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# POSTHUMAN MATERIALITIES IN EDUCATION: A NOMADIC AND NON-ANTHROPOCENTRIC RESEARCH

**Alessandro Ferrante**

*University of Milano-Bicocca (ITALY)*

## **Abstract**

For several decades, philosophy and social sciences have been affected by a radical change of cultural and scientific paradigm. In fact, theoretical and empirical research is increasingly inspired by posthumanist and new materialist perspectives. These perspectives challenge the assumptions of the humanist paradigm and seek to go beyond a human-centered view, as they believe that such view is inadequate to understand a globalized, multiethnic and hi-tech society in which technological, scientific, cultural and existential changes have rapidly altered previous ways of living and thinking. Posthumanist and materialist perspectives redefine the agency of matter, assume the relations between human and non-human as units of analysis, interpreting them through a non-anthropocentric approach, and allow to study the flows and interconnections that characterize the current historical scenario with new conceptual categories. These perspectives thus stimulate a transdisciplinary and nomadic research style that focuses on multiple becomings and questions the most common conceptualizations of humanity and of the relations between human, environment and non-human.

Despite being quite widespread in human sciences, these perspectives are hardly accepted in educational studies and learning studies. As a matter of fact, even today pedagogy seems very often to take inspiration from an anthropocentric frame. However, in recent years more and more scholars belonging to the educational debate (e.g. Richard Edwards, Tara Fenwick, Helena Pedersen, Nathan Snaza, Estrid Sørensen) have explicitly addressed posthuman and sociomaterial approaches. Through their work, education can be conceived as a complex and constantly changing practice, made of hybrid networks that take shape through the interaction between social and material elements.

The paper aims to foster a theoretical reflection on these issues, not only showing the limits of humanistic and anthropocentric perspectives in the field of education, but also exploring the opportunities that posthumanist and materialist approaches offer to renovate the conceptual categories of the educational debate. Specifically, the paper will focus on how these approaches contribute to: (1) exposing the anthropocentric assumptions that – explicitly or implicitly – affect educational research; (2) studying the relation between human and non-human in formal, non-formal and informal educational processes, on a theoretical and empirical level; (3) encouraging new and experimental relations with bodies, objects, spaces, and technologies.

Keywords: Posthuman, Materiality, Education.

## 1 BEYOND ANTHROPOCENTRISM

According to many scholars, anthropocentrism has been and still is the most widespread cultural and scientific paradigm, despite it is crossing a moment of profound crisis (e.g. [1], [2], [3]). In general terms, it can be said that anthropocentric narrative exalts the human being and tends to undervalue the dignity of non-human otherness, as it reduces it to mere means used to satisfy human needs both on the ontological level and on the epistemological and ethical levels [1], [3]. In an anthropocentric framework the human is conceived as an exceptional being, as the absolute protagonist of history, and is described as a conscious subject, master of the self and the world, or – in the most “nature-sensitive” versions of anthropocentrism – as the guardian of nature [4]. The human being is the central focus of every moral concern and is also thought to be separate from – and opposed to – the non-human. The anthropocentric perspective, therefore, generates a sense of human supremacy over non-human, and feeds some dualisms typical of the western tradition: human-animal, culture-nature, mind-body, biological-artificial, I-world, meaning-matter, etc.

However, for several decades, philosophy and social sciences have been affected by a radical paradigm shift [5]. As a matter of fact, an increasing amount of research is inspired by posthumanist approaches intertwined with various materialistic theories. Among these are the new materialisms, the actor-network theory (ANT), the material ecocriticism, the material feminisms, and the enactivist perspectives [6], [7], [8], [9]. Posthumanist and materialistic approaches – promoted by scholars such as Stacy Alaimo and Susan Hekman [10], Karen Barad [11], Jane Bennett [12], Rosi Braidotti [13], Katherine Hayles [14], Donna Haraway [15], Bruno Latour [16], Roberto Marchesini [17] – challenge the ontological, epistemological and ethical assumptions of the anthropocentric paradigm, and seek to go beyond a human-centered vision as they believe that such view is inadequate to understand a globalized, multiethnic, and hi-tech society, in which technological, ecological, material, and existential changes have in the course of time altered previous ways of living and thinking. Posthumanism therefore adopts the relationship between human and non-human (objects, technologies, plants, microbes, non-human animals, etc.) as a unit of analysis and interprets it through a non-anthropocentric theory. Posthumanist perspectives, moreover, emphasize the historical and contingent character of the concept of man; erode the stability of the boundaries between human, machine and animal; redefine the notions of subjectivity, agency and materiality; allow to study the flows and the interconnections that characterize today’s historical scenario through the lens of new conceptual categories. Thus, these perspectives encourage a transdisciplinary and nomadic research style that focuses on multiple becomings and questions the most common conceptualizations of humanity and of the relationship between the human, the environment and the non-human [13]. Posthumanism currently affects different fields of knowledge: literature, art, political theory, law, sociology, anthropology, pedagogy, philosophy, theology, architecture, geography, robotics, environmental sciences, computer science, media studies, gender studies, animal studies and disability studies [2], [13]. Such wide and transversal influence prompts to consider posthumanism as an emerging paradigm within which innovative research lines take place and develop. Thanks to posthumanism, the contents, methodologies, forms of knowledge and values orienting ways of thinking and practices are radically reviewed.

## 2 POSTHUMAN MATERIALITIES IN EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH

Despite being quite widespread in human sciences, posthumanism and sociomaterial perspectives are hardly accepted in educational studies and learning studies [18]. Even today, pedagogy seems to be inspired by an anthropocentric frame. It is grounded in the notion of human self-determination and it overlooks the role of non-human in the learner’s development; furthermore, non-humans are

usually considered as something to be used: they are instruments. As a consequence, in educational research the main focus is human, and only rarely the ways in which objects and other materialities contribute to shape educational practice and to transform learning contexts are considered. However, in recent years an increasing number of authors participating in the educational debate have explicitly adopted posthuman and sociomaterial approaches [7], [9], [19], [20], [21], [22], [23], [24], [25]. Thanks to these studies, education can be conceived as a multifaceted and ever-evolving practice, made of hybrid networks shaped by the interaction between social and material elements.

In the following sections of this paper, I will show synthetically the ways in which posthumanist perspectives deterritorialize the established understanding of what counts as human, learning and education. Specifically, we will focus on the contribution of these approaches to: (1) expose the anthropocentric assumptions that permeate research and educational practice; (2) study the theoretical and empirical levels of the relationship between human and non-human in formal, non-formal and informal educational processes; (3) encourage the experimentation of new forms of relationship with bodies, animals, objects, spaces, and technologies. These three different levels of reflection are closely related to each other. As a whole, they allow to gain an overview of the most important posthumanist surveys in education and to highlight a vital and evolving horizon, thanks to which we can trace the movement of pedagogy beyond itself, that is, beyond its traditional disciplinary and theoretical boundaries, focused solely on human beings. In fact, posthumanist pedagogy is able to reflect profoundly on the co-implication of human and non-human in educational processes.

## **2.1 An analysis of anthropocentric assumptions in education**

Posthumanist studies in education allow firstly to critically analyse the material and discursive practices that inform research methodologies and the ways in which educational actions are designed and implemented in a variety of formal and informal learning contexts (schools, educational services, supervisors and pedagogical advice, workplaces, media, peers, etc.). These studies unearth the anthropocentrism rooted in cultural imagery on education, hidden in the traditional school curriculum [9], [24], [25], [26], [27], [28], [29]; denounce the silent complicity of education with the capitalist and biopolitical system in promoting the cruel exploitation of non-human animals [22], [29]; show that the categories that we usually employ to discuss education and which we take as obvious – such as those of “human”, “learning”, “teacher”, and “pupil” – are actually the contingent product of historical processes and of specific social and material assemblages [18]. In other words, all these studies show that very often educational and research practices explicitly or implicitly ground on anthropocentric ideological premises [22], [24], [26]. As several scholars argue [29], teachers, educators and researchers often forget the fact that the school context is connected to the non-human world and is made up of hybrid materiality, which involves constant relationships between heterogeneous actors: “Consciously or not, we educators and educational researchers are used to looking at schools as places where humans dwell together to learn what it means to be human and to accumulate the kinds of skills and habits required to participate in human societies as adults. This occurs in spite of the fact that schools are connected with the nonhuman world in so many explicit and implicit ways” (p. 39). School and research promote a vision centered solely on human interaction. This perspective results in a persistent removal of the essential role of materiality in supporting school practices and of the dense network of connections between human and non-human (spaces, technologies, materials of common use, texts books, documents, pencils, counters, blackboards, computers, chairs, doors, hormones, plants, games, electric cables, animals, etc.), which is actually what makes schooling possible every day. School and educational research also contribute to the idea that humans are unique and special beings, separate from other livings and animals [19],

[26], [27], [30]. This way, they directly and indirectly contribute to the exploitation of the natural world and non-human animals: "Schools systematically teach us that animals are so unlike us that we can do whatever we want with them without worry" [29, p. 45]. The critical awareness of anthropocentric assumptions embedded in school as well as in many other research and learning contexts is an invite not to take our ways of conceiving and practicing education for granted. It is also an indispensable premise to change our thoughts, our policies, our daily actions, to experience new forms of existence, and to create a postanthropocentric educational milieu.

## **2.2 Studies on the relationship between human and non-human in educational processes**

Posthumanist researches in educational studies explore the relation between human and non-human in various educational, formal, non-formal and informal experiences. These researches not only expose and criticize the anthropocentric assumptions implicit in educational discourses or contexts, denouncing the complicity of education in the exploitation of the natural and animal world, but also investigate the often unexpected ways in which humans interact with non-human otherness, and the ways in which the latter contribute to structuring and modifying educational action [26].

Posthumanist perspectives refuse to attribute to human beings alone the ability to act, and recognize the active role of non-humans too. The agency is redistributed throughout the network. For posthumanist scholars the matter is performative, not inert [18]. Things, that is, act on and with human subjects and vice versa. They are ubiquitous, and shape and transform practices, meanings and routines. Materials, therefore, should be considered for the complex and unpredictable outcomes they generate by collaborating with other elements, human and non-human. Daily learning activity emerges through a myriad of translations, negotiations, mediations between discourses, knowledges, objects, desires, emotions, bodies, texts, artefacts, and times. Educating and teaching are actions that presuppose a material tangle that cannot be reduced to human beings only. The different posthumanist research lines therefore bring materials and materiality to the fore, analyse the ways in which learning and knowledge are rooted in action, invite to consider spaces, technologies, and objects as relevant actors in educational processes, and focus on the interactions occurring between human and non-human agents. Posthumanist approaches, hence, make it possible to look at educational experiences as if they were "hybrid collectives", i.e. systems consisting of heterogeneous elements lined up in specific sets of practices [31], [32]. In this context, educational relationships are not made up of individual minds floating within an incorporeal void, but of networks, that is, assemblies of people and things, and of things with things that take occasional and contingent sociomaterial configurations [32]. Learning, therefore, is not described as a purely individual, cognitive, social fact, but is the effect of a dynamic ecology of relationships that involve continuously human and non-human actors [7], [18].

Exploring education through posthumanist orientations allows the researcher to ask some fundamental questions: what knowledges, processes, objects, texts, bodies, spaces are involved in a specific educational practice? What connections, negotiations, symbolic and material mediations do sustain such practice? How are the elements that make it assembled, shaping it the way it is? Which other systems cooperate, conflict or overlap with it, and with what effects on learning? What changes does the current network configurations make possible? What alternative assemblages are likely, and what are unlikely or apparently unimaginable [18]? Starting from this common background of reflection, numerous theoretical and empirical researches are dealt with from multiple points of view, such as the transformations of spatial and temporal dimensions in education [33], [34]; the integration of technology into schools [7], [18], [21]; the analysis of educational

standards and policies [35]; the didactic and curriculum innovation processes [9], [27], [28], [29], [36]; the educational effects of materiality in the contexts of medical cure [23].

### **2.3 Experimenting new pedagogical theories and practices**

Educational research that focuses on posthuman materialities undermines established traditions of thought and the practical habits that have settled over time. It does not only dissolve the anthropocentric assumptions of education and analyse the relationships between human and non-human in a variety of educational experiences, but also actively encourages the emergence of new ways of thinking and action. Posthumanist perspectives, in fact, especially if combined with sociomaterial approaches, modify the ontological, epistemological and ethical premises of education studies, open up original research directions and support unprecedented ways of conceiving and practicing curriculum, teaching, design pedagogy and educational methods in a number of contexts [7], [9] [18], [20], [24]. Posthumanist perspectives also redefine disciplinary boundaries and promote the encounter of knowledges that in an anthropocentric framework would remain separated, such as animal studies and learning studies [22]. These perspectives, finally, renew the imagination, the lexicon and the concepts of pedagogy, helping it to think about the social, technological and ecological transformations of contemporaneity, as well as to conceive it within these transformations and, at the same time, as transforming discipline [19], [20]. Posthumanism encourages the creative experimentation of new relationships with bodies, animals, objects, spaces, and technologies, and produces decentralization from the human being that is more or less radical, depending on the authors and the theories of reference. This does not mean to say, however, that posthumanism necessarily reaches anti-humanist or even anti-human positions. As Richard Edwards wrote, it is important that the “post-” is not read as “anti-”: the post in post-humanism must be interpreted in terms of offering a constant experimentation with or questioning of the human [37]. In this sense, humans’ relationship with their self and with the non-human is not already given, but is always and still is to be built. Posthumanist pedagogy, hence, traces new connections between human and non-human, whether in daily education practices or in research practices [38].

## **3 THE HUMAN IN POSTHUMANIST STUDIES ON EDUCATION**

These last considerations point to an issue that I consider particularly relevant, on which I would like to dwell briefly in these concluding remarks. The issue concerns the “place” that human can occupy – once it has been scaled up from the center of the scene – in posthumanist studies on education. To ask this question does not mean to try and define in unequivocal terms and once and for all the position that educational research assigns to human beings. The intent, rather, is to critically question the human presence in the network of relations that characterizes material and discursive practices.

In most cases, posthumanist theories do not reject per se the use of the category of “human”. They, however, wish to overthrow the anthropocentric premises through which the human being has long been described. Decentering human, then, means moving away from the self-image that the human has produced in an anthropocentric and humanistic cultural milieu, first and foremost ceasing to consider human as an immutable essence inheriting the boundaries that separate humans from animals and from other materialities. In a posthumanist view, human can be read as a relational, hybrid and changeable being whose boundaries are unstable, dynamic and constantly renegotiated and questioned. Human, like any other being, is immersed in complex streams and multiple interconnections and becomes what, from time to time, results from her/his hybridization with different kinds of things. It is part of material processes that continually reconfigure the world’s

becoming. Since education also belongs to such processes and directly and indirectly affects the relationship between human and biological and technological otherness, it must be investigated without placing the human in the center, especially when conceiving human as separate and opposed to non-human. Such displacement entails the need to deeply modify the theoretical and practical assumptions of pedagogy, creating the conditions for experimenting with new forms of humanity and unprecedented connections between human and non-human. The scope of pedagogical research can no longer be limited to the relationship between teachers and students, learning contents, or human intentions. The field of analysis of education studies needs to be expanded to understand everything that is involved in structuring – symbolically and materially – educational processes. Posthumanist pedagogy, as a matter of fact, is authentically postanthropocentric if it considers the heterogeneity of the actors – whether human or non-human – who cooperate in the realization of educational events and if the ability of agency is not attributed to human beings only.

However, in the posthumanist educational reflection, the focus is undoubtedly on the “cybernetic triangle”, a product of the interplay between humans, non-human animals and machines. According to some scholars, however, the cybernetic triangle human-animal-machine is still too anthropocentric [24], [29]. In the pattern of relationships that the cyber triangle presents, in fact, human remains one of the polarities, so ultimately all things are related to it, although in fact there are a plurality of relationships unrelated to human. Things, that is, establish relationships that are independent from human perceptions and thoughts. For this reason, several authors have proposed to go beyond the cybernetic triangle, by adopting an object-oriented ontology. This ontological position considers the relationships between all the objects that are part of the world and levels the differences between human and non-human, without conferring any privilege on the human. However, in my opinion, in the pedagogical field and in the social sciences there is inevitably a specific reference to the way humans interact with reality. In any case, I believe that the topic of which place the human can occupy in posthumanist pedagogical studies evokes very problematic issues that can and must remain open, so that they can continue to challenge the theory to rethink itself.

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# **‘SPEEDY ETHNOGRAPHY’ AS AN APPROACH TO STUDY VERBAL AND NON-VERBAL RESPONSES OF CASUAL PASSERS-BY TO STREET ART**

**Karin Hannes**

*<sup>1</sup>Social Research Methodology Group, Centre for Sociological Research, KU Leuven (BELGIUM)*

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## **Abstract**

Street art has developed into a world phenomenon. Many cities now feature a collection of tags, murals, quick pieces and figurative throw-ups. Street art or graffiti has been approached from a crime-prevention, a social-cultural and an economic perspective by policy makers. However, the voice of citizens has been remarkable absent in their debates and the claims underpinning the suggested perspectives have not substantially been investigated in practice. We draw on the method of ‘speedy ethnography’ to observe 1200 casual passers-by in 4 major cities where new works of art were recently placed. We also conducted a fast interview with 82 of them. The approach was meant to increase our understanding of how the casual passer-by responds to street art creations when encountering one and how they appreciate different forms of street art, referring to aesthetic as well as place-based and judicial appreciations (legally or illegally placed). Our findings suggests that the creations are hardly noticed, that most people would like to see some regulations about what enters the public domain, with tags identified the least appreciated form from an aesthetic point of view. Opinions differed on how to best deal with illegally placed art in terms of integrating (or separating) it from the public domain.

Keywords: street art, citizens, ethnography.

## **1 BACKGROUND**

Street art can be defined as the art of claiming a spot in the public domain for an artistic creation with or without the knowledge and/or permission of the private owners or governmental authorities to which the location where the creation appears belongs. It comes in many forms, in two-dimensional as well as three-dimensional formats. In the context of this study we focus on drawings and paintings in the public domain. The most popular forms of street art include tags and throw-ups, generally linked to the graffiti movement, quick pieces and large size wall paintings. The last two formats are often referred to as mural art. Street art, particularly illegal forms, is generally approached from three different policy perspectives: a crime prevention perspective, a social-cultural perspective and an economic perspective (see table 1)

**Table 1: Perspectives related to the street art tradition**

Perspective	Rationale
Crime Prevention	Street art is a social threat. Especially the illegally placed street art (also referred to as graffiti) has an impact on the quality of life of citizens. It disfigures the environment and is considered a first step towards more serious crimes. It must therefore be avoided and punished.
Social-Cultural	Street art offers opportunities in terms of inclusiveness and the challenge of certain power relations. It has a formative character and encourages citizens to dialogue. It therefore has an important public function and must be encouraged.
Economic	A well-thought-out street art policy attracts visitors and tourists. It strengthens the economic position of local traders and cultural institutions or networks in the city and is therefore desirable.

Governmental city boards may differ in the way they role out their street art policy, particularly for illegally placed street art creations. In the entire process of developing policies towards street art the voice of citizens is underrepresented [1]. Little effort is done to investigate what the public considers as a potential sign of disorder or more generally what street art means or does to them or how these creations contribute or distort the public space in which they move on a daily basis [2]. We conducted a pilot study meant to generate insight into the behaviour of citizens when encountering street art and their appreciation of the creations, focussing on new arrivals.

The following research questions guided our study:

- How does the casual passer-by respond to street art creations when encountering one?
- How do they appreciate different forms of street art?

The concept ‘appreciation’ in this study refers both to an aesthetically observable dimension, a place-based and a more legal form of appreciation (legal versus illegal placement).

We problematize two assumptions linked to the crime prevention and the social-cultural perspective discussed above. The crime prevention perspective suggests that citizens’ attitude towards (illegally placed) street art is negative. The appreciation of the public for formats like tags and figurative throw-ups often linked to the graffiti movement is therefore expected to be rather low and the demand for legal regulation high. The social-cultural perspective suggests that street art generates a positive response, because it ‘speaks’ to the passer-by and initiates a dialogue that encourages critical thinking. Following this logic we would expect that citizen’s appreciation for street art is rather high and the demand for legal regulation will be rather limited. We have operationalized the idea of a ‘speedy form of ethnography’ initially developed by Soenen [3] into a design that would allow us to involve the casual passer-by into our research. With this more volatile type of ethnography we wish to lay a modest empirical foundation for some of the policy claims made in the debates on street art.

## 2 METHOD

Speedy ethnography has initially been developed to study volatile phenomena, that is: phenomena that arise as quickly as they disappear and usually create discomfort in social scientists conducting ethnographic studies [3]. Ethnographic research is often conducted on a particular site or in a well-defined cultural environment. The ethnographer aims to generate an in-depth holistic understanding of social, cultural phenomena in an encapsulated spatial environment, based on prolonged engagement in the field and with the people that move into that spatial area. This allows the researcher to arrive at more or less stable patterns of insights. In this study, we want to focus on the volatile contact between the casual passer-by and a newly arrived street art creation in the public space. It requires the ethnographer to also embrace this volatility, both in terms of chasing the new street art arrivals as in terms of approaching the casual passer-by to record his/her on-the-spot behavior, verbal and non-verbal responses to the creations. We therefore developed a mixed method approach based on a structured form of observation and an informal type of fast interviewing.

We opted for urban environments and collected data in the city of Ghent, Leuven and Mechelen (all located in Flanders, Belgium). We positioned ourselves strategically in a busy avenue or street where a street art creation was recently installed. The population we examined were the casual passers-by. In each city a different form of street art style was chosen. We opted for a mural in Mechelen, a throw-up in Ghent and a tag / quick piece in Leuven (figure 1).

**Figure 1: Forms of street art at the different locations**



Tag

Figurative throw up



Quick piece

Mural

To observe the accidental passer-by in their natural environment, a structured observation scheme was used. We recorded his/her spontaneous verbal (when walking in pairs or groups) and non-verbal response to the selected creation. A couple of plausible reaction patterns were predetermined:

merely passing by, looking up, dwelling around, discussing the creation. In addition, we registered information on timing and weather conditions that may possibly influence their behavioral pattern. The observer was publicly visible but positioned on the side-line. The passers-by were observed until they had passed the creation and were no longer in a physical position to respond to the creation. At this point a second researcher initiated an informal semi-structured interview with the casual passer-by that could quickly be completed but provided sufficient openness for qualitative nuancing. The passer-by was queried on his/her appreciation of the work, as well as his/her judicial viewpoints concerning the street art tradition. At the conclusion of an interview the next available casual passer-by was asked to participate in an interview.

The data from the structured observation sheet and the structured answer options in the fast interviews were all analyzed using SPSS. We focused on reporting frequencies and searched for a correlation between the style of a particular creation (tag, quick piece etc.) and the response of the casual passer-by, as well as correlations between demographic characteristics of the passers-by registered during the observation and the observed reaction pattern. From the interviews we generated data relating to the aesthetic appreciation and the legal appreciation in relation to style characteristics of the work and demographic characteristics of the interviewees. Open answers during the fast interviews were noted via key-words and these were analysed thematically. Examples of such key-words include: modern, old-fashioned, standard, boring, funny, illuminating etc.

### **3 FINDINGS**

Overall we observed 1200 casual passers-by in the four selected cities and interviewed 82 of them. On average we conducted 300 observations (range 177-400) and approximately 20 interviews (range 17 -24) on each site. The observer used her own perception of age to categorize passers-by. We worked with broad categories: children (4,2%), youngsters (44,9%), adults (33,6%) and seniors (17,3%). Most passers-by were male (46%) and walked on their own (57,3%). In the group of interviewees 43,9% was male. Most of them were youngsters (48,8%), followed by adults (40,2%) and seniors (11%).

#### **3.1. Appreciation of street art**

The findings related to the appreciation of street art have been generated via the fast interviews. We discuss the aesthetic, place-based and judicial appreciation.

##### *3.1.1. Aesthetic appreciation*

A total of 43,9% of the passers-by appreciated the creations as 'okay' and 23,2% appreciating the works as 'beautiful'. A minority of passers-by thought the works were 'not beautiful', with 17,1% stating that the creations were really 'ugly'. Overall, murals and figurative throw-ups were appreciated as aesthetically valuable (95,2% and 87,5% respectively). Tags were perceived as ugly by 58,8% of the passers-by and consequently received a lower score on aesthetic appreciation. What are some of the reasons why murals and throw-ups were more appreciated than e.g. tags? Overall, people appreciated the pallet of colors in murals, that nicely contrasted with often grey buildings and environments. Figurative throw-ups were mostly associated with key-words such as 'funny', 'original' and thus much more appealing than name tags or quick pieces. Tags were often associated with

phrases such as ‘a name is no painting’, ‘vandalism’, ‘doesn’t contribute anything’, ‘don’t see what it is’, ‘has no message’. Quick pieces got similar associations, although people generally were more positive about its contribution because of the colorful patterns. Comments about the form of the creations were dominant in discussions about aesthetic appreciation (42,11%), followed by color (25%). Several passers-by discussed the place of the work in the environment and appreciated it more when it creatively interacted with the environment (40,8%). There was a strong and significant correlation between the term ‘ugly’ and the ‘absence of meaning’ in the work.

### *3.1.2 Place-based appreciation*

We asked people about what they considered the best possible place for street art. Most people indicated that the public area was most appropriate (87,8%). Private property was the least popular spot (12,2%). Approximately 45% preferred remote places, where it was hidden from the eye unless it was actively searched for. Most of these people were still in favor of street art in the public domain (75%).

### *3.1.3 Judicial appreciation*

None of the passers-by spontaneously talked about the relation between legal and illegal street art forms, so we asked them explicitly about their opinion. The majority of the interviewees thought illegal street art had a role to play (56,8%). However, most passers-by felt the need to further explain their point of view. We learned that not all forms of street art were equally important to them. Most people mentioned they did not like to see name tags. Also, when a work is placed, it has to have some aesthetic quality and it has to be free from racist or discriminating jargon or dead messages. This suggests that many people expect street art to please them: “street art is not supposed to damage property or disturb people, the goal should be to ‘bring about positive change’ (34,1% of the people mentioned this as important in the debate on illegal street art).” This was opposed by others stating that it should reveal the opinion of the one placing it (the rebellion position). We also learned that illegal street art was not welcome on private property and historical buildings. Some passers-by mentioned that they generally liked the legally placed works more in terms of their aesthetic value. There was a significant correlation between aesthetic appreciation and tolerance towards illegally placed works. Figurative works like throw-ups (75%) and murals (65%) were generally more supported as an illegal form of street art placed in the public sphere compared to tags (35%) and quick pieces (45%).

## **3.2. What does street art do with the passer-by?**

The findings for this part were generated via interviews as well as structured observations. Both will be discussed below.

### *3.1.1. Fast interviews:*

Most people mention that the creations don’t do anything special to them (78%). A small 12,2% of the people interviewed indicates that it leads to some sort of resistance modus in them. Only 9,8% mentioned that they were emotionally touched by it. Some passers-by specified what emotional

value it had (makes me happy, brings live, is funny and makes me laugh). There was a significant correlation between the type of format encountered and the emotional response, with tags leading people in a resistance modus more often. Murals, on the other hand, seem to be better able to emotionally touch people. There also seemed to be a relationship between aesthetic appreciation and what the creation does to people. Those who describe a work as 'beautiful' are more likely to be emotionally touched by it, while those indicating that a work is 'okay' or 'not very beautiful' often fell in the category 'not really touched by the work'. A total of 17,1% of the passers-by found meaning in the works discussed, particularly in the murals (47,6%). When asked about what specific meaning people saw, the responses were very diverse, but mostly linked to iconographic interpretations. Tags were generally perceived as meaningless.

### 3.1.2. *Structured observations:*

Overall, 89,2% of the passers-by did not seem to notice the works and this was consistent with the number of interviewees that mentioned that they did not pay attention to it (90,2%). Only 10,6% noticed the work, of which 0,3% talked about it with other passers-by. No-one stopped to watch it in more detail. The quick piece and the mural were noticed more often (20,2% and 11% respectively) compared to tags (3,1%) and the quick piece (2,3%). We also found a correlation between noticing a work and age, with seniors (17,8%) more alert for the creations than other age groups. Over 90% of the youngsters did not notice the works at all.

## 4 DISCUSSION

The most important things we learned from this pilot study is that aesthetic appreciation is linked to style, with murals and figurative throw-ups more appreciated by passers-by; that the most dominant reasons for why a street art creation was appealing were form, color and its positive contribution to the (often grey) public environment; that most people are positive towards illegal street art, under certain conditions, the most important one that it should not be done on private property and buildings with cultural value.

We found little evidence that the works sparked a particular interest in the casual passer-by or moved him/her into a discussion about the works. The most receptive populations appeared to be seniors, not youngsters. This suggests that overall, street art does not fully fulfil the public mission of stimulating critical dialogue, at least not spontaneously and not in the group with which the movement is strongly associated. Most people just wanted to be pleased by the works, not so much challenges by them. The findings also suggest that not all that is currently labelled as street art is perceived as such. Particularly the tags were not considered an act of art and were more easily associated with the term 'vandalism'.

There was a strong link between people's tolerance towards illegally placed street art and their perception of what the aesthetic value of the works is. This raises questions about what its actual role is and whether it is desirable to make what appears in the public sphere dependent on people's aesthetic appreciation? Should we sacrifice some of the critical, political or even inappropriate voices just because they lead to resistance? Should we distance these voices from the public domain, ban them to the so-called hidden spots in a city environment or throw up a series of walls where one can



legally express his/her creativity? What does this imply for the social-cultural value assigned to these works of street art?

So far, it remains unclear what street art exactly does on a social-cultural level other than 'making the environment more beautiful' or 'generating particular emotions'. Interaction with the words, both in terms of noticing them or speaking about them, were scarce. Those who were able to reflect on meaning mostly spoke about the objects on the creation (pre-iconographic level), with some also relating the different options to each other (iconographic level). This was more the case with murals than with other forms.

## 5 CONCLUSION

Linking our findings back to some of the policy perspectives outlined previously, we found modest support for the statement that not all types or forms of street art are equally appreciated, which might suggest that the public would have less trouble understanding why e.g. illegally placed name tags were removed, but might be less supportive for the removal of murals and quick pieces that do have an aesthetic value and nicely blend into the public environment. This suggests that the public would like to see some regulation about what enters the public domain. Our sample of works and settings was too small to generate firm conclusions about what sort of content might lead to resistance in the public and what the exact relationship is between aesthetic value and meaning of the creations.

Based on our speedy ethnography there is little reason to assume that street art works will move people into a critical reflection modus if this dialogue is not orchestrated by a professional, youth worker or other stakeholder with this particular goal in mind. We did notice though that people who moved into the iconographic level of searching for meaning brought a message that was somehow politically inspired, e.g. 'the world should be more colorful' or there is this 'collision of colors and diversity that somehow unites us in the world'. Do people have a low aesthetic and place-based appreciation and an intolerance towards illegal street art as suggested by the crime prevention perspective? No, not necessarily. This pattern is more outspoken for tags than for other forms of street art. Whether the work was legally or illegally placed did not seem to affect people much in their appreciation. Meaning on the other hand, or an attempt of an artist to invite people to think about meaning seemed to be well appreciated.

There might be value in bringing the different parties together: the citizens, the artists, the policy makers. It would at least help us to see the other's point of view. And who knows that, after such dialogue, we might be able to say that the whole debate on street art is polyphonic in nature, rather than aligned with a criminal prevention, social-cultural or economic perspective. Based on our findings we see no reason for a removal of all illegally placed works. McAuliffe has suggested to create particular places for street art artists, where they can legally work, without necessarily 'disturbing' the citizen with controversial messages [4]. Other authors plead for a policy where the street is "offered back as a collective good, where sense of belonging and dialogue restore it to a meaningful place." [5], where there is space for dialectal exchange that fuels forms of layered agency, not necessarily agencies in agreement.

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# SHADED LOVE: A PERSONAL NARRATIVE ON FADING NAIVETÉ AND AWAKENING CONSCIOUSNESS

Dr Marte Rinck de Boer<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>*School of Hospitality Management / School of Education,  
NHLStenden University of Applied Sciences, Leeuwarden (The Netherlands)*

## Abstract

Once, I embraced an innovation discourse ....

Being a lecturer in a constructivist higher education program, I had been sensitive to and appreciative of educational alternatives that challenged traditional forms of schooling. Therefore, being a mother, I welcomed a new 'learning community' as secondary school for my 12-year old son—he enrolled, I became a participative parent. Then, being a researcher, I gradually distanced myself from the discourse. In a mode 3 PhD research project [1], I conjoined with the 'learning community' teachers. Through "correspondence" ([2], p. 105) with teachers in a shared world of education, I became a wanderer and, unexpectedly, departed from this world. The research, resulting in perplexity and perception of paradox, estranged me also from my educational beliefs and from my own higher education practice. With the late sociologist Karl Mannheim's [3] theory on ideology and utopia mind sets, I recognised and could accept my sedentary naiveté and developed intellectual consciousness.

After the completion of the PhD, I encountered the consequences of a transformed perspective on my teaching practice: I had become a stranger in and to my own professional world—*as if* Cassandra.

In writing, I returned to my text. I took the thread of awakening intellectual consciousness and unravelled just as Homer's Penelope, the woven texture to make sense of my estrangement to be able to live with it. This paper presents a forgotten story of shaded love [4] and aims at a dialogue on an altered self in doing qualitative PhD research.

Keywords: correspondence, estrangement, nomadic consciousness

## 1 UNTOLD STORY

In 2010, after almost 23 years of teaching in higher education, I started a practitioner PhD in a specially designed 'post-experience PhD program' at the University of Humanistics in Utrecht. The reasons for my choice were twofold: first, I could take my own practical experiences as starting point for a critical and reflexive investigation; second, I would be freed from boundaries regarding disciplines and methodology to develop my understanding—and framing—of the issue [1]. Thus, this program placed me in a non-mainstream world of scholarship and offered opportunities for wonder and wander.

A thesis in this program would not follow a restrictive scientific standardised 5-chapter format. It needed to give space to reflective accounts presenting wonder and wander of the self, the researcher. Laurel Richardson's [5] approach to writing as a method of inquiry had inspired me. Her elaboration on blurring boundaries in regard to what is considered scientific and what is literary writing enabled me to connect my research with my own academic background in arts and

humanities (Geisteswissenschaften). Therefore, I started to write in my way and wove new insights on educational innovation, the altering of thoughts as well as the pain and emotions that went along into a meshwork, “a texture of threads’ ([6], p. 13), reflecting “an engagement with material, movement and objects [giving] a book the impression of being unfinished and in the process of becoming” ([4], p. 47).

The publication of my book and the defence felt like giving birth to a child. In the birth of the thesis, I had to let go the enriching research journey, now reified into a readable tangible object: a 250 pages account of transforming encounters summarised in an attractive title on a beautiful cover. I had to let go the inspiring conversations with supervisors, scholars and PhD peers to exchange understanding and struggles. I let go the readings and writing, and, finally, I let go my own pace—an essential nomadic way of life. I returned to my teaching practice, to my University of Applied Sciences. It had substantially facilitated the PhD in time and money to fulfil its performance indicator of 10% staff with doctorate degree by the year 2017—my achievement was registered in the annual year plan.

One year later, I started to feel exhausted—physically and mentally. In order to avoid a burn out, I took a (part-time) time out to explore what happened. In the recovery process, my coach asked me to reflect and to write my thoughts and feelings down. I enjoyed the peacefulness this writing brought me. Actually, it recalled those times that I sat in my room and transformed my field notes, thoughts, knowing and emotions in stories. How could I have forgotten about this? The writing remembered me of Richardson’s approach to write writing-stories to make sense of life occurrences:

Writing-stories .... Narratives that situate one’s own writing in other parts of one’s life such as disciplinary constraints, academic debates, departmental politics, social movements community structures research interest familial ties, and personal history. They offer critical reflexivity about the writing self in different contexts as a valuable creative analytic practice. They evoke new questions about the self and the subject; remind us that our work is grounded, contextual and rhizomatic; and demystify the research/writing process and help others to do the same. They can evoke deeper parts of the self, heal wounds, enhance the sense of the self – or even alter one’s sense of identity. ([5], p. 824)

In the writing, I returned to my thesis and unravelled the meshwork. I took the thread of awakening consciousness and rethought – said differently: I started a new weaving process. It reminded me of the myth of Penelope, who while waiting for Ulysses and protecting herself from intruders unravelled at night what she had woven during the day. Hannah Arendt [7][8] used the myth to illustrate natality that forms the heart of her philosophy on life: it is about having the chance to continuously rethink one’s own thoughts and conditions and having the chance to continuously start all over again.

The weaving had a clear starting point, but no point of arrival. It could lead me anywhere as long as I was able to make sense of my whereabouts to walk my path. This paper weaves pieces of text and thoughts from my thesis combined with new stories and theory, and narrates a new shaded love story.

## **2 HORA EST – IT IS THE TIME**

I wait on the threshold of the university’s senate room, my paranymphs – my eldest son and one of my sisters stand behind me. The highly learned opponents already entered the room, and are welcomed by honoured scholars looking down from their paintings’ frames – the room’s wall paper

so to speak. I feel the warmth, nerves and respect of my loved ones, friends and colleagues in the audience, impatiently waiting for the public defence of my thesis. They will witness the very last hour of my PhD journey - my arrival, my rite the passage, 5 years after embarkation on a research journey. We are given a sign to pass through the threshold of academia, we move, bow to the opponents and take our position.

For the very first time, I speak in public about my PhD research, its complexity and my transformation process. I feel vulnerable, uncertain, humble; my voice trembles. While reading my text out loud, I see, however, encouraging smiles and concentrated listeners. Gradually, my anxiety fades away and, with growing trust, I present my stories: a story told with three different voices: the idealistic mother, the shocked teacher, the critical reflective researcher; a story of an anthropological participant observation creating crucial encounters with innovating secondary education teachers; and finally, a Sherlock Holmes like story discovering the innovation roots in an ideological neoliberalist discourse misusing language and concepts from critical pedagogy.

The tension of perplexity about the findings, of a growing consciousness challenging former naiveté and of making sense of the research experience meanders through my speech and the defence. I argue that vital education needs idealistic utopian initiatives that challenge existing conditions and strive for real change—for transformation. Simultaneous, I emphasize the importance of integrating a critical inquisitive attitude integrating in pragmatic orientation in innovation initiatives, which goes beyond a traditional practitioner reflection. I state that especially in education those responsible for innovation and those that agree with proposals and new viewpoints should understand thoughts that drive innovation. This, so I state, is essential to think and act as an autonomous and conscious human being in any professional context. I am aware of the fact that I address an audience of teaching practitioners. I critically talk about our practice—in a soft tone and with kind words.

