and survived! From this time onwards I used to order records through mail order, exciting things arrive through the post, which is exactly what I still do now. It is a lifetime obsession. When I was 13, I went with friends to see Uriah Heep at the Lea's Cliff Hall, Folkestone. It was a wild and strange affair to be surrounded by dark figures with lots of hair hunched over in black leather swaying in unison. About this time, I was I introduced to playing the guitar riffs of *Interstellar Overdrive* and *Smoke on the Water* by friends Steve and Russell. After initial success, the guitar declined

as academic work and art took over! Sad! But inevitable. Throughout Secondary school I become fascinated with an archival approach to music, where I'd search for music by artists that were not part of my generation. This has continued in the present day where the search has been retained to look for new artists to join those who have 'made the shelf' then back again to those artists who I missed. The priority being to discover and capture new sounds and words to celebrate their feel.

At school, I used to go out at lunch time to the High Street in the town and buy a record at the local music shop. For example, coming back to school with Neil Young's (1972) *Harvest* album was a thrill, nobody knew who he was, it was exciting if slightly isolating. When I was fourteen, one lunch time we all went down the Avenue to a friend's house to listen to Augustus Pablo's (1974) *Ital Dub*. What was cathartic about this was we did not know who he was, and the music was something we did not even know how to understand either. When I was 15, I went with a friend to Hammersmith Odeon to see Supertramp, but it was the support artist who stole the show, it was Joan Armatrading: she occupied your mind and emotion. During my latter teenage years there were many gigs which were attended, and this was continued when I went to Hatfield Polytechnic/University of Hertfordshire. The list of popular music concerts is extensive, but a few that had an impact were Weather Report at the Rainbow Theatre, six rows from the front with Wayne Shorter and Jaco Pastorius you were literally blown away. Kraftwerk at the Hammersmith Odeon doing the *Man Machine* tour was a such a shock because they entered and performed on stage where there were no recognisable musical instruments. Both Asya and I found that the experience of attending live gigs was a major pedagogic resource to be delivered and unpacked in the classroom which gained massive attention from students. On this basis, knowledge about musical skills and cultural interpretation could be combined with fun and seriousness.

Asya – Summer 1994: Discovery

I am four years old. My beloved uncle is taking care of me for the afternoon. It is a hot day in the town of Sliven where my mum's family come from. Some tune comes on the telly during the credits and as it ends, I repeat it – from start to finish. My uncle, an excellent guitar player, singer, teacher, and a bit of a local celebrity seems a little overimpressed and asks me to do it again, commenting on some music skills I never considered particularly special. He reports to my mum what happened and that he thinks it is time for music lessons for me which I did indeed begin to take later that year back in Sofia. Soon I realised that piano is

simply not for me: as a kid I found it too big and inflexible: “Mum, how would I take it to a party when I grow up?”. And so, in what seemed a perfectly natural turn of events, I took up the family tradition of playing the guitar – my uncle was, after all, the student of his mum and my grandmother, two sisters born in the 1910s and 1920s, who were both guitar players. My uncle Nedelcho travelled to Sofia for my birthday to pick the best guitar for me: I remember him, a very tall man, sitting on some uncomfortable small chair in the corner of a huge department store – heritage from the communist regime - trying tiny guitars for hours. He became my teacher and my most prominent inspiration; he was someone who could transform people and places with the presence of his music and his voice, a one-man-theatre, if you like. Every summer, during my time in Sliven, he taught me something new and at some point, I became his teacher too, not only when it came to guitar but also technology as he came into the digital world late in his life yet in time to publish several books with music infused stories and memoirs about his bands. He inspired me to think about the relationships between music, place and people.

I can’t believe he has gone now, my favourite musician in the world, with the brightest spirit – and the best teacher in music and in life, I am so lucky. The relationship between teachers and students, isn’t that a metaphor of life? Their roles swap and change and intertwine, they are never fixed: and those relationships do not belong to school or university or any formal education institution like that, we are all both teachers and students, all the time.

