Helsinki Journal, Entry 14, November 5, 2006

I begin each day of the work week with the short walk from our place to the nearest stop for the route 67 bus. The left-hand picture below was taken from this stop; our place is in the bottom of the backmost building in the picture. The #67 is also Alex’s school bus, and so we often make the trip together. Ten minutes past Alex’s stop is my own. From there the walk in to work is 15 minutes and is quite pleasant. (One of the great things about Helsinki is that it still contains many pockets of open space, two of which I traverse in my daily walk to work. Ellie can be seen standing in one of them in the right-hand picture below.)

![Our place from the #67 bus stop.](image1)

![Ellie posing on a trail that I walk on my way to work.](image2)

My work is what brought us to Helsinki, and because of that, I feel a deep sense of gratitude and responsibility toward it. That having been said, my relationship with my work is a complex one. On the one hand, I’ve long cherished a belief that a good life is measured in richly lived moments, most of which I imagine as being spent out-of-doors, or with family and friends, and that by definition don’t involve working. On the other hand, I also have a driven and ambitious side whose primary focus is work. This part of me is demanding, desires excellence and success, and is, quite frankly, thoroughly exasperating. Yet, at the same time, it has gotten me where I am today and it fuels the passion I feel for what I do. The ongoing battle between my two inner selves is never-ending, and, at this point in my life, I feel that it defines me. This, in one terse paragraph, is: Me. Now.

Since I am not teaching, I have been able to focus completely on my research. This has been a revelation; good research requires long periods of absorption and focus. But is has also been difficult; for me, the path from absorption to obsession is short. Thus, even though I don’t bring my work home with me, it sometimes occupies my mind when I’m at home. And the more difficult are the day’s, or week’s, mathematical struggles, the more pronounced is my preoccupation. As a result, I have had more sleepless nights in the past couple of months than I’ve had for some time.
Research is an interesting thing: it is demanding and requires creativity. In fact, when I read the following lines from T.S. Eliot’s *East Coker*, in which he discusses his own relationship with his art, I felt a resonance with my own experience with my research.

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And so each venture
Is a new beginning, a raid on the inarticulate
With shabby equipment always deteriorating
In the general mess of imprecision of feeling,
Undisciplined squads of emotion. And what there is to conquer
By strength and submission, has already been discovered
Once or twice, or several times, by men whom one cannot hope
To emulate – but there is no competition –
There is only the fight to recover what has been lost
And found and lost again and again: and now, under conditions
That seem unpropitious. But perhaps neither gain nor loss.
For us, there is only the trying. The rest is not our business.
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The last three sentences gives me comfort. Writing this entry gives me comfort.

INFO: Winter has hit here, as you can see from the pictures. It came very suddenly.