After 15 minutes, I formulate my last sentence: “often I was asked: how can you spend 5 years of your life on understanding and interpreting an educational innovation? I answered, only through ‘slow research’, through slow intellectual exploration of reality my consciousness could develop – at hindsight, the innovative school was just a motive for an unexpected enriching special journey”. In this sentence, the message in *Ithaka*, a poem from the Greek Poet Cavafy [9] recalling Ulysses return from Troy resounds:

Better if it lasts for years,  
so you are old by the time you reach the island,  
wealthy with all you have gained on the way,  
not expecting Ithaka to make you rich.  
Ithaka gave you the marvelous journey.

### **3 AS IF CASSANDRA**

After the defence and the festive moments, I first enjoy the return to the pragmatic down to earth ‘business as usual’ mode. After all the pressure of completing the thesis I appreciate the relatively relaxing time with my students and their bachelor dissertations, to my colleagues for whom I had so little attention over the last years. I am respectfully welcomed and paid compliments on the degree achieved with perseverance, in part-time and in a limited period of time. So, for a while, I am over the moon, till, however, clouds of ambiguity appear. Obviously, I am expected to re-adjust to the known rhythm and rituals of the teaching practice, I had left behind—I could not. In spite an entrepreneurial physical return, I had difficulty to re-enter a practice that felt like a cage. It turned out that there was no policy beyond the 10% target – it still had to be developed. Nevertheless, I was

impatient, and, with a utopian mind set [3], I moved on trying to find *cracks in rigidity*—this turned me into a mentally restless nomad—in situ—challenging the once self-evident points of reference, the rhythm and rituals. I found that the invested public money should be returned to society, thus to the teaching practice—to me this was an important matter of moral responsibility. In addition, the thesis had a relevant message and I felt the urge to feed it back into the organisation. Only reluctantly, I accepted the absence of policy and that I as one of the first staff members that completed a PhD faced a treacle organisation. Gradually, it impeded my functioning and well-being – my voice started to get lost. In my thesis final conclusions, I had anticipated that this could happen:

I wonder whether the [impact of this specific staff development policy] was considered at schools and universities of applied sciences as its employees started to conduct research, and to become more conscious of their circumstances. Teachers doing research do not only develop professionalism in the sense of professional competences; the research gives the opportunity to develop awareness. .... The interesting question for both the organisation and the professional would be 'What could be the added value of a cognisant pedagogue for the students and for the organisation?' ([4], p. 215)

As if Cassandra, the beautiful daughter of the Trojan King Priam, knowing about the fall of Troy, knowing about Agamemnon's being killed [10]. The myth tells that the god Apollo tries to seduce her with the desired gift of foresight. Yet, as she rejects his advances, his punishment decides her fate: nobody will believe her prophecies—in her knowing her voice and strength get lost. A mortal and a god encounter in shared interests: she wants to know and he wants her body. He gives her what she wants and now she sees what others cannot see or do not want to see: her unwelcome alarming prophecies. In her refusal—perhaps an attempt to challenge divine power games—added value of her awareness for the community, she loves and belonged to, is neglected. She finds herself back at the edge of the community, at the edge of life; nevertheless, this does not refrain her from foretelling—she continues till she is killed.

#### 4 ROOMS – ALTERED EYES

The research had unravelled woven realities and the book I had written and defended was a newly woven reality: my sentences had passed as the weft threads over and under the warp, gradually forming a different tapestry or texture reflecting encounters, thoughts, perception of paradox and transformation—“the material of life” ([6], p. 17). I found the thesis a nice place on a shelf in my study. For unclear reasons, I did not read it again: was I afraid of what I had written, of what I had experienced, of the paradox? Had I internalised what came to me through the mirror? I knew that there still were not tied-off threads. I knew the text asked for further wandering, but I wanted rest. Now—facing my lost voice—I took it from the shelf and opened it. The pages present movement and places to reflect—rooms.

##### *Room with a view*

*As I entered secondary education at the age of 12, my mother renovated my little sister's nursery and turned it into a study of my own. When I start my PhD project, I think such a study might be functional. This time, I furnish it myself—partly with second hand furniture which held interesting stories about other places, other times. I put photos of my loved ones on my desk, and buy a huge Clivia; the bookshelves fill with books on philosophy, research, complexity and education, innovation. Through the large windows, I see a Japanese maple tree—an Acer Palmatum. The colouring of its leaves throughout the seasons mirrors the development of my thoughts: rain, snow, and sun touched my mind. Moreover, the tree continuously reminds me of the world, my encounters with others and*

*otherness that shape my PhD research: a so-called learning community, a school for secondary education in my hometown, and its team members; at the university in Utrecht, where I find myself again in the role of a doctoral student; in my supervisor's study in Den Haag with nice cappuccino's and inspiring reflections and ideas; in restaurants in Paris where I enjoy the French language, nice food, and my French supervisor's patient attempts to have my voice integrated in the text. And after I return from other places, other rooms and other people; my study is my refuge for reflections on what I encounter outside its confines. In this space, I find silence; here, I can reflect on and continue the encounters. ([4], p. 12)*

I had forgotten about the room as a pasture that nourished after wandering—a continuous cyclic leaving behind and returning—and encounters with otherness.

#### *Island voices and silence*

*I rented a room in a hotel on a Dutch island. It was only a few weeks till Christmas, not yet high season. Both the hotel and the island were empty and silent. Although I was on my own, I was not alone: I had taken your voices with me—around 12 hours of taped talks. ... For days, I listened to a historical document about the future development of the learning community. I heard your voices and imagined how you were seated around a large table, figuring out who sat next to whom, who listened and who did the talking. I heard the sound of a coffee machine, of rattling cups placed on the table, of opening and closing doors, of laptops; of whispers, gossip and sighs.... Most of the time, I heard one dominating voice: it conducted your voices like a choir director. This management voice had decided the text that should be sung in unison. I felt uncomfortable because I missed your autonomous voices in your own future.*

*While listening to the voice that spoke and the voices not heard, I felt both sad and irritated. I had to move and started to walk around my room. I imagined that my body perhaps resonated your emotions and frustrations and acted in a way you could not—confined as you were around the table, in the text, and on the tape. I took a long stroll on the beach and enjoyed the stormy sea. The experience of freedom on the beach set itself apart from the lack of freedom in your voices in regard to student grouping, schedules, activities, examination requirements. Only when the table was split up into smaller work groups, and the tape recorders wandered with you, they recorded your protesting voices: anger and critique.*

*These tape recordings were a condensed illustration of what I had perceived during the year.*

...

*I walked for hours and enjoyed the island's silence, the cold and the wind. Gradually and hesitantly, I faced my disappointment. I had to accept that you were confined to your own efforts to maintain a pleasant learning environment; and I had to accept that you had lost its idealist and utopian points of departure. It was unbelievable to me that you had—perhaps reluctantly—accepted your return to the mainstream education culture; moreover, voluntarily or forced, that you had subordinated yourself to hierarchy. I shivered in this unexpected experience.*

*This shivering, however, was an utterance of recognition: I saw myself through your eyes. Sometimes, someone needs mirrors to understand one's own whereabouts. Being with you confronted me to similar mechanisms and consequences in my own professional practice. I cannot deny that I worked in self-evidence and consensus; within collective unconsciousness and unknown motives; with speechlessness and subordination influencing my pedagogical responsibility. I believe it is easier and more comfortable to ignore difficult issues and confrontations, and to remain on a level of pragmatic*

*orientation. Thus, I was placed in an unpleasant double bind: the experience no longer accepted my ignorance—I had to ‘leave’ a comfort zone; but the consequences of my consciousness gave me a hard time as well—and I did not really know what to do. Consequently, I had to reconsider my initial harsh feelings about you and consider your work and activities with mildness. ([4], 102 – 104)*

I read the text several times out loud to myself. The reading recalled the described feelings and saved the thesis’ significance from oblivion. It illuminated sources of painful estrangement from the teaching practice, but also a word of wisdom I had not taken into consideration: mildness.

## 5 SHADED LOVE

I sat in my supervisor’s study and explained why I felt quite miserable about my findings. With a kind, empathic smile he replied, *“This is what a PhD is about; now it is getting interesting because you got touched by your discoveries and entered a process of transformation. [The learning community] gives you a mirror”* ([4], p. 18). In the writing of the thesis I ‘exteriorized’ myself in the encounter with the other that created the perception of otherness despite sameness. In this sense, the writing as such was a method of inquiry, because it urged and enabled me to get personal [11] and to explore my worries, idealism and blind spots; my position in my professional context, my relationship with so far self-evident rhythms and rituals [1]. In the process of learning about and with the other, I started to discover myself anew and perhaps produced a “new self or alter-ego” ([1], p. 11)—a new professional identity. The French philosopher Michel Serres [12] poetically explains what happens and possibly what should happen when doing research, in the way I did,

Departure requires a rending that rips a part of the body from the part that still adheres to the shore where it was born, to the neighbourhood of its kinfolk, to the house and the village with its customary inhabitants, to the culture of its language and to the rigidity of habit. Whoever does not get moving learns nothing. Yes, depart, divide yourself into parts. (p. 7)

A voyager is alone. One must cross in order to know solitude, which is signalled by the disappearance of all reference points”. (p. 5)

My fatigue signalled perplexity—again—and the struggle to find a mode to adjust, to balance consciousness and practice. Mannheim [3] argued that feelings of discomfort reflecting incongruence with the social reality are a starting point for intellectual attention and enriching sense making of one’s whereabouts. I was unaware of where my PhD would lead me to—where it is still leading me to. But had this not been the beauty—significance—of the journey?

The post experience PhD program I followed called for a mode 3 knowledge creation in practitioner research in which the complexity of the social, the significance of normativity of the researched practice and the attentive and attuned researcher is at the heart of the work [1]. Unfortunately, this kind of conducting research and writing is uncommon in a world that embraces the knowledge economy and considers a regular mode 2 [13] knowledge PhD in practice based research as more relevant for its production of practical knowledge to solve problems, design change and support entrepreneurship [1]. Thus, a PhD thesis that becomes a mirror for self-reflection in engagement with the world “driven by serious considerations” and that “forces the author to rethink many things, and to re-examine and restate priorities” ([1], p. 11) is not consistent with the knowledge production expected in my teaching practice and organisation. The awakening consciousness not only gave a different perspective on my teaching practice and critical attitude towards its steering assumptions,



its ontological and epistemological points of view and its identification of self in society. The reading of and the writing about the thesis clarified that a gap between me and my teaching practice and organisation came into existence, as I choose to conduct the research in the critical post experience PhD program. The insights gained from the research reinforced the distancing movement. Yet, I returned and have to come to terms with the emerging circumstances.

What if I would start to cherish the *as if Cassandra* feeling – the call to engagement with the world but also to take a position at the edge, to remain a mild meandering wanderer who continues in writing—in correspondence with the other?

In past times, a traveller used to write letters to the people inhabiting the places left behind. The correspondence entailed movement through time and place. It not only comprised writing, sending, reading and waiting, but also gestures of a hand, an arm, an eye; and emotions in choice of words, in the handwriting, in traces left on the pages. In the waiting, time passed by; one thinks of possible answers, and perhaps reconsiders what was written. An invisible relation between people exists: through the letters, a reader and a writer engage in each other lives and move forward. Correspondence is like a meandering line without a fix starting point or end- the line simply emerges. ([4], p. 46)

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# GIRLS WITH A MIGRATION BACKGROUND IN ITALIAN SCHOOLS AND SOCIAL SERVICES. HOW PEDAGOGICAL RESEARCH CAN SUPPORT EDUCATIONAL CHALLENGES.

1

Giulia Pozzebon

<sup>1</sup>

*Departement of Human Sciences for Education, University of Milano-Bicocca (ITALY)*

## Abstract

If social inquiry should have a transformative goal on social reality, it is an even stronger requirement for critical education research related to disempowered groups in a specific social context, whose purpose is at the same time exploratory, emancipatory, technical and political. Among several emerging issues, two complex processes concern Italian pedagogues and practitioners interested in *intersectionality* and gender-based or ethnic differences: the growing multiculturalisation of territories goes hand in hand with a revamped wave of racism and xenophobia, while the rise of gender equality fails to reduce the still concerning level of sexual discrimination. A potentially-at-risk population are young women with a migration background, cast in the middle of this flexible situation of emancipation and discrimination. These women have to constantly re-affirm their multiple identities, juggling with different cultural expectations and racialized gender models. Given that education is a powerful opportunity against harassment and discrimination, Pedagogy – social, gender and intercultural pedagogy in particular - has both theoretical and practical responsibilities towards the upbringing of new generations and particularly that of those girls. These responsibilities variate from granting safety and justice in all sorts of educational services to exploring their patterns of life and taking them into account in order to plan educational interventions. This proposal comes from an ongoing doctoral research in Social Pedagogy, based on the interaction with 54 girls from various backgrounds and their teachers and educators in Italian high schools and educational services. The study aims to be transformative in a threefold way. First and foremost, towards the girls thanks to the election of the *focus group* as methodological tool, which can stimulate a better awareness around their gender and ethnic identity and more in general around their life choices, enhancing a better comprehension of the dynamics they are cast in and the formation of a sense of community. Secondly the study would provide professionals who are directly in contact with these girls with a better knowledge of this segment of population, in these days so strongly represented in educational services; furthermore, the study should provide the whole educational system with suggestions in order to improve educational planning and professionals' training. Finally, the study aims at creating a deeper awareness in Italian society towards a phenomenon that is still widely underestimated, giving voice and space to a potentially marginalized group and finally contributing to the promotion of respect for differences and for individual rights.

Keywords: Girls with a migration background, critical education research, Social Pedagogy, focus group.

## 1 INTRODUCTION

Girls with a migration background are a fascinating subject of inquiry. This subject has already been explored from different perspectives (psychological, sociological, anthropological and also pedagogical) and particularly in countries with a long history of migration. At the same time, the subject appear under-explored in Italian pedagogy and especially in the perspective of Social Pedagogy which explores social influence on patterns of life and society's educational dimensions [1]. Furthermore, Italian pedagogical research around migrant children focused mostly on school and didactic issues, considering boys and girls as a whole, without a gender gaze. Nevertheless, the presence of girls with a migration background is increasing in Italian society and consequentially in the intentional educational settings (schools and educational services). Their increasing presence pushes for a reflection around what it means to be at the same time “young”, “woman” and “with a migration background” in contemporary Italian society. As we will see, the combination of these 3 features can represent a risk for these girls' well-being and auto-determination, exposing them to harassment and discrimination. In addition, their very own life stories are complex: they are cast at the crossroad of developmental, generational, cultural and gender-based dynamics, which are interlaced and influence each other. Educational professionals can't ignore this complexity and traditional models of intervention appear inappropriate.

### 1.1 Educational challenges and pedagogical research responsibilities towards girls with a migration background

The challenges for educational professionals working with girls with a migration background are multiple. The first challenge is to assist each girl towards recognizing her potentially vulnerable situation [2], acknowledging the efforts and resources proper of their condition of mixed identities [3]; the second is a technical challenge, deepening the reflection around the dynamics these girls are involved in, and implementing a re-elaboration and reorganization of traditional models of intervention; finally, considering the promotion of equal opportunities and active citizenship as education purposes, the third challenge is represented by the social and ethic engagement to promote these girls' inclusion and participation and sensitize civil society. In this sense, education should take the lead in a desirable social change towards a most egalitarian and democratic society. Each educational challenge results into a clear responsibility for pedagogical research. Pedagogical research, in fact, is at the service of educational practice and takes action when this practice is in trouble. For pedagogical research, being ethic means being useful, and to “adhere to reality needs” [4]. If the need for social change is the starting point for social research, the need for a reflection around traditional educational praxis is the starting point for pedagogical research:

“The best research projects arise when action is blocked, when available knowledges aren't enough to face a specific question and a cognitive effort is needed to overtake the impasse” [5]

All these things considered, the stories of girls with a migration background require special attention from both practitioners and researchers in education. It seems necessary to enhance the reflection around their educational biographies, through the exploration of the educational system (both formal and informal) [1] and opportunities and difficulties concerning intentional education. A pedagogical

research took place addressing the relationship between girls with a migration background, their educational biographies and Italian educational services. In the following sections I will first provide an overview of Italian contemporary situation regarding girls with a migration background, showing why they can be considered a “potentially-at-risk” population; secondly, I will show the research design, explaining theoretical and methodological choices and finally I will present the results focusing on why this research can be considered supportive for current educational challenges.

## **2 CURRENT ITALIAN CONTEXT TOWARDS GIRLS WITH A MIGRATION BACKGROUND**

At the turn of the twenty-first century, Anthony Giddens used the word “runaway” to define the fleeting and evanescent nature of our contemporary world [6]. That definition totally fits Italian society, where many transformative processes are rapidly changing the social environment. Among them, this paper focuses on three pairs of processes, simultaneous and contradictory at the same time; they're particularly interesting to understand opportunities and difficulties faced by young women with a migration background in the current Italian context.

First of all, as part of the so-called “Mediterranean model of immigration” [7], Italy lived a massive migratory transition which transformed a little country of emigration into one of the most important receiving countries in Europe in less than one hundred years. Migration towards Italy began in the 1980es; those first migrants were predominantly temporary single workers, both male and female. At the dawn of the new millennium, foreign people living in the country were joined by their relatives, and this migrant population took a stable residence in the Peninsula. Recently, an increasing number of migrants — mostly refugees and asylum seekers — arrived from what is known as the Mediterranean Route of Migration. At the moment, immigrant population is strongly heterogeneous and represent around the 8% of population [8]. Multiculturalism turned to “daily” [9] in all national territory, although percentages sensibly differ between north and south and from city to country. At the same time, a revamped wave of racism and xenophobia is crossing the public discourse, sustained by political/ideological movements advocating a native “Italian” identity. This concerning new form of “modern” racism is deeply-rooted in the patterns of social crisis and insecurity [10]. Although those positions may appear anachronistic in a period defined as *The age of migration* [11], the “black wave” of ultra-nationalist and anti-immigration movements gain more and more consensus, in Italy as in Europe.

Secondly, despite decades of feminism and constant pronouncements that gender equality is one of the main goals of democratic society, Italy's score in gender gap index is still cause of concern. In the last report the country was ranked at the 82<sup>nd</sup> position over 144 countries analyzed, scoring just 0,69 points in the gender equality index. The worst scores referred to economic participation and opportunities and to political empowerment [12]. Women role in society has deeply changed in the past few decades, a revolution where women claimed for themselves the role of social subjects, obtaining access to places, activities and roles previously reserved to men. The traditional and hierarchical division between “male” and “female” tasks is now denied by increased rates of women education, work and participation in social life. A wider social and cultural change took place, together with important legislative reforms. Despite these positive trends, gender stereotypes and prejudices remain in public opinion to shape opportunities for women. These stereotypes are strengthened by parts of the mainstream media and by a familistic welfare system, still based on the model of a nuclear family composed by a breadwinner (man) and a caregiver (woman). In Italian contemporary society, new opportunities of development and auto-determination for girls and

women coexist with a high level of sexual discrimination and sexism and an alarming level of femicide and gender violence [13], [14].

Contemporary society offers multiple opportunities to boys and girls who have to design and build their *self-made biography* [15] in a context affected by individualization. This process is not always fair and positive: freedom flourish side by side with uncertainty and unpredictability. The coming of age of new generations is burdened by a *strong adulthood crisis* [16], where parents are no longer a model for their children: what was a successful choice just thirty years ago is now a failure in contemporary social environment. In this context, new opportunities of freedom and auto-determination are intertwined with fear and mistrust towards the future. Furthermore, youth unemployment is around 35% and there is a preference for unstable forms of employment that make access to adult life more and more difficult for young generations.

Girls with a migration background are in the middle of these complex dynamics: the adulthood crisis is more and more relevant in migrant families, where children have to face totally different challenges from those of their parents. Although gender stereotypes are weakened for native women, the strength of racialized gender norms [2] is undeniable in both the Italian society and ethnic communities. This fluctuating situation of emancipation and discrimination force girls with a migration background into constant re-affirmation of themselves as free subjects and active citizens, representing a risk for their well-being and auto-determination. [17]

### **3 RESEARCH PROJECT**

#### **3.1 Paradigm and philosophy**

With the premises I illustrated in parts 1 and 2, I elaborated the research project. The project is cast into the critical paradigm as described by Lincoln, Lynham and Guba [18] because of its transformative purposes. In fact, critical education research intention

“is not merely to give an account of society and behavior but to realize a society that is based on equality and democracy for all its members. Its purpose is not merely to understand situations and phenomena but to change them. In particular it seeks to emancipate the disempowered, to redress inequality and to promote individual freedom within democratic society [...] its intention is *transformative*: the purpose of critical education research is intensely practical and political, to bring about a more just, egalitarian society [...] For critical theorist, researchers can no longer claim neutrality and ideological and political innocence .” [19]

Another point of reference in this study is Intersectionality, both as a theoretical framework and as an analytical tool [20]. This perspective, born through the experience of black feminism in the second part of the XX century, expresses the dissatisfaction for social analyses that take into account just a single variable. Intersectionality sustains the need for a holistic understanding of human experience, considering each subject's multiple characteristics and their interconnections. Intersectional perspective assumes that

“social outcomes cannot be properly explained by investigating independent social categories – such as race, gender, and social class – and treating them as a stand-alone variable. [...] Intersectionality has been positioned as particularly useful for

understanding and explain the experiences of social categories of people who experience compound disadvantages” [21]

Furthermore, Intersectionality research stresses the focus on the links between individual biographies, collective experience of a group, and social history [22]. Personal experience can be a significant representation of social dynamics. Girls with a migration background are an emerging social subject in Italian society, cast in the middle of different power struggles; the analysis of their experience can help to understand some unreported aspects of contemporary social change. Race, gender and age are all taken into account as core features of these girls' experience of Italian society. Considering these girls as a single subject with a collective story to tell, allows us to study what it means to “grow up as Other” [23] in Italian society.

The study aims to answer the following research questions:

1. what are the characteristic of the educational system where the biographies of girls with a migration background are being developed?
2. what are the strengths and weaknesses of growing up as a young woman with a migration BG in contemporary Italian society?
3. what are the issues in schools and educational services towards this specific population?

### 3.2 Data collection

The study considered six schools and educational services (from now on referred simply as 'services') in the Italian region of Lombardy. In each service, one professional (teacher or educator) was chosen as contact person: she (all of them were women) acted in cooperation with the researcher to involve and motivate the girls in the study. These professionals played a key role not only by showing to the researcher the dynamics of each setting, but also by developing thoughts and reflections for a better understanding of the findings, as we will see later. In each service, the research focused on a group of 5 to 10 girls, aged 14 to 19, either born in Italy or arrived before the age of six. In total, the study involved 53 girls from families from 22 different countries. Some of these girls are Italian citizens, while others (although born in Italy) only are granted citizenship from their countries of origin and are considered “foreigners”. The tool chosen for the study is the focus group. It is a

“social research technique based on generation of data through discussion in a small group of people. The interaction between participants shows [...] how identities are continuously re-negotiated, more or less conflictive”. [24]

#### 3.2.1 *Why Focus Groups*

According with Kamberelis and Dimitriadis, focus groups particularly fit critical education research because they are multifunctional and prismatic, presenting three dimensions at the same time: pedagogical, political, and of inquiry.

“focus group research is a key site where pedagogy, politics and inquiry intersect and interanimate each other. [...] focus group afford researchers access to social interactional dynamics that produce particular memories, positions, ideologies, practices and desires among specific groups of people” [25]

The pedagogical function of focus groups, particularly analyzed by Paulo Freire in his *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* [26], recognizes the power of group settings in the process of conscientization of people. According to Freire people who reflect together around their situation can achieve higher levels of understanding the dynamics they're into. The political function, expressed in particular during the

second and the third waves of feminism with consciousness-raising groups of women, implies that people sharing experiences and emotions can unveil more “pressing” issues for dis-empowered groups and bring them to public spaces, enacting social change and redressing inequalities. Finally, the use of focus groups in social research dates back to the Merton and Lazarfield research on American soldiers in WW2; at the beginning, it was used as a secondary and less legitimate data collection tool with quantitative strategies. With the affirmation of the interpretative and post-positivist turn in methodological research, it became a valid research instrument in itself. I choose to use focus groups because the three functions exist and integrate each other simultaneously. Furthermore, focus groups in critical pedagogical research have been largely conceived as a “safe place”, where people

“could talk freely without being judged or questioned by people that did not understand them. The use of focus groups enabled the researcher to get ‘upfront and personal’ with the chosen participants and to persuade them to share their stories, especially if there was any hint of hesitation. [...]. In addition, the intention of the focus group was to provide an informal atmosphere that encouraged the participants to connect with and support each other during and after the telling of each of their stories. [17]

Also considering the young age of the participants and the possible awkwardness in talking about their personal experiences, the group setting appears more enjoyable than individual interviews [27]. It also allows the girls to confront and recognize themselves in each other similar experiences and identify as “part of a group”. Last but not least, social research can be strongly influenced by the unequal relations of power between researcher and participants as Intersectionality considers. In the case of this study, there was an asymmetry of age, ethnicity and, for some of the participants, class. In order to limit this influence, I choose to use focus groups because they “can facilitate the democratization of the research process, allowing participants more ownerships over it and promoting more dialogic interactions and the joint construction of more polyvocal texts” [25].

### 3.2.2 Structure of focus groups

Once the tool had been chosen, data collection started. During the research process I met seven groups of girls for three times, for a total of 21 focus groups. Every cycle of three meetings was conducted with the main goal of exploring the educational biography of the girls. As qualitative research suggests, data collection, analysis and interpretation was not organized in subsequent moments. Instead, a circular structure of research was used:

“qualitative data analysis is distinguished by its merging of analysis and interpretation and often by the merging of data collection with data analysis in an iterative, back and forth process” [19].

The structure presented here is the last version proposed:

<sup>st</sup>  
1 focus: THE PAST - After introducing herself to the group with a fake name, each girl was asked to retrace her educational history: by drawing a tree on a sheet of paper, she was asked to list places, events and persons that influenced her in becoming the girl she is now.

<sup>nd</sup>  
2 focus: THE PRESENT - In this phase, the girls were first asked to identify places that “teach them something” in their daily life. Afterwards, they had to list “advantages and disadvantages”, from their point of view, linked to “being a women and being a stranger in current Italian context”; finally, using printed cards from the game “Dixit”, the girls had to find a card representative of their situation.

<sup>rd</sup>  
3 focus: THE FUTURE - Through imagination and creativity, the girls were asked to act as an “adult version” of themselves, interacting as if they were in 2021, 2026, 2031 about their private and professional life. Finally, the girls provided a feedback from their experience, their feelings in talking with each other and their opinions about the issues discussed.



The choice to use visual materials in order to stimulate dialogue and reflection meant that girls were pushed forward to speak and offered a “fun” and not-judging moment [27]. Extra care was directed to keep the discussion “open” to suggestions coming from the participants, without censoring digressions from the focus track; this in order to allow the articulation of themes the girls may consider relevant but not previously identified by the researcher. For this reason, the meetings covered the most disparate issues, from daily life in class to relationship with the home country, from conflict with parents to dreams for the future, from work to marriage and adult life. Each focus group was audio recorded and then verbatim transcribed. The transcriptions were analyzed with the help of the Nvivo software, following the operational procedures of Grounded Theory: coding, classification and conceptualization [28].

### 3.2.3 *A last focus with professionals*

After the transcription of all focus groups, I organized one more focus group with the six contact persons, who were asked to share their opinion on the most controversial issues emerged. By doing so, the study can be considered “participative” because the professionals were directly involved in the process of construction of research results. This last focus group generated a lot of new questions but also relevant indications for educational interventions, based both in practice and theory.

## 4 RESULTS

### 4.1 Theoretical results

The theoretical results will be quickly presented here in order to make space for the transformative repercussions, more pertinent to this conference approach.

In response to research questions, the data analysis shows that:

- the educational system where girls with a migration background grow is transnational [29] and complex: it is placed not only in Italy and in the family's home country, but also in the virtual life. This new dimension plays a stronger influence on new generations, and, as such, technological tools became educational tools. Further relevant elements of this system are churches and religious institutions, where girls can reinforce their knowledge of their parents' culture;
- a significant obstacle in growing up as a woman and simultaneously a stranger in Italian society is the solitary dimension of some key developmental passages, and a troublesome role of mediation between the family and Italian institutions, as already identified by previous researches [30]; another obstacle is the permanence in both the Italian society and ethnic communities of racialized gender norms [2], source of discrimination and exclusion. These obstacles play in some cases a strengthening role, when they provide the girls further independence and autonomy and the development of a “third gaze”, which implies a more aware and free subjectivity;
- schools are indicated as fundamental places for girls' development and integration, and they often are the only intentional educational setting where the girls can meet Italian professionals. Sometimes, the girls reported of discrimination at school and from teachers and educators too. The fact that their biographies are *multisituated and transnational* represents an undeniable challenge for educational services and their traditional models of intervention: they have to reform in order to manage a new complexity and to grant and promote safety and justice.

### 4.2 Transformative repercussions

Concerning the transformative aims of the study, both the professionals and the girls reported interesting trends in their feedback. Professionals declared that their role in the constitution of the groups, the informal dialogues with the researcher and the participation to the final focus group

provided them with a firmer knowledge of this segment of population, and was an occasion for deepening their analysis. Most of them already work in relation to inclusion in their institutions, so they were expert on the theme, but often feel alone in their task. Thanks to this research they had the opportunity to relate to other colleagues sensitive to these issues. The lessons they learned will have positive effects on their workplace; furthermore, the study should enhance educational system in general, by reporting its findings in articles and conferences. It could provide suggestions for the improvement of educational planning and professionals' training.

But the main transformative repercussion of this study was identified in the girls themselves; each and every one of them told her personal story with enthusiasm, and pleasure. Most of them declared that they did not have any occasion of speaking about those issues and they felt lonely in confronting such difficult challenges. During the focus groups, they developed an increased awareness of their gender and ethnic identity and their life choices, further knowing the dynamics they find themselves in. The focus group was painted by the girls as a "safe place", where they could speak without fear of being judged and recognize their story in a "collective testimony" [31].

## 5 CONCLUSION

The paper shows how pedagogical research concerning potentially disempowered groups and their relationships with educational services cannot be unaware of educational challenges in contemporary society. In relation to the challenges as defined in section one, the study offers important findings and makes some controversial questions clearer; but what is more relevant is the transformation triggered by the research process itself: towards participants, through the focus group tool; towards professionals, making them part of the research process, and finally towards society in general: thanks to the dissemination of results it can support further awareness around this unreported phenomenon, it can give voice and space to a potentially marginalised group and finally contribute in the promotion of respect for differences and individual rights.

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## INTERPRETING VISUAL INFORMATION IN RESEARCH:

### TACIT KNOWLEDGE AND NOMADIC INQUIRY

Richard Siegesmund<sup>1</sup> and Kerry Freedman<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>*Northern Illinois University (UNITED STATES)*

<sup>2</sup>*Northern Illinois University (UNITED STATES)*

#### Abstract

A broad literature has developed around visual research methods in the social sciences; however weaknesses in this literature exist from an aesthetic arts-based perspective. The promise of visual research methods is their ability to move beyond semiotic discourse and to allow for the representation and analysis of tacit knowledge. Tacit knowledge is knowledge of more than words can say. Tacit knowledge is one of the aspects of images and forms that gives them their power to inform, seduce, and convince. In order to understand tacit visual knowledge, skills of viewing and meaning making, differences between taste and judgment, and the concept of an iconic store that supports expert opinion and exists within a community of shared understanding and agreement, must be addressed.

In visual culture research, the concepts of objectivity and subjectivity may be thought of as tied to language. When used in relation to qualitative visual research, notions of objectivity and subjectivity are complex theoretical constructs that may be understood as existing on a relational scale connected to tacit knowledge.

Artists and other visual culture creators set up parameters within which interpretation occurs, but they do not control the previous knowledge of viewers, the context of viewing, or the other cultural conditions that influence visual interpretation. As a result, like objectivity and subjectivity, validity and reliability may be discussed in terms of communities of agreement, which is the context and process by which visual culture is compared, judged, and valued.

Five questions can probe methodologies for appropriate use of the visual within any given study. First, does the methodology acknowledge the qualitative materiality of the visual, specifically that the visual provides more information than a semiotic text? Second, do these methods support interpretive analysis of visual data? Third, do the methods respond to issues of skill required to construct intentionally meaningful images? Fourth, do the methods acknowledge that images are constructed, yet enable access to researchers' intent? Fifth, do these methods support the construction of tacit knowledge by the researcher?

Key words: visual culture, visual methodologies, visual research, arts-based research, visual data analysis.

## 1 INTRODUCTION

As the field seeks to refine and improve the power of arts-based research and artistic research methods, clarifying the range of types and appropriate uses of visual information interpretation is extremely important. This paper focuses on the interpretation of visual information in research contexts and the use of this information in research methods. A broadly applicable body of literature has developed around visual research methods. However, the critical peculiarities of learning gained from the visual arts have not been addressed adequately. In this paper, we begin discussion of ways to address this weakness in the literature.

In order to provide a context for this discussion, we briefly introduce aspects of visual research methods and then discuss the need for greater attention to the complex conditions and interpretations of tacit knowledge gained from visual data. Simply put, tacit knowledge is more than words can say. Tacit knowledge is one of the aspects of images and forms that give them their power to inform, seduce, and convince. It may be related to Deleuze's notion of 'affect', which is pre-individual and connected to sensations that "actual socio-cultural situations occlude" [1].

In order to understand tacit visual knowledge, skills of viewing and meaning making, differences between taste and judgment, and the concept of an iconic store must be considered. Iconic store refers to the body of images humans store in memory. Humans have a vast memory capacity for images and experts store particularly high numbers of images related to their area of expertise, which are used as benchmarks for decision-making. These images support expert opinion, in part, because they exist within a community of shared consciousness and agreement. A collective tacit knowledge connects images across people through this common iconic store.

As Gillian Rose [2] points out, three sites of interpretation exist: the site of production, the site of image or object, and the site of "audiencing." The site of production has to do with the influence of the media and context within which the image or object has been made. These contexts have a great impact on the visual and will influence interpretation. For example, the type of camera, film, and processing used will influence the way a photograph looks. The creator's purposes, economic, and sociocultural contexts also influence the visual. The site of the image or object refers to its formal qualities. The site of audiencing refers the contexts and processes of viewing and meaning negotiation and construction, in part dependent upon previous experience. The complex ways of this site are particularly important here. As mentioned above, and as Rose points out, little work has been done on this aspect of visual methodologies.

## 2 THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN TACIT KNOWLEDGE AND NOMADIC INQUIRY

Rosi Braidotti (2011) claims that the nomadic "stresses the idea of embodiment and the embodied and embedded material structure of what we commonly call thinking" [3]. In particular, this embodiment captures the movement through space in the sequence of time. Continuing this idea of knowing as embodied movement, she further states that "knowing is accordingly something we perform, an activity through which we orient ourselves to our surroundings, not a detached state of awareness" [4,6].

Braidotti posits a *fluid sensibility* that "combines the accuracy of the cartographer with the hypersensitivity of the sensualist in apprehending the precise quality of assemblage of elements, like the shade of the light at dusk or the curve of the wind just before the rain falls." [3, 152] This ability to experientially apprehend the nuanced quality of detail without articulating this into semiotic thought is the core of what philosopher of science, Michael Polanyi (1967), called tacit knowledge [4].

Tacit knowledge is insight that is sensed but not immediately articulated, and in fact, may not be adequately put into words. While words are able to approach and evoke the tacit, they can also adumbrate and obscure it. In order to grasp the full resonance of the concept of the tacit, it is important to credit the work of the American Pragmatist philosopher John Dewey, who in two of his late books *Experience* and *Nature and Art as Experience* anticipated Polanyi's concept.

Thirty years before Polanyi, Dewey laid out the importance of nomadic tacit attentiveness to the conduct of inquiry. Although Dewey did not use the term, in *Experience* and *Nature*, he made the case that the world is not passively waiting to be discovered, but is in dynamic interaction with our embodied encounters as we move through the world. Through our material interactions with the world, new combinations of reality—that in turn affect future action—take shape. As Dewey said:

Only action, interaction, can change or remake objects. The analogy of the skilled artist still holds. His intelligence is a factor in forming new objects, which mark a fulfillment. But this is because intelligence is incarnate in overt action, using things as means to affect other things.[5, 158]

This intelligence of making through materiality—seeing with the eye and sensing with the hand—are moments of dwelling in a tacit dimension where one has a heightened sense of how visual and sensual materials come into relationship with each other in what philosopher Nelson Goodman called rightness of fit [6]. Things affect other things. However, these moments of coherence are not permanent. They are transitional and thus of a fundamentally different quality from semiotic tools and systems of categorization that fasten and sort meaning. In the tacit dimension knowledge works in a different way. As Dewey said of this alternative realm:

[K]nowledge is a memorandum of conditions of their appearance, concerned, that is, with sequences, co-existences, relations. Immediate things may be *pointed* to by words, but not described or defined. Description when it occurs is but a part of a circuitous method of pointing [5, 86].

Description does not and never can fully explain the tacit. Furthermore, words and numbers—those things that are known—can diminish the tacit, for the tacit is what lies beyond our grasp. The image is not a recording. It is not a depicting. It is a reaching. It is reaching for a potentiality --- a tacit dimension. This is a critical point made explicit by Polanyi: exploring the tacit is not a process of digging down below the surface; rather, it is extending inquiry out beyond our reach [7]. The tacit points to that-which-is-not-yet. It is the spark that sets off the imaginative quest. It initiates the nomadic.

Returning to Dewey's earlier thought, philosopher Peter Godfrey-Smith explained, "Meaning, for Dewey, consists in the total pattern of potentialities for interaction with human activity that an object has" [8, 80]. Visual objects do not simply record; their tacit knowledge projects us into the future. Meaning extends into all the iterations of what a visual image can become. Later in *Art as Experience*, Dewey called this energy that moves us into the future an "impulsion." Impulsion moves us to act, interact, and inscribe images into the world. Godfrey-Smith explained Dewey's concept of reality expressed in *Experience and Nature* as "we find the world in one condition and leave it in another" [8, 78].

In *Art as Experience*, Dewey came back to this idea of perception as an open, constant state of absorbing new information and recalibrating (what Braidotti later called *fluid sensibility*). He stated, "recognition is perception arrested" [9, 58]. For Dewey, once we succumb to the easy comfort of assigning names to nouns and numbers to quantity, we cease our perceptual explorations. Once classification begins, we stop being nomadic.