Shane – October 1980: working in the music industry

After gaining my degree, I got employment working at Our Price Records, London. This was a sort of paradise. Here you meet staff in the shop who were really into different genres, punk, reggae, jazz, and it was fun. It was really hard work, but you were surrounded by the music. When in the central part of the shop you could dictate the type of music being played throughout the mega store. This was power! This was influence! At the Our Price Records mega store there was no company policy about what music was played: the only company policy was to make money from music! One of the most exciting things was not when we had visits by guest musicians, but the morning delivery to get the first glimpse of a brand-new release LP, CD, and promotional material. I still have Eric Clapton’s guitar (cardboard of course!) Customers were fun as well. They would ask about artist, genres, and different types of obscure or classic releases. When I was put in charge of ordering vinyl LPs, I noticed that certain artists’ albums had never been ordered. So, my aim became to fill the artist location in

the rack with all their back catalogue not just the most recent material. I would order all albums by Sly and the Family Stone, John Martyn, Joan Armatrading, The Doors, Augustus Pablo, Joni Mitchell and Rory Gallagher and others. Guess what? Sales took off! They all sold! In an odd sort of way, I had been doing this as a young teen, I now practised this within commercial retail setting. I made money for the company, but it was not for me!

Asya – 12 May 2011: 21

I am 21 and have just completed my university degree. This is a classical moment of uncertainty: I need a stable income, and I need to move house, I just generally need to figure out what I am doing with my life next. It is like finishing school but worse: what they call "real life" is truly at the doorstep, and I am not even home to open the door. Will I go back to Bulgaria or stay in the UK? Why stay? Why go?

I work behind the bar in the Maidens Head pub in Canterbury, we put on excellent punk rock gigs and even weekenders, and I love it, but I hope to continue with my education. At the uni, they've given me the chance to lead some seminars and I now have got the taste of something I'd like to do in future. I have earned a first in my degree and I have a PhD interview coming up: will I get the scholarship or not? Who am I even up against? I feel I am entering a field of competition and all I can do is turn up and answer all the questions on the day… And hope I can spend the next few years of my life immersing myself in a world I've been lured into - ethnographic research and music cultures.

On that day in May 2011, for my PhD scholarship interview, I wore a purple summer dress that I still fit in now, though it's hidden somewhere in a suitcase. But otherwise, how have I changed?

P.S. *Shane remembers that at Asya's scholarship interview he was a little nervous because it was a very competitive event and there were vested parties in opposition, but confidence, imagination and relevance to cultural studies won the day! Thank goodness!*

Shane – October 1981: Beginning the PhD

It came as a bit of a shock to Our Price Records that I handed-in my notice. Everyone thought I was happy. Indeed, I was. I had moved through the hierarchy from floor functionary to manager. This brought rewards but a certain level of enclosure. I found that listening to music

all day was beginning to kill my love of music because I was now labouring under the obedience of an employer. Don't get me wrong. I loved it but I was beginning to feel an uncomfortable estrangement towards music which I did not want!

It had been my plan before undertaking a career sojourn in music industry retail, that I would apply for an ESRC a scholarship to do a PhD in Sociology at the Institute of Education, University of London. I wanted to be supervised by Professor Basil Bernstein. In the end I got Basil and Phil Cohen too. Successfully gaining the scholarship I set sail to do an ethnography on youth cultures focused on music within secondary school. Motivated by Paul Willis' (1977) *Learning to Labour*, I began to explore youth subcultural identities related to music, style, and education. Within a matter of weeks, I was up to my neck in fieldwork focused on a group of mod boys and new wave girls where music was a central feature of their subcultural identities. Through undertaking the PhD, I was looking at young people's cultures inside and outside school, from a multiplicity of perspectives including education, sociology, cultural studies, anthropology, all wrapped with young people's celebration of popular music. Thus, music became an important variable to understand young people's behaviour, values, and actions. At certain PhD supervisory meetings with Professor Basil Bernstein our first duty was to pore over the NME before we engaged on data analysis and develop theory from my fieldwork. In the NME during the late 1980s and early 1990s you could find references to Roland Barthes, Michelle Foucault, Levi-Strauss, Bourdieu, and others; it was like being in a lecture.