For Dewey, there is a clear social dimension to nomadic inquiry, however this task of a new becoming is more than recognizing social inequity and working toward solutions. Instead, it is an openness to a new materiality: what philosopher Jacques Rancière called a new distribution of the sensible [10]. Thus, the tacit dimension is not initially driven by social criticality; it is driven by perception and attention to qualitative nuance that can allow new redistributions of relationships to come into view. In this sense, the tacit dimension can provoke attention to social inequity, but inquiry does not begin by seeking attention to social inequity. Attention to materiality—what is tacitly present—is the concern.

How we get from what is known within our semiotic code to new understandings is the work of tacit knowledge. If all we do is duplicate the known and settle for the self-satisfaction of the mastery of known technique, we stagnate. This is a problem for the conduct of art and science. A lack of awareness and nurturing of tacit knowledge stagnates research. Should this happen, civil society becomes imperiled through both artistic and scientific ossification. Therefore, we need to develop research tools to reach and sustain tacit knowledge.

Working with visual images provides an immediate and accessible pathway for inquiry into the tacit dimension. Applying tacit knowledge and nomadic inquiry to the interpretation of visual images is a sound place to begin. In order to proceed towards this goal, in the next section, we discuss the relationship between image making, interpretation, and the construction of knowledge through imagery.

### **3 THE REALM OF VISUAL INTERPRETATION**

Researchers can best interpret visual information and reveal this tacit, visual knowledge in arts-based research through methods that enable visual-to-visual learning [11]. Visual-to-visual learning is the process by which tacit, visual knowledge is learned from a visual source and can be reproduced or applied to a visual act or production. For example, when people learn about an art style, the most efficient way to learn it is by viewing many examples of that style. Then, when they see a new example of that style, they are able to discern the visual qualities that characterize the style and categorize it as belonging to the style. Of course, styles of art can be described, but no amount of textual description will enable an efficient a learning experience.

Visual knowledge can also be revealed through visual-to-visual production. Another best practice for someone to demonstrate that they have learned to discern the visual qualities of a style is to reveal their learning by visually replicating that style. For centuries, apprentices and students learned how to make art in this manner. We do not emphasize this particular method in contemporary art education because we seek to help students develop their own styles. Generally, contemporary art educators use the first method of categorization to determine what students have learned about a particular style. However, research has different priorities and the fact that people have the capacity to learn how to replicate a style by studying its visual characteristics indicates that the visual-to-visual learning process is a powerful method of revealing visual knowledge.

As a result, the concepts of objectivity and subjectivity cannot apply as assessment criteria with regards to visual arts-based research. The process of visual-to-visual learning, and the necessary use of the visual to provide evidence of visual knowledge, reveals the interconnection between the object and the viewer's subjectivity.

The interpretation of visual information as data in research, particularly in regards to the visual arts, has been highly problematic. Concerns about the so-called "objective" visual source and "subjective" meaning have often prevented appropriate valuing of knowledge that accrues, which cannot be

articulated using typical qualitative and quantitative methods of analysis and reporting. This limits the possibilities of gaining and revealing insights into research questions that cannot be addressed through other means.

If we assume that visual-to-visual methods can succeed where text does not, and visual methods can be used to study a wide range of topics, then all researchers must be equipped to at least analyze visual methods. This will require a higher level of visual literacy than we can expect from the general population and means that researchers should be trained for this literacy. In terms of text, literacy means that one is both well-read and widely read. In the case of visual literacy, one must be familiar with major visual exemplars, such as influential works of fine or popular art, just as a well-read person is acquainted with major literary works. It also means that researchers need to be at least aware of ways to analyze the formal qualities of imagery through which viewers access the intentions of creators. Knowledge of these will both ensure that visual arts-based creations are of a quality that meaning can be discerned and that those creations can be assessed for quality by the professional community.

Visual interpretation is an open process, perhaps even more open than textual interpretation, resulting in knowledge being constructed by viewers. To limit the range of possible interpretations of their work, artists and other visual culture creators, such as curators, arts-based researchers, and so on, set up parameters within which interpretation occurs. Creators do this, for example, by using particular media and formal qualities and selecting contexts of viewing. However, creators cannot control the previous knowledge of viewers, and some contemporary artists use this unknown to the advantage of their work, to deliberately broaden interpretation. These artists are said to intentionally direct the audience to complete their work.

We would argue that an essential quality of visual arts-based research is that a researcher generally intends to inform and a researcher's presentation of visual research will be directed so as to enable viewers to access this intention. So, two responsibilities of arts-based researchers are: first, connect to viewers in the widest possible range so that any potential viewer will be informed by the research; and second, direct or educate viewers through a research presentation so that viewers understand the researcher's intentions.

## **4 CRITERIA FOR APPROPRIATE METHODS REQUIRING VISUAL INTERPRETATION**

Which visual arts-based methods will enable these? We present five questions to probe methodologies for appropriate use within any visual arts-based study:

### **4.1 Does the methodology acknowledge the qualitative materiality of the visual, specifically that the visual provides more information than a semiotic text?**

Visual images do more than capture and rearrange semiotic symbols and signs. The arts are generative and searching. In particular, does the visual image leave a record (an inscription) of a visceral encounter with raw materiality? A visual image is the result of interacting with apparatuses that make a cut into the empirical world [12]. A single lens camera, a video camera, a paintbrush, or scissors to make a collage are all apparatuses that allow certain kinds of material inscriptions to be recorded. These records are "sequences, co-existences, relations" [5] that are made through physical and social interactions in the world.



#### **4.2 Do these methods support interpretive analysis of visual data?**

We interpret the visual data by responding in both linguistic and visual forms of analysis. In either case, the analysis cannot say what the picture means. The analysis strives to point to the tacit knowledge in the picture, but the analysis can never provide a translation. The analysis while striving for the refinement of clarity is simultaneously an adumbration. How do the images intentionally direct the audience to complete their work?

#### **4.3 Third, do the methods respond to issues of skill required to construct intentionally meaningful images?**

The basic toolkits of the visual arts apply to the construction of visual images. Most individuals intuit this toolkit. However, if researchers seek to apply the visual to their inquiry, then good researchers learn to understand the visual as well as the literature and background of the tools they are using. This should be basic professional conduct for academics. Researchers who use the visual should be familiar with major historical and cultural visual exemplars.

#### **4.4 Do the methods acknowledge that images are constructed, yet enable access to researchers' intent?**

Data are made. There is no innocent eye. Babies know how to alter their behavior in front of a camera. Every image is an explicit or implicit co-conspiracy by both the person controlling the apparatus and the person being recorded. Visual images in research at a minimum need to acknowledge this fictive nature of image making. At best, finding ways to play with this problem could be important for reaching new levels of tacit knowledge beyond the expected.

#### **4.5 Do these methods support the construction of tacit knowledge by the researcher?**

Visual images are not a static record of an event. They are a provocation. They are, as Dewey claims, an impulsion into the future [9]. Tacit knowledge is a reaching out to the glimpse in the clearing. It is the impetus that impels us forward. How has the researcher used the tacit knowledge of the visual to drive the inquiry?

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# COMPOSITIONAL ETHNOGRAPHY: ENRICHING OUR UNDERSTANDING OF A CHANGING NEIGHBORHOOD THROUGH AN AESTHETICALLY INSPIRED APPROACH

Sara Coemans<sup>1</sup>, Joke Vandenabeele<sup>1</sup>, Karin Hannes<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> KU Leuven, Education, Culture and Society (BELGIUM)

<sup>2</sup> KU Leuven, Social Research Methodology Group (BELGIUM)

## Abstract

Academic interest in sensory research methods has been increasing over the last years, particularly in social sciences. In sensory research, attention is given to visual, auditory, tactile, gustative, olfactory,... dimensions of experience. It complements the almost exclusive reliance on watching, listening and writing in social sciences. Sensory research methods are mainly applied to study *place* and *place-making processes* and often involve walking in the sensory environment. As an emerging field of methodological interest, it creates possibilities for interdisciplinary collaborations, but it also involves many challenges, such as collecting and analyzing sensory research data. A particular challenge is to focus not only on the cognitive, abstract dimensions of place (e.g. memories, emotions, associations in relation to that place) but to include the -what is often forgotten- physical, concrete dimensions of place. In this paper, we introduce compositional ethnography as an aesthetic orientation to our physical surroundings that recognizes “*the existing but silenced poetry of the senses inherent to material life*”. We describe how we applied this ethnographical approach in a collaborative research project with art students to study a large-scale urban renewal project in a Belgian neighborhood, Leuven’s Vaartkom.

Keywords: sensory research methods; compositional ethnography, arts-based research

## 1 INTRODUCTION

Qualitative researchers have focused for a long time on the importance of social relationships in methodology. This is reflected in the frequent use of ‘methods as dialogue’. Oral data collection methods such as interviews were hereby regarded as the preferred medium for conversations between the reflexive researcher and the participants to articulate participants’ experiences. Simultaneously, the researcher’s positionality towards his or her participants and towards the research project was the focus of attention.

What often remains unacknowledged is the geographical dimension of methodology, or in other words the ‘place of method’. When place is mentioned in qualitative research projects, it is often limited to describing the location where the research work has taken place, for instance ‘in a rural neighborhood’, ‘in a small village’, ‘in an urban school’.

**specified.** As a result, participants' and researchers' experiences are disconnected from the materialities of the place under research.

More recently, and in relation to spatial and material turns across the social sciences, qualitative researchers (including geographers, sociologists and educational researchers) have searched for a more meaningful engagement with place. They have experimented with methodologies and "*methods that enable data collection and analyses that address place more explicitly*" **Invalid source specified.**

An example of a research approach wherein the agency of place is taken more seriously is sensory ethnography. This critical methodology foregrounds "*the multisensoriality of experience, perception, knowing and practice*" **Invalid source specified.** Doing sensory ethnography goes beyond the use of oral data collection methods. It implies the use of mobile, emplaced methods, such as walking (**Invalid source specified.,Invalid source specified.,Invalid source specified.,Invalid source specified.,Invalid source specified.**), which is in fact a sensory event: "*walking is an accomplishment of the whole body in motion, as much the work of the hands and lungs as of the feet*" **Invalid source specified..**

The walking method has been explored in different ways. It varies from informal conversations between researcher and participants during walks through the landscape, to structured walking tours, explicitly designed to elicit responses to predetermined places **Invalid source specified.** Where traditional oral data collection methods such as interviews can *provide information on abstract orientations to place through information on participants' thoughts, memories, and feelings as they relate to place*" **Invalid source specified.**, walking can bring into account an additional layer. Walking as a research method allows researchers and participants to focus more easily on physical aspects of the place under research that are triggered by what can be seen, touched, heard, smelled,... in the research environment. They can give "*more insight into the concrete aspects of place that may be affecting understandings and actions*" **Invalid source specified.** This makes the research encounter more situated and contextualised.

However, to undertake empirical research with an active orientation to place suggests more than a dialogue between research and participants, whether it is in- or outside the place of interest. It suggests "*the need to go beyond collecting data from and with human research participants on and in place, to also examining place itself in its social and material manifestations*" **Invalid source specified.** This implies including other actants (non-human actors) that influence place, for instance the landscape, weather, buildings and so on. Walking methods with an active orientation to place could then be conceived as what Anderson, Adey and Bevan refer to as 'polylogic' research methods **Invalid source specified.**

These 'polylogic' methods (Fig. 1) can include video go-alongs **Invalid source specified.** or photography walking tours **Invalid source specified.** in which walking is combined with filming or photographing, but they can also include sound walks **Invalid source specified.** or smell walks **Invalid source specified.** to give attention to other sensorial dimensions of experiences. Hence, moving towards art-based research practice is one way to extending the inquiry process from dialogue to polylogue, thereby stretching our cognitive understanding and attuning to the material and sensorial manifestations of place.

We argue that other than inviting people into a sensorial type of ethnography to explore the materialities of their living environment and reflect on these in terms of generating insight in concrete aspects of place, there is a way to create materiality out of these experiences, an aesthetic

type of materiality that can be considered an imaginary re-composition of that place. This process is what we call ‘compositional ethnography’.

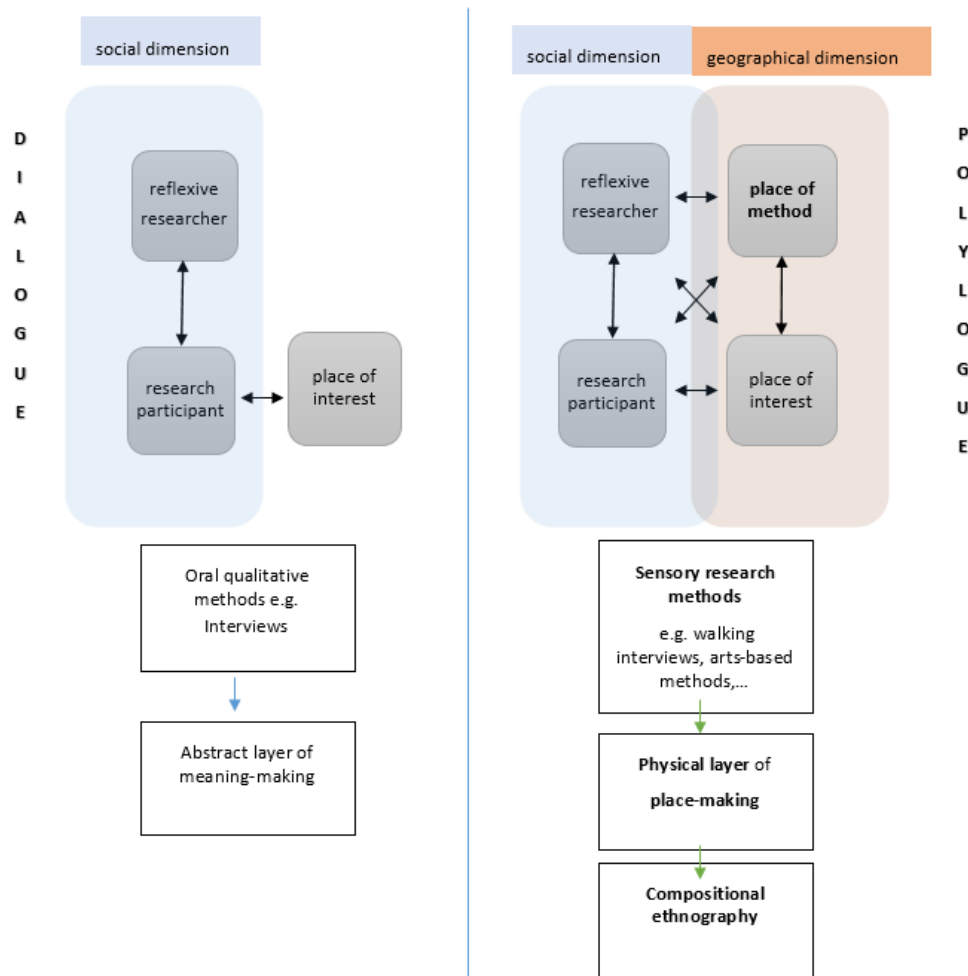


Fig. 1. Extended version of the model of Anderson, Adey & Bevan (2010)

## 2 MOVING FROM SENSORIAL TO COMPOSITIONAL ETHNOGRAPHY

In this paper, we introduce compositional ethnography as an aesthetic orientation to our physical surroundings that recognizes *“the existing but silenced poetry of the senses inherent to material life”* **Invalid source specified**. It includes both a composing and recomposing component. The (re)composing element is central for the methodology and denotes different phases of the research process. Firstly, it refers to composing place through walking and talking with research participants while focusing on the physical aspects of the sensory environment (through smells, sounds, views,...). Secondly, it refers to recomposing place through artistic creations that materialize research participants’ feelings and thoughts based upon the walks, to imaginatively gave shape to that place, using these materialities to create something new and to learn to sense different dimensions of the neighbourhood that had not been sensed before. These (re)compositions involve combining things, parts, elements from the sensory environment and transforming it into a research creation.

Working in a space of recomposition challenged our analytical toolbox. How could we prevent from falling into the same trap of trying to work with storylines behind the creation instead of trying to look first at the creations based upon their intrinsic qualities? We added a compositional lens in response to the creations. It involves analyzing the recompositions based on their aesthetic and physical qualities. Details on how to develop a compositional lens to materialized data are in the process of being published elsewhere.

In what follows, we illustrate how we applied this compositional ethnographical approach in a collaborative research project with a group of art students. Then, we describe what the findings based on a compositional analytical lens could look like.

## **2.1 The setting and sample**

The project was carried out in the Belgian neighborhood Vaartkom (also known as the 'Canal Bowl'), which is the old industrial site in the city of Leuven. For centuries it has served as the economic heart of the city. The local brewery Stella Artois and related activities played an important role in the development of the area. With the disappearance and relocation of the traditional industry at the end of the 20th century, the district lost its original function and became a desolate post-industrial area. Since 2007, the district is Belgium's largest urban renewal area, undergoing significant transformations. Consequently, both inhabitants and the material environment of this area are subject to profound changes. The old industrial site is being developed at a very quick pace which results in new residential and shopping complexes, social housing and the first CO<sub>2</sub>-negative residential area of Belgium **Invalid source specified**.. It is on its way to becoming a multifunctional urban development pole.

We invited four semi-professionally trained students studying at the art academy of the city of Leuven (SLAC) to participate in a multisensory trajectory. They all had several years of artistic training in one particular discipline (painting, photography, drawing,..) and were following a specialization course to further develop their own artistic vision.

## **2.2 The aim of the research**

The aim of the project was twofold. First, we wanted to develop an understanding of how the art students experienced this Belgian neighbourhood in transition. Second, we wanted to explore the methodological potential of moving from sensorial ethnography to compositional ethnography, by adding an aesthetic dimension to it. Leading questions were: How does a multisensory engagement with an environment help to create and illuminate a sense of place? What is the power of a compositional lens to analyse material dimensions of experiences?

# **3 PUTTING COMPOSITIONAL ETHNOGRAPHY TO WORK**

In what follows, we describe the different phases of the research project. We used a combined approach of walking, creating, analysing and disseminating

## **3.1 Stage 1: Setting up a collaboration between researchers and art students**

In October 2016, we presented our research line during a first meeting between KU Leuven researchers and SLAC/Academy. The art students from SLAC also presented their previous artistic work and interests and further contacts were made. After this initial meeting, our small group of researchers from educational and social sciences and art students met several times to further shape the collaborative project. Expectations regarding the project and towards each other were

explicated, points of resonance among the researchers and artists' point of view were found, and practical arrangements regarding the various phases of the process were made.

### 3.2 Stage 2: Walking – composing place

After the formation of the team, sensory go-along interviews (or walking interviews) were held with the artists to explore the changing neighborhood. Researchers and artists walked, talked and experienced the neighborhood together. A semi-structured interview guide was used during the walks that followed a predetermined route as can be seen in Fig. 2. The walking exercises encouraged sensory awareness. Attention was given to the material and atmospheric environment by asking what the artists saw, felt, touched, heard, smelled,... while walking through the area. The artists shared their initial impressions about the area with the researchers. The journeys were audio recorded and transcribed afterwards.

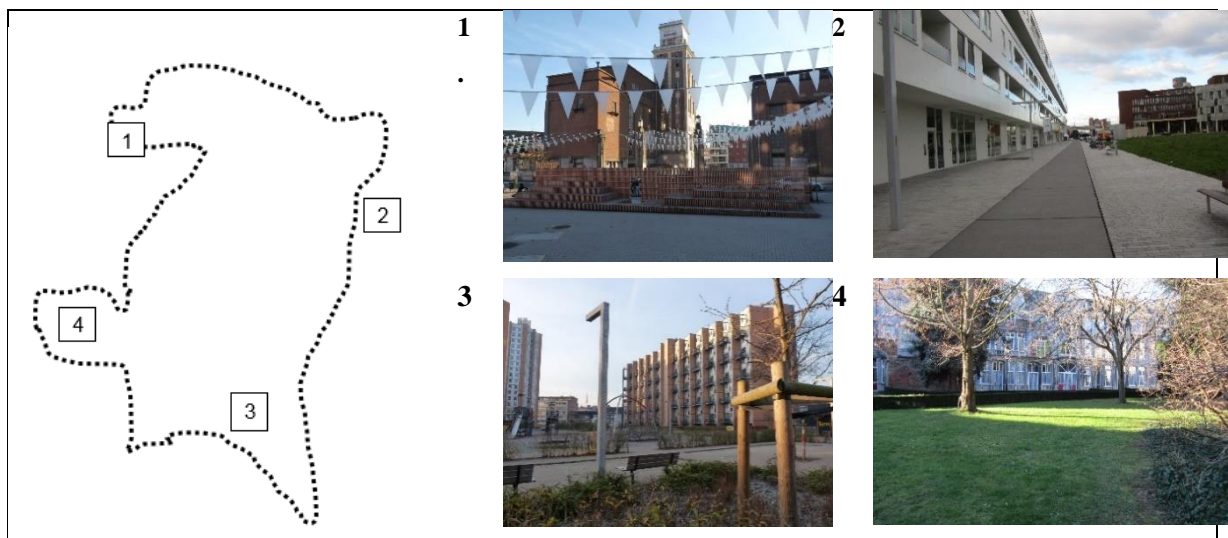


Fig. 2. The go-along route with some anchor points

### 3.3 Stage 3: Creating – recomposing place

To understand participants' sensory experiences, how they feel about space and place, it was deemed necessary to consider the importance of 'materialities'. Moulaert, Scheurs and Van Dyck **Invalid source specified**. argue that attention should be given to different modes of experience of space to understand how users feel about space and place. These different modes can be sensorimotor, tactile, visual or conceptual. These sensory, emplaced experiences are not always easy or necessary to express directly through words, but concerns the tacit, unspoken, non-verbal **Invalid source specified**.. Hence, in the next phase of the research process, the art students were invited to draw attention to their embodied experiences of these walks. This was done by drawing attention to some characteristic features of the changing environment such as particular smells, sounds or tactile sensations **Invalid source specified**.. Through the making of an art work, the art students thought in terms of compositions and qualities and constructed meaning about how they perceive this particular neighborhood. The creative work produced by the art students constituted an integral component of the research process by affording them time to engage and consider the research exercise, rather than having to produce an instant linguistic response. In order to make these creations, the participating art students went back to the locations several times. During these post walks, most of them took photographs to visually document what had been seen, touched, smelled, heard,... Some of them also made use of a weblog to post links, memos, background information, photos of the neighborhood and photos of their creations. The

(re)compositions made by the students can be considered as narratives of place experiences and imaginations of place, narratives that are not necessarily verbal but that can *“take many forms, depending on the individuals involved and the contexts they derive from”* **Invalid source specified.** Depending on the students artistic background, several visual creations were made, including photographic work, art installations made out of upcycled materials, paintings and drawings.

### 3.4 Stage 4: Compositional analysis

In the fourth stage of the research process we systematically analyzed the research materials gathered in the previous phases. It consisted of a diverse ‘gathering’ or ‘composing’ **Invalid source specified.** of different knowledges about the place: on the one hand the written interview transcripts, sound files and visual materials (photographs made by one of the researchers) from the walking stage and on the other hand installations and visual art works made by the involved students in the creation stage. The gathering of the materials was followed up by a collaborative reading and meaning-making process of the created art works. In addition to the verbal accounts of the sensory experiences, we hoped that the art works could give us insight into non-verbal and tacit knowledge and could be regarded as *“evocative of the sensoriality, and thus of the embodied, emplaced ways of knowing, that formed part of the research encounter”* **Invalid source specified.** This collaborative process consisted of discussion rounds between the participating artists - that presented their art works to each other and searched for commonalities and differences - and the researchers (Fig. 3).



Fig. 3. Group discussion

It also consisted of individual interviews with every art student. A compositional analytic lens was used as the point of departure for these individual interviews; an analytical approach that accounts for and attends to the senses. Box 1 contains an example of how to put a compositional analytical lens to work. It is based on the work of Christiane, one of the SLAC participants. Christiane started this stage with taking photographs of the neighborhood. She made visual images of locations that caught her attention whilst walking. Afterwards, she went back to these particular locations several times. What followed was a tactile exploration of the changing neighborhood and the objects and materials she encountered during the walks. At several locations, she collected found objects and materials. They were transformed into an art installation (Fig. 4). The installation can be perceived as an imaginary walk and recomposition of place: *“It is not the reality, but the reality imagined”* (Christiane). It consists of several creations that can be linked to particular locations she photographed: *“Depending on the location I made something out of the banal elements from that location where people normally do not pay attention to”* (Christiane).





Fig. 4. Christiane's installation (exhibition in STUK, Leuven)

All the materials she used came from the neighborhood, they include found objects for example rubbish such as ropes and cans that were left behind by people and organic materials such as stones, leaves and wooden branches. With these materials she wanted to create something new: *"I'm going to extract elements, isolate, recover, rearrange, label, organize. The elements are removed from their environment and placed in a different context and as a result they get a new order"* (Christiane).

She also used photographs. To create this installation, Christiane designed 'visual image pairs' **Invalid source specified..** These pairs are composed of two images: the initial photograph taken at a specific location (the left picture as illustrated in box 1) and the photographs of her creation inspired by that particular location (the right picture as illustrated in box 1). They are joined to one another to construct an argumentation based on her sensorial experiences.

#### Box 1. An illustrated example



In this first visual image pair, the photograph at the right (the creation) has a good figure-ground relationship. The most important aspect of the picture is clearly recognizable placed in the center of the photograph. The size of the figure and its contrast with the black background increases its recognizability **Invalid source specified..** The photograph of the initial location at the left and the picture of the creation at the right are clearly connected to each other. This becomes obvious by the use of picture elements that are similar to one another in shape and color. The figure in the second picture consists of a bundle of wooden branches. It has the same shape as the tree standing at the foreground in the left picture. The wooden branches are kept firmly

together by a blue rope. The color of this rope is important for two reasons. First of all, in her overall installation she worked with a variety of colors to create a new order. Every material she re-used was labeled with a particular color and clustered together based on these particular colors. Wood was labelled as blue in the installation. Second, the color blue is chosen for a specific reason. It connects the creation with her original location. The color blue is also visible in the first photograph of the investigated place, where a blue bicycle is visible at the front. Moreover, the table-cloth in the second picture does not only have the same blue color as the rope, there is also a similarity with the ground portrayed in the first picture: both have a clear pattern: *“I used this table-cloth because of its chaotic print that resembles the texture of the stones visible in the first picture”* (Christiane).

For Christiane, the left photograph resonates with her image of Leuven city: *“It’s so typical for Leuven, these bicycles that stand around that pole and that red building in the background... But also when I looked more closely to the trees I got the idea that these trees needed to be trimmed. So that’s what I wanted to portray in my creation. That’s why I used pruning wood that I found in the area.”* While working with these wooden branches and making this composition, it also reminded her of her childhood: *“In the past, people would never leave good branches like these laying on the streets. They would tie an iron wire around it. That was the stock for the firewood. To stir up the fire. So when I came home with all those branches after my walk in the neighborhood I started to bundle them all together. For good old’s sake”* (Christiane).

### 3.5 Stage 5: Disseminating

It culminated in an exhibition at STUK (House for Dance, Image and Sound) from 17 to 28 May 2017 in the city of Leuven. A selection of 21 art works that were made in the context of a broader KULeuven-SLAC project **Invalid source specified**, and based on the research collaborations between several art students and researchers were displayed at this event. This included four art works named ‘Si(gh)tes of necessary trouble’, that were made in the context of this particular study. Afterwards, these four works of art were displayed in the Library of Social Sciences (KU Leuven). This exhibition took place from 6 to 13 June 2017 (Fig. 5)

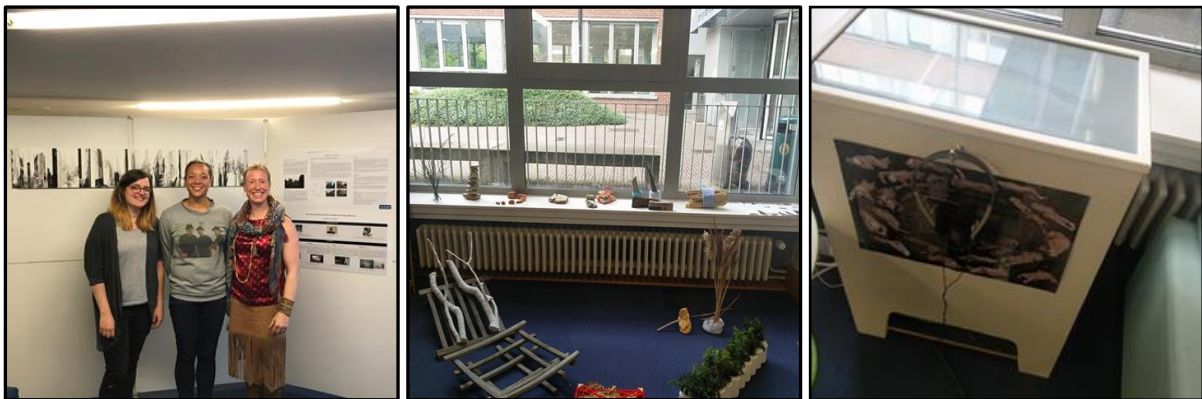


Fig. 5. Exhibition in the Library of Social Sciences

## 4 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUDING REMARKS

In this paper, we presented compositional ethnography as an interesting methodology to explore place-making processes. We argued that place can be more than just the location of a research, it has a material right of existence. The material, intrinsic qualities of the environment can have a more central place in the research, in addition to a focus on the researcher’s reflexivity and on the dialogues that take place between researcher and participants. The proposed methodology to give more agency to place consisted of a combined approach of walking, creating, analyzing and

disseminating. Compositions and re-compositions of place were created in various stages of the research process. Place compositions were made through a focus on physical aspects of the sensory environment as the starting point for conversations during walk-alongs in the neighborhood. Place was then recomposed and transformed into a research creation by the participants themselves. These re-compositions of place can reverse traditional claims of science that are concerned with what is, rather than what ought to be **Invalid source specified..** These re-compositions address issues of value. It is about the future that these participants value and how they imaginatively gave shape to that place under research. The recompositions created by the artists /composers after the walk-alongs became a kind of performance. The emphasis was not on producing an absolutely 'truthful' account (representation) of their sensorial experiences during the walk, but a presentation of their experiences, impressions and imaginations. Rather than a fixed representation, each of the art students' creations was part of *"an on-going process, an improvisation, a response to a context inherent in the relations among people, places, materials and activities"* **Invalid source specified..**

In this paper, we provided only a snapshot of our findings related to applying the compositional lens that we have developed. In the coming year we plan to provide rich worked examples on both how to use the lens and information about what sort of extra layers of insights it reveals in ethnographic research.

This explorative project can be regarded as a search for the value of integrative methods; as a concrete attempt to explore how qualitative researchers and artists can work together in a research context to bring into account different layers of understanding and new ways of engaging with our research environment, *"whether these are verbal, pictorial, gestural or affective"* **Invalid source specified..**

We believe that artists can change the way we look at social science reality and can help qualitative researchers to see interesting ways of looking at reality, and looking at place-making processes in particular. Artists can show us new ways to recognize compositions and aesthetic qualities, so we can express ourselves and analyze the world around us through the recognition of relationships of qualities. Attending to qualities can reorder our narrative experience of space and time. And maybe in the long run, cross-fertilization between artistic and scientific research practices can lead to a change in the research and education culture of the university. Perhaps it can even lead to the development of another type of university that takes into account that there are many ways to understand the world: cognitive, pragmatic, empirical, sensual, emotive, associative, intuitive **Invalid source specified..**

## 5 ACKNOWLEDGMENT

We would like to thank all the participating art students (Christiane Aerts, Monik Myle, Patrick De Nys, Annemie Moriau) for their enthusiastic involvement throughout the research process and sociology student Tamara Lodder for her assistance in the project. We would also like to thank the organizers of the PiLoT1-project for giving us the opportunity to collaborate with SLAC-students. Special thanks to the people from the Library of Social Sciences to provide a platform for sharing our research with a broader audience.

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# **ATTUNING TO THE PAST WHILE AGING OUT OF CARE – A METASYNTHESIS**

**Ole Steen Kristensen**

Department of Psychology and Behavioural Sciences,  
*Aarhus University, Denmark*

## **Abstract**

The transition from care to independent life is difficult for former foster care youth. The experience of aging out of care may be troublesome and accentuate problems already experienced. The youth face a lot of setbacks and rejections during the transition, resulting in a high risk of unemployment and a low educational level. This is referred to as disappointing and/or an attainment gap. There is, however, still a lack of knowledge as to what creates these disappointing results and how the youth may overcome influences of their foster care history and their experiences while in care. Thesaurus, free-text terms and broad text terms formed the basis for a broad search. Systematic searches of PsycInfo and Social Science Citation Index were undertaken, and relevant studies were identified. Strict criteria were used and the studies were evaluated by using the “Framework for assessing qualitative evaluations”. The selected studies were coded in NVivo and the following themes were identified and described: First, the obstacles were identified: placement instability, negative experiences in care and school, stigma and lack of vocational guidance. Second, the transition may evoke ambivalent feelings and accentuate the experience of the past and of social ties. Third, the struggle for an independent life, dreams and aspirations are mixed with negative feelings and beliefs that may occupy their minds and turn the balance between thinking about the future and living in the moment towards the latter. Ambivalence and disruptions are more common than persistence and goal setting. The results could be useful in improving the transitional services in an attempt to help former foster care youth to deal with their troublesome foster care history.

Keywords: transition, leaving care, metasynthesis.

## **1 INTRODUCTION**

The experience of aging out of care may be troublesome and makes it difficult for former foster youth to adjust to new demands and activities during the transition. Transitions are broadly defined as changes that an individual is faced with, and the individual will then need to organize activities in a new way [1]. For former foster youth this transition is accelerated [2], meaning that former foster care youth have to learn the same skills as other youth, only faster and without any support.

Much is known about care leavers in transition. As adults, care leavers are at high risk of unemployment and low educational level, which in turn may result in an increased risk of psychosocial and social problems in adulthood [e.g., 3, 4, 5, for a review see 6]. The outcome of transition in terms of health, risk behavior, work, crime and education may depend on placement instability, family dysfunction, and emotional and behavioral problems (For reviews see 7, 8, 9, 10,

11]. These results are referred to as disappointing [12, 13] or as an attainment gap [14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 11]. The results also attract a lot of attention, and efforts to close the gap are of high priority to the authorities.

There is still a lack of knowledge of what creates these disappointing results, how young people tackle challenges during the transition and how the transition can be facilitated. The group of youth leaving care is very heterogeneous [19, 20], and adolescents' beliefs about the transition vary, even under different circumstances and at different times of their lives. The youth have to navigate between different institutional pathways. This heterogeneity increases the need to understand the adversity that the young people meet and bring with them. The diversity is well recognized in the research literature. By virtue of the heterogeneity, positive as well as negative stories about the transition can be found. Problems once encountered in childhood may be accentuated [1] or may develop as a cascade and activate other kinds of social and psychological problems [21, 22, 23, 24].

Social support seems to play a major role and the youth's own stories are a mixture of support from and anger towards their families [20]. Some emphasize [7, 25] that social support and ties to a local community are essential for the well-performed transition. In a meta-synthesis, it was found that social support is crucial for the ease of the transition [25]. The youth face plenty of new tasks and the relationship to others may be the reference point that makes it easier to cope with the transition. The youth fight for social support in a situation where former negative experiences are combined in a movement towards acquisition of new skills. In a narrative review, [7] found that wrong timing of the transition may interrupt the process of synchronizing the youth and the social institutions on their way. A broad range of transition programs has been developed worldwide [26]. Considering the fact that former foster youth have experienced setbacks and rejections during the transition, the question is how life during the transition is attuned to their issues, meaning bringing their past in accord with their current life.

The purpose of this article is to synthesize qualitative studies of transition viewed from the perspective of young people and through this synthesis to identify how the present life of young people is characterized by accumulated memories of the past and fragmented ideas about the future.

## **2 META-SYNTHESIS**

The essence of qualitative research is an in-depth description of the complexity of an experience or a perspective in the context of the setting which the person is embedded in. Qualitative research often uses a variety of concepts, methods and designs, making any kind of generalization across different studies difficult. Meta-synthesis is a method by means of which it is possible to examine, compare and generalize the findings from several qualitative studies. The output from this process is a model of the transition, and this process makes the available knowledge accessible to practitioners.

Research on transition is mainly based on individual-level theorizing, meaning that the main focus is the child in institutional care, leaving the impression that the outcome is only a question of "summing-up" the individual results. Given the heterogeneity, it is a challenge to summarize the results. In 1988, Noblit & Hare [27] suggested metaphors and analogies as a synthesis method to translate qualitative studies and interpret the results. Since then, this synthesis method has been followed by quite a number of methods that prioritize different aspects of the synthesis process [28], for instance, test of key theoretical assumptions [29], aggregation of other researchers' concepts [30], and interpretive synthesis [31]. Common to them all is the view that meta-synthesis makes it possible to investigate, compare and generalize results from many qualitative studies. A meta-

synthesis builds to a greater extent, than does a review, on a stringent multi-phase method of collecting and analysing data; keeping transition studies in mind, this will be commented on below.

### 2.1.1 Identifying published papers

Studies of out-of-home placement are generally poorly indexed, hence search strategies (and, accordingly, meta-syntheses) are made difficult. A small-mesh net need be cast, afterwards the catch must first be preliminarily sorted and then studied more closely. Owing to the fact that qualitative literature is in general poorly indexed [31] and the literature on out-of-home placement is “messy” as well, relatively broad criteria have been applied with regard to identification of relevant publications. This required a multi-string search strategy.

The following data bases were searched: PsycInfo and Social Science Citation Index. Using thesaurus, free-text terms and broad text terms, a broad search took place, which was varied according to the facilities (i.e. keywords and applied limits) of the database in question. In addition, the snowball method was applied.

The search strategy was based on the following:

- population, young people in out-of-home placement and in the middle of transition<sup>1</sup>.
- transition, work or education<sup>2</sup>.
- limited to adolescence or young adulthood (between 13 and 29 years of age) and qualitative studies<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> *PsycInfo implementation: ("foster children" OR "foster care" OR "looked after" OR "looked-after" OR "out of home care" OR "out-of-home care" OR "out of home placement" OR "out-of-home placement" OR "residential care" OR "state care" OR "public care" OR "kinship care" OR "in care" OR "foster home" OR "independent living") OR (su("Child welfare" OR "foster children" OR "foster care" OR "child care" OR "Residential care institution" OR "Child abuse" OR "child neglect"))*

<sup>2</sup> *PsycInfo implementation: AND su("school to work transition" OR "educational attainment level" OR "vocational rehabilitation" OR "education" OR "employment" OR Housing OR intervention OR "Academic achievement" OR "Life course" OR "Life Stage Transition" OR "Life changes")*

<sup>3</sup> *PsycInfo implementation: AND age.exact("Young Adulthood (18-29 Yrs)" OR "Adolescence (13-17 Yrs)") AND qualitative*



No attempt has been made to differentiate between different types of placement.

This broad search criteria were chosen as they would likely make more hits than the ones intended.

Duplicates were excluded. The search resulted in 1,043 articles and books.

### *2.1.2 Inclusion and exclusion criteria*

All references found were sorted by means of Endnote, peripheral topics were sorted out. This broad search strategy was delimited, and the following topics were excluded: adoption, homelessness, youth crime, correctional institutions, excess weight, sexual problems, psychiatric hospitalization, elderly people, dementia, somatic problems (IPV, hepatitis, HIV), youth placed out of home because of handicap (autism, deafness, intellectual disabilities). Professionals' perspective on transition were excluded as were articles on supervision, therapy, grant proposals, policy analysis, technical papers on assessment, guides and manuals, statistical indicators. English articles were preferred.

The process resulted in 70 items, prepared for quality assessment.

### *2.1.3 Quality assessment*

Appraising qualitative research is still a relatively new topic on the research agenda. Although no consensus has been reached so far, it is common for the frameworks that they focus on documenting all aspects of the study method, including sampling, auditability, reflexivity, attention to contradictory data, and effective use of theory and prior knowledge. Several criteria has been developed in order to assess the quality of qualitative studies [32, 33, 34]. The most comprehensive framework comes from a study by Spencer [34], which emphasizes 16 different appraisal questions of an assessment process with additional quality indicators for each appraisal question.

These evaluation criteria are answers to questions such as: Does the study have a relevant and important research question? Has the background for this research question been described? Has the methodology been thoroughly accounted for? Does the study provide a convincing analysis of the findings and are they presented in a meaningful way? How useful are the findings in view of existing research?

All 70 items were screened and coded in NVivo and the quality of the qualitative studies was assessed. The first step was to identify and exclude studies that were either quantitative in nature or studies with very interesting but non-empirical reflections on an intervention strategy. Based on quality assessment, several studies were excluded due to lack of sampling strategy and lack of systematic analysis of data. Some articles used citation as an illustration of tendencies from quantitative studies or quantified the qualitative information while others summarized conversations with former foster youth without any documentation or citations. A few studies were interesting and yet rejected in this study because they used the voice of the child to challenge existing child care policy.

After open coding, 30 articles were selected for in-depth analysis.

The sample size varied between 3 and 88. All samples were convenience samples or purposive samples. Selection is often unclear, which may influence the findings.

## **3 DIMENSIONS IN THE LIVED EXPERIENCE OF FORMER FOSTER CARE ADULTS**

Being in transition means that the former foster youth are faced with new challenges while they are still concerned about the care history. Descriptive studies have demonstrated very carefully that

youth in transition are in a vulnerable situation and need support to cope with the new demands in the transition from dependence to independence. The reports also draw a picture of youth that believe there is a causal connection between their past, present and future, and this will be the focus in the following, which is divided into three parts:

- 1) first, obstacles that occupies the mind, e.g. disruption of previous plans is related to trauma experiences, desire to be successful was motivated by their past misfortunes, placement breakdowns led to poor grades and drop-out, family disorganization creates distraction, moving away from family was good for them
- 2) second, ambivalent feelings and conflicts that may accentuate problems in the past, e.g. stigma of being in care and frustration with the system create anger and a wish for involvement in decision-making, lack or loss of social support is tied to aging out, desire of control is related to decisions to leave the system,
- 3) third, the struggle for their dreams, hopes and ambitions, e.g. disruptions in relationships led to and influenced self-reliance, critical consciousness maintain a positive sense of self, motivation is linked to self-esteem and health, being in care does not affect chances of getting a job or an education

### *3.1.1 Obstacles – being in care occupies the mind*

Being in care seems to create a double ambiguity. First, many placements, breakdowns and reentry into placements as well as stigma and lack of confidence to ‘the system’ often question the meaning of being in care, creating a paradox between working autonomously and following the advice of professionals [35, 36, 37, 38, 39]. “The only person I could trust is myself and my head” [40].

Second, being in care means that the youth feel rejected from their family and friends, and this loss occupies their minds while in care [41, 39]. This has been understood as a survival strategy [35, 40, 42], trying to avoid stigmatization and a wish to hide their origin and struggling against stigma and fear of what the system will do [43]. They feel the label of “being in care” by professionals; as a child with problems. There is no attuning [36]. “My past will of course always be with me” [44].

The double ambiguity occupies their minds and disrupt a link between their actual family situation and their biological family [41]. Young people’s interaction with others during transition varies enormously, quantitatively as well as qualitatively. The youth have mixed experience with social support during transition. Some young people look for help from family and friends whereas others are comprehensively supported [43]. Some young people try to contact family and other young people do not [45]. The contradiction between ideal and real family creates ambiguity [41, 46]. The past and the placement is always under consideration, for some it ended in a positive mode, while others are still severely affected by negativity caused by their parents’ failure to provide a secure upbringing for them [45, 47, 48, 49, 50].

The youth experience many obstacles such as placement instability, negative care and school experiences, poor educational planning, lack of social support, stigma and lack of vocational guidance [51, 52], which in turn affect their aspirations and achievements in the educational system (cf. later). Quite a few young people identify with other former foster care youth [53]. Young people will often compare themselves with other young people, and their internalization of other people’s perspectives will often be strongly present, e.g., in the form of stigmatization.

Stability during transition seems to compensate for former instability in family and foster care. Opportunities for enhancing job performance will increase the youth’s sense of autonomy and may facilitate transition by means of agency, energy and hard work [54].

### *3.1.2 Ambivalent feelings and conflicts that may accentuate the past*

Former foster care youth are caught in the middle of different dilemmas or conflicts: first, the conflict between focusing on themselves and exploring possibilities in adult life versus maintaining their ties to their friends [55]. Secondly, the dilemma between their longing for family and models to avoid [52], and thirdly, the wish to develop autonomy and independence and make their own decisions versus being part of a welfare system [46, 56]. The youth are leaving childhood and not yet in adulthood, and the feeling of being in-between may evoke ambiguity and ambivalent feelings [55] while they are at the same time struggling for independence of the welfare system [35, 55].

Youth are concerned about housing, work, education, friends etc and at the same time they experience that the care system does not address their worries [45, 51]; this predicament seems to be the context for accentuating former experiences. Their drift for autonomy may be restricted by fewer opportunities than experienced by youth in general; for instance, past experiences interfere with their wish for self-determination. Being dependent of “the system” creates a feeling of lack of control [50] and they are compelled to leave the conflicts of the past and reflect on their own resourcefulness and their future [57]. In addition, inadequate relations, e.g., lack of social support, often implying that others do not interpret or understand their problems. Empirical evidence is found in the youth’s narratives about other people. For some young people it may be a good and necessary strategy to move away from family and break with the past while others are struggling to maintain life through an emerging agency in young adulthood [40, 44, 56, 58, 59].

The loss of social ties – the separation from family and friends – is accompanied by adversity, ambivalence and strong feelings towards others. Their relationship to the family may be seen as a distraction rather than a supporting relationship [55]. The relationship to other people involves strong feelings. Likewise, social support is a balance between loss of network and building new relations, between longing, belonging and permanence. Ambiguity creates anxiety-provoking situations [39] and transitions often involve setbacks and rejections, which in turn disconnect their knowledge about what to do in a challenging situation. The ambiguity may disconnect the link between situation and coping with the situation [57].

Doubt arises in young people who experience that adults do not show any interest in them [37]. Fear of failure and of not living up to expectations is what may make transition complicated. A common view in the literature is to look at the transition as a series of small steps towards autonomy, and the regulation of emotions and decisions in the process are affected by experiences and losses that come close to traumas [46].

On the other hand, however, transition is facilitated if adults show patience, build on the wishes of the young people and attune their reactions to the youth. A decisive factor for a well-performed transition is the ability to be independent of other people’s opinions, to make new friends, to be goal oriented and to accept help when necessary [37, 60].

Although many groups are involved in providing social support, the crucial aspect is the family, biological as well as foster family or professionals at the institutions. Children and youth in foster care work hard to attune to disappointments experienced in their biological family [60, 61, 62], the neglect they encountered or the lack of understanding they were met with. Whether or not the child returns to the family, reconciliation is essential.

### *3.1.3 The struggle for dreams, wishes and aspirations*

Having goals motivate young people and barriers for the future is an issue, which comes up frequently [50]. The youth are realistic with regard to balancing between living in the moment and

thinking about the future. Different coping strategies will influence their choice: “I try not to think about the future too much because that usually stresses me out” [50]. Young people’s inner dialogue [40] may be concerned with initiative, involvement and dreams about a career whereas the same positive capacities are in some young people mixed with negative emotions that prevail and lead to day-to-day planning.

Many young people wish to have a good career, their ideas are, however, limited or fragmented as to how this career is to be pursued [37, 40]. In general, the youth wish to become involved in decisions regarding own life and, in general, the youth are goal directed [60] and pursue their plans [50]. However, they may need assistance, supervision and sparring in order to make plans in the balance between social ties and pursuing plans [50, 51].

It is not unusual that former foster care youth find assistance to, but also resistance towards, fulfilling their aspirations in role models outside the systems of foster care or education [37, 51, 52, 63]. This kind of assistance may consist of encouraging the youth to carry on as well as finding a balance between their wish to control own life [35]. Goals arise as a contextual driving force [56] in the process between lived experiences and motivation.

#### **4 DISCUSSION**

Ambiguity, losses and placement instability seems to have a major impact on the ease of transition [8, 9, 20, 23, 39]. Former foster youth is a heterogeneous group; some are successful during the transition while others still have social or psychological problems. Studies in this synthesis seem to suggest that a successful transition depends on conducive circumstances that makes attuning to the past possible to the youth. The obstacles are placement instability, negative experiences in care and school, stigma and lack of vocational guidance. The transition may, secondly, evoke ambivalent feelings and accentuate the experience of the past and of social ties. The loss of social ties – exclusion from family and friends – is accompanied by adversity, ambivalence and strong feelings towards others. Social ties are about the balance between longing, belonging and permanence. The struggle for an independent life, dreams and aspirations are, thirdly, mixed with negative feelings and beliefs that may occupy their minds and turn the balance between thinking about the future and living in the moment towards the latter. Ambivalence and disruptions are more common than persistence and goal setting. During and after placement in foster care, certain patterns are established, which turn out to be hard to break - a risk trajectory. Out-of-home placement is associated with self-reinforcing processes, which will over time make it difficult to break the risk trajectory, that is, the trajectory from being excluded in childhood to being marginalized in adulthood. The transition is just one – albeit an important one – among many obstacles for children placed in out-of-home care.

Apparently, the transition is gradual and to the youth themselves the transition seems ambiguous. The transition process is understood as a complex, non-linear transaction between person and context [54]. The transition may be perceived as a process where the youth are left to themselves, but at the same time as a process where they discover a new meaning of life. For former foster care youth this may be a process in which they are – often randomly – supported by other people in the educational system or on the labour market. In an attempt to avoid accentuation of early problems, it is essential to provide conducive circumstances in which the youth are able to attune their beliefs to the current situation, for instance, circumstances such as contact on a regular basis and availability, belongingness, reciprocity and accept and acknowledgement [64]. In addition to these qualitative circumstances, it is necessary to align goals of the youth and of others, e.g. caregivers. Attempts at

improving the personal goals of the youth show that a close coaching process, during which the young person are taught how to set goals and make plans, does in fact make a difference [65, 66].

#### 4.1.1 Limitations

This metasynthesis reports the results from peer-reviewed articles. Many reports may, however, be published in different languages as local reports. These reports are not included. However, knowing some Danish and English reports these local reports do not change the conclusions.

The majority of transition studies were conducted after the millennium, resulting in a static picture of the transition. However, there is a temporal aspect of transition, meaning that the pattern of transition varies across economic fluctuation, the structure of the labour market and the resulting educational policy. So far, studies are mainly focusing on the youth and their transition. Studies of the larger context for the transition is rare and it could be interesting to elaborate further on the process of attuning to the past.

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# HOW TO (QUALITATIVELY) INVOLVE OLDER PEOPLE WITH DEMENTIA AND THEIR INFORMAL CARERS WITH A MIGRATION BACKGROUND IN RESEARCH? INSIGHTS FROM A LONGITUDINAL PROJECT IN BRUSSELS

Saloua Berdai-Chaoui<sup>1,3</sup>, Ann Claeys<sup>2,3</sup>, Liesbeth De Donder<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Erasmus University College Brussels, Department of Media, Management and Society (BELGIUM)

<sup>2</sup>Erasmus University College Brussels, Department of Health Care and Landscape Architecture, KC Brussels Integrated Care (BELGIUM)

<sup>3</sup>Vrije Universiteit Brussel, Department of Educational Sciences (BELGIUM)

## Abstract

Representation of vulnerable groups and ethnic cultural minorities is inadequate in scientific studies. Aiming to include older people with dementia and a migration background in longitudinal research requires careful preparation to succeed. Based on this hypothesis we investigated what this good preparation means. What are do's and don'ts in the recruitment and retention of these older people and their carers? Based on insights acquired from the literature, interviews with ten experts with experience in involving older persons with migration roots and their close environment in their (research) projects we formulate six points of attention and possible success factors in involving the intended target group. Findings demonstrated 6 key-areas for consideration when developing a research design for older migrants with dementia: 1) investing in sustainable relationships with the respondents, beyond the traditional researcher-respondent relation; 2) collaborating with community key-figures for the recruitment of respondents; 3) focus on qualitative research methods; 4) investing in transparent communication techniques; 5) 'ethnic matching' by recruiting bicultural, bilingual researchers; 6) reflection on researchers own societal position. There's a need for specific, customized and flexible research design.

Keywords: ethnic minorities, older people, inclusion, methodological approach, qualitative research.

## 1 INTRODUCTION

In 2017 the Flemish governmental Research Centre estimated that in Flanders, the Dutch-speaking region of Belgium, 6% of all persons aged 65 and older had a migration background [1]. The number is much higher in those cities and regions that hosted the majority of migrants who came to Belgium during the nineteen-sixties and seventies [1],[2]. Moreover, this share of older persons of diverse ethnic background will continue to grow in the future: by 2020, nearly half of the older people living in Brussels will have a migration background [1].

In 2016 the Flanders Government estimated that 122 000 persons in the region had dementia. This prevalence of dementia is expected to increase by 25% by 2030 [3]. Given the difficulty of diagnosing dementia in ethnic minority seniors, it remains a challenge to accurately estimate the prevalence of dementia amongst such groups [4]. Recent research by Parlevliet et al. [5] in the Netherlands using culturally sensitive diagnostic tools shows a higher prevalence of dementia among non-European older people. The prevalence of dementia among older people with a Moroccan background in the Netherlands was fourfold than among native-born older people. In addition to differences in

prevalence, also the experiences might differ: researching how ethnic minorities in Belgium face dementia experience and manage the condition is important because (even when the clinical manifestations of dementia may be similar across different countries), migration and cultural background can influence the experience of the condition [6].

With the research project DiversElderlyCare – funded by European funding for regional development - we want to fill some of the research gaps and answer the following questions: how do migrant older persons and their informal and professional caregivers experience the dementia caring process and how can we work towards more suitable dementia care for these migrant older people in Brussels. This project runs over five years (2016-2021) giving the opportunity to follow participants over several years. Inclusion of participants with migration background, including the older persons with dementia, during this research project is essential to answer the research questions. However, research has shown that involving ethnic minority older people in studies comes with methodological challenges, explaining the underrepresentation of these specific older persons in scientific studies [7],[8]. Based on these insights, we can also expect methodological challenges in including older migrants with dementia and their family caregivers in our study. Careful preparation of the methodological approach is needed to guarantee an inclusion and retention of older migrants with dementia and their family caregivers. This article will therefore give an overview of the lessons learned during our search process of the do's and don'ts in including our target population and how we incorporated these insights into our methodological approach.

## 2 METHODS

This study aims to answer the question of how to include migrant older persons with dementia and their family caregivers in a qualitative (longitudinal) study. What is a successful methodological approach and which pitfalls should be avoided? The study is built upon two methodological steps: first a narrative review of the existing literature, followed by qualitative, individual interviews with ten acknowledged experts, who have experience in the inclusion of vulnerable groups.

To conduct the literature review we used Web of Science, Medline, Cinahl, Science Direct and Psycinfo as search databases. Combinations of the following search terms were used: ethnic minorities, migrants, elderly, family caregivers, informal caregivers, dementia, (longitudinal) qualitative research, inclusion, recruitment and retention. A selection of the articles was made based on the relevance for our research purpose.

The second step was interviewing ten experts using qualitative, individual interviews. The experts were researchers or health care- or social care workers in Belgium (n=3) or in Europe (n=7). They were selected, based upon their research publications or from their well-known experience in working with vulnerable and hard-to-reach groups (older people, older migrants, family carers). The interviews had a duration ranging from 60 to 180 minutes and were conducted by two researchers. Minutes were taken during the interview. Minutes of both researchers were put together afterwards and were the basis of a thematic analysis [9].

The last step was the translation of the insights from the first two steps into a research methodological approach suitable to our research goals. The team of three researchers discussed the insights from the first two steps, in three meetings and developed a research action plan that was presented and discussed with experts: a panel of four experts in successful collaborating with ethnic

minorities in Brussels and the steering committee (n= 8) of the research project consisting of experts in the field of ageing, dementia, care and migration.

### 3 RESULTS

This study's aim was to determine what could be a successful approach to include older migrants with dementia and their family caregivers into a longitudinal qualitative study. Neither literature, nor the experts examples could answer the research question to a full extend. This means that the results are based upon experiences with either older people or family carers from ethnic minorities, either older people with dementia and within other study designs than merely longitudinal research. Based on the insights gained from the literature review and interviews we made an overview of successful factors that will be elaborated in the next sections.

#### 3.1 Insights from the literature review?

Longitudinal qualitative research has gained interest in the domain of the health sciences. Using such a research design is considered useful to better understand the nuances of experiencing a condition and providing care over time[10], [11]. Qualitative research provides - in general - different possible design approaches where the choice of approach is linked to the goals of the study[10], [11].

##### 3.1.1 *Inclusion of (families from) older persons with dementia*

In general, including older people in a longitudinal study involves a number of challenges [12] . The first question that can be posed is which research method is best suited. In this case, Bond and Corner [13] advise the use of qualitative research in which the perspective of the older person with dementia is mapped. Methods such as participatory observation for example are relevant when the objective is to study the complex interaction of diverse factors during the experience of dementia together with the participants. This inductive approach aims at a first-line representation of the experience of the person with dementia in which general assumptions about these target groups and their experience are challenged. According to Bond & Corner [13], this approach is relevant if no theoretical framework is set beforehand.

Second, working with people with dementia also requires several points of attention in the execution of the research. For instance, considering the social desirability of the answers is important. Developing a good relationship with the older person is also an important point for attention here to pinpoint the social desirability [13]. This is also important in case of a conversation with a 'proxy'. Including proxies, such as (informal) carers, can even become a primary source of data during phases of dementia where the older person has lost their ability to communicate[13], [14].

Third, estimating the number of older people well before hand with strategies for the 'drop outs' are required. Integrating strategies in the research design that minimise the loss of the recruited participants throughout the research is important [15]. These strategies concern conscious actions to make it as easy as possible for older people to participate, such as flexibility in follow-up times, developing a good relationship with the older person and their environment, continuation of the same researchers and creating a pleasant environment. In this way, Personen, Remes and Isola [16] state that a combination interview of the older person with dementia together with his/her carer can give a better atmosphere of trust to the participants. In addition, it is also important to look at the effect of 'missing values'. Specifically, a lot of data is lost that could have influenced the results of the

research. The collection of the reasons why older people withdraw can help when processing the results [17].

### *3.1.2 Inclusion of older persons with a migration background*

Several studies mention the difficulties of involving ethnic minorities in research. Areal and Gallagher-Thompson [18] already warned about the challenges connected with the recruitment and retention of older people with a migration background so that they are underrepresented in research. They argued for specific strategies to tackle these challenges. Based on the same motivation, Dreer et al. [19] argued for strategic planning in the recruitment and retention of older people with African American and by extension, with other roots. These strategies should take into account the multiple thresholds that hinder these older people and their environment from participating in studies: no trust in the researchers and health-related research, lack of cultural competencies and knowledge of native language in execution of the research, experience of racism, fear of being abused, lack of knowledge about the research process and fear or taboo around the research topic such as dementia [19], [20]. In addition, researchers can also be viewed as outsiders which causes a social disconnection [21], [22].

However, Zubair and Norris [23] warned for an essentialist research approach in studies including older persons in general and including ethnic minority older persons more specifically. Focusing on a single aspect of the older people like their poor health condition or their ethnic background is a problematic, one-dimensional approach [23]. This essentialist approach has a one-dimensional unrealistic image of a group of older people and expects them to fit into a classic research paradigm. According to Zubair and Norris [23], the current research criteria are not adjusted to the fieldwork reality. It is therefore necessary to question some assumptions and self-evidences within the research protocols and methods. It is a necessary step if we truly want to include ethnic minority older people on an equal way. They argue that lots of research protocols and methods, like the written informed consent, are based on a Western middleclass logic. Looking further to the informed consent as an example, also other authors like Mazaheri et al. [24] confirm the unsuitability of the written informed consent in a study involving older migrants, and use a recorded verbal consent instead. Their plea to broaden the more classic way of research with creative approaches as a way to include the underrepresented groups in research has also been supported by Swabrick [25].

### *3.1.3 Suggested successful approaches*

A first important success factor is building up and maintain trust within the intended communities, in different phases. Researchers such as Dreer et al, Hinton et al. and Romero et al. [19], [20], [26] invested step-by-step in the development of the relationship with the recruiters, such as key figures or organisations which reach those communities, subsequently to develop a relationship with the older person and their environment, such as their children. Children after all appeared to be determining the participation of older people in the research [20]. When it comes to key figures, self-organisations, or other community leaders, it is important that the cooperation takes place respectfully and in (genuine) partnership [19]. This means also listening and formulating answers to the needs of these partners. This seems to increase the credibility of the researchers.

Second, several studies [19], [20], [26] also demonstrate the success of 'ethnic matching'. In this approach bi-cultural and bilingual researchers are members of the research team and are matched according to a shared ethnicity or language with the research participants. This approach however is challenged by Zubair and Norris [23]. Ethnic matching can become problematic when ethnicity of the researcher and the subjects is presumed the only way to avoid distance between a researcher and an ethnic group. The presumed proximity due to a shared ethnicity can be challenged by the distance

resulting from other factors, like the social class that researchers represent. Another distance creating factor, they argued, is the use of the classic, not adapted research protocols and methods.

Third, active 'face-to-face', respectful communication is needed [19], [20], [26]. This communication is supplemented with translated and image-recognisable flyers, posters, ... . Being respectful means also being flexible as a researcher in collaboration with ethnic minority families. Adjusting to their reality is therefore a needed competence. In this approach, it is important that the older persons and their family understand the relevance and purpose of the research and can preferably also see a visible return in it. For example, in the study of Hinton et al. [20] families of the older person appreciated the information they acquired about dementia through the researchers which they would not otherwise have received. Dennis & Neese [21] also mention this 'reciprocity' as a success factor. The same study shows that ethnicity is not in itself a predictive factor. It is important for a researcher rather to know the historical and socio-economic context of the intended target group, the position of that group in society and what possible sensitivities must be taken into account. Furthermore, reflecting on the position of the researcher within this shared context is also necessary [21], [22].

### **3. 2 Insights from the expert interviews?**

The experts interviewed were either researchers or practitioners working in Belgium or Europe. They were selected based on the expertise known through the literature or reputation in the field in involving the ethnic minority older persons and/or carers of family members with dementia.

These participants stressed first the importance of involving key figures and reliable networks or people in the recruitment of these older people and their environment. Key figures are people with a good reputation and an influence within particular communities. They also have broad networks and know from experience what does and does not work within those networks. In addition, it is important to work locally and to involve networks where the intended target groups may be in the recruitment and retention of participants. Being introduced as a researcher by these reliable people or key figures is important. This increases the chance that older people and carers agree to participate in the research.

Second, making the 'win-win' of their participation in the research clear to the intended target group appeared from the interview as important. In their opinion, the researcher must not only propose their 'win', namely finding respondents to answer his/her research question, but must also include, communicate and guarantee the 'win' for the participants in the research. Many ethnic communities have become distrustful of questioners (researchers and others). This is based on bad experiences in which the communities were often questioned without being informed of the result of that questioning or in which the results of the research were too little shown as an added value for themselves or for their own community. This results in a sense of 'being abused' which makes people reluctant to answer more questions. This 'win' for the community may only lead to access within the communities if it is sincere, visible and responds to a genuine need within the community.

Third, the respondents stressed that trust is a point of attention throughout the research. The carers and older people must trust the researcher concerned. Therefore, investing in a sincere relationship of trust in the execution of the research is important and that starts from contacting the key figures that lead you to the intended target group.

All of the above implies constant attention to the mode of communication, which is a forth key recommendation the experts discussed. Tailoring the communication to the person in front of you is important. This implies attention to both non-verbal elements, such as posture and verbal elements in communication. For instance, a respondent suggested it is important not exclusively to use biomedical names for disorders, such as dementia, but to search for names used by the intended group, such as 'forgetting'. This increases the recognisability of the subject which reduces the distance in communication.

It also requires dealing with communication tools consciously and in a targeted way. Experts recommend using different types of tools simultaneously, each time with a different objective. For instance, leaving behind an official folder will legitimize your research and make you seem more reliable to the participants, but the information about it should preferably be given verbally.

## 4 DISCUSSION

This study is attempt to formulate an answer to the following question: how to include migrant older persons with dementia and their family caregivers in an qualitative (longitudinal) study. We did not find any research that could respond to this question to a full extend, but researchers' experiences in preforming dementia research on the one hand and research including ethnic minorities on the other hand provides valuable insights. Their experiences confirm that research including underrepresented target groups demands a careful preparation and execution. These suggested success factors will be included in our research. A phased action plan, in which flexibility is central and where evaluation of our methodological approach is included. These planned evaluations in the action plan gives us the opportunity to analyse our methodological approach and to adjust it to the experienced needs of that moment.

First, in terms of research design, we opt for a qualitative approach rather than a quantitative approach. In addition, based on the suggestions of the literature review we will supplement classical data collection methods such as interviews with an alternative creative approach such as participatory observations and collecting intermediate calls/texts/emails. In addition some aspects of standard research methodology are not included in our approach or will be adapted to the reality of the field. An example of this is the inclusion of an oral consent by the older person with dementia as a substitute for written informed consent.

It is also clear from both the literature as the interviews with experts that the communication approach in the study should be conducted in a thoughtful way. Good communication starts with a reflective, modest and open attitude [6], [22], [27]. Every researcher involved in our research project reflects on how his background, approach, ... can come across to the respondents and this during every step of the research. We also aim for a sincere and honest communication with the older migrants and their family caregivers about the research and the goal of the study. The researchers are clear about their role and what they can or cannot expect from them. Building a relationship of trust is therefore sincere and not something instrumental. We also aim to communicate sincerely about the win-win for the community, and to explicitly search for a win for the older person and his carers. The respondents are not seen merely as subjects in our research but they should experience short and long term benefits of our study and therefore should be seen as a partner in the research. Possible ideas are organizing information group sessions about dementia to the targeted community, or training social and health care professionals who work with our target group. In addition, this research should contribute to the improvement of care for the older people with a diverse background. This is a long term sincere goal of our research project. To realize this, we actively communicate about our, and valorize recommendations and examples of good practices to policy makers and the care sector.

The results indicate as well that in our communication strategy we have to pay explicit attention to the choice of verbal and non-verbal communication tools accessible information, where the different target groups could identify themselves in. Language bridging is also a point of attention [27] which is why we opt for multilingual researchers and communication tools. 'Ethnic matching' is a success factor that we carefully and critically approach. The research team is ethnically diverse but socio-economically homogeneous. Moreover we are also very keen on not to approach ourselves as a researcher from a particular ethnic background, and to approach the migrant older persons and their family caregivers in a one-dimensional way. We are aware of several, intersectional nuances [28] and take these into the reflections and the team discussions.

Final, collaboration with key figures within the various communities is also appeared to be essential. They open the door to the different communities. We could benefit from the trust that the families have in such key figures. Recommendation of a key figure makes us a trustworthy person to initiate a contact with. We want to further collaborate with the key figures during all phases of the study. Their critical feedback, from different perspectives, about our approach is an important added value for the research. This reflective and step-by-step approach will unlikely lead to the use of other (above-mentioned) methodological success factors. Because it is clear that in addition to traditional research skills, specific actions and skills are also required to conduct a research thriving to give a underrepresented group like the ethnic minorities a voice [29].

## 5 CONCLUSION

Both the experts interviewed as the literature emphasise that the involvement of older people with dementia of different origin and their environment requires a well-considered approach. Traditional research methods are inadequate to involve this population and to make their voice visible in the field of research. The results demonstrate a number of specific elements which research on older people with dementia, and with a migration background has to take into account: flexibility from the researchers and good listening abilities to listen carefully to those involved in our approach; investing in the trust and relationship with these target groups; building a relationship with the ethnic minority elders means also building a relationship with their gatekeepers: key figures and children of the older person with dementia. A relationship in trust is only sustainable when there is a transparent communication and partnership based on equal and a balanced 'win-win' on both sides. To achieve all these requirements researchers should have the time and resources to do so. To conclude, if we truly want to include underrepresented target groups into scientific research we should integrate tailored actions and move away from the 'one-size-fits-all' research approach.

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# EXPERIENCE OF LIVING WITH A HEREDITARY DISEASE: AT THE INTERSECTION OF ANTHROPOLOGY, BIOMEDICINE AND PHILOSOPHY

Insa, E<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>*Campus Docent Sant Joan de Déu, Fundació privada (SPAIN)*

## Abstract

Since the 1960s, there has been unprecedented research in the field of genetics in Western societies. This has led to discoveries of new genetic diseases, some of which are susceptible to hereditary transmission. From an anthropological point of view, the approximation of hereditary diseases to the cultural dimension has been carried out mostly from a hermeneutic paradigm. However, there are fewer studies on approaches from a phenomenological perspective, which addresses the experience of the disease. The objective of this study was to describe the ethical aspects of individuals with a hereditary disease. Specifically, the ethical aspects described by individuals diagnosed with a hereditary disease were analysed by investigating their embodied moralities, at times of ethical choice and moral breakdown, as well as the efforts made with respect to their sense of self according to their desires along the path to self-realization.

This is an ethnography based on a phenomenological theoretical-methodological perspective and the fieldwork was carried out in two Western societies, Barcelona and Los Angeles (California).

The results of this study provide evidence of how the body produces morality and ethics, and how these are put into practice in day-to-day life. (Dis)ability, symptoms, commitment to survival and stigma make people experience a remodeling of their moral personalities that can only be understood through the intersection of their historical, social and cultural determinants.

According to the complexity of this phenomenon, the present study may lie at the intersection of anthropology, biomedicine and philosophy, and the results may not fully fit into any of these disciplines.

Body, hereditary disease, morality, ethics, experience

## 1 INTRODUCTION

Thanks to biotechnological advances since the 1960s there has been unprecedented research related to the field of genetics and genetic diseases in Western societies. Most studies have been performed from a biomedical point of view leading to the identification of mutations and genetic diseases, some of which are susceptible to hereditary transmission. This phenomenon has also been investigated by other disciplines such as anthropology, from an interpretative perspective, or philosophy, from a phenomenological existentialist point of view. The reason for this lies in the fact that an individual diagnosed with a hereditary disease lives with physical symptoms and medical problems, and social and cultural experiences [1] and examines the meaning of life and what a good life is [2,3] when survival is in question [4].

The problem is that each discipline has approached the phenomenon from its own perspective, but daily life is not divided into disciplines or perspectives for a person with a hereditary disease. The difficulty is for the investigator who aims to study the experience of disease from a specific discipline. Considering the growing interest in understanding the experience, it is important to be aware of the limitations of the different disciplines and results which are situated at the intersection of these limits.

## **2 BACKGROUND**

The number of genetic and hereditary disorders and the proportion of people living with a chronic disease which may be transmitted to their descendents is on the rise. It is essential to know the experience of these subjects and their journey of transformation in times of health, disease and illness since it provides information for strategies used for living with the disease. In addition, this information allows healthcare professionals to provide patient-centered care [5,6], increase the quality of the treatment [7] and improve treatment effectiveness for good management of the healthcare systems [8].

Therefore, this study is aimed at three aspects of the above-mentioned experience: 1) the approach to the experience and position, 2) the elements making up the experience, and 3) the origin of the experience.

### **2.1 Approach to the experience and the position**

In the approach to the experience the paradigm chosen by the investigator is important to gain access to the experience and determine the theoretic and methodological positioning adopted. Phenomenology has contributed to how anthropologists consider the experience lived, the disease and cure, the suffering, morality, perception, creativity and intersubjectivity and has helped to reconfigure what it means to be human, have a body, suffer and cure as well as live among others [9].

The approach to the experience from phenomenology has often been made from first person humanism. Despite certain scepticism towards this approach, it allows anthropologists to choose among different positions [3]: those which insist on emphasising what it means to inhabit particular worlds and attempt to theoreticise these experiences in the first person [9] and those which prefer to situate that which is individual as a crucial aspect of experience. Douglass Hollan warned that the first-person position has been very useful for theorizing about how people have lived intersubjectively along their lives. However, it has been less useful for understanding how particular individuals are able to get along with these aspects, how they live with them or form them along their pathways [3]. Hollan developed the tradition of *person-centered ethnography*.

### **2.2 The elements of experience**

Another important aspect of the approach to experience is the elements of which it is composed. From a phenomenological position, experience is the basis of human existence since “we are born into the flow of palpable experience” [10]. This line includes thoughts, images, feeling, emotions, moods, sensations, perceptions, judgement etc. as well as the properties attributed to physical objects, bodies, people, animals, etc. Likewise, we participate in their constitution.

Considering that disease is “a body and existential experience” [11, 12], this study focuses on two elements which make up the experience of hereditary disease: 1) the conception of genes, the body, disease and inheritance in Western societies and interpretative frameworks, and 2) the conception of existence, reality and the process and awareness in relation to genetics.

### *2.2.1 The conception of genes, the body, disease and inheritance in Western societies and interpretative frameworks.*

One element considered to be relevant to the constitution of experience is the existence of interpretation pathways providing meaning. In the case of hereditary diseases, the framework provided by biomedicine is strongly influenced by the constitution of the experience of disease. As the cultural frame that it is, the biomedical model has an internal logic based on objectivity and rationality. The biomedical interpretation of concepts lies in the objectification of genes, mutations, the body and disease and inheritance. For biomedicine, the genes are the fundamental unit of information of living beings. They are part of the body which is understood as being a physical, organic, material, palpable, approachable and fragmentable body. This body is the objective of biomedical studies.

Alterations of body structures or the organic dysfunctions which produce signs and symptoms or even death are known as *disease* [12], and the dysfunctions produced by genetic mutations or chromosomal defects are known as *genetic disease*. The real notion of genetic disease lies in the diagnosis of discomfort or disturbance based on the personal genetic profile of the patient, thereby omitting possible environmental causes [13].

On defining genetic disease as a dysfunction, the object of biomedicine is to resolve the problems of these abnormalities or at least palliate some of the manifestations of the disease [12]. The capacity of diseases to be transmitted to future generations also makes inheritance, which is understood as the basis of human reproduction, an objective of biomedicine.

How biomedicine interprets the concepts presented has led to the development of the area of genetics and has also led to the belief that biology determines human life. For biomedicine, biological processes are what constitute and determine human beings.

Some anthropologists concerned about sociocultural factors of disease have defended the interpretative approach to disease as a pathway to understanding patients. The influence of the meaning-centered approach led by authors such as Kleinman (1980, 1995) or Good (2003) has provided many anthropologic and ethnologic studies on genetics which have been framed within the anthropology of medicine and kinship [14,15,16,17,18,19,20,21,22,23,24,25,26, 27, 28].

In order to know how the internalisation of the cultural significance of the experience of disease is produced, access to daily life involving the interactions, worries and everyday events is fundamental [29].

### *2.2.2 The conception of existence, reality and the process and awareness in relation to genetics.*

The other element considered to be relevant in the constitution of experience is the conception of existence and reality [9]. The two concepts are described by experience, but phenomenology questions the relationship between the subjective and objective aspects of reality.

Existence is the indispensable condition for being in the living world [30] and in which we are immersed in everyday life. Heidegger defines everyday life as the regular way of human existence in which things are interpreted from the conception of the previous world ruled by difficult to overcome prejudices [31,32]. For Heidegger, everyday life is existence itself; it is a way of existing [32].

From a Heideggerian perspective, in day-to-day life we maintain a particular position towards reality in which we do not question, and we confirm the obvious and normal character. The irreflexive way of being in the world is what Zigon denominates *morality* [33,34]. For Zigon, morality is plural and is made up by *embodied dispositions*, by *institutional morality* and *public discourses morality* [34]. However, in everyday life the subject may investigate into what Zigon calls *innate knowledge* of morality. This knowledge is the result of work which humans make of themselves along their lifetime from suffering moral breakdowns. According to Zigon when an event or a person becomes involved in the daily life of another and forces them to conscientiously reflect on the adequate response to a situation, the person experiences a moral breakdown. This moral breakdown makes the subject reflect upon their lives, that is, the door which Zigon denominates the *ethical moment* [34]. For Zigon, this ethical moment is a creative moment through which the person is created, introduces slight changes in their personality and creates a new moral personality [34]. According to Zigon, ethics is what is done at times in which one questions one or more of the three aspects of morality mentioned previously. The work of the same consequence of moral rupture is undertaken thanks to the use of certain ethical methods. For Zigon, ethics is a conscientious process of working on oneself in order to cultivate a moral pathway [33] with the objective of creating a new moral disposition and returning to the irreflexive disposition of morality. With this way of conceiving existence morality is conceived as a cultivated form of being in the world [33].

### 2.3 The origin of experience

The last aspect to consider understanding experience is the origin of experience: in human subjectivity. The conceptualization and interpretation of subjectivity is often only understood within the sense of self [35] but this also implies the relationship of self-world. Desjarlais and Throop (2011) reported that there are many anthropological studies on subjectivity that have shown that it is deeply intersubjective in nature. From a phenomenological perspective some authors have prioritized the concept of intersubjectivity versus that of subjectivity when constituting the meaning of the lives and problems of people [9]. In this way they escape from the risks of a vision of subjective experience reduced to self.