Asya – 15 September 2008, Sofia: Birthday flight

My nineteenth birthday. I wake up in my sunlit room in Sofia, in the flat where I grew up happy with my mum and dad. This is the first school day in Bulgaria, so the usual children's noise, celebratory music, and bells ringing can be heard from the school yard opposite where I once stood, too, beginning what I suppose I could call my academic journey which doesn't seem to be ending. Ever.

But this is a strange, bittersweet birthday memory. Because that day, with a suitcase and a guitar, I got on a plane to London. Then on a couch to Canterbury, a place where I'd never been. I was on my way to a new, bold beginning – my undergraduate degree in Media and Cultural Studies. I loved my parents, I loved my friends, I loved my music bands, my social circle, Bulgaria, the hot summers, and snowy winters, and I always will. So why was I doing this (you may ask… or not)? I was surprised by my own decision, too. I was convinced I was going to stay in Sofia to live and study only three or four months earlier. But then, at some

University fair in a downtown Sofia hotel where I accompanied a friend, I saw a… picture of Canterbury. And, wow, was that picture powerful: Canterbury cathedral and the surrounding city, at dusk, as seen from the campus of this new university I'd never heard about Canterbury Christ Church. England! Exactly the way I imagined it, exactly how I had dreamt it, and how I had romanticised it even since my dad first visited England in the mid-nineties and brought me back some lovely books and souvenirs. So, that picture sparked my curiosity, my imagination, yes, but what I found most amazing was this unknown beast – Media and Cultural Studies – which I discovered in the University's brochure. Everything I'd dreamt about – music, film, youth studies, a bit of everything, really. And I was someone who had an endless struggle with determining their path – I played the guitar and sang in bands, I went to art lessons, I was in a poetry club, and, no, I was not ready to decide between it all. Who is, seriously? But I sure had a direction, no matter how broad that direction was, and this course was it. I didn't bother about researching University rankings, I simply didn't care, I guess at this adventurous age I was more able to trust my intuition that I may be now, as an ever-so-slightly-more-cynical thirty-something year-old. And so, I leaped, and landed on my feet… despite the looming economic crisis.

Asya – 9 March 2016, Canterbury: Viva Day

The day has come: my viva. I did not submit my PhD within three years of embarking on the PhD programme, instead I submitted a year later. At the time, this felt like a bit of an epic fail, but, in retrospect, the three-year time frame is unrealistic, plus the "extra" time had allowed me to gain a substantial amount of practice in teaching: I had become a versatile and confident pedagogue who had worked across a range of degrees and modules. I had also been involved in the postgraduate association at my university as a researcher representative, worked at the Graduate School, and on a bunch of research projects… And though it felt like a "stable" job and sufficient income were totally out of sight, and the world was against me, the breadth of the experience I had gained was invaluable.

So, I sat in this beautifully lit room at St Martin's Priory, a historical building, with a fever and throat infection that had developed overnight out of stress, two professors sitting opposite me – Bill Osgerby and Peter Webb – and one professor, just to the side, Shane, his quiet presence bringing me a sense of familiarity and peace. I was engulfed in a fantastic conversation, a retrospective journey through the years of working on my PhD: recalling all the fantastic relationships I had established in the process, the gigs, the interviews, the sense of

discovery, the mess, the emergence of a theoretical description, the way that ethnography had shaped not only my research, but also, my life. This way of looking at the world, which I was first introduced to as a fresher at CCCU, had now become part of my individual intellectual DNA – perhaps it was always there, perhaps it is just a way of addressing and organising the way I tend to look at the world, my curiosity about the way that identity, perception, the invention of rituals and meanings. I felt flattered by the questions of the examiners who complimented the way I had accessed insight, how I had used my position in the field, and so on: it seemed that those hours of interviewing, transcribing, and translating were worth it after all. A PhD is often described as years of pain, but another way of looking at it is… years of allowing yourself to be absorbed by what you love, which can indeed be a test about whether that love can stand the test of… anything. And, truth be told, I felt like my research into popular music in contemporary Bulgaria and I had become entwined: not just because this PhD paved the way for the future developments of my career. Shane remembers that in preparation for my viva we prepared a diversity of potential questions, issues, and answers. He said the key factor was defence combined with being clear, thoughtful, not rushing and getting the examiners to ask questions related to the strengths of the PhD.

The subheading of my thesis (and later the monograph it became the basis for) was *At the Crossroads*. And at the crossroads I was, am, and probably always will be. Just like in the PhD I describe Bulgaria as a liminal space, a melting pot of cultural and musical influences, between the perceived "East" and "West", stuck in a forever (post-communist) transition… I am at the crossroads, too, maybe a bit like philosopher Julia Kristeva but with a lot less intention to embrace a form of British-ness the way she may have embraced French-ness. "A monster at the crossroads" is my language: I live the double life between Bulgaria and the UK, and I do not seem to belong to one or the other, neither do I want to belong. This form of freedom is synonymous to instability, or is it? I feel the only way to terms with my own crossroad-ness is through ethnography, or at least my version of what ethnography may be – reflection, rather than totality, the ability to remain alive to the beauty of the human nature. Does that pre-empty ethnography? Make it another hollow term to hide ourselves behind in research? An interview or two rather than full immersion, then claim that one has done ethnography – isn't that an abusive? And here it comes I don't think I'd ever claim I've done an ethnography, rather, this is an ethnographic approach etc. etc.

At the end of that morning in March, I was awarded a PhD, so I went straight to the Two Sawyers on Love Lane to celebrate with a few PhD mates and, of course Shane, who had watched me grow and change, and encouraged me throughout. Shane never seems to be into

picking up "polished" diamonds… or any other kind of academic precious stone, for that matter. Looking at his record as a supervisor, he's always been working with not-so-standard researchers, with topics which might seem risky – burlesque entrepreneurship (Gemma Commane), drinking cultures (Laura Doherty/Robert McPherson), Chinese subcultural scenes (Mengyao Jiang), etc. I feel this embodies what ethnography is about in the life and role of an academic – to encourage new perspectives, to challenge the very notion of taboo in social and cultural research. And I hope to continue this strand.

Later that day, I went to fencing as I always did, but now fought like a Doctor.

Shane comments: An advantage of having been able to supervise Asya and other PhD students to successful viva completions, is that each event is an individual and unique experience. But no matter how many doctoral students you have brought to their viva, you always remember, for better or worse, your own! My viva took place at the Institute of Education, under the supervision of Professor Basil Bernstein, and second supervisor Phil Cohen. It sounds absurd even crazy, but I was never in any doubt when I walked into the room but there sat Professor Laurie Taylor and David Downes. Would be a fight to the death? It turned out to be a three-hour pleasure of an intellectual discussion and rigorous questioning. My guidance to Asya offered equivalent personalised preparation.

Shane – 28 October 2017: The Canterbury Sound

So, here is some background: We could say that our collaboration began when we met: as the learning and teaching experience in higher education is not a one direction process, but a form of communication and exchange. As co-researchers, Asya and I first authored a conference paper in 2014 and a chapter on post-punk in Bulgaria, inspired from elements of Asya's developing PhD study at the time. Later, we successfully secured some funding for small-scale research into contemporary music scenes in the historic and student city of Canterbury. During 2015 and 2017 we put a series of bids for research money to work on what became our emergent Canterbury Sound project. Most of our Canterbury Sound research bids for gaining funding were reasonably successful as they offered a minimum amount of money to cover our expenses to undertake interviews and fieldwork. There were a couple of major outcomes of this effort, first was the one-day music event titled: *The Canterbury Sound: place, music and myth* (2017), followed by the publication of "No Blue Plaques 'in the Land of Grey and Pink': the Canterbury Sound, heritage and the alternative relationships of popular music and place"

in Samantha Holland, and Karl Spracklen's edited book *Subcultures, Bodies and Spaces: essays on Alternativity and Marginalisation* (2018).