## 3 METHODOLOGY

The objective of this study was to describe the disciplinary intersection which occurs when trying to describe the experience of living with a hereditary disease as it appears to the person affected. Specifically, how the ethical experience was lived and articulated by individuals diagnosed with a hereditary disease is analysed by looking into their embodied moralities, at times of ethical choice and moral breakdown, as well as the work related to their sense of self according to their desires in the pathway to self-realization.

Several investigative techniques were used from 2010 to 2012 according to the ethnographic method using a phenomenological approach in two different societies, Barcelona and Los Angeles (California). These techniques include semistructured interviews, participant observation and go-alongs [36]. The fieldwork was carried out along 17 months (12 in Barcelona and 5 in Los Angeles).

A total of 17 participants with hereditary diseases were studied: 11 in Barcelona and 6 in Los Angeles. The inclusion criteria included: diagnosis of a hereditary disease (independently of the presence or not of symptoms), residence in Catalunya or California and absence of cognitive deterioration at the time of inclusion in the study.

Ethical approval for this study was obtained from the Institutional Review Board at the University of California, Los Angeles.

The semistructured interviews were focused on four areas to collect the experience of the participants (Table. 1).

Table. 1

Subjects studied

<u>Subjects studied</u>	<u>Purpose of studying this subject</u>
Subject 1: Symbolic construction and interpretation of the disease	To gather information about the participants experience's lived in relation to the subject of study and the meaning of its experience in their contexts
Subject 2: The experience of difference and comparison with others	To gather information about the construction of the emotional-sensitive schema and the process of becoming aware
Subject 3: Kinship relationships	To gather information about the role of kinship in the process of <i>self-awareness</i>
Subject 4: Knowledge	To gather information about what knowledge is relevant and how it participates in building experience

The data were collected and analysed using an iterative process in which the activity of initial data collection reported the collection of future data and the analysis of each case. At first, each case was studied, and individually revised and recurrent models were identified [37]. Attention was paid to subjects arising from each of the transcripts reviewed and fieldwork notes. On completion of the analysis of each case, all the cases were analysed to identify common subjects. References were linked to the analysis in order to provide support to the entire analytic process. Scientific rigour was guaranteed by applying criteria of credibility, transferability, auditability and confirmability (Table. 2).

Table 2

Criteria applied to ensure scientific rigour

<u>Rigour criteria</u>	<u>Description</u>
Credibility	The transcript was validated by each participant An internal audit was performed of the decisions made by the investigator. An external audit was carried out by including expert patients with hereditary disorders.
Transferability	Sampling context has been identified and socio-cultural context was analyzed. Results have been considered as working hypotheses that are not

	susceptible to generalization.
Auditability	To systemize and support the analytic process, iterative work was used.
Confirmability	Internal and external audits were made

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## 4 RESULTS

The participants included 11 men and 6 women from 18 to 68 years of age. All were diagnosed with a hereditary disease. The sample included three possible family situations: families with more than one affected member, families in which the disease reappears and families which, due to their historical or personal data, do not know whether there are other cases in the family.

In all the cases the narratives described their journey through life with the disease and the stages of the process of awareness related to the genes and events derived from the disease. They identified: 1) the influencing moralities, 2) the ruptures with morality and ethical moments, 3) working on self-awareness and the method of self-realisation, and 4) the moral transformation experienced.

These stages were described separately and were closely related. They describe the experience of the participants with the disease and demonstrate the diversity of aspects involved in the configuration of the experience and which are difficult to accommodate in a single discipline.

### 4.1 Influencing moralities

In the narratives of the participants it is noted that their experiences are influenced by a large number of moralities, four of which are of note: biomedicine (especially during the process of diagnosis and initiation of treatment), religion, public opinion of an unknown diseases and family history.

#### 4.1.1 Morality of biomedicine

The onset of symptoms makes the affected person or their relatives question the normality or not of what occurs with the physical body and seek help from the medical system most appropriate to the context. For many this is when the medical pilgrimage starts as well as the use of alternative medicines when they find no response to their health problem. Despite not finding answers or solutions to their health problem, it is difficult to abandon the hegemonic medical model and they continue to attend the medical visits or to follow the treatment, which in many cases is not effective. The difficulty lies, first, in assuming the limits of biomedicine, and second, once it is assumed that biomedicine has no solution for their disease outside what is considered "socially correct", they must manage the judgement of others and assume the responsibility of self-cure.

#### 4.1.2 Religious morality

The diagnosis of a hereditary disease mobilises the value granted to reproduction and the disease in being able to be transmitted to descendents. When biomedicine is able to determine the mutation causing the defect and thus avoid transmission, in some participants this generates distress related to fate and choice. The origin of the distress lies in religious beliefs related to events of human nature. The belief of the Catholic religion that humans should not interfere with biological order

places some investigators in the dilemma of having to choose between the morality of the Catholic religion and biomedicine, with both choices producing suffering.

#### *4.1.3 Morality of public opinion of disease*

A disease which affects different members of a family and which has socially visible consequences generates social opinion at a local level which has consequences on the affected people. One participant, Pilar, stated that the deaths of the members of her family at young ages was “a great loss and also a great...like a great guilt, as if it was an enormous sin”. Apart from the consequences that public opinion had on the relatives of Pilar in the past, which obliged them to leave the place where they lived, she described that the influence of morality of public opinion goes beyond borders and remains over time, having consequences decades later.

#### *4.1.4 Morality of family history*

The influence of the family history on how to manage and live with the disease is the last morality of note. In families with other affected members, the family history of the disease is embodied by the other members and they must accept to either reproduce or reject the history and seek to differentiate from the other members. In the two cases the comparison and search for similar or differentiating traits (physical, character or behaviour) are related to the constitution of individual and family identity which is affected by this morality. When no other member is affected and the disease reappears, the historic memory refers to family roots or a populace, leading to strategies for overcoming the disease or survival used in other situations.

### **4.2 Moral ruptures and ethical moments**

Moral rupture leads to ethical moments or awareness. These ruptures occur in daily life and in a large range of situations derived from incapacity, symptoms, social rejection, etc. In all the cases, the rupture produces suffering. The participants seem to describe that suffering itself is of no value; it is not deemed a virtue. On the other hand, what they do value is suffering as a dynamic to start work, to become a person with certain virtuous qualities. Therefore, it can be stated that the suffering experienced, together with the awareness of certain moral influences and the rupture with these, provide alternative pathways for achievement, albeit initially with a certain degree of ambivalence, ambiguity and instability. The narratives also demonstrate that for each participant, morality has a different meaning, including independence, bonding, justice, joy and happiness.

### **4.3 Working on self and self-realisation**

Despite the limitations of the diseases of the participants, they showed that there are many paths to confront along the experience of living with one of these diseases. Once one is conscious of the existence of aspects such as incapacity, the symptoms, the compromises of survival and stigma, they start to work on themselves in the search for a new position of self. In this work of transformation, the participants choose between the opinions associated with the context and they use these based on their objectives; the desire to transform leads them to undertake strategies which open pathways to be in the world.

Three strategies of self-realisation appeared in the narratives: self-discipline, study and discussion. Discussion or dialogue is the action most frequently used but not everyone uses discussion in the



same way. Although some authors report that discussion as spoken communication [38] is always done with another, what the participants of this study showed was that this “other” may be a person, a group or even themselves. Discussion as a communicative event always involves more than one participant and, thus, is considered as an interaction with another [39], which may be the objectification of oneself. In all the cases, the discussion which takes place during the process of moral reasoning and dilemmas helps to evaluate the situation and define what one believes to be best for oneself.

#### **4.4 Moral transformation**

The result of the work with oneself and the use of strategies of self-realisation lead to the transformation of the subject which can be recognised in many situations occurring in the community, the biomedical setting, the family, social networks and school. In these situations the particularities of their morality can be observed as well as the influence their personality has within a determined context. In this sense the participants may be considered at a theoretical level as “moral pioneers” [40]. They all participate in the transformation of the discussion of what it is to be a person and what it is to live with the characteristics of the disease they have. This participation can be understood as an action which leads to a type of release, internal freedom.

### **5 CONCLUSIONS**

Genetics and inheritance convert humans into a genetic being, understood as a human being with the ability of conscious self-transformation through genes and inheritance [41]. In the world of hereditary disease, the evaluation which people make of their lives originates from biological events but is demonstrated in their social discourse on comparison with another. In this aspect the participants described that a perception of loss prevails as well as a basic condition of existential dissatisfaction. This aspect is relevant because from the assessment they make of their lives the process of remodelling of their moral personalities is begun as is the search for the attainment of a new position of self that can only be understood through the intersection of their particular historical, social and cultural determinants (biological, familial, political, economic, religious). In this way biology, culture, society and existence are interrelated as shown in the results. The focalisation of each participant on different aspects of their experience due to the influence of different moralities provides a complex view of the phenomenon which places the results at the intersection of anthropology, biomedicine and philosophy and may not fully be accommodated into any of these disciplines, despite having different aspects of each.

In relation to the intersection among disciplines, it should be considered whether it is the contributions of the participants which converges at the intersection or whether it is the anthropologist who, considering different areas of knowledge, finds a pathway for presenting the complexity of the phenomenon. These questions highlight the need to specify the positioning of the investigator in the study and open the door to theoretical and methodological debate of the objectivity of the data and the participation of subjectivity of the investigator. From a phenomenologic point of view, the data are intersubjectively created, and in this case, the subjectivity of the investigator, who has both biomedical and anthropologic training, has inevitably influenced the results. Likewise, it is interesting to note that in relation to hereditary diseases, it is possible to reconsider the divisions created by the disciplines and self-question the moral influences guiding the studies. The intersection of disciplines questions the idealness of performing

investigation alone and within a single discipline or whether it should be done by multidisciplinary teams.

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# ON THE BORDER BETWEEN ANTHROPOLOGY AND PEDAGOGY. A THEORETICAL ANALYSIS ABOUT THE IMPLICATIONS OF AN INTERDISCIPLINARY PERSPECTIVE

Alessandra Mussi<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>*University of Milano Bicocca (ITALY)*

## Abstract

Several contributions have already stressed the usefulness of disciplinary contaminations between anthropology and pedagogy, the use of the ethnographic method in the study of educational facts and the adoption by the researcher in the educational field of a posture similar to the anthropologist's one.

The paper intends to theoretically analyse, through the narrative paradigm of the literature review, the contributions that were most successful in remaining within the boundary between these two disciplines while also making it a strength of their work.

The focus is on deepening methodological aspects of contemporary anthropology and exploring their implications in the field of educational research. This study will examine several theoretical concepts: from the review of the participant observation, now asserted in anthropological tradition but often interpreted literally from pedagogy, to the perspectives of dialogic anthropology, with its resonances in the educational concept of reflexivity, and the reflection on the role of the researcher.

They are all interesting points for a pedagogy that wants to take on the challenges of the contemporary world: globalization, migration, new media, encounters with diversity in all its forms: cultural, social, economic, religious and gender-related. A pedagogy which consciously chooses to be intercultural, not as a specific area of competence but as a paradigm of reference for the entire discipline.

This theoretical dissertation will be supported by an example of empirical research that started recently, based on the use of the ethnographic method in an educational research. The aim is to demonstrate that a scientific metissage between anthropological and educational disciplines is particularly fruitful in an area of work with issues related to migratory phenomenon, gender issues and contemporaneity in general.

The results will aim to emphasize how this fluidity in crossing and re-crossing the disciplinary boundary between anthropology and pedagogy has positive implications on both sides: for a pedagogy that rediscovers the usefulness of anthropological methods and postures, but also for an anthropology that discovers a transformative and educative dimension of its own categories.

Keywords: ethnographic method, anthropology, intercultural pedagogy, interdisciplinary perspective.

## 1 INTRODUCTION

An increasingly complex world presents itself in front of the contemporary human being and researcher's life experiences and the cognitive journey. Globalization, migration of people, goods and ideas and media world interconnection are structural features that have transformed and continue to transform the contemporary world. Today more than ever, pedagogy is questioned by external reality in order to find new foundations and a new approach to educational projects while, at the same time, it is constantly challenged by the current plurality of cultural and educational models. In such a complex context, various scientific contributions have underlined the usefulness of a contamination of pedagogy with other disciplinary perspectives, including anthropology, with a declination especially in the field of intercultural pedagogy [1]; others of the use of the ethnographic method in the study of educational facts [2], [3], and of the adoption of a posture similar to the anthropologist's one by the researcher in the educational field [4].

This *metissage* between pedagogy and anthropology, far from being a weakness, turns out to be a strength in the contributions that have had most success in standing on the border between these two disciplines. The focus here is on the methodological dimension, with an exploration of the implications of contemporary anthropology reflection on methods in the field of educational research. First of all, an attempt will be made to motivate scientific interest in using the ethnographic method within the pedagogical disciplinary sector, then some crucial aspects of methodological reflection in the anthropological field and their noteworthy implications - also for educational research - will be analysed. Finally, an example of empirical research based on the use of the ethnographic method in the educational field will be the object of reflection.

### 1.1 Understanding complexity

The ethnographic approach is useful in understanding the complexity of the contemporary world and in reacting to the current challenges which face pedagogy, since it is a particularly effective perspective from where to try to understand the processes of social transformation in place and what they entail in terms of «educational meanings and projects»<sup>1</sup> [5:5].

The contradictions and nuances that characterize contemporary social reality and, in particular, the educational one could pose dilemmas to the researcher from other research perspectives which are difficult to solve. From the point of view of the ethnographer, they constitute the specific material itself of their cognitive effort, which is directed towards an analysis that is able to «grasp the nuances, the richness and the multiplicity of reality»<sup>2</sup> [6:23].

While ethnography is a useful methodological tool to describe micro-practices [7], it also aims to explore the multiple layers of meaning that individuals attribute to their and others' daily actions [8], holding two dimensions - practice and meaning - together. Both are analysed by anthropologists within educational contexts as part of "cultural environments" [5], [9]. Starting from this perspective, it is possible to read about the practices implemented within a school or any educational context as an expression of the school or the educational context cultures. So historically evolved and not universally valid cultures, spaces within which power relations and systems of governmentality come into play [10] and arenas where dominant and subordinate cultures interact with each other [7]. Within them, the ethnographer considers the different actors involved as "agents of culture" [11],

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<sup>1</sup> In the text: «significati e progetti educativi».

<sup>2</sup> In the text: «cogliere le sfumature, la ricchezza e la molteplicità del reale».

who implement various forms of agency [9] in relation to the educational practices and strategies they face.

To hold all these levels of analysis together, Ogbu suggests an ethnographic model, which moves on different and interacting levels: institutional, social, scholastic, family, ..., through an ethnographic approach to research in education characterized by “multilevel” analysis [12].

Different levels, networks of stratified meanings, micro-practices and social and institutional dimensions make ethnography a method that consciously takes on the complexity of educational reality without forcing it to make concessions due to overly-defined theories or methodological approaches. On the contrary, ethnography arises as a never predictive methodology, orienting through a research process that defines itself ongoing, through an elaboration of hypothesis *in fieri*, choices that allow for self-corrections and impediments which can lead to fresh research repercussions [6].

What might be seen as a weakness from other disciplinary perspectives proves to be a strength for ethnography, which «saves from the excesses of deductive hypotheses to leave ample space for manoeuvring to the inductive empiricism of everyday life»<sup>1</sup> [13:75]. Hence the data collection is a continuous process that follows the flow of the ethnographic experience, as well as the flow of human existence in its complexity.

## 1.2 The encounter with the other

Another important feature of the ethnographic approach used in educational research concerns the dimension of the encounter with otherness. The anthropologist is guided by the purpose of understanding the other striving, however, not to bring them back to their own conceptual categories. In doing so, a delicate work comes into play of managing the relationship with their informants, constructed by negotiating roles, recognitions and meanings. It is a relationship which is nurtured from the moment of access to the field, gradually becoming more intimate thanks in particular to the “power of resonance” [14], but which does not lead to a total identification of the researcher with their informants: anthropological knowledge arises from difference, so from the encounter and above all dialogue between the two different perspectives of researcher and informant.

Intercultural pedagogy, in particular, has sought inspiration from the disciplinary contamination with anthropology, but too often the expectation has been to receive from anthropology specific and immediate knowledge on the other [4]. The influence of anthropology on the intercultural pedagogy field, however, passes through the particular relationship that the researcher establishes with the other and the ways in which they cultivate this relationship. Thanks to this, useful indications emerge for the researcher in the field of intercultural pedagogy and also for the operators who work in intercultural contexts.

The ethnographer’s experience is already in itself an experiment of intercultural conversation [15]. The anthropologist intentionally exercises an attitude marked by cultural decentralization. A complete suspension of one’s cultural presuppositions is impossible but the researcher, aware of this, engages to decentralize themselves from their own categories, mental habits and behaviours [16], in order to understand the otherness in its own terms and recognize its legitimacy.

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<sup>1</sup> In the text: «salva dagli eccessi delle ipotesi deduttive per lasciare ampio spazio di manovra all’empiria induttiva del quotidiano».

The recognition of differences, however, risks turning into a device that builds the other as irremediably distant from us [15]. The ethnographic approach appears here as an opportunity to counteract the reification effects of the so-called “ethnological intellect” [17] through the adoption of “mixed logic”, in which culture presents itself in terms of relationship, construction, hybridization [18].

By adopting this logic, the anthropology of education can turn out to be a pragmatic and dynamic perspective through which to address the issues related to interculturality, focusing not so much on definitions of cultures as on «how people interact and what skills they use to do it»<sup>1</sup> [19:104,105], providing useful indications for pedagogy too.

All these points turn out to be of theoretical interest for a pedagogy ready to deal with diversity in all its forms: not only cultural, but also social, economic, religious and related to gender. By doing this, it has consciously to choose to be intercultural, not as current but as a reference paradigm for the entire discipline [20].

This choice does not only mean adopting a relational approach characterized by dialogue and negotiation, a logic of hybridization and mingling of cultures and a pragmatic and hermeneutical perspective at the same time in the encounter and relationship with the other, but also to arrive at a deep level of self-questioning and an insight on our cultural and educational models from a fresh perspective, subjecting them to critical reflection and opening up to the possibility of revising them.

## 2 METHODOLOGICAL ASPECTS

More and more frequently we hear talk of the ethnographic method within educational studies, but with the same frequency it is an «appropriation of methodological focuses»<sup>2</sup> [21:263] without a corresponding understanding of the epistemological and theoretical implications. Given this, some of the methodological aspects of anthropology will be examined here, allowing space for contemporary anthropological reflection on the theoretical-epistemological level together with the exploration of the implications in the field of educational research.

### 2.1 The oxymoron of Participant Observation

The expression “participant observation” has long been used to define the method of data collection by the anthropologist. For generations of anthropologists it has been the method par excellence of anthropology, until inherent criticalities in this methodological paradigm emerged and its revisions spread.

Participant observation includes within itself two contradictory poles. The first is observation, which is based on the model of laboratory observation owned by experimental science. On the other hand there is participation, which foresees the researcher’s involvement on the scene as a subject that directly makes the ethnographic experience, sharing the daily practices of their informants and hence emotionally involved. The participant observation expresses the tension between the detachment required by observation and the emotional involvement required by participation [22], a tension that assumes a methodological and at the same time epistemological characteristic of interrogation on the scientific status of contemporary anthropology. Today the anthropologist consciously accepts this contradiction in ethnographic work, placing together daily involvement and distance, their

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<sup>1</sup> In the text: «come interagiscono le persone e quali competenze usano per farlo».

<sup>2</sup> In the text: «appropriazione di focus metodologici».

subjectivity and the relationship they create with interlocutors through what Tedlock calls the “observation of participation”: experimenting and observing at the same time «their own and others’ co-participation within the ethnographic encounter» [23:69]. In view of this, fieldwork is constantly accompanied by a reflection on the modalities of participation of both the anthropologist and their interlocutors, equally active participants in the ethnographic encounter. The latter is to a large extent constituted by conversations between the anthropologist and their informants, where observing by being scientifically detached or participating in the daily life of the natives are not so easily practicable in the reality of ethnographic work. Within this dialogic interaction, anthropologist and native engage in the shared production of meanings, an essential component of ethnographic work.

The participant observation, following Clifford, can be reworked as a dialectic of experience and interpretation [24]. On one hand there are the experiences that the ethnographer makes on the field; on the other their interpretations, which closely related to experiences through the reference to those that Dilthey calls “common spheres” and therefore constructed intersubjectively [24].

The re-elaborations of participant observation and, therefore, of the ethnographic method, which characterized the anthropological debate of the preceding years, does not seem to be assimilated in equal measure by pedagogical research, which risks interpreting these aspects in a more literal manner. An integration of the ideas that anthropological reflection could offer would enrich the adoption of the ethnographic method in the study of educational facts and contexts of a greater epistemological awareness and a greater methodological refinement, particularly suitable to respond to the complexity of the contemporary world.

## **2.2 From dialogue to reflexivity**

First, mention was made of the importance, within the ethnographic experience, of the moments of interaction between the anthropologist and their informants. It is, in particular, the current state of dialogic anthropology that attributes a new importance to the dialogue between the two voices of the anthropologist and the informant [25].

It is not only a recognition of the interactional dimension of field work, but also of awareness of the asymmetric relationship between anthropologist and native, “researcher” and “researched”. An attempt to remedy is made through the recognition of the status of the informant as co-producer of meanings. Doing so, the dialogic perspective is intentionally used as a modality through which one can take into account the voices of the observed, and also to give them space in the ethnographic report.

Assuming this perspective, the ethnographic experience becomes an intersubjective exchange between the other and the self [1], both actors involved in the ethnographic relationship and dialogue.

If the subjectivity of the researcher is part of the ethnographic experience, the report must not be purged from their figure, in a false aura of scientific objectivity, but rather it must be questioned, in a systematic analysis of its effects in the context of study and of the “mediation” that he puts into effect in the representation contained in the ethnographic report [26]. The reflection on the role of the researcher themselves, but also on the many other roles that the researcher can assume or that are attributed to themselves by their interlocutors [27] and their repercussions on the collected data is central. Here a question that is also ethical: on a role as a researcher but also as a person who is in intimacy with their informants, a relationship that is professional but also personal [6], on dynamics between researcher and informant which change from time to time based on mutual interests and



expectations. To respond to these ethical dilemmas, it is necessary to set «objectives, bases and moral limits»<sup>1</sup> [28:166,167] that orient research work.

The reflexivity, put in place by the anthropologist to clarify the intense intertwining of «personal experience, others' experience and professional experience»<sup>2</sup> [16:102], recalls a key concept for pedagogy, whose paternity belongs to Dewey. Reflexivity is seen here as that broader attitude that allows a person to detach themselves from everyday practice and make it the object of critical analysis [29]. This approach is not only limited to research, but it is placed in a dialectical manner with the educational practice in order to extract the problems out of the practice so to be able to confront them - and the implicit dimensions it bears - hence giving way to maturation and self-training [30].

### 3 AN EXAMPLE OF RESEARCH

These theoretical reflections intersect with the suggestions coming from the experience of a recently initiated empirical research based on the use of the ethnographic method in the educational field.

This research focuses on the issue of parenting in migrant women of Arab origin<sup>3</sup>. In particular, the aim is to investigate maternal experiences and representations on parenting and education in connection with the experience of migration. The study has the objectives of: exploring the resources and skills that can contribute to the creation of a positive family environment and identify, starting from the maternal voices, orientating criteria for the development of initiatives to support parenting in migration.

The issues related to migration and gender are complex, so an approach made of encounters of different disciplines, of "metissage" of methods and theoretical references can be particularly useful. The analysis of the literature on the subject also highlights numerous references to Arab women as mothers in the anthropological, sociological and psychological fields [31]–[36], while in the educational field the studies on this topic are still relatively rare.

The study adopts a pedagogical perspective, drawing on material from different disciplinary perspectives, in particular from anthropology. Methodologically, the research is based on the use of the ethnographic method, together with in-depth interviews. In particular, I dwell on an initial phase of research: a phase of exploration of the field, in order to penetrate gradually into the contexts of study, to know and make myself known by the subjects.

The relevance of such a perspective is twofold: on the one hand it enriches pedagogical reflection in the field of parenting support thanks to the stimuli coming from anthropology, on the other it widens the reflection on a phenomenon discussed at an interdisciplinary level, through the specific contribution of the pedagogical perspective.

In particular, I dwell here on two aspects that derive from the methodological approach of this research situated between pedagogy and anthropology and which show the theoretical interest of

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<sup>1</sup> In the text: «obiettivi, basi e limiti morali».

<sup>2</sup> In the text: «esperienza personale, esperienza altrui ed esperienza professionale».

<sup>3</sup> To avoid the risk of homogenizing representations that do not recognize the subcultures existing within the various Arab world, in my work I focus on Muslim women who belong to the most populated Arab communities in Milan, Italy.

interdisciplinary perspectives, especially in the field of migration, gender issues and current issues in general.

### **3.1 The relationship as basis of research**

During this exploratory phase of the research, I focused on creating an intimate relationship with my potential informants, paying attention to the relational dynamics and the various roles involved. In doing so, I decided, for the moment, to leave aside more invasive research tools, such as observation with block-notes or video/audio recordings. Only once in a separate location I used the ethnographic diary tool.

Through a personal contact network, I met I. (Egypt) whom I repeatedly visited at home, allowing us to forge a deep relationship based on conversations and shared moments from daily life.

Here is an excerpt from the ethnographic diary, in which I impart one of the first afternoons spent with her. Meeting both I. and one of the children in front of their home:

We go upstairs and we joke about how there are too many stairs and we struggle to get to the top. There is a nice and relaxed atmosphere! At home there are all the other children (...). The conversation is pleasant and we talk a bit about everything. They tell me about a store that is offering super discounts where they went shopping several times, buying shoes and clothes for everyone. They show me what they have bought and I happily partake in the enthusiasm. After all, this is part of the ritual of creating intimacy among women. (...)

G. [one of the daughters]: "These are the shoes for a wedding party we will go to this summer in Egypt. (...) With this dress". (...)

Me: "Oh, so nice!"

I.: "But the ceremonial dresses here are not as beautiful as those in Egypt! Look at these beautiful clothes!" And so she shows me on her phone a Google image search of some ceremonial and wedding dresses.

So I take the opportunity to ask her about her marriage. Me: "'And how was your dress when you got married?'"<sup>1</sup>

The conversation appears to offer little in the way of useful information for my research, but every step is important in order to build our ethnographic relationship and I always try to cover every possible aspect, later reporting it reflexively in the diary. The initial joke together and liberal conversation helped to create a relaxed atmosphere, sharing shopping stories contributes to the creation of an intimate space reserved for women; and finally, I can hang on to the photographic stimuli offered by my interlocutor to bring me closer to the topics of my research.

At the same time, it is important to analyse constantly on what basis this relationship is founded and which roles are negotiated within it. Sometimes, the interlocutors attribute different roles to those the researcher expected which could in some cases exceed the ethical limits they had defined. In others, they could be negotiated or indulged through new, unexpected, research paths.

In the episode I report here, I initially felt that my role could be misunderstood by I.'s family - a potential risk – but I later decided to welcome it as an opportunity:

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<sup>1</sup> Ethnographic Diary, I.'s house, Milan, 16/03/17.

At a certain point, N. [husband of I.] and T. [daughter] start talking together about the citizenship request of the daughter, who has just reached legal age and has applied for Italian citizenship. T. received a call and the following day she has to go to the council office in Via Larga but she does not remember the way to get there. N. jokes: "You can go with Alessandra!". I am a little dismayed: why do they expect a researcher to accompany their daughter to the council office? Perhaps they are confusing my role with that of a social worker or an educator, probably due to the fact that the Italians with whom they typically relate with occupy such roles? (...) But it is also a useful opportunity for me to ensure that our relationship is not simply one-way, but an exchange: in this way I will feel more legitimate in my research, without feeling uncomfortable in continuing to ask questions in the future.<sup>1</sup>

### **3.2 Research as a form of education**

The methodological choices made reflect both the indications developed in the educational field in relation to approaches that give voice to the insiders, in particular to migrants [37], and the indications of method developed in the tradition of dialogic anthropology [25]. This is a way of doing research with both political and formative effects. Political because it offers a gateway in order to give a voice to women who usually have "little voice" in the institutional contexts of the host countries, invoking not only public recognition but also an institutional acceptance of their requests. The formative effects are important too: the researcher's questions not only lead the subjects to reflect on themselves [6], but they stimulate the agency of the protagonists by encouraging them to reconnect with their own representational world and to activate their resources and skills.

Maternity is an extremely delicate moment in the life of each woman, but especially in that of a migrant woman [38]. Migration is a traumatic event; motherhood while living the trauma of migration becomes a moment of distinct vulnerability. So it is also important to emphasise the protection factors and the resilience and educational skills that motherhood can bring to Arab migrant.

Below is an example of a conversation between myself and R. (Egypt), a young mothers attending the Italian course organised by the association Mamme a Scuola<sup>2</sup>. She is extremely worried about being able to build a life in her new country and to learn Italian. In this excerpt, R. fires off a number of questions to understand how I lived in Egypt and learnt the Arabic language<sup>3</sup>:

R.: "But how did you learn Arabic so well? (...) How long have you been in Egypt? (...) Ah, did you study Arabic at the university? (...) And why did you study Arabic? (...) And who was with you at the university? (...) And were the others Egyptian? (...) And when you went to Egypt were you alone?"

Me: "Yes, I went alone, but I was hosted by a friend of mine and her family became like my second family."

R.: "Ah, I understand, it became a second family because the Egyptians are good and they welcomed you like a daughter, right?"<sup>4</sup>

It is similar to a process of mirroring between her and me: my experience in Egypt reminds her of hers in Italy, being alone, difficulties with a new language. But it also gives her the hope of being able

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<sup>1</sup> Ethnographic diary, I.'s house, Milan, 16/03/17.

<sup>2</sup> The name means: "Mums at school", website: [www.mammeascuola.it](http://www.mammeascuola.it).

<sup>3</sup> Here the reference is to a my previous work field in Egypt.

<sup>4</sup> Ethnographic diary, Mamme a scuola, Milan, 04/05/17.

to make it: a language can be learned, new relationships can be built, but you can also meet people who might understand you because they have lived an experience similar to yours. Through our encounter, R. reflects on herself and her own migration experience, discovering resources that could help her face the difficult path of integration in the host country.

#### 4 CONCLUSION

This paper highlights the positive aspects of a perspective which crosses and re-crosses the border between pedagogy and anthropology, in particular by adopting the ethnographic method in the study of educational facts/contexts in connection with contemporary issues. Here we are only dealing with a taste of how interdisciplinary contaminations between pedagogy and anthropology can be fruitful on both sides for a researcher who knows how to live their disciplinary sector with confidence, but who at the same time is able to draw awareness from the other.

On one hand the pedagogue, riding this fluidity between the two disciplines, rediscovers the usefulness of anthropological methods and postures not only for research, but also in terms of providing suggestions for educators and teachers so that they themselves can become ethnographers within the context they work in [9].

In turn, the anthropologist discovers the transformative and formative effects of their categories and their own research. This transformative/formative flow develops on several levels: that of the subject, which reflects on themselves starting from the encounter with the researcher, and the broader transformation of the educational systems. Ethnographic research can contribute to the «creation of educational alternatives»<sup>1</sup> [21:268]. In this manner, anthropology becomes aware of its active role, able to collaborate in the improvement of services and educational practices with local and institutional subjects [10].

Finally, the formative effects of this interdisciplinary perspective also impacts the researcher themselves, becoming a «real opportunity for education - in particular of intercultural education»<sup>2</sup> [5:9].

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<sup>1</sup> In the text: «creazione di alternative educative».

<sup>2</sup> In the text: «Vera e propria occasione di educazione – in particolare di educazione interculturale».

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## REPRESENTATION OF GOOD CARE IN (PHOTO-)STORIES\*

Sitvast, Jan<sup>1</sup>, Kanne, Mariël<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>*University of Applied Sciences, Utrecht (Netherlands)*

<sup>2</sup>*University of Applied Sciences, Utrecht (Netherlands)*

### Abstract

Humans use metaphors in thinking. Most metaphors are visual. In processing information stimuli the mind depends partly on visual codes. Information is processed and stored through two channels: one for non-verbal information and another for verbal information. The two different areas of information in the brain are interconnected. The information is stored in patterns that form an inner representation of how individuals perceive their reality and their self. The active processing of new information, remembering and the self-image are related phenomena, that influence each other, sometimes leading to biased interpretation or even reconstruction of contents in each of these areas. Imagination, expectations and anticipations of the future and memories are the more active manifestations of this process.

In this process mimesis plays an important role. Mimesis is the imitation of reality in play, story-telling or creating images of how things should look like in the future. Through mimesis people can anticipate on roles in social life, or appropriate experiences from someone else and relate them to one's own life story. When this happens the information is related to the self through processes of association and becomes 'Erfahrung'.

We will illustrate how these processes work, on the basis of our own empirical research with photography and dilemma-stories in mental health care practices. Making a photograph the pictured information is limited to a pinpointed moment in time. The spatial involvement is cropped into the encadrement of a photograph. This invites viewers to interpret the image as standing for hidden meanings and connect these with their own inner representations of reality. This is the punctum function that photographs can have. Something similar happens when someone tells her own story about a situation where she experienced a moral dilemma.

When photographs and stories are exchanged and shared, e.g. by organizing an exhibition or a reflective dialogue in a moral case deliberation session, the photo/story becomes a 'relational narrative'. When applied in care ethics in order to do empiric research on good care, this 'enacted' story can be analyzed in search for the existential and moral dimension. The image of the self that emerges from it shows how persons relate to their social context.

Such phenomenological-hermeneutic research should be based on three elements (reflection-expression-self representation) and must be part of a social interaction and/or a dialogue directed in such a way that these three elements strengthen each other.

Keywords: narrative research, photography, care ethics.

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## 1 INTRODUCTION

Qualitative research concerning questions on good care can be done in many ways, but it can never be done without paying attention to the ethical dimension. There are many different theoretical and/or empirical ways to 'catch' this dimension: for example by doing empirical ethics [1,2], via a phenomenological-hermeneutical approach [3,4,5] or by putting normative professionalization into practice [6].

We, as teachers at the Master Advanced Nursing Practice of the University of Applied Sciences in Utrecht (Netherlands), use several of these examples when we show our students how they can learn to do practice oriented research. Because our students are experienced professionals working in the field of health care and social care, their research is aimed at developing innovations in their own organization. The final goal always is: co-creation of good care for – and with – patients [7].

But there is no definition of good care that applies for all patients and caregivers. What is experienced as good care can never be seen loose from a concrete context and it can be different for every person: everyone wishes to receive and provide care in another way [8,9]. This is why standards and protocols are not always sufficient for care providers; and why it is important for them to find out what needs their patients have, how they see themselves and how they relate to their surroundings and how the opinions of other care providers influence the realization of good care. Images and stories play an important role here. In this paper, we will explain this and illustrate how it can have a valuable function in (qualitative) research processes.

## 2 METAPHORS, REPRESENTATION AND IDENTITY

Humans use metaphors in thinking. Most metaphors are visual [10]. In processing information stimuli the mind depends partly on visual codes. Information is processed and stored through two channels: one for non-verbal information and another for verbal information [11]. The two different areas of information in the brain are interconnected. An image calls forth the concurrent verbal coded information and vice versa. The information is stored in patterns that form an inner representation of how the individual perceives his reality: the so-called *imagens* (for images) and *logogens* (verbal). Memories and anticipations of the future are part of this representation. Representations are dynamic and can be manipulated, for instance when influenced by strong emotions. One aspect of the representation is how man looks upon himself. What image does someone have of his/her 'self'? How does someone position this 'self' in a life story? People build their life stories on remembered experiences that are often interpreted in such a way that they point forward to an anticipated and hoped-for future. From research we know that remembered images have a greater evocative and convincing power than verbal memories. The active processing of new information, remembering and the self-image are no isolated phenomena. They are related and influence each other, sometimes leading to biased interpretation or even reconstruction of contents in each of these areas. Imagination, expectations and memories are the more active manifestations of these processes. Keeping the self-image up-to-date in order to face challenges in life, happens in a continuous process of fine-tuning, adaptations and testing of how one relates to relevant variables in one's milieu.



## 2.1 Mimesis

In this process mimesis plays an important role. Mimesis is the imitation of reality in play, in storytelling or in creating images of how things should look like in future. Through mimesis people can anticipate on roles in social life or appropriate experiences from someone else and relate them to their own life story [5]. In the processing of information mimesis contributes to protecting a person from too many perceptual stimuli. It protects a person's psyche against a perceptual shock. We can illustrate how this works with photography. Making a photograph the pictured information is limited to a pinpointed moment in time. The spatial involvement is cropped into the encadrement of a photograph. This selectiveness of visual information in a photograph invites viewers to interpret the image as standing for hidden meanings and connect these with their own inner representations of reality. This is what Barthes [12] has called the *punctum* function that photographs can have.

## 2.2 'Erfahrung'

So on the one hand we can distinguish the function of protective buffer against perceptual shocks caused by the never stopping stream of information in modern society [13] and on the other hand the facilitation of meaning making from what otherwise would remain mere superficial experiences and sensations. In the first case the protective buffer prevents information to overload someone's system. Information does not get assimilated into an experience that touches on deeper layers of self-consciousness. In the other case the information is related to the self through processes of association and becomes 'Erfahrung'. The philosopher Gadamer [3] reserved this term for a process in which someone not only associates subjective experiences with personal anticipations and memories, but also assimilates meanings from the collective cultural repertory into the constructed meaning. An experience ('Erfahrung') can be traced in memory, but that will not be the case with mere sensations or feelings.

## 2.3 Identity research

By making and interpreting photographs a person can become aware of meanings and thus appropriate experiences into the life story. A photograph fixes time and space in one point. An incident is lifted from the stream of time and transformed in a moment that is made conscious. By making a photograph the photographer detaches herself for just a moment from the lived world. Choosing a subject for photographing and then recounting what the photograph shows us, the photographer projects her orientation in photographs. Photographs are multi-interpretable and in themselves seem banal [14]. Photographs elicit stories when viewed by the photographers or the public and only then they receive meaning [15]. Photographs depict reality but are also always an interpretation. Through their mimetic character photographs mirror not only the physical world but also the representations in the photographer's or viewer's mind. The image in the photograph will be connected with the *imagens* from the autobiographical memory and will in this way call forth meanings that first lay hidden. Photographs elicit meanings that the photographer or someone else who views the photograph were not aware of or were not able to express before. Photographs can become the vehicle of motivated interest for telling a new story. This is the 'punctum' character of certain photographs. Photographs lower the threshold for expressing what one feels and thinks and at the same time connect us with deeper layers of consciousness [16, 14, 17]. The inner representation of the self-image reveals itself in photo stories. In the same way someone's perceptual orientations on the life world become transparent in photo stories [14]. This richness in data makes photo stories relevant for identity research. We may note here that the expression of individuality is a cultural skill that is determined by social class, education and professional training. On a subconscious level it will also be coloured by ideological traditions. While some persons will use

the available cultural repertory and idiom of images in a flexible and self-conscious way, others will imitate the standard pattern and not divert from safe and well-trodden paths [18]. So personal identity never is purely individual: it develops in the relation between the self and the other. In this relation, care – or solicitude ('sollicitude' in French) [19] – is an essential element. Solicitude unfolds a dialogical dimension in identity which becomes apparent in the two sides of self-interpretation (the image that the self has of itself): self-appraisal and self-respect [5].