The Canterbury Sound event was part of the Canterbury Festival and featured in their programme. Within popular music culture, the Canterbury Sound is a signature style that emerged in the 1960s and that draws upon psychedelic music, progressive rock, jazz and pop (Draganova, Blackman and Bennett 2021). It became the basis for a collection called *The Canterbury Sound in Popular Music: Scene, Identity and Myth* (2021), co-edited with Andy Bennett, professor at Griffith University, who first explored the scene a couple of decades ago. The festival event included a series of discussions, daytime performances, and an evening gig. It included different generations of people – musicians, archivists, fans, scene facilitators, and academics - involved with the stylistic of the Canterbury Sound within popular music. This day brought together the gentle acoustic sound of Jack Hues and his quartet; Koloto's experimental electronic sound; the heavy but fun and lengthy pieces by Lapis Lazuli; and the wonderful renditions of Robert Wyatt songs by the Soup Songs and Sarah Jane-Morris. Kevin Ayers' poetry book, Brian Hopper's Wilde Flowers guitar, fanzines, and archives from across the UK and continental Europe; research papers vs humour-filled storytelling and city mapping…. This day was eclectic and memorable. And we had the most colourful design for our programme and posters to highlight this! We believe that play, openness and creativity in the processes and outputs of research, are central to meaningful impact and continuity. The book, like the event, included authors, music artists, producers, journalists, engineers, collectors, fans, and academics. It was about accommodating diverse perspectives and styles of expression, framing them as a lively, accessible form of research and reflection.

Undertaking academic collaboration, as well as work that has the potential to reach wider communities, is now a formal requirement with universities for staff as it is suggested 'It will help your career?' To work together, the two of us required no requirement or 'forcing'; it was an organic growth of our early contact. Never forgetting that it is a privilege to work within a university, we suggest that university work without any risk means stagnation. While we had to negotiate bureaucracy, the experience of collaboration was defined by a love of ethnography and popular music. Formal requirements can lead to narrowness and individualism, and in contrast we sought openness through risk and fun. For example, we were told by certain figures within the University "Why do you want to put on a concert?" A good question! But really for us the hidden issue which drove us forward to put on a festival event, was the fact that it was seen as not relevant: "you should be writing books or journal articles." We found that the Academy can appear open and progressive but when inside it can be

claustrophobic and limiting. You find yourself looking around for support from colleagues who have vanished into their interior individual atomistic projects. We had problems with the lights, this was resolved but under much pressure, we had tension about car parking space, this was resolved, we had lack of support from marketing and publicity, we did this ourselves. Asya went on radio to promote the event and we both put up posters everywhere we could. It was an exhausting event to organise and operate. We felt alone. But we survived!

Asya – 9 February 2022, Birmingham

I am sitting in a café in Moseley, South Birmingham. I have just dropped off my nearly eight-month-old baby son to stay with a childminder for the first time and while he's only ten minutes away from here, this is a storm of emotions. So here I am, after months of embracing my new role as a parent, trying to get back to what I have spent a lot of my personal and professional life doing: writing about popular music and people. And, ultimately, writing myself into it all which is now called researcher positionality. Samantha Punch (2012: 87) suggests that in ethnography the "diaries may play a more central role in striving to understand the often-hidden struggles in the production of knowledge".

For me this moment of separating from my young child for pretty much the first time is charged with mixed feelings for another reason, too: it has only been two or three days since I found out that a good friend from my University and PhD era has just passed away from an aggressive form of cancer. Simon, with whom we shared so much in Canterbury and at Canterbury Christ Church University. This has inevitably evoked a reflection on my time in Canterbury. Last night, I even had a strange dream about my friend, co-author, and once lecturer and supervisor – Shane. This is not a surprise, as he represents how Canterbury shaped my life – a fascination with the concept of ethnography, and how it can be used to explore music as a cultural and social phenomenon. In my dream, we were trying to find ourselves at the same time and same place to catch up, but we both kept finding ourselves in different dimensions, unable to cross paths. What a predictable dream, you might say, as we are reaching now the second anniversary since the beginning of the global COVID-19 pandemic. I have not seen Shane since my thirtieth birthday in September 2019 which I spent in Whitstable. Yet, in this time, we have managed to complete an edited book about the Canterbury Sound together, a co-authored chapter, and embark on our next intellectual journey: this piece of writing which… tells our story and, hopefully, why it matters.

Asya – 11 June 2021, Birmingham Women's Hospital: towards a summary of a diary to be continued

The birth of my son Svetlin. And here I am, wondering in what language to address him as we first meet "face-to-face" – Bulgarian or English? In the end, I don't remember what I said. And I have brought another potential crossroad person to the world. In the coming months as we travelled back and forth between Bulgaria and the UK, I saw him struggling with the transitions, then making impressive developmental jumps. An immense sense of guilt and pride from me. "The apple (or according to the Bulgarians – the pear) does not fall too far from the tree." But as a friend of mine once said, the fruit never wanted to fall from the tree on first place. This young person had not made a conscious decision to be living the "double life"; yet I hope he grows to see richness in it, somewhere in the constant struggle and self-reflection.

Over the past few months, my opportunities to work have been very limited and while I am enjoying every moment with my long-awaited child, I am filled with this kind of longing to work with students again, to carry out interviews and study a range of social and music scenes, and to write. In fact, it feels like I have never stopped: but instead of my usual post-communist scenes or the Canterbury Sound, I have been observing baby music classes and the economy of social opportunities for new parents in the aftermath of a global pandemic. Spending an entire pregnancy in lockdown was also an interesting phenomenon – the online networks of support that emerge as a single alternative to complete isolation, and the ways they crumble down as soon as the pub is open again. My lack of dread from returning to work must suggest I love it indeed. Why?

A Voice: Ethnography and so, what is ethnography for us?

This last section in the chapter we decide to move out from the scattered diary's structure and reflect on what ethnography is and how it relates to popular music and youth culture for us. For us an ethnographic voice has many layers in its revelation, it is not just a voice as in the voice of those who are being studied, the social phenomena or scene that is being observed: most likely a distinct, an alternative voice. A voice that can be claimed by the researcher as a creative force; a style if you like. An ethnographic study doesn't have to end up with a boring write-up and the world of cultural research is increasingly opening-up for that. Ethnography can be articulated creatively and has a reach well-beyond academia. This public sense of ethnography is what we tried to capture with the Festival Event and subsequently within the

book (not just full of academics). To invite the public in and for people to engage, argue, offer memories, and reflect with us.

Asya says that she misses Canterbury: *This is one of my "homes", surrounded in the allure of nostalgia and romanticisation, I have had incredible opportunities in Birmingham – such as becoming part of the journal Riffs (dedicated to experimental writing about popular music) and Nicholas Gebhardt's not-so-secret Write Club (based at the Birmingham Centre for Media and Cultural Research). My thick descriptions were unleashed into poetry, short stories, word-games, even drawings. My writing was free again. And why is that important? Because it would not make any sense to write about interesting stuff in a somewhat standardised, or boring way: that would be a paradox. And when you study popular music, especially, prospects of an audience that is not strictly academic is important.*