### 3 EXAMPLES

We will give two examples of how these processes work, on the basis of our own empirical research with photography [20] and dilemma-stories in mental health care practices [7].

#### 3.1 Photography and recovery

Making a photograph the pictured information is limited to a pinpointed moment in time. The spatial involvement is cropped into the encadrement of a photograph. This selectiveness of visual information in a photograph invites the photographer to interpret the image as standing for hidden meanings and connect these with his own inner representations of reality. But the same happens with others who view the photograph and make their own interpretation. We organised photo-groups in mental health care settings. This was done for therapeutic reasons: helping persons with severe mental illness (SMI) to give meaning to their life story. We show one of the photographs, made by William (Fig. 1).



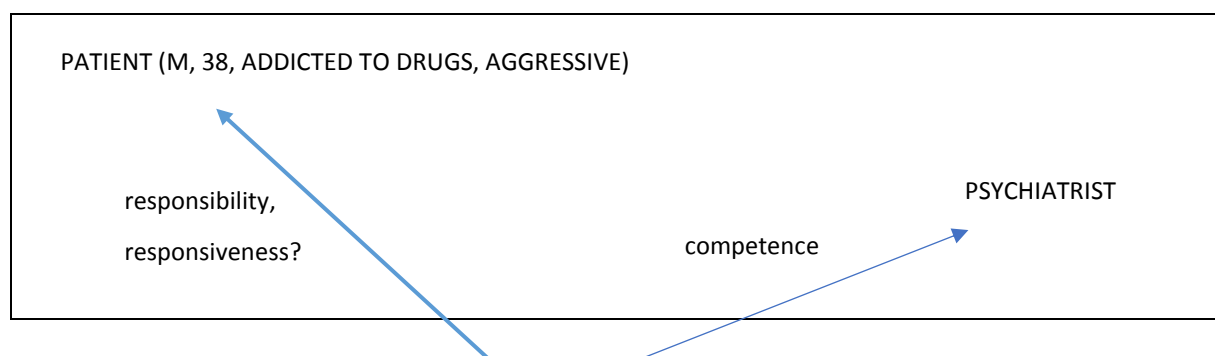
Figure 1: an example of a photograph, made by a person in a therapeutic photo-group.

This may look like just another café terrace waiting for people to sit down. But the person who made the photograph had auditory hallucinations and heard voices all the time. He talked back to them, so walking the street he was looked upon as an odd figure. That’s why he interpreted this photograph as standing for his loneliness as he could not sit down at the terrace without uneasy looks from bystanders. So, he told us, he had decided to spare others his company as a kind of sacrifice for other people to sit there and drink their coffee in peace. He presented it almost as a kind of heroic act.

As a researcher it makes me realize how persons with severe mental illness can become disconnected from society, and the loneliness this causes, but also how strong the impulse is to maintain self-esteem. The photographer was not a victim, but a hero. Sharing this photograph and receiving recognition for his interpretation, as well as hearing the interpretations of other people who were looking at the photograph, shaped his experience.

### 3.2 Personal stories and topography in ethical reflection

In moral case deliberation (MCD) sessions within (mental) health care institutions, professionals reflect on actual ethical questions in a facilitated dialogue in order to be able to give good care [21,7]. Various conversation methods have been developed to structure these MCD sessions, but the start often is a concrete case about a moral dilemma. When the person who experiences the dilemma is present in the MCD session and tells his/her own story, the effect on participants usually is greater than when a written dilemma is presented. Seeing, hearing and feeling the emotions of someone who faces a moral dilemma and tells about it affects other people. Emotions, mimesis, sympathy and empathy play an important role in moral reasoning [22,23] and this is why the step when participants are asked to identify with the person who experiences the dilemma is a crucial element in most MCD conversation methods. Transforming the narrative of another person into your own narrative, and/or comparing different narratives, enables people to imagine themselves in another position. This opens up new perspectives and possibilities. A concrete method to stimulate this process has been developed on the theoretical basis of the Ethic of Care as developed by Tronto [8,9]. According to this view, care is a process which is crucial for human living and living together, a practice that is ‘nested’ in other practices. It consists of five phases (‘caring about’, ‘taking care of’, ‘care-giving’, ‘care-receiving’, ‘caring with’) and with each phase comes an ethical element of care: attentiveness, responsibility, competence, responsiveness and solidarity. These elements have been integrated in the so-called topographical method [24], which can be used in combination with other methods for MCD. After having listened to the description of a concrete case, participants are invited to draw a ‘map’. Here they can depict positions of persons involved in the dilemma-situation as well as the relations they see/feel in the story (see Fig. 2).



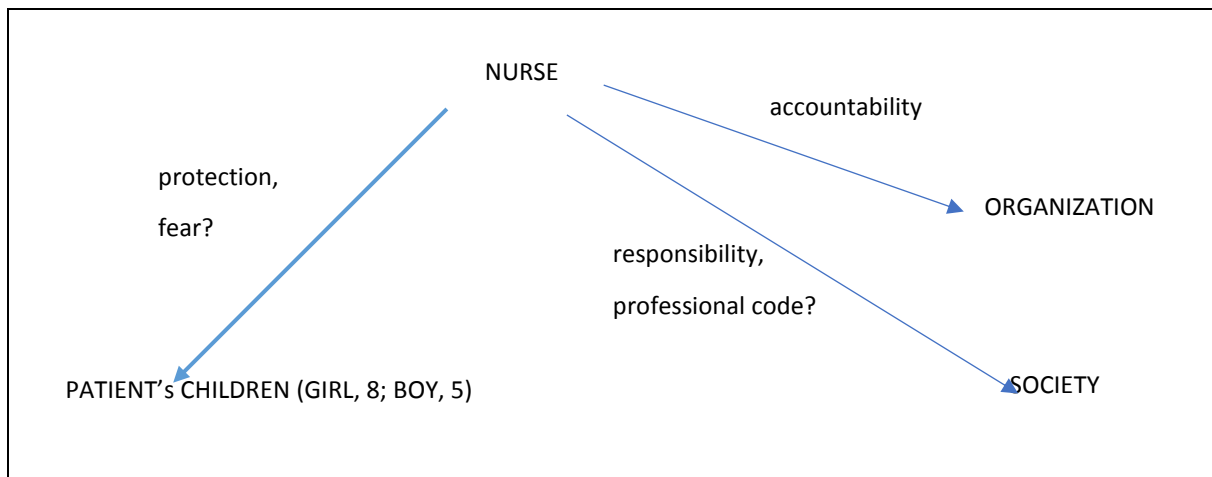


Figure 2: an example of a 'map', drawn after listening to a dilemma-story

In maps like this, participants of a MCD session visualize both sides of a dilemma and their own image of different relevant aspects. They have proven to be a sound and fruitful basis for further dialogue and ethical reflection. The word 'map' may be slightly misleading because everyone present in a MCD session may have another image of the perceived situation. These 'maps' will not guide the persons involved in the case to the one and only 'right' way of conduct; they are not meant as blueprints for actions, but as means to appeal to all participants to be conscious of their own position in a specific situation. In this way, these maps can be considered as a realization of Walkers call for geographies of responsibility [25, 26]. They can be used when we want to (learn to) know what is good care for a specific person in a specific situation, and when we want to (learn to) know how people want to give and receive care; so this method of telling stories and drawing topographies is relevant both in daily care practices as in research projects.

## 4 CONCLUSION

When photographs, topographies and stories are exchanged and shared, for example by organizing an exhibition or a reflective dialogue in a moral case deliberation session, the photo/story becomes a 'relational narrative'. When applied in care ethics in order to do empirical research on good care, this 'enacted' story can be analyzed in search for the existential and moral dimension. The image of the self that emerges from it shows how persons relate to their social context and unveils their ethical position.

Such phenomenological-hermeneutic research should be based on three elements (reflection-expression-self representation) and must be part of a social interaction and/or a dialogue which is directed in such a way that these three elements strengthen each other.

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# NOMADIC MATERIALITY WITHIN ARTS-BASED RESEARCH

Richard Siegesmund<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>*Northern Illinois University (UNITED STATES)*

## Abstract

The current focus on the material follows political scientist Jane Bennett's call for attention to vibrant matter: the inhuman that collaborates, cooperates, or resists the human. This position is often associated with the concept of new materialisms. St. Pierre observes that we now conceive of social relations as including the inhuman with the human. This shift demands new conceptual frameworks and methodological approaches to inquiry in the social sciences. The visual arts have long explored the interaction of the human with a variety of empirical materials. This paper explores two historical examples. The first is the impact in early Renaissance Flanders on the possibilities for conceptualizing meanings through the newly invented media of oil paint. This innovation introduced the potentiality of layered luminosity. The second is the impact in the 17<sup>th</sup> century of the possibility for metal inscription, applied through the evolving printing process of intaglio, for manipulating the appearance of light to both clarify and adumbrate meaning. These approaches drawn from arts practice can serve as metaphors that help inform post-qualitative research as it struggles toward new methods. The arts-based educational researcher (ABER), poet, and dancer Donald Blumenfeld-Jones calls for a greater recognition of how the arts struggle with complexity and suggests that embracing the disruption of the vibrant matter to human intent, creates a nomadic methodology of becoming lost in order to find. These examples demonstrate how arts-based research (ABR) may suggest general, practical methods for the conduct of post-qualitative research.

Keywords: arts-based research, post-qualitative research, visual research, new materialisms.

## 1 INTRODUCTION

This paper focuses on materiality in post-qualitative social science research, how materiality is central to the arts, and finally how arts-based methods—which are inherently nomadic—contribute to the move to post-qualitative social science.

Political theorist Jane Bennett [1] calls for attention to *vibrant matter*. This appeal attempts to shift social thinking away from a paradigm that frames humans as agents who have the ability to act over materials. Instead, Bennett is concerned with how humans relate and respond to—but do not control—the empirical materials of the world around them. Bennett links her concern to sociologist Bruno Latour's [2] conception of the "actant": sources of action that may be either human or inhuman but always collaborating or cooperating within the contexts in which they operate. Bennett further distinguishes her work from Marxist historical materialism's focus on systems created through human effort that in turn control human agency. An example of historical materialism is Paul Willis' [3] study of the secondary education in Britain's industrial West Midlands where he found the structure of education caused young adults to rebel and leave school, thus guarantying that the local industries had an adequate supply of unskilled labor. No one consciously said the societal structure

of school and work were designed to work this way, but it is how education had evolved to serve the needs of the community. Bennett's project is more fundamental. She sees it as challenging the vertical plane that places the human over matter. In so doing, she brackets the issue of human subjectivity. Separate from human control and interpretation, materials do things in unintended and unexpected ways. She is concerned that our concept of the social is conflated to the study of actions and subjective reactions of humans. The agency of materials is not realized. For Bennett, the over emphasis of the human in the social results in a false attribution of human credit or blame in situations that could be better understood as intersections with actants.

Bennett's conception of accounting for vibrant matter in sociological discourse diminishes the over privileging of human control. It shifts our inquiry into the world from a pursuit of how to control material with certainty to an attention of how we are in relationship with the world and how we accommodate our presence to materials. This is a shift from epistemology (what we know about the world) to ontology (the form of our being in the world). Thus, Bennett's vibrant matter aligns with Karen Barad's agential *realism* [4] and her call that science demands compromise in the traditional conception of epistemology. These concerns for a new kind of conception of qualitative inquiry in the social sciences are now referred to new materialisms and post-qualitative inquiry. Educational theorist Elizabeth St. Pierre [5] suggests that the need to accept the limits of epistemology opens new territory for the role of ontology. It certainly rejects the Cartesian claim that to know is to be. Being is more than knowing. Unpacking being is the new direction of post-qualitative inquiry and it requires new ways of thinking about qualitative methods. Post-qualitative inquiry should move beyond the conceptual frameworks that have been imposed through quantitative methodologies that seek disembodied comprehensive explanations, or qualitative methodologies that privilege the subjective "I" of the researcher.

The visual arts are familiar with being in relationship with the materials of the world. Artists understand what it means to negotiate with materials—with stone, metal, or ink pooling in absorbent paper. Advanced training in the arts—past the basic skills of technique and control—largely deal with strategies for negotiating with the non-human. Therefore, the arts may suggest ways of thinking in material that could be fruitful to new ways of conducting post-qualitative research.

However, the arts are not exempt from being understood in traditional epistemological terms that mark the human as the measure of analysis and interpretation. Therefore it is important to note how they make the qualitative to post-qualitative move. In so doing, we can consider how certain material art practices can suggest metaphors that take up St. Pierre's challenge to radically rethink what we mean by inquiry and research.

## **2 FLUID SENSIBILITY**

In the arts, encounters with materials can allow for a fluid, nomadic sensibility. They are nomadic in the sense that they require an embodiment—or embodied projection—that creates the painting's presence, its ontological being. Braidotti [6] suggests nomadic thought works outside of typical constructions of semiotic thought, where meaning is stated, grounded, and secure. Instead, through a relationship of the material and the human a dialogue takes place where there is motion as exploration of different forms of relational being. Braidotti call this a *fluid sensibility*. To illustrate this point of fluid sensibility, I wish to explore examples of works of art from two different artists that are particularly relevant to Flanders and the Low Countries.



## 2.1 Luminous Layering

The first of these, Fig. 1, is by early Flemish Renaissance painter Jan van Eyck (c. 1390-1441). *The Virgin and Child with Canon van der Paele* is an oil painting on a wood panel approximate 1 x 1.5 meters and was completed around 1434–36. It is currently on display at the Groeningemuseum in Bruges.



Fig 1. Jan van Eyck, *The Virgin and Child with Canon van der Paele* (1434–36) oil on oak panel 122 x 157 cm, Groeningemuseum, Bruges.

A typical analysis of what this painting means would begin with a discussion of the figures displayed: who are these people, why are they grouped in this particular order, and what is the significance of the symbols that adorn and accompany them? These are facts all clearly controlled and stated by the artist. The task of the viewer is epistemological. It is to know them. A traditional aesthetic analysis would also point out that Van Eyck's methodological use of the new medium of oil paint brought a new level of clarity to the recording of images. This new clarity provided the illusion of seeing minute detail in remarkable lucidity. Such a move announces the arrival of the Renaissance and previsions Enlightenment values, where light penetrates everything and facilitates inquiry by revealing the universe. Such a view also aligns with a traditional epistemological approach to inquiry.

However, from a new materialisms standpoint, such a discussion is only a footnote to the more important issue of what the physical materials are from which this object was made, and how these materials gain agency in a way that brings us into relationship with this object. In this painting, Van Eyck is showcasing two new techniques—in the language of Karan Barad, apparatuses—that would change the course of Western art. The first of these is the new material of oil paint. The second is the breakthrough in perceptual rendering made possible by new advances in mirror finished reflective lenses. Both combine to produce a new form of qualitative inquiry. Due to the limits of this paper, I will only discuss the first of these, the new material of oil paint, yet both of these apparatuses, paint and lens, work together in the conduct of inquiry.

In *The Virgin and Child with Canon van der Paele*, Van Eyck provides a bravura performance of the aesthetic possibilities of the new technique of applying paints by suspending ground earth pigments

in refined linseed oil. The oil would harden into a clear transparent layer that would allow light to seamlessly pass through, bounce back against the back surface of the painting and enter the eye of the viewer. A small amount of pigment added to the oil still maintains transparency. Fig. 2 is a visualization. As demonstrated in Fig. 2, mixing more pigment into the oil would make the layer translucent. Light could still pass through and bounce back into the eye of the viewer, but the pigment would further alter the perception of color. Oil paint permitted more pigment to be suspended in a translucent or semi-opaque layer, and thus created the visual impression of greater saturation of color. Furthermore, the ability to hold more pigment, gave oil painters a new ability to create greater nuances of color through layering different translucent layers of paint. The materiality of painting dictates that intensity of color is not achieved by painting a single opaque layer. The perception of intensity is the product of layering: multiple transparent and translucent layers, each slightly altering and amplifying the quality of light on its trajectory before reaching the eye. Perception is a nomadic journey of moving through these layers of paint.

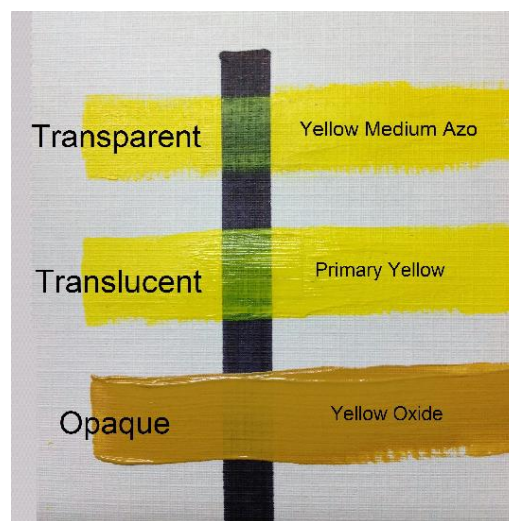


Fig 2. Transparent, Translucent, Opaque [7]

To achieve a final impression of clarity, the artist had to carefully apply layer, upon layer of transparent, to translucent to semi-opaque paint. This is a process that begins in light and works toward the evocation of form as the surface darkens. The technical trick is to arrive at a suggestion of darkness through layers of transparent and translucent paint, thereby keeping darkness and density as illusions of light.



Fig 3. Sandro Botticelli, detail --*The Birth of Venus* (c. 1486). Tempera on canvas. 172.5 cm × 278.9 cm. Uffizi, Florence

To better appreciate this change, it is helpful to compare Van Eyck's new materiality of oil painting with a comparable Early Renaissance painter, Sandro Botticelli, who worked in the long established medium of egg tempera (see Fig. 3). As the name suggests, mixing pigment into raw eggs forms tempera. Like oil, the egg medium (even the initially yellow yolk) will dry clear over time. By controlling the amount of pigment in the egg medium, the artist can control the opaqueness of the final color. However the pigments dries soft and chalky—which in the hands of a master like Botticelli—creates its own pastel-like aesthetic appeal.

The translucent layering that is possible in tempera is qualitatively different from the layering that is possible in the new material of oil paint. In both cases, our eye is perceptually nomadic. The eye must make sense of light that is moving through multiple levels of paint. However, with the oil medium, the eye is literally responding to a more open and nomadic movement of light than in the egg tempera. The movement of light is sensed in an embodied experience by the viewer shaped by the artist. This does not provide a specific meaning that the artist states and the viewer interprets. Instead, this is the viewer's qualitative reaction. Along with explicit semiotic meaning, there is a layering of nomadic experience to hold the viewer in the presence of the artist's inquiry.



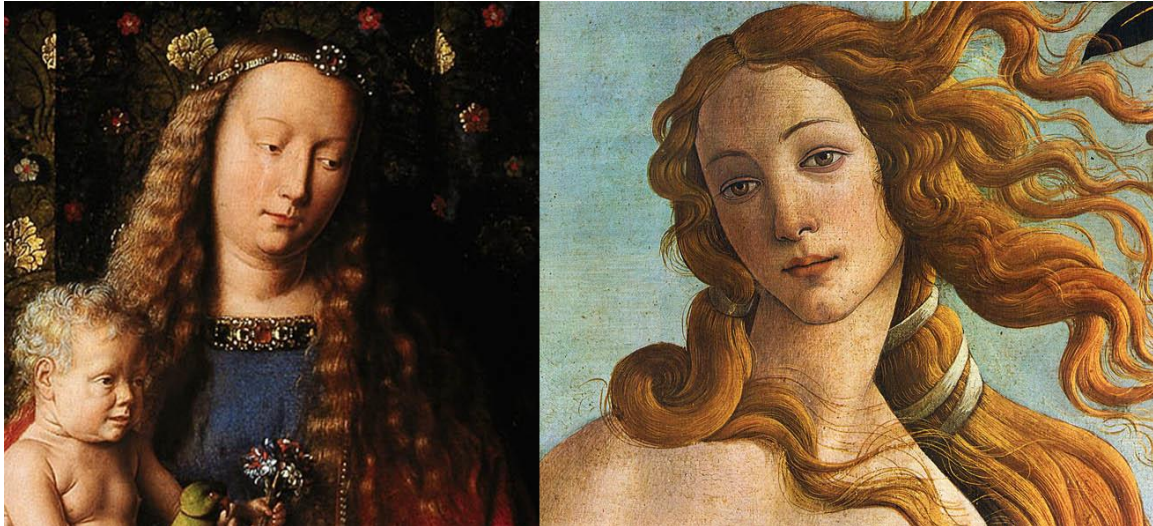


Fig. 4. Comparison of translucent materiality: oil vs. egg tempera

With Van Eyck and Botticelli, the materials result in qualitatively different forms of luminosity and radiance (see Fig 4). Restraint in the Botticelli contrasts with the intensity in the Van Eyck. These are qualities, produced through layering, that hold our attention. They result in our embodied engagement to *be* with the painting, separate from any semiotic interpretive meaning that work might hold. Botticelli is a master because he makes this ontological move with the chalkiness of egg tempera; but Van Eyck is a game changer as he introduces the power of a new material that transforms our ability to see the world. In both cases, the skillful artist aligns complementary embodied, sensory qualitative meaning (not redundancy) to the semiotic text. While in both cases, the semiotic text of each painting offers an immediate entry way into meaning, still there remains an independent embodied felt experience that each artist evokes through materiality. It represents the shift in nomadic inquiry from epistemological to ontological. Van Eyck is breaking open the potential of a new world of ontological being.

Layering can move from being an embodied technique in painting, to a metaphorical approach for conducting qualitative inquiry. The arts-based educational inquiry of photographer Natalie LeBlanc provides an example [8] (see Fig. 5). LeBlanc conducted a multi-year photography study of an abandoned school in Canada. LeBlanc approached her photography as a kind of layering. She was not taking a picture of individual semiotic texts, but trusting the artistic process of layering and began to build assemblages of photographs that did not “say” anything, but instead pulled the viewer into their luminosity.

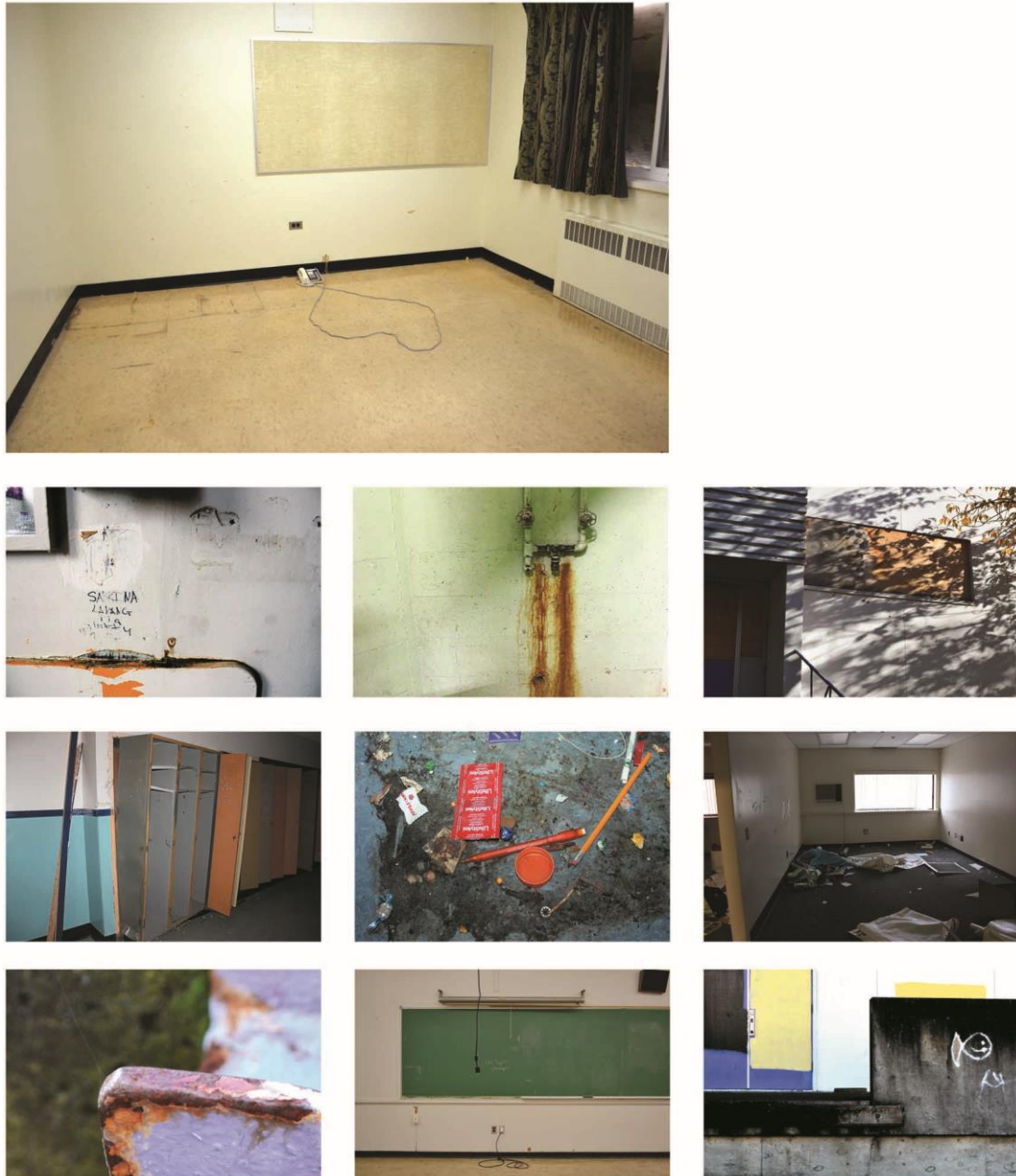


Fig 5. Natalie LeBlanc: Luminous Layering in Arts-Based Inquiry

Our inherent desire to know what anyone of these images might mean is disrupted through the layering of disparate counter narratives. The apparent clarity of any single image is disrupted by the arrangement, which creates a new density. LeBlanc's work suggests how layering, where images create conceptual levels of transparency, translucency, and opaqueness could become an arts-based criterion for the evaluation of post-qualitative work.

## 2.2 Clarifying and Adumbrating

The printmaking technique of intaglio, pioneered in the Low Countries during the Renaissance, offers a second way to think of post-qualitative methodology. In the processes of intaglio, the artist strikes paper prints from a metal plate that has been cut by hand with engraving tools or burned with acid. In this next example, I want to turn to the celebrated print of the Dutch artist Rembrandt van Rijn



(1606-1669), whose own prints demonstrate a move from the epistemological to the ontological. Rembrandt achieves this by reconsidering light as a source of clarification to light as an agent of adumbration. To address this issue, I consider the series of prints from Rembrandt's "The Three Crosses." In intaglio, the artist works on one metal plate, which s/he works to a conclusion. This is called a *state*. If the artist should decide to alter the plate, changing the impression that will be pulled by running the plate through the printer, this is now a *second state*. In the case of the "Three Crosses," art historians present evidence of five states. Again, due to limitations of space I will discuss two.

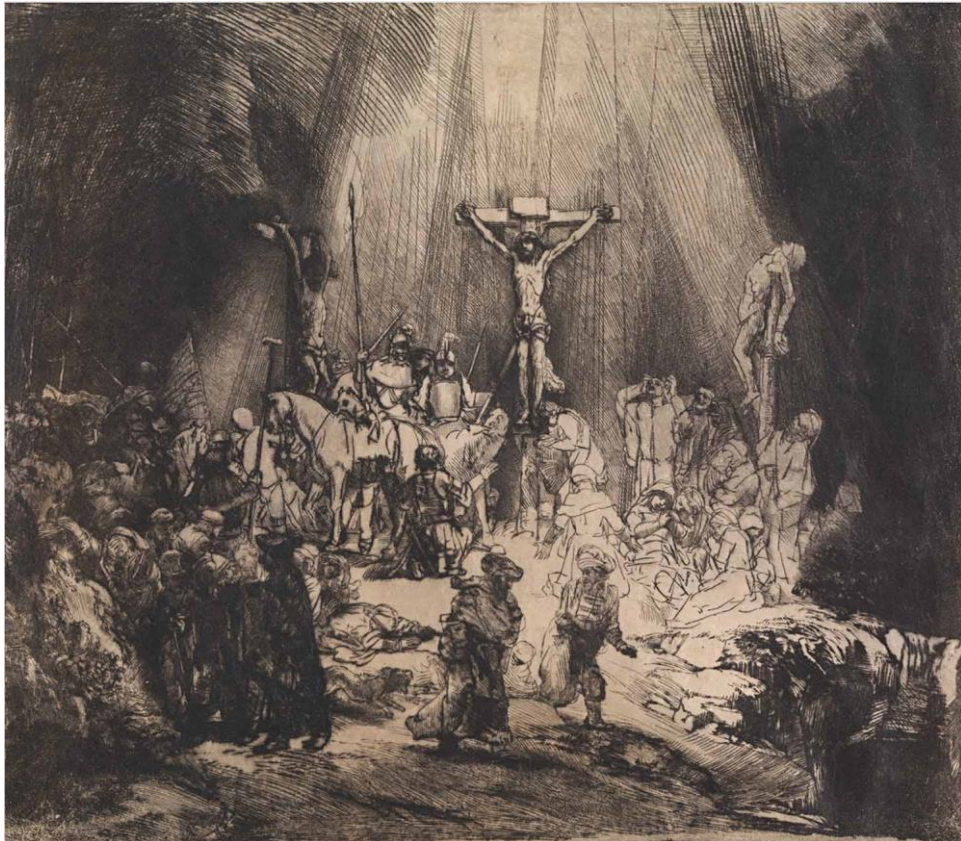


Fig. 6, Rembrandt, "The Three Crosses," State 2

In the second state, Rembrandt is portraying a moment that is central to the Christian religion: Christ has perished on the cross, and the Roman centurion falls to his knees in anguish as he has a moment of revelation that the man he has just helped to crucify is the Son of God. In this moment of divine revelation, light parts the darkness, everything is seen, and the truth is known. It is a triumphant epistemological moment.

However, by the fourth state, Rembrandt has recast the print. Through a laborious method of scraping away metal, Rembrandt has erased the centurion's central role to the composition. Other figures in the foreground have been scraped away as well, but not entirely. They are adumbrated: traces remain that suggest ghost-like forms. The divine light of the second state that provides clarity no longer exists. Although the overall tone of the print is lighter, impenetrable shadows now envelop the lower right third of the print. Rembrandt has also reworked the figure of Christ. His eyes are half-open, and his mouth agape. This is the moment of despair, when Christ asks why God has forsaken him. Rembrandt has changed the moment of epistemological clarity to doubt. The viewer no longer

has a clear semiotic text to view. This has now become a land of uncertainty, shadow, and light in which to nomadically wander.

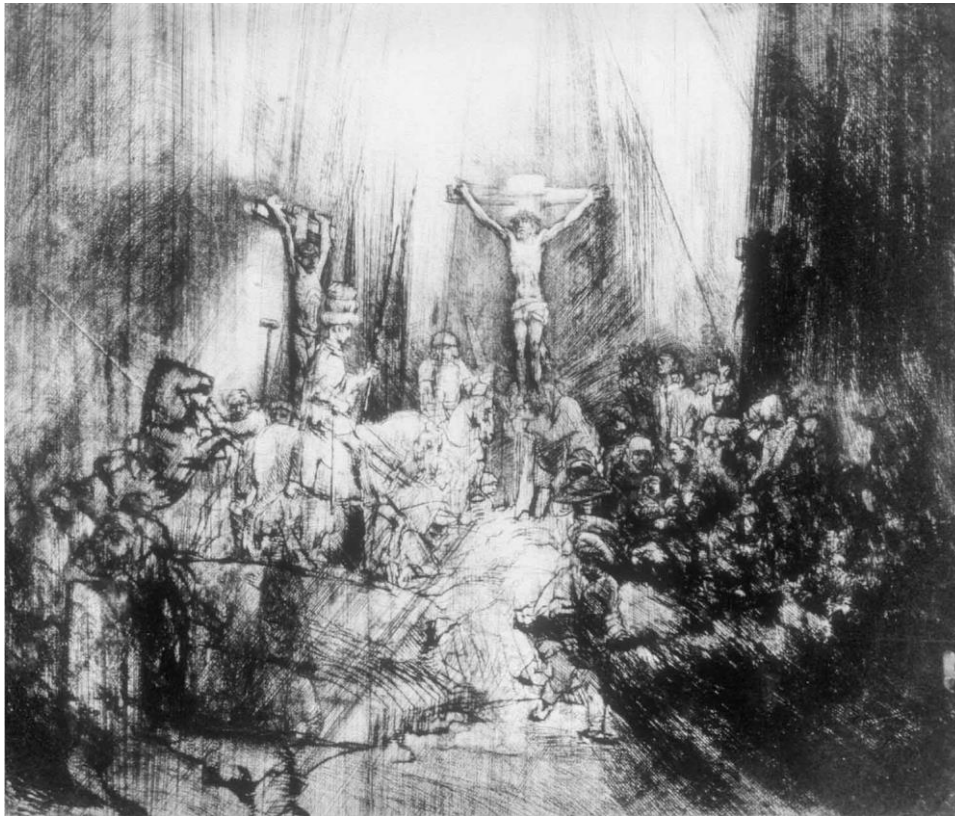


Fig 7. Rembrandt, "The Three Crosses," State 4

Much of the information that was clear in the second state has become ambiguous in the fourth. Although the basic composition remains, state 4 presents a new way of seeing that reveals and obscures at the same time. The philosopher Jacques Rancière would call this a new distribution of the sensible [9]. Reconfiguration conceals and brings new ways of thinking to the foreground. Now, Rembrandt is no longer making an assertion of faith, as he had done in the second state. Rembrandt is no longer certain of a meaning; this is now an open pathway of meditation. We are invited to wander in this intimate and portentous space. Adumbration (the faint outlines of erasure, the change of time in the narrative that portends the revelation to come, and the use of shadow to further doubt and uncertainty) promotes an ontological presence, instead of the epistemological explanation.

Qualitative research has often been distinguished by the commitment of researchers to reveal epistemological conditions of the world. Frequently, these revolve around social justices and silenced minorities. In a way that harkens to the lessons of Rembrandt's artistic journey through the evolving states of "The Three Crosses," arts-based educational researcher (ABER), poet, and dancer Donald Blumenfeld-Jones [10] asks that post-qualitative researchers step back from the certainty of what they want their research to show. As we begin our inquiry, we need to be less certain about our destination and conclusions and more open to what Blumenfeld-Jones calls wild imagination. He sees this as losing one-self in the darkness of complexity that merges reality and fantasy. This is perhaps a methodological step in post-qualitative work: the opening to the darkness of being purposefully lost with no clear demarcations to the lines of fact and fiction in a struggle to assemble shape-shifting traces into an ontological moment. In such ways, the arts might point to new methodological directions in post-qualitative inquiry.

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# LIVING INQUIRY IN HIGHER EDUCATION: NOMADIC INTERBEING

Marta Madrid-Manrique<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Glyndwr University (UNITED KINGDOM)

## Abstract

This paper provides insights about the problems of finding oneself at home in the neoliberalized international Higher Education sector through a visual autobiographical narrative. Within an increasingly mobile sector, I reflect on my experience as international lecturer in the UK to generate a dialogue between text and image through the sequential art of comic. I acknowledge the problematic aspects of a displaced migrant subjectivity. The story proposes meditation as the mental training to find a stable home in oneself instead of making oneself feel at home depending on uncertain changing circumstances. With a transdisciplinary approach, this proposal takes theoretical elements from political and social studies, Art Education, postfeminist theories and Buddhist philosophy to merge them in a creative narrative. To do so, I apply aspects of the arts-based educational research methodology of a/r/tography and living inquiry. The paper takes the invitation of a/r/tography to live between the coexistent and interdependent practices of the artist/ researcher/ teacher. A/r/tographers become involved in processes of inquiry that recognizes subjectivity, autobiography, reflection, meditation and story-telling as valid forms of constructing meaning through art making. I commit to the process of embracing both the personal, the professional and the spiritual, where the professional-personal are in a continuous process of becoming. The struggle to belong to the new place-culture might point to an awareness of the network of interdependent relationships that challenges the modern notion of the individual self. Therefore, relationality and Buddhist concept of interbeing can lead to the proposal of meditation as a methodology of inquiry. Following this approach, the comic narrative aspires to construct an emergent dialogic space with the reader that allows me to embrace my vulnerability, pain and discomfort of searching for one's place in the world. There is a strong communicative potential in graphic narratives to engage with readers-viewers and generate a meaningful subjective connection. This connection has the potential to allow the singular-plural to emerge, with no intention to provide generalizable universal truths. The limitations of the study rely on the limited ability of the narrative to touch the reader-viewer. The success of the work depends on its ability to disrupt previous conceptions of "being at home".

Keywords: Living inquiry, meditation, a/r/tography, interbeing.

## 1 HOMELESS AND REST-LESS IN THE INTERNATIONALISATION OF NEOLIBERAL HIGHER EDUCATION

*"It is particularly important not to confuse the concept of subjectivity with the notion of the individual or individualism: subjectivity is a socially mediated process of entitlements to and negotiations with power relations. Consequently, the formation and emergence of new social subjects is always a collective enterprise, "external" to the individual self while also mobilizing the self's in-*

*depth and singular structures.*" (Braidotti 2011, 18 [1])

In this paper, I pay attention to the impact of the neoliberal economy on Higher Education in the UK and how it might push international students and staff towards becoming nomadic subjects. The impact of the neoliberalization of Higher Education has diverse aspects that affect scholars, students and societies in different ways. As Shore and Wright (2000 [2]) point out, universities have reinvented themselves as quasi- or pseudo-marketised entities competing for quasi-customers (such as students). With the recent introduction of fees of fees in the UK system, students could become high demanding "clients" and higher education is increasingly reduced to a consumer good. The analysis of Watermeyer and Olssen (2016 [3]) of the Research Excellence Framework and the New Public Management system in the UK, criticize the instrumentalization of research with the subsequent loss of academic freedom and criticality. In this regard, Canaan (2010 [4]) stresses that the main value has become competition as higher education becomes a competitive market and universities are restructured and managed to control and direct what academics must perform. Canaan refers to the work of Judith Butler (1993 [5]) to invite us to become aware of the process through which the self becomes subjected to the dominant order and becomes submissive to the neoliberal ideology and imperatives. Canaan stresses how as academics we are disciplined by hierarchies of power that might make us more insecure about our critical positions.