For Shane who had previously worked within both ethnography and feminism, the concept and idea of voice has critical resonance, and it makes researchers aware of who they are, how they interact, that they are also part of the social world, not some visitor. As a result, you have to write yourself into the text. However, Asya and I agree that the priority should always be on the research participants, this means you have to explain what your relationship with your participants is because it impacts on the type of data you will collect. So, our belief is that ethnography has many forms of coproduction from the first fieldwork meeting to writing the study itself. We never let go of the research participants they always remain with us. Forever, within the field diary and the memory. When writing ethnography, we have found that it is possible to reclaim data from previous ethnographic studies. Data in the diary that simply stayed within the folds of the pages. Providing you offer enough context; ethnography can be part of the present and then interact with the past through critical engagements. This is especially important when participants offer their personal, private, and inner worlds to us. We respect them and we interpret their comments as we would our own. At the same time, we offer independence not ventriloquy (Blackman 2016). When researching music feelings and emotions run high because it is about authenticity, cultural, identity and belonging.

Imagination

For us an ethnographic approach creates a lens for making sense of the world, imagining its specificity in context and its wholeness at the same time.

The imagination within social and cultural research set out by C.W. Mills (1959) is the practice taking our biographies as a resource in a cultural field as described by Bourdieu (1992,

1993): we employ our imagination through this subjective and personal series for experiences. In this way you touch upon common ground and in a Nietzschean sense we can trace archival connections between musicals artists and recorded music between both ourselves and with participants. We further support Mills' aim of wanting to be surprised by research participants; this enables agency to shift so that we are no longer in possession of the field but are being conducted through the field of music by the research participants. So, for us, the use of the imagination within ethnography enables opportunities for difference and diversity to recognise forms of coproduction.

Involvement and (Self-)reflection

We follow Heewon Chang's (2016: 449) assertion that a 'desirable autoethnography' should be 'liberating not limiting', to go beyond the researchers' experiences to offer a critical interpretation. For us it is a process, that involves becoming an insider and an outsider at the same time; a process of going back for more, of searching for new angles, of building and updating. Thinking ethnographically is not "an ethnography": it is not claiming to capture all detail of symbolic relationships, rituals, social significance, and context – it is partial, like all research, and that is okay, if we are being honest about it. Thinking ethnographically is something that we have been trained to do, it is acquired and becomes part of your researcher identity. For us, when doing an ethnography, you are involved in participants lives, they can be part of your life. In fact, we suggest that as researchers our lives have been changed by research participants. Participants enter your private space. You walk, run, and spend time together both during the day and night at concerts together. Involvement also means commitment. They are you and you are them. But it needs to be remembered that the research participants have allowed you access because they like you, if they don't like you, you will be out! End of the ethnography. Involvement is part of power relations. It is also a responsibility that you must wear, but at the same time it is not an equal relation with the research participants because as a researcher you do depend on them. Ethnography is about involvement, and it cannot be any other way. As researchers we are part of what we study and what we produce and therefore self-reflection is a key aspect of the work at every stage. This is one of the empowering features of taking on an ethnographic approach; the need to write ourselves into our own work, to claim authorship… and find out more about who we are in the process.

For Asya, it was through her PhD research and the work that followed soon afterwards, that she "became" Bulgarian by conceptualising growing up in a post-communist environment

and getting to understand better its transitional qualities: *It is also through ethnography that I finally made sense of the irresistible aura of Canterbury and the music associated with it. It is through ethnography that I can write this chapter and make sense of my own journey, because there is always an "auto" element, which hopefully does not become a narcissistic exercise.*

"Doing it Together"… and some sexist encounters

For Shane doing ethnographic research in popular music is a space for collaboration. This is an exciting field which does not conform to the rules of the functional, rational, and the tamed: it involves emotionality, subjectivity, passion, and therefore organic friendship has a place in popular music ethnographies. This is not about clinical professional relations, but about free-flowing creative shared work and struggle. When researching and writing together, the power relation was clear in the early stages: I had a position within the discipline and field, and Asya was forging hers. Awareness of the power differentials is crucial and sensitive. I can open doors for Asya, and she can open doors for me, hence my involvement in working for the Popular Music Journal Riffs, for example. When writing together, we have found that you need to come together on an equal basis, with no hang ups or ego. If you have either of these it will not work. Working together means that you need to agree of theoretical, positionality or work it through as you write. As a man writing with a female academic is something that I have undertaken since I worked on a feminist research project in the late 1980s.

Research in popular music crosses over with the music industry which may be 'unreconstructed' in gender and feminist issues. For example, when Asya and I attended a popular music conference in the 2010s in London there were a few academic researchers. We came into conversation with one middle aged male who had a successful career in music production. He approached me and said: "Who is that young woman you're with." I said she is a PhD research student. To my surprise he advanced towards Asya who was next to me and said: "I'd really like to fuck you!" We were both surprised by this unwanted invitation at an 'academic - industry 'conference as he continued his request for sex. We said this was not possible and moved away. From my experience of being with young female academics, although this request was brusque, it has happened on other occasions where a male academic centres in on the female academic who is with me and thinks they can take up an opportunity for sexual contact. My reaction in each case is to challenge the male researcher. Not that Asya

needed me for defence, but as her PhD supervisor I had a duty of care and importantly we were working together.

When we have undertaken joint research interviews as conversation especially with famous musicians, it remains essential to be focused on them, not their image, reputation, or particularity. Egos can trip you up quite easily, but of course degrees of homage are required. Keeping the balance right is essential.

Asya reflects over the years: *Shane has become my ethnographic friend and collaborator. He would pick up on things I might miss out on, and vice versa. Feels a bit like we are bandmates complementing each other with a different set of song-writing skills. I have a few other bandmates, too, of course, as working in the field of popular music research includes the creation of a distinct network. But this is not the kind of band that is for researchers only: the networks, the relationships, the collaborations extend to the people involved in the scenes or social phenomena that are being studied. They participate not only in observations and interviews, but with their agency in the process. Also, co-authors are not always fellow academics – but those who would normally not write such as musicians, producers, industry figures, fans… as we did in* The Canterbury Sound in Popular Music: Scene, Identity and Myth *(2021) book.*

Conclusion or introduction?

In ethnography one main aim is to emerge with theory, not start with it. Ethnography is defined through relationships and empathy, so as you write ethnography you return to the beginning: the fieldwork in the diary. In *Under the Mosquito Net*, Clifford Geertz's (1967) review of Malinowski's (1967) *A Diary in the Strict Sense of the Term*, argues that the scholar who gave us modern ethnography based on rapport 'destroyed' the ideal of 'empathy.' Caught in the historical context of his time Geertz did not see that this was the start of contemporary reflexivity in ethnography. Malinowski reveals the exciting days of pleasures and the tortured days of boring fieldwork, the sexual encounters, and the everyday distractions within the diary as labour. However, Malinowski (1967: 192) loved music as part of his fieldwork and he took care in recording his singers, loved 'humming songs', 'seizing upon a musical idea expressing it in my own melody.'

So too we love music, whether we played music to students during a module, or observing and interviewing musicians exploring their creative thoughts and blocks. But never seeking to impose theory on them, instead always trying to release the energy of their

biography. From our first meeting to discuss Bulgarian rock music before and after the Fall of the Berlin Wall, through to our PhD supervisions and subsequent work on the Canterbury Sound we have sought the dynamism of popular music and how it has been brought to life through ethnographies. Researching popular music can be magically fun, but never forget the brutal labour of planning, contacting, reorganising and the failures when always trying to be, oh so nice!

We have approached this study through our lived experience of an ongoing academic journey where both immediacy and reflection are intertwined. At times our successes have been rewarded yet at other times, we have struggled with internal and external pressures relating to access of research funds, publishers and management. But we are still here!

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