The neoliberal game has no innocence regarding the pressure on lecturers. Some scholars have affirmed that this competition and pressure contributes to a bullying culture (Watermeyer and Olssen 2016, 20 [3]). In some instances, the pressure of work is becoming unsustainable resulting in academics quitting their positions. For Coin (2017 [6]), the quitting phenomena might be an act of resistance and renunciation to neoliberal values. Quitting might not be just a political decision but a desperate attempt to protect one's own mental and physical health from the exhaustion of the frenetic activity required to keep up with university "demand of efficiency and functionalism" (Coin 2017, 705 [6]). Some scholars do not fit the neo-liberal set of values and therefore live alienated and conflicted by "their ethical ideals and the array of measured, meaningless and bureaucratized tasks that fill their lives" (Coin 2017, 707 [6]). Universities are becoming "de facto exploitative labor market" (Collier, 2013 [7]). In this neoliberal context, well-being and mental health are at risk: "commitment, judgement and authenticity are sacrificed for impression and performances" in the benefit of an ongoing intensification of academic workloads (Ball 2003, 221 [8]). We might feel homeless at work in the midst of bureaucratization, competition and the expectation to demonstrate excellent practice. We might become homeless and restless trying to do everything and trying to be everything: artists, researchers and teachers. Our identities are fragmented into multiple pieces that try to fulfill multiple pressures, expectations and demands.

Identities are rendered as fluid, fragmented, complex and multiple in poststructuralist, postcolonial and feminist theories. The subject is rendered as a non-unit that is rhizomatic (Deleuze, 2004 [9]), singular plural (Nancy, 2000 [10]), and nomadic (Braidotti, 2011 [1]). Nomadic theory (Braidotti, 2011 [1]) aims to construct a political cartographic figuration of mobility in a globalized world. The author points out that the flexibility and dynamism of the subject is forced, among other factors, by exploitative capitalist neoliberal economies and the precariousness of work. World economies generate a flow of transnational capital and labor workforces that feed flows of migration and mobility. This "perverse" force of nomadism privileges the free circulation of data, commodities and goods while restricting the mobility of human subjects such as refugees, asylum seekers and illegal migrants. Braidotti (2011 [1]) uses the metaphor of the two sides of the global coin where one side is the global city and the other side is a refugee camp; both coexisting interdependently. I intend to respond to Braidotti's political critique of Eurocentrism and nationalism through a visual narrative that explores the embodied spiritual dimension of a nomadic subject looking for home into herself

through meditation.

Non-British workers become nomadic subjects in the UK regarding the uncertainty about the new citizenship status. Changing place demands opening the heart and the mind to loss and new learning opportunities. Becoming international involves learning to live between places, languages, cultures and affective territories. It involves loss, change and discomfort. Being international involves learning to deal with the fear of being seen as inadequate, excessive, and insufficient regarding the new unknown hostess culture's parameters. Depending on the intensity of one's otherness, this fear might involve the threat to be punished, prosecuted, or becoming disposable. Becoming a nomadic international worker might involve feeling restless trying to follow a deep purpose while pleasing the demands of the hosting institution-culture. It is a challenge to align administrative duties with what Giroux identifies as the purpose of higher education: critical insight, imagination and a sense of responsibility that struggles for social justice (2015, 6 [11]). Nomadic theory might overlook the exhaustion trying to conciliate the opposite demands of the neoliberal values of competition, exploitation and accumulation of academic merits with personal and spiritual Buddhist notions of merit associated with generosity, wisdom and deep understanding. Nomadic subjects can become homeless and restless in the midst of neoliberal international academia: how to feel at home with an "inter-national" identity?

"International" can have contradictory meanings in the midst of the Brexit process of separation of the UK from the European Union. On the one hand, the Government aims to control the flow of people and products from other nations. On the other hand, there is an emphasis on the "internationalization" of Higher Education to attract student from overseas and prepare students for a global market. Green and Whitsed (2015 [12]) stress that in the past, Europe and North America have directed their efforts towards outward-bound student mobility, in contrast with the British, Australian and New Zealand strategies to use higher education as an export industry and attract incoming international students. The annual study of internationalization of the organisation Universities UK (2017 [13]) shows a 30% increase in the enrolment of international students in the last ten years in British Universities. While the UK government aims to control the flow of migrants and limit the stay of foreigners, it also struggles to attract international students as sources of capital during their studies. Universities are concerned with making students feel at home (The Guardian, 2016, [14]). International staff members might be able to make a contribution in this regard. This study states that the 29% of academics in the UK are from overseas: "the number of EU academics in the UK has more than doubled in the last decade". British Higher Education is increasingly international and therefore it is relevant to address the challenge of generating a sense of belonging to a global community. Braidotti (2011 [1]) stresses that the point is not to deconstruct the identity of the nomadic subject but to relocate the identity on a new ground that accounts for multiple belongings. How to generate a sense of belonging within multiple and diverse socioeconomic and symbolic locations?

## **2 MEDITATION AS AN A/R/TOGRAPHIC METHOD OF LIVING INQUIRY**

*"Living inquiry includes ways of knowing that have traditionally been excluded from academic epistemologies such as the emotional, intuitive, personal, spiritual, and embodied, where there is no strict line drawn among the private, public and professional self."*

(Springgay, Irwin and Kind 2005, 903 [15])

The methodology of a/r/tography proposes that researchers become involved in a process of living inquiry generating embodied encounters created through visual and textual understandings that might reflect on their lived experiences. A/r/tography describes living inquiry as an aesthetic

encounter where the processes of making and being are inextricably connected to the awareness and practice of visual arts and creative writing. I embrace this challenging integrative proposal to dissolve strict frontiers between the territories of theory and practice. I take the invitation of a/r/tography to expose myself as artist/ researcher/ teacher and become involved in process of inquiry that considers memory, subjectivity, autobiography, reflection, meditation, story-telling, interpretation and representation “in an evocative way, suggesting meaning rather than communicating facts” (Springgay, Irwin and Kind 2005, 903 [15]).

Inspired by a/r/tography, I get involved in a meditative process of living inquiry that pays attention to the diverse responsibilities and roles of the artist/ researcher/ teacher in relation to the multiple academic identities, the spiritual and the personal embodied experience. Therefore, relationality is a key rendering when we get involved in an a/r/tographic process of inquiry. Being an artist, researcher and teacher may have a strong creative potential but it entails many challenges. Becoming a nomadic subject moving from one identity to another has the potential to require an energetic cost that might be frequently overlooked. A/r/tographer’s nomadic subjectivity can have two paradoxical potentials. While a/r/tographers have the potential to resist the tensions of neoliberal demands generating meaningful encounters with others through the arts, there is a risk of becoming homeless and restless within the unsustainable demands and desires attempting to address too diverse a range of tasks and roles, wanting to be everything: artist, researcher and lecturer. The aim of the paper is to generate a relational creative meaningful space of meditation, understanding, compassion and transformation. This welcoming space of all aspects of our multiple identities might be useful to set our own limits and direct our actions towards a deep meaningful purpose that can be sustainable in terms of energetic and emotional cost. This is a relational compassionate space among the different aspects of ourselves, so that we can relate in a loving way with others in the midst of the tensions of working places.

Relationality suggests that our process of interpretation and understanding is embodied, it happens in connections to ours and other’s bodies, and in connection to other beings (Springgay, Irwin, Kind 2008 [16]). The relational (e)pistemology proposed by Thayer-Bacon (2010 [17]) stresses the transactional nature of knowledge with its social, personal, holistic, ecologic and scientific dimensions. Thayer-Bacon (2010, [17]) mentions American indigenous traditions and Buddhist philosophies as examples of epistemologies that may connect with our essential experience and develop the concept of knowers in relation to others, including the natural world and other non-material realms of existence. The rendering of relationality can resonate with the concept of interdependence and “interbeing” in Buddhist philosophies: *“to be is to inter-be with every other thing. You cannot just be by yourself alone. You have to inter-be with every other thing.”* (Thich Nhat Hanh 2009, 3 [18]). Living inquiry and meditation share the aim to reflect on the lived experience. Buddhist philosophy and research aim for reflective practice. Within Buddhism, it is not possible to acquire experience of the notion of “interbeing” without some awareness of the interconnection of causes, effects and conditions. This awareness requires training our attention to perceive and learn how phenomena exist.

Zen Vietnamese Buddhist author and Master Thich Nhat Hanh holds a very poetic approach of the rendering “interbeing” (2009 [18]). In the section “Interbeing”, Thich Nhat Hanh invites the reader to see a cloud floating in the sheet of paper. He traces back the relationships of interdependence between the paper, the tree, the rain needed for the tree to grow and therefore the cloud that contains the rain. He also invites the reader to see the sunshine in the sheet of paper

that allows the forest to grow; and therefore, acknowledge that the sun and the paper inter-are. He also invites us to see ourselves in the piece of paper as if the observer was part of his/her object of perception. Finally, Thich Nhat Hahn invites us to see that everything in the universe is contained in the sheet of paper. This meditation process invites us to acknowledge the interdependence in the succession of causes and conditions that make life possible. For example, this paper is the result of the struggle of finding an “inter-national” place in the world, the process of developing resilient strategies within neoliberalised Higher Education institutions, and the vital drive to make work meaningful through research. The struggle becomes the mud that feeds the lotus (the compassionate mind). The training of attention, or mindfulness, can facilitate a learning process to deal with obstacles so that we can produce something out of suffering that is beneficial for us and for others.

There are diverse types of meditation in which the training of our attention is a starting point. Thich Nhat Hanh (1993 [19]) describes the fundamentals of meditation practice as a training in four methods: mindfulness of the body, mindfulness of the feelings, mindfulness of the mind and mindfulness of the objects of the mind, as it was stated by the Buddha in the sutra of the Four Establishments of Mindfulness. As it is stated in the Mahayana tradition, “all is just mind. All things are just consciousness” (Thich Nhat Hanh 1993, 124 [19]). Meditation can be a practice of awareness that can help us deal with our condition of nomadic inter-beings subject to constant change in professional vital situations. Nomadic inter-being implies an awareness of interdependence, impermanence and radical relationality in Higher Education. The practice of meditation within a scientific context has the aim to provide a space and a time to relate to phenomena differently. Meditation can acknowledge what is arising in the mind and the body and offer strategies to transform ourselves, change what we do and how we do it. Our continual and contiguous becoming as researchers, mentors and humans, as it is referred to by a/r/tography, resonates with the Buddhist philosophy of impermanence and constant change. Breathing consciously allows us to focus on the constant subtle shifting experience that resonates with our mortality. If we expand the scope of being nomadic subjects within one life span to the possibility of multiple rebirths, the notion of nomad opens to the possibility of rendering ourselves as transmigratory beings from life to life. The notion of rebirth and bardo in Buddhist philosophy highlights the relevance of in-between spaces of becoming.

### **3 TRANSMIGRATORY INTER-BEINGS: IN-BETWEEN SPACES AND BARDOS**

*"There is only one law in the universe that never changes – that all things change, and that all things are impermanent."*

(Sogyal Rinpoche 2002, 29 [20])

A/r/tography has a specific focus on *in-between* places, where the undetermined, the transitional and the unknown emerge. Dealing with the unknown is a constant challenge for migrants who enter a new territory and culture. The experience of “coming and going” from the culture and place of birth to the hosting culture and place of work might open opportunities to think about where is home. In Buddhist traditions, one takes refuge in the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha when there is a conscious decision to follow the spiritual Buddhist path. In Buddhist philosophy, the mind is a continuum that has no beginning or end. This understanding of the mind informs the notion of rebirth. If the mind is not material and does not depend on the body, it cannot be inherited from our parents. As Sogyal Rinpoche states, " the great majority of scientists continue to reduce the mind to

no more than a physical process in the brain, which goes against the testimony of thousands of years of experience of mystics and meditators of all religions" (2002, 13 [20]). Therefore, the mind can be considered a continuum that might have its own trajectory after leaving the body through the process of death. What follows death is conceptualized as the bardo, defined as an in-between state. Sogyal Rimpoche (2002 [20]) states that bardos do not happen just after death but in any transitional situation. Since life is constant change, life is full of bardos or situations of deep uncertainty with transformational potential. Sogyal Rimpoche (2002 [20]) define bardos as particular powerful opportunities charged with potential, when whatever you do has a crucial far-reaching effect. Sogyal Rimpoche extends the understanding of the bardo as the "moment when you step toward the edge of a precipice" (2002, 11 [20]). This moment might have a great potential for learning and for transformation. Actually, in Tibetan, the word for body means something you leave behind. Sogyal Rimpoche shares the Tibetan notion of the body as baggage that reminds us that we are only travellers, taking temporary refuge in this life and in this body (2002 [20]).

#### **4 MY STORY**

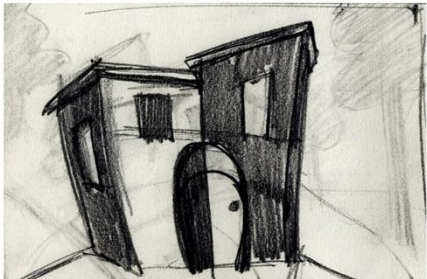
Braidotti (2011 [1]) encourages us to use transformative and inspirational imagination to construct horizons of hope in the future. Inspired by Buddhist philosophy and practice, my graphic story proposes meditation as a process to look for a sense of belonging inside ourselves, opening the heart and the mind to interdependence and impermanence. As it can be seen in figures 1-6, meditation can give us the stability and confidence needed to live situations of constant change. As Sogyal Rimpoche states: "meditation is bringing the mind home" (2002, 60 [20]).



Where is home?



Is home in your town?



Is home your region?



Is home owning a house?



Is home protection and safety?



I found home in mother's arms.



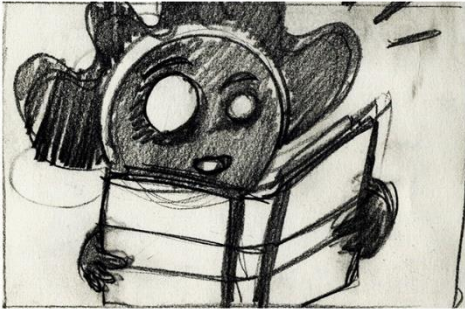
How to find home as an adult?



I found home in learning places.

Fig. 1: page 1 of story (sketches).





Some books became my refuge



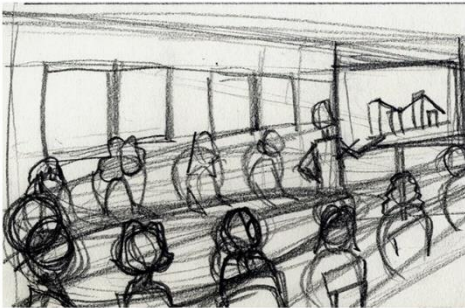
I wanted to become a writer



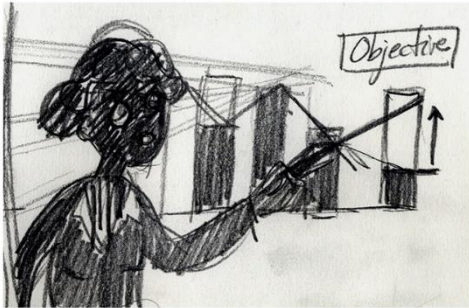
Until I started a PhD...



And aimed to work in the Academy



Where is home in competition?



What is my deep motivation?



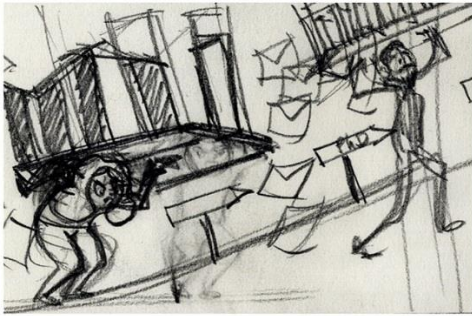
What is the price of doing everything?



How could I set healthy limits?

Fig. 2: page 2 of story (sketches).





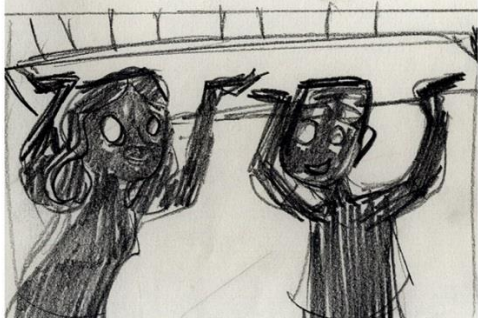
**Homeless in a lonely competition**



**Jealous about those who were happy**



**The pressure for merits was unbearable**



**Then I met him**



**He made life worth it**



**I discovered the joy of teaching**



**Work was now just a part of life**



**He became my refuge**

Fig. 3: page 3 of story (sketches).





He was my home until we broke up.



Something shook and trembled inside.



My self broke into pieces.



In the midst of chaos I started a search.



Where was I? Where was home?



I only found noise, confusion, pain.



I kept searching a way out of suffering.



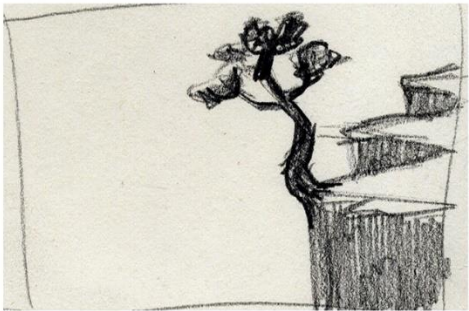
Pain was relieved when I embraced it.

Fig. 4: page 4 of story (sketches).

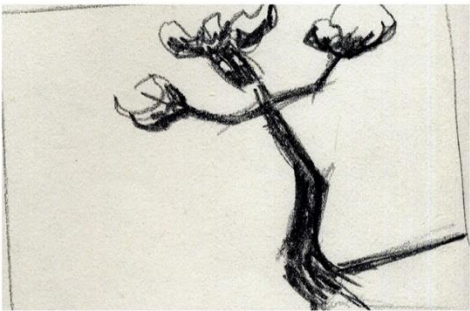




**I learnt to be by myself.**



**My scholarship ended, but not my PhD.**



**Spain was entering an economic crisis.**



**My family had to support me financially.**



**With no future, I became a doctor.**



**There were no academic jobs any more.**



**My map of affection trembled again.**



**No professional future unless migrating.**

Fig. 5: page 5 of story (sketches).



**Where is home in the unfamiliar?**



**What is my pivot point in this dance?**



**Where do I belong in the midst of pain?**



**Rooted in love, wings of compassion.**



**Among the family of sentient beings,**



**Can I make my mind home?**



**Shared suffering; wanted happiness,**



**I found refuge in the Three Jewels.**

Fig. 6: page 6 of story (sketches).

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## MEDITATION AS LIVING INQUIRY

**Marta Madrid Manrique**

*Glyndwr University (UNITED KINGDOM)*

### Abstract

Following Tibetan Buddhist meditation traditions, this workshop gives researchers the opportunity to engage in meditative living inquiry about the difficult aspects of being a professional in Higher Education. Meditation can acknowledge what is arising in the mind and the body and offer strategies to transform ourselves, change what we do and how we do it. This workshop is proposed along with the paper titled "Living inquiry in Higher Education: Nomadic *Inter-being*." Our condition of nomadic inter-beings points to constant inner and exterior change in professional vital migrations along roles, disciplines, territories and affective relationships. Paying attention to our breath reveals our material fragile embodied existence conditioned and threatened by shifting economies and unstable politics. Economic and political crisis challenge the notion of home and the craving of a sense of belonging in globalised communities. Where is home in the midst of the pressures of Higher Education to fulfil changing economic, political and social demands? How could living inquiry include the study of our shared anxieties, our fears and the suffering of impermanence so that we can change our professional practices?

**Keywords:** Meditation, Mindfulness.

A deeper relational meaning of our professional roles as mentors might be manifested through the observation of the body in the body, the observations of sensations in the sensations, and the observation of the mind in the mind (Thich Nhat Hanh, 1993). Breathing consciously allow us to become aware of our mortality (Sogyal Rinpoche, 2002). The awareness of death challenges how we make our careers meaningful. The practice of mediation within a scientific context has the aim to provide a space and a time to relate to phenomena differently. With persistent practice, meditation cultivates an awareness of our mental patterns that condition the way we respond to reality and relate to others (Thich Nhat Hanh, 2009). This knowledge gives us the opportunity to open a space of reflection to decide and negotiate within our limitations and conditions how we want to live our professional lives.

#### **1\_Observing the body in the body (body scan: 20 minutes)**

What is the body manifesting? How can sensations be related to vital professional struggles? How do we relate to our sensations?

#### **2\_Observing sensations in sensations (meditation on breath: 15 minutes).**

How does breathing feel? What does breathing involve as researchers?

#### **3\_Observing the mind in the mind (15 min)**

How do we live our professional practice? What would we like to change? How could we focus on our capacity to change what we can change?

**4\_Meditation on interdependence and impermanence. (20 min)**

How can death become a motivation to transform ourselves and change our practices?

**5\_DIFFICULTIES AND FINDINGS:** conversations in pairs **(10 minutes)**// writing in diary-notebook.

**6\_Closure** (5 minutes)

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# **IDEAS ABOUT A WORKSHOP OF MUSIC LISTENING-PERFORMANCE FOR MUSICALLY UNTRAINED INSTRUCTION PRACTITIONERS. A CASE STUDY**

**Vincenzo Culotta**

*Università degli Studi Milano/Bicocca (ITALY)*

## **Abstract**

In this paper, I am going to present my doctoral research project about a music listening practice for a musically untrained instruction practitioners group towards an embodied knowledge experience. In traditional theories, music listening is conceived as merely receptive. Since 1960s, thanks to psychology of music studies development, music listening has been portrayed as an active representation of the music being heard. However, also in that research context, it has been hardly considered as actually music making. The premise of this research project, instead, is that music listening can be considered not only as a musical activity in its own right but also as a real cooperative knowing process meant in a performative way. A certain workshop setting enables the group of listeners to enact a re-presentation of the musical piece played at the piano by the conductor-musician, through their body's motion, plastic actions, reflective and verbal acts. The paper is structured as follows: firstly, a brief critical literature review on music listening is carried out in order to show the research hypothesis backgrounds; secondly, a theoretical frame is tried to be structured relating to bodily music listening experience. Thirdly, the actual workshop project is set out referring to attendees, setting, phases, methodology, epistemological references. Lastly, workshop expected results are presented along with its pedagogical aim.

Keywords: music listening workshop, bodily music listening, embodied knowledge, art education, music education, teacher training, adult education.

## **1 INTRODUCTION**

In this paper, my current doctoral research project is set out in its principal lines. It concerns a music listening workshop projected for a group of musically untrained instruction practitioners. In traditional theories, listening to music is considered more as a contemplative state than a real act; and where it is portrayed as an act, it is mostly meant as a mental, interior, covert act, rather than a creative, visible, embodied, shared, procedural practice associated with achievement, that is, with performance. The latter, partly unedited, concept of music listening guides the workshop project that is going to be below presented. The research questions concern, on the one hand, music education, on the other, music *as* education. What is asked is: firstly, whether a bodily music listening, i.e. active listening that involves body's sensations and actions, provides listeners with a better music understanding; secondly, whether such a music listening practice provides workshop's participants with an embodied knowledge experience that challenges their implicit assumptions and educational



habits. The starting point is a brief critical literature review on music listening. Regard to that, it is not my interest to present an exhaustive overview of the studies and their outcomes on the theme, but rather to highlight some of the principal theoretical lines with which the idea of an embodied music listening and knowing can confront. From that it will be possible, then, to structure a theoretical frame of the workshop that focuses on the relationship between music, bodily listening and embodied, cooperative knowing process. The second part of the paper addresses the actual workshop project relating to attendees, conductor, setting, work steps. As conclusion, it is going to be prospected the educational potentialities of music listening beyond music education and towards a better teaching-learning practice experience.

## **2 A BRIEF CRITICAL LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **2.1 Traditional musicological theories**

Leaving aside the hedonistic view of the music listening as a passive individual pleasure or as a pleasant trip of imagination of the listeners, I will concentrate on any representative conceptions of listening to music which account for listening as an aesthetic experience as well as a music understanding and knowing process. According to Massimo Mila [1], whose theories played a significant role in the past musicology, the aesthetic music listening involves essentially intelligence and memory: understanding a music work is perceiving the logic relationship between one note and the other one based on the harmony rules. These twin factors assure, in the perception of the listeners, a continuity of the musical work from its starting idea, through its development, until the end that is finally comprehended as the fulfilment of the composition. Music listening, meant in this way, is an act of the consciousness that wins the senseless flowing of the time and goes beyond the irrational effects of the timbre (the matter of sounds) and rhythm on the listener [1]. From the above said, it seems to follow that aesthetic music listening, i.e. understanding music, is a disembodied rational experience.

### **2.2 The psychology of music turn**

Since 1960s, music listening and understanding has been studied in the light of cognitive psychology theories. In «The Musical Mind: the Cognitive Psychology of Music», John A. Sloboda accounts for, among other different musical skills and activities, music perception and cognition in terms of cognitive processes of the mind. According to him, the listener has the ability to form abstract mental representations of music [2]. It is noteworthy that the concept of «mental representation» involves more and less implicit ontological assumptions, i.e.: the existence of an interior room separate from body (mind or consciousness) within which a pure image of the external musical object can be formed; the autonomy of the musical object, of which an experiencing subject can form a more or less accurate representation; and last but not least the centrality and the primacy of the mind that guides the affective responses to music. With regard to this, it is to stress the Sloboda's claim that one can understand music without being moved, but if moved by the music being heard then it must previously be passed through that cognitive phase that involves the formation of an abstract mental representation of the music work [2]. From above it seems to follow that bodily feelings and emotions felt by the listener when listening to a musical work depend on previous abstract understanding of that musical work.

Leonard Meyer, in his important first book [3], tries to account for the relationship between emotions and understanding in a closer and interacting way. According to him, the affective experience of the listener coincides with grasping the meaning of the musical work being heard, so

that one thing cannot be given without the other (in contrast to how Sloboda seems to claim). The possibility of this correspondence is to be found in the principle of a formal isomorphism (principle that Meyer draws from the psychology of form) between the sonic structure of the musical object and the affective life dynamics of the subject. Furthermore, because of the historical character of this isomorphic process, «music in a style with which we are totally unfamiliar is meaningless» [3, p. 35]. The crucial point is the previous knowledge of the style, without which listeners can neither understand musical work nor be moved by it. From the above it is drawn what follows: firstly, only trained listeners can have an actual music listening experience; secondly, in spite of his effort to account for a music listening experience in which cognition and emotions are interconnected in a more dialectical way, Meyer's theory keeps the *a priori* of the cognitive knowledge bound to a previously musical style training.

### **2.3 The phenomenology of music turn**

We have to turn to phenomenology of music, developed within sixty years, to find a more substantial account of a bodily music listening and a musical understanding which arises from a psycho-physical interaction between musical sounds and listener. F. Joseph Smith claims an «eidetic reduction» of aesthetics to *aisthesis* [4]: music listening experience involves the entire individual for which the division between mind and body actually doesn't exist. In a bodily (i.e. organic) music listening, the listener experiences a thinking-in-hearing. Furthermore, musical work is something other than an object in that «it is generated through the creativity of the subject during the musical experience» [4] and for that reason it is not to be considered a close and self-contained system. Don Ihde claims that music in a concentrated listening «calls on one to dance». Dance is to mean not only as actual dancing but also as «covert rhythms and movements felt internally while quietly listening to music» [4]. Dufrenne emphasizes the role of the body in music listening, in that it is «capable of knowledge», even though the bodily knowing is not sufficient for an actual conscious perception and comprehension [4]. With regard to this, he states the importance of an interactive alternation between reflection and feeling: «reflection prepares the way and then clarifies feeling. Conversely, feeling first appeals to and then guides reflection» [5]. Finally, Giovanni Piana, when addressing the issue of the musical meaning, suggests phenomenologically to restart from simply hearing the sounds for their own right [6]. In this way, we are engaged with them before asking what do they mean. Firstly, we are called on to do something with them, i.e. to explore their matter, multiple relationships, movement and dynamic. Music, then, will be able to reveal itself as an open field of endless possibilities for a bodily imagination that ties in with each concrete determination of sounds, beyond representing images, figures, scenes with determined contours [6]. That pre-conceptual (and pre-figural) interaction between musical sounds and subject's imagination is the origin of musical meaning and knowing. Phenomenological research on music, while shifting attention towards matter of musical sounds, takes account of a bodily music listening experience within knowledge is not at begin or at the end but through the process that organically involves perception, feeling, emotion, reflection.

### **2.4 «Praxial philosophy of music»**

With his «praxial philosophy of music», Elliott has intended stress on music making (for which he invented the neologism «musicing») as the actual via of music knowing and understanding [7]. Listening and music making, he claims, are two sides of the same coin, in that listening is a form of «musically thinking». However, he thinks of listening as an activity involved in music performing, that is, an activity of performers who adjust and improve their performance while listening to the music that they are playing. Music listening for its own sake, instead, is not to be considered «musicing».

Starting from Elliott's rationale, and referring to the Donald Schön's concept of «thinking-in-action» [8], Morrison suggests, conversely, that music listening is actually a creative and performative act [9]. In fact, he maintains that engaged listening is to be considered as a «higher-order thinking», i.e. critical and creative thinking, in that the listener transforms «musical raw materials (...) into something that is meaningful» through procedural knowing - that is, «acts as concept-forming, inventing, synthesizing, (...) comparing» [9]. This transformative, creative thinking-in-listening is a performative act, in spite of its covert, private nature. However, despite considering listening in the same way as a musical performance, Morrison does not attribute to listening activity that public value that essentially belongs to performances. Once again, music listening is ultimately considered as mental process, and it lacks a reference to body and his actions, on one hand, and to a community of listeners, on the other.

## **2.5 Jaques-Dalcroze's music education**

Those twin requirements can be found in Jaques-Dalcroze's music pedagogical thought [10]. He puts the focus on movement, meant as both music own rhythm and listeners' corporeal action, through which they can better live and comprehend the music. In his innovative music education system (called «eurhythmics» by him), listening really assumes the form of a performative act in that the former is overtly carried out through body movements and actions of listeners. In Dalcrozian approach, the body becomes the «intermediary between sounds and thought, where there is communication between feeling and understanding, and between sensations that inform the mind and those that recreate sensorial means of expression» [11]. In the light of this view, the body is not an expressive means of a mental representation but a possibilities field towards enacting a knowing of music being heard. Music listening as well as music making is here really «knowing-in-action» [8].

## **3 A THEORETICAL FRAME**

Following a suggestion of Roland Barthes [12], under certain conditions music listening could be considered as music making «by proxy», provided that listeners, despite handing over to the player the making sounds, are bodily engaged in music as well as the player. Along with Barthes, it can be pointed out that really engaging with music is actualising the latter's meaning through entire body (and not only by ears), through muscles, corporeal movements, physical sensations; and this is true both players and listeners. Saying that, it is not to overlook the importance of imagination and reflection, but rather to argue that their functionalities are not only enhanced but also fulfilled if put in partnership with the other knowing resources of the living body. The pre-figurative imagination dynamic oriented by musical sounds, which is described by Piana, can only arise from body's feelings and motion. Furthermore, according to Piana's rationale, it can be maintained that only relying on that free, indeterminate, flowing and unintentional imagination, listeners can ultimately reach a better and bodily understanding of music within which images, verbal metaphors or concepts are really pertinent, i.e. in correlation with the music being heard. Given this, the point is how to let this original imaginative dynamic develop without drowning it with disembodied, pre-formed representations. In regard to that, Jaques-Dalcroze has paved the way for envisaging a learning music listening set within which a group of listeners, along with the player, can enact their music understanding through physical, visible actions. This has the advantage, on one side, of strengthening bodily music knowing [11], and on the other, of making possible an actual cooperative music knowing process. Relating to the former point, musical structures – as Dalcroze has shown - are drawn on movement, energy and space (along with time) whose expressive function can be easier understood relating to our muscular dynamics and lived body motion. In this case, the movement of knowledge is

from the exterior to inward, i.e. from body to awareness of it through reflection. In the light of this view, the body is neither passively subjected to music (as if it were the room of reflective responds to stimuli) nor an expressive means of an inward affective state; rather, as lived body, it is the open field of action through that a knowledge is enacted, and a music sense is made. In regard of cooperative dimension of music listening, it is to be stressed that an intensified presence of the bodies through their actions and interactions in a common space makes possible the emergence of an empathic and pre-understanding level of participation, on which an actual cooperative knowing process can be drawn. The latter can be developed through alternation between action and reflection. Body's experience is present in both of them, provided reflection is not only a cognitive moment but, along with it, also a quite unintentional, creative, metaphoric elaboration of the physical experience just lived [13][14]. Through perceptive, emotional, reflective feedbacks that round among participants, an «autopoietic» making sense process develops, autonomous and unpredictable. In this case, knowledge is carried out as a compositional process whose actual actor is the group meant as a unique trans-individual Mind. The idea of a common mind is meant in the light of a systemic philosophy, which shifts the focus from individual intentionality to the complex of material conditions – human and non-human – that contribute to a cooperative knowing process.

## 4 THE WORKSHOP PROJECT

### 4.1 Attendees and conductor

The performative music listening workshop is thought for a small group (ten persons circa) of musically untrained education practitioners. It could be proposed, for instance, in schools as updating course for teachers. It provides for minimum twelve hours in presence. Each session takes three hours. The fact of being musically untrained enables participants to live a pure music listening experience, free from musical technic pre-concepts. That said, the diversity and disparities of cultural provenience of participants will make the collective listening experience richer and more unpredictable referring to results of knowing process. The workshop conductor is a musician and piano player practitioner as well as a teacher with pedagogical research interests. He intends to research not *on* participants but, to some extent, *with* them, according to a cooperative research philosophy. Moreover, he uses his musical background in order to structure an engaged music listening set rather than to impose a music making sense. In this way, within the workshop he behaves as a facilitator, a scaffolder, above all, a performative listener as well as the others.

### 4.2 Setting

The workshop activity needs a quite big open space with an acoustic piano; that is, a musical atelier. That is the «scene» where the listening performance will take place. The spatial quality relies on not only static material conditions, but also human dynamics, that is, relationships and connections among bodies, movements, actions, prospects. In this respect, space is not a datum but a changing, transformational, developing factor. It is tied to energy, communication level, embodiment, deepening of listening and making sense. In other words, workshop's space is not given *a priori* but is rather a product of performative music listening experience. While music playing, listeners are allowed to get around and choose an own listening place, i.e. listening prospect, which can be changed during the musical execution. When carrying out individual physical actions, each listener will be asked to always relate to a common space, that is, to what is happening within the «scene» beyond he is doing. In every moment, the point is the collective, cooperative dimension of the listening experience.

### 4.3 Work steps

Each work session starts with a musical-physical training. It concerns free and improvised movement sequences that each attendee is asked to do referring to any assignments provided by conductor. The actions, which have a musical nature, are carried out without playing music. Become the bodies musical instruments on its own right [15]. Music will be felt, imagined, lived «in the flesh». Through the bodies, the attendees can experience essentially three aspects of musical composition: sounds space (highness, lowness, farness, proximity); musical orientation (tonal point, peripheral areas, estrangements, returns); temporal phases and processes (starting point, development or divagation or dilation, conclusion). The aim of this first step is to have bodies activate and creatively explore their own musicality tied to energy, movement, spatial feeling, tension, procedural action, in order to make listeners' perceptual heed deepen towards music sounds that will be made as well as the other attendees along with which listening experience will be lived. The choice of starting with a physical training is underlain by the willing to put the listener first, not the work, drawing, then, a different path from traditional listening, i.e. from «living body's music» to music played by instrument.

After physical training, the conductor plays the piece previously chosen for that workshop session. The piece is played two times in a row. During the first execution, each listener is let to simply listen to, in a freely way. Then, while the piece is played for the second time, each listener is asked to project an action relating to music being heard and according to the three musical dimensions previously explored (space, orientation, temporal process). Afterwards, each one by rotation represents its action to the others of group, who note down emotions, sensations, thoughts, images. From what above said, it is quite clear how the reflection phase is bound to performance phase. In this regard, it is possible to talk of embodied reflection, through which perceptions, images, metaphors are shaped keeping in contact with that indeterminate, musical imagination dynamic individualised by Piana. This is the crucial point of bodily listening process. Indeed, getting back constantly to «imaging vectors» present in the music being heard provides for an actual connection between perceiving and knowing, feeling and making musical sense. Reflection is the crossroad of them, provided that it is drawn on an extraordinary memory of what the body has just comprehended, and not only on a cognitive interpretation striving.

Next step of the workshop concerns the cooperative construction of a satisfying interpretation of the musical piece being heard. Given that, according to the epistemological idea underlying the workshop project, the meaning of musical work is built through and within the understanding of listener [18][19], an interpretation is assessed «satisfying» beyond a static and external correspondence to the work (that is the old theory of «adeguatio intellectus et rei»), but rather relating to the fulfilment of a layered, performative knowing process. The latter culminates in a verbal, conceptual, collective com-position of ideas arisen from the experiences of the previous phases. Here too, the «autopoietic feedback loop» [...] is the principle on which the com-position is drawn. The latter is musical as well as the piece being heard in that it presents a harmonization of dissonances and consonances and does not pretend to close the imaginative matrix provided by the music work on a defined, uniform interpretation. The open com-position, instead, is not more than an expression of the process by which it has been generated and within which musical sounds structural dynamics, bodily sensations, actions, feelings and thoughts have been tried to be harmonically brought together in a (sub)objective whole.

## 5 CONCLUSION

A «satisfying interpretation» reflects finally the achievement of a living relationship between listeners and musical piece. The workshop project expects as result that each attendee experiences and deepens, through performative listening process above described, an inedited way of being engaged with the understanding and knowing, beyond music. Mediated by the group listening «action», musical experience will be able to reveal its transformational power on prospects according to which we think of our relationship with knowledge. Music is particular fit to reveal something new about our «epistemological» habits because of its constitutive apparent lack of cognitive meaning. In that sense, we could claim that a musical piece, ultimately, does not mean at all. Yet, it is expressive in that its structures (timbric, harmonic, melodic, rhythmic) let «imagining vectors» emerge relating to a creative, procedural effort of listener imagination. The latter is necessary bound to body's acts and states, i.e. it involves not the mind but the one's whole body-mind system. Then, music listening, given a certain setting, can provide an exemplar experience of embodied and enacted knowledge. This is the point of music listening workshop as teacher training. Here, music listening is a «vehicle», because of its being used not in education but as education. The Jaques-Dalcroze's pedagogical thought seems to be along these lines. According to him, music education is «pour la musique and par la musique: for and through music» [11]. Through a music education device that focuses on «body-mind in action» [11], general knowing and teaching-learning process can be reconsidered in terms of performative action, whose contents emerge from the material, embedded, cooperative, interconnected, poietic engagement of bodies, sensations, motions, feelings, images, perceptions, thoughts. The possible influences of what experienced in music listening on past and futures attendees' professional perspectives is the theme of the final session of the workshop projected.

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# MAPPING SECONDARY SCHOOL TEACHERS' NOMADIC LEARNING PATHS MEDIATED BY VISUAL CARTOGRAPHIES

Fernando Hernandez-Hernandez<sup>1</sup>, Juana M. Sancho-Gil<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>University of Barcelona, SPAIN.

## Abstract

This paper is part of the research project, in which secondary teachers were invited to generate visual cartographies, and participate in conversations, on those scenarios and movements, inside and outside school, where they learn, and to think about what they value of this performative act as source of knowledge and experience. By generating visual cartographies, as a visual and textual epistemological and methodological move, we inquire those interstices, displacements, instable journeys, ways of knowing, assemblages and entanglement through which teachers explore and perform their nomadic learning paths. The aim of this research process it is no longer about getting results but generating and put in action concepts such as rhizome, intensity, affect, gesture, displacement, metaphor, and so on, which are helping us to think on how learning takes through teachers' movements and trajectories. We also reflect on how nomadism localizes learning not as an outcome but as an activity staged within a processual, relational and performative ontology of becoming. And how all this process affects us, as teachers and researchers.

Keywords: post-qualitative research, secondary school teachers, entanglement, affects gestures.

## 1 CARTOGRAPHIES AS ENTANGLEMENT OF EPISTEMOLOGICAL AND METHODOLOGICAL MOVEMENTS, EDUCATIONAL PRACTICE AND POLICY

Time to time in social and educational sciences a new turn arrives to the research agenda. This turn can be occasional or more permanent. This seems the case of the spatial turn, that coming from Geography involves a reworking of the notion and significance of spatiality [1, p: 1, paraphrased]. From this frame, we arrive to visual cartographies both, as an epistemological tool and as a rhizomatic research strategy, with a long trajectory in social sciences and education research [2,3,4,5]. Visual cartographies have also an extended presence on art practices [6] and beyond [7] to depict physic, mental, and emotional territories, as well for exploring social and political issues; body and life experiences, and for mapping the intangible and generating concepts.

We put in dialog these various notions and practices of cartography with Guattari' s approach of 'schizoanalytic cartographies' [8], considered as maps which refuse a fixed and invariant domain of subjectivity, but are rather relational configurations, which change state and status as a function of particular assemblages. As Deleuze, who considers maps as spaces of becoming, "where the unconscious is 'uncover' through cartographic performances" [5, p.139], Guattari contributes with this book to on-going debates in contemporary social and educational research, with regards to abstraction, affect, cartography, subjectivity, and theory. From this approach we consider cartography as a powerful and versatile representation of personal/social learning trajectories; as a



connector of experiences and knowledge of design, abstraction and translation, as well as an increaser of knowledge and appreciation toward oneself and one's learning environment [9]. Therefore, beyond the dihedral, geographical and conceptual mapping, we explore other ways of mapping, opening them, as spaces of thinking, to alternative cultural interpretations and new educational meanings.

In that sense, cartographies are not just an elicitation visual method but an entanglement in which all these substances –bodies and things, texts and situations, ideas and manners of doing, etc., remain assembled, an also a challenge we brought to the teachers. We reflected on how nomadism localizes learning not as an outcome but as an activity staged within a processual, relational and performative ontology of becoming. This turned the space of creating of and thinking on teachers' visual cartographies to what [10] calls a space-event.

## 2. EXPLORING TEACHERS' NOMADIC LEARNING PATHS FROM A POST-QUALITATIVE INQUIRY

The poststructuralist ontology of nomadic thought is defined in terms of processes of becoming, characterized by forces, flows and fluxes that disrupt the unity of the subject [11,12,13]. Therefore, a nomadic approach to teachers' learning trajectories, as part of the research project "How teachers learn: Educational implications and challenges to address social change" (EDU2015-70912-C2-1-R), encourage to be attentive to the disruptive characteristics of our inquiry. We began by inviting three groups of secondary schools teachers to map through cartographies their learning spaces and trajectories, not as an outcome but as "a question of orientations, points of entry and exit, a constant unfolding" [14, p: 160].

Nomadology remains central during the inquiry process—the encounters with teachers, the uncertainties about the unknown in the research group, because it allows us to introduce provocative questions. These questions are what make our 'data' (teachers' cartographies and verbalizations, researchers' field notes, photographs and videos) glow [15]. Nomadology therefore is a movement through the research process that works across both horizontal and vertical axes, affecting how the project advances (the questions that are posed along the way) as well as interacting with the different layers implicit within the project: the generation of evidences, the dialogical and rhizomatic forms of analysis, and the decisions on how make public the research process.

Nomadology is an approach that considers teachers' actions and processes differently than the more humanistic concept of agency. Agency draws our attention to how teachers' capacity to act is regulated by external forces—as illustrated by the phrase "giving voice". Nomadology takes a different approach, to consider how teachers' actions, which they are always already engaged in, affect the context in which they are embedded or introduced. This difference is captured by the shift in perspective from teachers' *voice* to learning *practices*.

Adopting a nomadic approach led our research group to introduce disruptive ways of thinking concepts during the research meetings at the university. Notions such as "becoming, displacement, strength, assemblage, entanglement, affects, gestures..." and others have circulated to name those shared experiences, to expand the ways of narrating and to raise new questions about: a) what it means to generate nomadic cartographies as epistemological 'spaces', "associated with speed, flotation, and disjunctures" [5, p. 139], b) how to investigate the sources and experiences that founded teachers' learning movements and c) how to advance our understanding on the entanglement circulating among teachers professional and biographical learning experiences.

One consequence of this way of bringing the nomadic approach into the inquiry process on teachers' nomadic learning movements is that the contributions and experiences brought by them are considered in relation to how they affect the context of researchers' trajectories, and those learning practices that take place both in the research and outside it.

Following this approach has allowed us to investigate, both as researchers and university professors, our own frames of what means to be a teacher and a researcher. As participants accompanying a process of teachers' nomadic learning cartographies we have been challenged to be involved in a process of inquiry that subverts the limits of researching relationship and that has enabled us to generate and live within the event. This is an event that at the same time that disturbs us, transforms us; it modifies the traditional places of research at the university, drawing us into the space-event of nomadic researching.

When we went to the schools and invited teachers to be part of the research process by design and explore their learning trajectories, we became part of an entanglement of relations that affected us. When we, as part of a larger group, started thinking on the 28 cartographies created by teachers, we entered into spaces of multiple meanings, not as isolated evidences, but as a rhizoanalytic opportunity for thinking different of -and-in- a network, where the diaries of our encounters, the photos we collected, the decision process for making three videos, and the presentations with our thoughts and reflections we shared with them, were part of these assemblages and an immanent ethics [16], that transformed what data could be.

### 3. ANALYSIS

We take cartographies not as a representational tool but as an ontological and epistemological medium. We unveiled what constitutes their limits and invites us to consider how access these 'places' of learning (beyond those frameworks pre-established in research) which are defined in terms of processes and three nomadic spaces [17, p: 2]:

*Cartographies as spaces of reality.* We pay attention to the 'cartographic discourse' revealed in teachers' maps and to the rhetoric and metaphors of images "bound by rules which govern their codes and modes of social production, exchange and use" [18, p: 278–279]. Three seem to be the main rhetoric references of the cartographies: Visual metaphors related to nature and culture, not as a dualistic opposition, but as a rhizomatic network. Conceptual maps of relationships. And places, tools and people. These rhetoric strategies are linked to biographical experiences and, to some extent, with common knowledge

*Cartographies as spaces of representation.* Cartography is a form of visual representation organized by axes, links, key places (notions), locations, positions, distances... The possibility of characterize this 'non-place' –of multiple places- is one of the interest of our research. This transitional place appears in the cartographies with: intersection zones, chaotic zones, overlapping zones, concentric zones, consecutive zones, deploying and, not-knowing zones. These zones put us in the direction to understand and represent learning transitions as part of a process of the 'demystification' of learning as a natural process [19].

*Cartographies as spaces of subjectivity.* Cartographies produced in our encounters include, as a key issue, aspects linked teachers' biographies of learning. Learning is not only a cognitive operation but a biographic embodied experience. Thus, mapping appears not only as a method of representation but as a way to understand how the subject places and interprets learning in a network of relationships with: humans and not human.

Thinking through these spaces we were able to locate moments, relations and experiences of learning, but not how it takes place. Teachers' cartographies tell stories about where and with whom they learn, but it is unclear –unknown– what they tell us about how we learn. However, we do not consider this 'unknown' as a limitation but, as a possibility for “constantly being challenged by doubts about what we don't know. This is what effective research does, it helps us see that uncertainty and curiosity not only motivate new inquiries, but also inspires artistic impulses.” [20, p: 50].

#### 4. CONCLUSION

Cartographies have been 'useful' for our research because were taken as a strategy to generate 'knowledge' and relate to the theory (concepts such as 'becoming', 'nomadic learning' 'gestures', 'rhizomatic relations', and so on), from combining different elements, keeping a driver and articulator of an unfinished narrative. This idea of cartography is not as result but a space of thinking and making connections between teachers' nomadic learning experiences and their visual mapping process. *Nomadic learning* [21] is used to give account of those interactions that subvert learning process, unveiling what constitutes their limits. This notion invites us to consider how access these 'places' beyond those frameworks pre-established in teaching and research. Some authors such as [12, 13, 17] have guided us to explore and signify *what* is outside the framework of the learning cartographies.

Visual cartographies, taking not as a prescriptive navigational formula, but as a fluid, dynamic process for exploration and experimenting in research, do not seek to locate or trace meanings but “to extend beyond normative forms of theorizing and representing” [5, p: 139]. This approach prevents in relation of “the use of mapping as a way of describing and interpreting any kind of learning” [22]. Firstly, because teachers are who represent their own trajectories, being able to escape of the colonial discourse of the maps, by using appropriation and transformation strategies; secondly, because those cartographies tell stories about where and with whom secondary teachers learn, but it is unclear what they tell us about how they learn, because, as [19] says, learning is not something natural, but contextually constructed.

In this case, visual cartographies are not only visual and textual form of expression, but a process of collaboration and generating concepts which go beyond the visual representation. For teachers and researchers, this means, “in a sense putting [ourselves] at risk, becoming unrecognised within the normalising frameworks that govern [our] practice” [23, p: 5].

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## MOTIVATING FACTORS THROUGHOUT THE PROFESSIONAL LIFE OF EDUCATORS IN SOCIAL-EDUCATION CONTEXTS

Stefano Bonometti<sup>1</sup>, Livia Cadei<sup>2</sup>,

<sup>1</sup>*University of Insubria (Italy)*

<sup>2</sup>*Catholic University of Milan (Italy)*

### Abstract

The paper addresses the transformation of the educator's self-image in his or her period of university education. By describing the skills profile, emotional resources and work environment associated with professional identity. The work in socio-educational and health contexts puts into play a professional identity based on a motivation connected with a high vocational level. These aspects characterize the socio-educational work as an activity of remarkable emotional and energetic impact. Personal values and competences are linked up with the professional and cultural context. This situated activity is carried out mainly in the daily relationship with users. The research has investigated these themes through a qualitative and quantitative research path, using questionnaires and focus groups. In addition, the methodological path also provides an in-depth study through the activation of reflection groups with the prompting of PEGs (Positive Emotional Granularity Card). In the first results of the research it emerges that the identity of the educator perceived by novice students is characterized by a micro-relational vision with the user. This is based on a concern evaluated and connected with prejudices and fears. The group of educators trained show a meso-relational vision in which the teamwork becomes stronger and the relationship is distanced. Emotional resonance in the educator characterizes educational action by interpreting models and practices activated in the relationship. In particular, a positive emotion based on hope emerges above all. In both groups, there is a strong positioning on the most intimate dimension of the educational relationship and on the self, leaving aside the value of the social impact of educational action.

Keywords: Educator, Emotional, Identity professional.

### 1 INTRODUCTION

Working in socio-educational and health contexts requires a professional identity, strongly connected to a high vocational level.

The variety of different sets of problems, work contexts which are unlike one from each other and not at least the repeating of unexpected events are three fundamental aspects to better understand the professional acting of educators. This complexity leads the socio-educational work to dear emotional and energetic impact.

The research has as intention to compare the efforts activated by the educators both at the beginning of their own professional identity and at the height of the professional experience. The elements that transform professional identity in the course of work experience will be analysed, basing the attention on the internal resources of the educators and those distributed in the context.

The survey's purpose is especially to understand the emotional and reflective experience of educators that sustain own develop professional and to learn new action pattern.

The theoretic models used to understand the evolution of the professional identity of educator in formation are taken by three specific sources: a) the studies of the professional identity according the Billet perspective [1]; b) the studies of emotionality suggested both from Damasio [2] and also Ekman [3]; and finally the studies within the university training internship according the Engeström perspective [4].

## 2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

### 2.1 The concept of professional identity of the educator

In the path of formation of the professional identity, in particular of those who impose themselves in the context of educational work, it is possible to delineate three dimensions. They reinforce the professional identity.

The first dimension is represented by the personal and professional cultural horizon of the professional person.

It is the baggage of knowledge that has been elaborated during one's own family and social, school life. Through this plan, the person can understand the social processes, the change in the actions of people, being able to decode the complexity and the fragmentation of the society itself.

Within this area there is also the ethic-professional matter.

The second dimension is represented by the technical-professional skill, the know-out of the professional person expressed both by the awareness of the *modus operandi* and his own professional community and by practical-procedural action, as well as the operative one, required by the concrete action.

The third dimension refers to the motivational dimension of the person, his engagement with respect to the role, to the purposes to be achieved, to the social impact of one's own professionalism.

These three dimensions show how the training path towards professionalism must necessarily be multilevel, involving ethical, motivational, cultural issues as well as technical-practical ones.

In particular, for those educators who live in a social and working context of low reward, a significant factor of professional identity derives from the recognition of the usefulness and importance of one's own work [5].

Recognition mobilizes the ability to act in spaces and times subjectively centered with a dynamism by virtue of which the variety of the resources does not cease to be transformed to better fit the changes in reality and needs of people.

Two issues seem to be central to the construction of the professional identity of the educator that is *motivation* and *recognition* [6]. From their intersection, four conditions can be delineated:

The first condition describes a lack of recognition and a reduced motivation at the base of a process of alienation in the educational profession. The educator becomes more and more incapable and disinterested in getting involved, in identifying lines of action and initiating processes in which there is a margin of risk that must be addressed.

The second condition outlines a strong motivation combined with a lack of recognition that does not allow the educator to share a culture of education. In the "great space" of ideas and creative freedom he can assume the role of the "solitary protagonist" and assume a challenging attitude, when he does not find spaces for debate to identify the importance and the meaning of his work. It is the case of a strong personal investment related to the enthusiasm of working.

The third condition is that of a lack of motivation due to a mediocre interest and a weak ability to trace the sense of actions implemented and which pushes the educator to flat and ordinary performances.

The fourth condition is the one in which the educator engagement is the result of a personal implication bound to a creation in agreement with the colleagues and sometimes with the users, and in this case the educators have a roll of protagonist.

From these premise on the professional identity we can attribute a relevant importance to the process of formation of the professional identity, that develops in the internship. The internship constitutes for the student a concrete opportunity to confront personal expectations in reference to the professional role and takes on the sense of an anticipatory experimentation for the profession. It allows to verify in the "field" the knowledge of the values of the profession as well as the personal skills.

The training intervention pursues two intertwining trajectories: on the one hand, a progressive approach to the core of the community of practices; on the other hand, the experience learning take on meaning and develops through an emotional involvement.

Learning in educational work context, suppose to understand the position of the actor in the collective. In this way, Billett [7] devises learning as a inter-psyhic phenomenon, emerging from the negotiations and adjustments between individual practices and social professional practices present in the workplace.

In particular, Billett explains that the opportunities qualities and quantities offered in terms of affordances are based on the nature of the work practices on the one hand and the interests at stake on the other.

The professional iterations and the ways in which the work is organized influence the activity of the subjects facing the assumption of the role and their legitimate peripheral participation [8]. It deals with multi-dimensional learning, social cultural cognitive emotional learning.

## 2.2 The emotions

The emotion is connected to the sense of urgency whose expression lasts a few seconds, but whose sensations can continue to last over time [9]. The emotional system is a genetic information system that allows the brain to inform the human being about what to do, when and how, according to different temporal modalities.

The classifications of A. Damasio divides emotions in three levels: a) background emotions; b) primary emotions; c) social emotions.

The background emotions are not particularly evident in human behavior, but are considered "the consequence of the use of particular combinations of simpler regulatory reactions" [10].

In the primary emotions, we enclose those that in a natural way come to mind if we talk about emotions: fear, anger, sadness, joy, surprise, disgust:

Their primary being derives from the fact the circumstances and the behavior that define these emotions are a constant in the human beings of different culture.

Then we find secondary emotions that appear as the result of variable combinations, belonging to primary emotions and among these there are: embarrassment, contempt, pride, jealousy, etc.

Moreover social emotions are those that most of all derive from education and from the observation of the behavior of others, so even if they are innate, they must necessarily be activated in order to express themselves.

The comparison of these psychological and neuroscientific theories reveals a certain datum that characterizes emotions, their multifactorial component. In fact, emotions owe their development to a series of factors that are not only biological, which are combined from time to time according different modalities. In short, it can be said that these derive from the intertwining of four phenomena: the assessment of the situation, the activation of the organism, the expression of emotional responses and the promptness of action.



This phenomenon, together with psychological and social biology, allows man to establish or maintain relationships with the external environment according to his own values and needs that allow him to maintain a state of well-being.

In delineating the primary and the secondary emotions for the understanding of the moods and feeling of the interviewees, we opted for the aggregation proposed by Ekman [10].

The combination of primary emotions and social alteration give rise to set of secondary emotions so listed: joy, envy, shame, anxiety, resignation, jealousy, hope, forgiveness, offense, nostalgia, remorse, disappointment.

### **2.3 The internship**

The internship is usually associated with the idea of transferring what has been learned during the classroom training towards a protected working environment. The trainee measures his preparation by putting the knowledge into practice through an operation required by precise task in a specific context.

The plurality of the subjects involved in the internship experience. Starting from this first indication, it is necessary to emphasize the systemic dimension of the internship. In fact, the practical training is a system defined by the mutual interaction of its members, whose peculiarity is totality. Each system relates material energy and information with other systems in a mutual influence. This aspect overcomes the sequentiality in time between university (or school) and workplace [11]. The workplace is in effect part of the internship system with its educational value that influences learning and teaching processes. According to the Cultural Historical Activity Theory proposed by Vygotskij and currently elaborated by Engeström [12], we could attribute to each of the three subjects the value of activity system. The subjects address some questions (Object) to achieve a result (Output) through use of tools and objects (tools and signs). The relationship between different systems of activity can find a space of mediation (boundary zone) in the sharing at a higher level of the issues that affect each subject.

Engeström defines this space in a second level object that requires subjects to elaborate skills in crossing disciplinary and professional boundaries.

## **3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

The research path develops with two groups of students enrolled in 1<sup>st</sup> (42 students) and in 3<sup>rd</sup> (30 students) year of the degree course for educators in the training phase for the educator profession. For the first group the intent of analysis is to intercept expectations and imaginations that the novices express at the beginning of their journey, while for the second group the attention is placed on the perception of their professional identity in those who are at the end of the path of training and are out of the university. At this moment, we observe the result of thinking over the experience done during the training time and over the expectations towards the world of working.

The research also has a longitudinal intent and aims to challenge the subjects of the survey again. In a following phase, identified after 2 years from the first survey, the students currently enrolled in the first year will find themselves in the respective condition to finish the training path and therefore in a similar condition to the students currently enrolled in the third year, whereas the students enrolled in the 3<sup>rd</sup> year will be traced in the conditions of exercise of the profession.

In this last case, the intent is to understand the transformations of the professional and work identity in the educational context, in order to identify what remains stable over time about the perception of one's own professional identity and this is transformed in reference both to the internal resources and those available in the context.

According to the theoretical framework of reference, some dimensions of interest have been identified for our research [13], later declined in items for the detection of both quantitative and qualitative nature. In particular, attention has been placed on the theme of professional identity, on emotional resonance and on the experience of training in a specific area of experiential learning. As far as the professional identity is concerned, the focus has been placed on the role recognition, on the skills and on the educational action: as far as the emotional resonance is concerned, it was investigated on the involvement with regard to the role, to the main educational practices (relation, planning, valuation and teamwork) and to the training experience: at last as far as the learning during the internship experience is concerned attention has been paid to the relation between tutor and tutee.

For the survey, a questionnaire has been distributed among the novice group (1<sup>st</sup> year course) and for the group of experts (3<sup>rd</sup> year course) with the aim of pointing out the differences between the two groups having regard to their training path. The items proposed in the provided questionnaire were for multiple choice, semantic, differential and open answers. Moreover, two focus groups were conducted. Every group had its own focus and on this basis, a reflection was developed on the most relevant matters emphasized by the questionnaire.

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## 4 DISCUSSION ON THE FIRST RESULTS

Examining the first results, it is possible to focus on some specific aspects.

### 4.1. The profile of educator

Prevailing choice describes the profile falls for 43% of students of 1<sup>st</sup> year course on "*who accompanies the person experimenting new methods*" we can deduce that what is recurrent is the accompaniment of the person and less the experimentation of new methods, that does not appear in any written specification.

As far as trained educators (3<sup>rd</sup> year course) are concerned, their idea as an educator strengthens the approach of accompanying, of self-care take care of the other, a commitment at the micro-social level in the exclusivity of the care relationship. From mentioned choices it appears an increase in an idea of educator as accompanist of the individual, who gets involved in the exclusive relationship with the other.

Confirming this focus on the one's self, it is included (on the opposite of novices) the definition of educator as "the one who has a big impulse", meant in the written notes as an educator with a high degree of empathy, awareness, control of prejudice, motivation.

These perspectives on the role expressed by expert educators are characterized by an emotional resonance mainly based on primary or secondary emotions, positive: almost the total number of the interviewed persons 96% associates *hope*, 60% is for *surprise* and *joy* and 48% *cheerfulness*.

There are also emotions that express difficulties, such as: *fear* for the 48%, *anxiety* and *disappointment* 37%, *anger* 20%.

These emotions are also indicated in relation to some practices of educational action respecting on the whole the greater choice for the theme of *hope*, *surprise* and *hope*. Particularly interesting is the strong emergence of anxiety, also associated with fear and stress, related to the teamwork, the gated data among these choices within the teamwork is the highest compared to other educational practices.

#### **4.2. The internal resources of educators and the context.**

In our research the students of the 1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> year have been asked to respond to two inputs, the first one related to factors and modalities which in their opinion, can hinder and/or support on *personal* level the role of the educator; the second one related to factors and modalities can hinder and / or support on *context* level the role of the educator.

A first interesting item concerns the student of 1<sup>st</sup> year, which on *personal* level are rather worried about obstacles for the educator role.

In fact, these are factors and modalities that interfere with the exercise of the function. In particular, “prejudices” and “preconceptions” seem to worry the students who will undertake the profession of educator, together with the fear of not knowing how to keep the “right” distance, as well as making wrong choices.

Fear and dread are often to be found among the emotions evoked by the neophytes. The data is interesting if compared to the students who are about to finish their path.

In synthesis, a great disparity is to be found between the two groups of students, that about the mentioned topics (“prejudice”, “fear” and “distance”...) certify a percentage of 73% referred to the students of first year and of 30,95% referred to the students of third year.

In addition to hindering factors and modalities it was asked to find, in a specular way, also supporting factors and modalities, among them without significant difference, listening and relationship skill, empathy and will, while more difference, to advantage of the third year students, is identified on “motivation” and ability “to get involved”.

What should be emphasized, on a personal level, is the difference between the presence of the reference to the “team” and to the “supervision” in the answers of students of third year and the almost completely lack of presence in those of first year.

On context level, the reference factors and modalities whether for the students of first or those of third year, are “team”, “group” and “colleagues”. The percentage of notes is more significant for the former (53%) compared to the latter (33%), nevertheless when reference is made to the actions (“co-ordination”, “collaboration”, “confrontation”) we don't find so a big difference. A matter of interest is the information related to the resources and opportunities which are present in the context, and in this case we can notice that any notes were made by the student of first year, while the students of third year are writing of “resources” in general, but then of “setting”, “space”, “supervision” and “formation” as available resources to be taken in consideration.

#### **4.3. The profile of skills**

With regard to profile of skills considered fundamental for the educator, the two groups present some characteristic trends. In particular, the majority of educators in the initial phase of their training (1<sup>st</sup> year course) believe that there are three key competences of the profession: “Communication”, “Awareness of self-efficacy” and “Availability to interpersonal relationships”, chosen by 50,3 % of the person who replied to the survey. It handles with competences that mainly fall in the relational and personal area, pointing out a concept educator centered on iteration with the other person, within a personal relationship.

The second group of already trained educators, emphasized the importance of a relational plan but with some focuses centered on the team. In addition to the “Communication” and to the importance of the “Awareness of self efficacy”, which had the majority of choices (56,7%), they pointed out the skill of “teamwork”, considered important for the 43,3%, followed by the skill of “adaptability and flexibility” and not less important the skill of “managing the stress and insecurity” classified by a 30% range from the educator. It looks like that the experts, in comparison to the novices, give more

importance to the values of team, adaptability and flexibility classified as important resources for the profession. Low percentages were given to the real managing area of the work. The skill of planning received only 6,7% and nobody choose neither the skill "result oriented" nor "quality and accuracy of work", likely considered more convenient for other kind of professions.

Furthermore, there are interesting differences between the two groups, as insecurity and stress are not considered as important by the training educators with a 2,3%, and "adaptability and flexibility" chosen by a narrower 16,7%. Different, but inversely proportional are on the contrary the skill "availability to interpersonal relationships" and the skill "planning the work", considered important by the novices with a very significant distance (40,5 versus 10;23,8 versus 6,7).

A possible synthesis describes a profile of competences in which the professionalism of the educator is contained for both groups mainly in the daily iteration, where communication and awareness of oneself represent the main tools, as well as continuous improvement and creativity. We highlight differentiation when novices consider availability and "willingness to relationships" and "work planning" to be important, while experts reinforce the idea of teamwork and the ability to negotiate and mediate.

## 5 CONCLUSION

Following the survey, we can conclude that different elements contribute to delineate the profile of the educator with an emotional perspective, distinguished by the relationship with the other in an intimate way. The students seem close to a professional model characterized by personal and private motivation, which, even if in the initial training phase can be predictable, though it could be predictive of results close to burnout.

In a similar way, the positive expression of emotions that is prevalently found, however, does not seem to be accompanied by a mastery of the wealth and complexity of the assets available within the educational processes. From this point of view, it is possible to recognize a training question in the direction of engagement, that is to say the implication of the subject who could get involved through new behaviours, increasing a richer awareness about the educational work, its meaning, visibility and recognition in the social sphere.

In this regard, the survey aimed to focus attention on the positive emotions that distinguish the educational work. In particular, we notice an oversimplified representation of the variety of human emotions, which the risk of marginalizes the richness of our emotional repertoire. Students seem use too concise or too comprehensive language about emotions connected to their work.

The alternative to the basic emotion sets is to work with the extensive semantic taxonomies on the subordinate level that have been developed by language researchers. We refer to Desmet, P. M. A. (2012)'s study with Positive Emotional Granularity Cards (PEG) [13]. Focus on emotion and discussed and share the ideas contribute to rich and meaningful experiences. Words are not only used to describe emotions in daily conversation, but also to describe moods or interpersonal traits so we think, awareness of emotions enriches the professional role of the educator

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## **POST-QUALITATIVE INQUIRY: ENGAGING GRADUATE STUDENTS WITH NEW MATERIALIST, NEW EMPIRICIST, AND AFFECTIVE METHODOLOGIES IN INTERDISCIPLINARY RESEARCH**

**Beatriz Revelles-Benavente<sup>1</sup>, Fernando Hernandez-Hernandez<sup>2</sup>**

<sup>1</sup>*University of Barcelona (SPAIN)*

<sup>2</sup>*University of Barcelona (SPAIN)*

### **Abstract**

Qualitative approaches to research combine human objectivity with interpretation in a myriad of ways. Posthuman approaches to research broadly have demonstrated that traditional qualitative methods show some caveats (Braidotti, 2013) to acquire, for example, an accurate account to structural social injustices. Post-humanism challenges the notion of human agency (Braidotti, 2013), clear-cut divisions between subjectivity and objectivity (Haraway, 1988) and pedagogical practices settled upon ontological divisions between matter and meaning (de Freitas, 2015; Hickey-Moody, 2013; Hernández, 2011; Revelles-Benavente, 2017).

Framed under post-humanist lenses, post-qualitative approaches to pedagogies are entering through interdisciplinary knowledges that attempt to offer innovative relations between concepts, methods, and agents of knowledge production. Inspired in the nomadic subject of Rosi Braidotti (1994), “knowmadism” is a concept that refers to a “permanent impermanence [...] tied to becoming a migrante cognitive force.” (Cielemcka & Revelles, 2017: 28). In this paper, we advocate for a knowmadic pedagogy, developed with postgraduate students, that permanently blurs the boundaries between professor and students, areas of knowledge, objectivity and subjectivity through focusing on performative processes instead of static results.

Both authors have dedicated last two years to develop a series of doctoral seminars based upon post-qualitative approaches such as new materialisms, new empiricisms and affect theory. We encourage students to create knowledge with us in a processual manner and in a relational way. In our research, we activate whatever feeling, concept or disturbance that the encounter with the text provoked in the students to produce a contemporary genealogical approach to the each of the discussed texts. Therefore, diffracting (Barad, 2007) to offer a relational approach to permanent impermanence of concepts, knowmadic pedagogies.

In this presentation, the authors will also include some of the inputs that the students had towards these specific classes and how it changed, or not, their perception and relation with research and knowledge inquiry. We will also provide a reflexive attitude with these results to unfold iteratively the process of research and account for (in)visible practices happening at the same moment that the classroom is being developed. This will help to produce a horizontal approach to post-qualitative inquiry in general and, specifically to post-qualitative pedagogies.

Keywords: *knowmadic* pedagogy, post-qualitative research, genealogical reading, collaborative teaching, post-humanism

## 1 INTRODUCTION

Qualitative approaches to research combine human objectivity with interpretation in a myriad of ways. Posthuman approaches to research broadly have demonstrated that traditional qualitative methods show some caveats (Braidotti, 2013) in order to acquire an accurate account to structural social injustices. Post-humanism challenges the notion of human agency (Braidotti, 2013), clear-cut divisions between subjectivity and objectivity (Haraway, 1988) and pedagogical practices settled upon ontological divisions between matter and meaning (de Freitas, 2015; Hickey-Moody, 2013; Hernández, 2011; Revelles-Benavente, 2017).

Framed under post-humanist lenses, post-qualitative approaches to pedagogies are entering through interdisciplinary knowledges that attempt to offer innovative relations between concepts, methods, and agents of knowledge production. Knowledge is a concept fundamental to humanism. “It is an enactment of an embodied metaphor, and any use of the concept presupposes an embodied knower who collects data via forms of perception” (Snaza et al. 2014: 50). For this reason, a post-humanist pedagogy needs to consider the critical differences between contexts in which knowing occurs. However, even if we consider only humans know; everything is imbricated in meaning (Bogost, 2012). This statement has as consequence, a pedagogical displacement where “meaning would replace knowing for education since meaning, understood as the interactions among patterns of information creation and the randomness of unperceived patterns, has implications for action, choice, and social/cultural life in physical environments that are transformed by human “knowing.” (Snaza et al. 2014: 54). Posthuman pedagogies are also ally with the politico-pedagogical projects of feminism, postcolonialism, anti-racism, and queer activism as the confront the systematic dehumanization of people under the hegemonic neoliberal economic and political practices (Snaza et al. 2014: 49, paraphrased).

## 2 POSTHUMANIST PEDAGOGIES, KNOWMADIC PEDAGOGIES

Inspired in the nomadic subject of Rosi Braidotti (1994), “knowmadism” is a concept that refers to a “permanent impermanence [...] tied to becoming a migrant cognitive force.” (Cielemcka & Revelles, 2017: 28). This migrant cognitive force here alludes to two specific movements that come from the students and from the teachers alike and produce affective relations in which one cannot be understood without the other. These two movements are based upon an affective relation of desire, a desire that is dynamic and a moving force in itself (Hernandez, 2011). This desire is the activating force to know whatever is unknown, as well as knowing what affects a concrete body. In words of one of our students, this move is encouraging “where am I when inside of a concrete learning experience that is, at the same time, collective; where are my expectations; my wonders and frustrations” (Juliana ). It is a clearly a temporary location that embodies the subject of learning in a permanent relation with an always already active context.

This automatically leads our pedagogical process to even think of the physicality of the classroom and being able to de-centralize it so that we can open up the flow of the desiring

movement. Making/unmaking the classroom “entails producing a permanent reflection upon what material processes are made visible and invisible while engaging with the creation of knowledge [through] ‘observation’ [that is] a collective process in which conventional meanings embodied in methodological processes become altered” (Revelles-Benavente, 2015: 62). Diffractively reading all the observations produced among ourselves and our students results in a making-meaning Boundary process in which the pedagogical process becomes a dynamic move with patterns instead of results and in a permanent re-working, that is, a *migrant cognitive force*, or a knowmadic pedagogy.

The notion of *nomadic pedagogy* (Fendler, 2015) is used to account for those interactions that subvert the teaching and research process, unveiling what constitutes their limits, and invites us to consider how access these ‘places’ beyond those frameworks pre-established in teaching and research. The poststructuralist ontology of nomadic thought is defined in terms of processes of becoming, characterized by forces, flows and fluxes that disrupt the unity of the subject (Deleuze & Guattari, 1980/2004; Braidotti, 2014; Jackson & Mazzei, 2012). Therefore, a nomadic approach encouraged our reading group to be attentive to the disruptive, explore and signify *what* is outside the framework of research meanings and the research students in their doctoral dissertation. This positionality brings us to explore the texts not as an outcome but as “a question of orientations, points of entry and exit, a constant unfolding” (Braidotti, 2006, p. 160).

Adopting a nomadic approach led the reading group to introduce disruptive ways of thinking by approaching to concepts such as “becoming, images of thought, contextual knowledge, intra-action, strength, assemblage...” and others concepts that have circulated around New Materialism, New Empiricism and Affect. This development provoked research that has taken place to name the shared experiences, to expand the ways of narrating and to raise questions about: a) what it means to generate meaning in a research process b) how to investigate the entanglement between human, matter, and affects and c) how to advance our understanding on the affects of the colonizing effects of pedagogical practices on ‘new’ and ‘post’ approaches to research.

One consequence of this way of bringing into action the nomadic approach into the inquiry process on students’ research imaginaries is that the contributions and experiences brought into the research are taken not by themselves and their visibility, but instead are considered in relation to how they affect the context of our thinking trajectories and those learning practices that take place both in the seminars and outside it. In this paper, we advocate for a knowmadic pedagogy that permanently blurs the boundaries between professor and students, areas of knowledge, objectivity and subjectivity through focusing on performative processes instead of static results.

### **3 DISCUSSION**

#### **3.1. Methodology**

Both authors have dedicated last year to develop a series of doctoral seminars based upon post-qualitative approaches such as New materialisms, New empiricisms and Affect theory. We encourage postgraduate students to create knowledge with us processually and in a relational way. One example of this is to perform a relational approach to pedagogy is what we called the “performative



materialization of the author” through “genealogical approaches to knowledge.” In the first one, Hernandez proposed to a group of students interact with an embodiment of a contemporary Donna Haraway able to explain why and how were the conditions to write her master piece *Situated Knowledges* (Haraway, 1988) as part of an undergraduate course on Visual culture. Activating how important is to understand a socio-cultural and historical context helped the student to relate with core concepts in that text such as canonization of knowledge, partial perspective and the importance to be inside and not above the object of research. Besides, digging into contextual settings necessarily also implies affecting the object of research during (in Bergsonian terms) the relation and not before. In our research, we activate whatever feeling, concept or disturbance that the encounter with the text provoked in the students in order to produce a contemporary genealogical approach to the text in particular. Therefore, diffracting (Barad, 2007) to offer a relational approach to permanent impermanence of concepts, knowmadic pedagogies.

The methodological steps follow a “reflexive and affirmative critique” (González & Revelles-Benavente, 2017) of our “desiring movement” (Hernández, 2011) through the intra-actions and affections produced within and out the doctoral program. We designed a cycle of seminars invested in post-qualitative methodologies for research and presenting the students with a less hierarchical approach to the creation of knowledge by encouraging multiplicity of voices in the seminars. This reflection will be accompanied in the analytical section by a diffractive reading (Barad, 2007) of the student’s input. We have gathered a total of 12 questionnaires in which the students were asked the following four questions:

1. How have you moved within the proposal of the seminars?
2. How can you evaluate the used format to confront the texts and the generated conversations?
3. How have these seminars changed, or not, your perception and relation with research and knowledge.”
4. How has all this process affected or not the research in your doctoral thesis?

### **3.1 Analysis**

The responses offered by the students emphasize three important points that need to be discussed in relation with each other. A “respond-ability” (Haraway, 2008; Revelles-Benavente & González, 2017) permeates the narration offered by most of the students. It seems that doing this kind of research implies a certain attachment (which more often than not is an affective attachment) to the differing relations involved in the investigation. The (in)visible forces leaving traces in the researching process require an implication on the part of the researcher that was easily identified by them. On the other hand, they also identified this responsibility in taking care of the “becoming classroom” (Revelles-Benavente, 2015). If they were not affecting the knowledge creation, they were left aside from this production and had a sense of being lost in an ocean of questions. This directly leads us towards the second theme identified in the narratives: the need for concreteness in the research design. They wanted to see examples, solutions to problems, relate a particular set of questions to certain social phenomena. Indeed, this follows the shadow of a vice social constructionism present in most of the pedagogical approaches contemporarily. Albeit important to break with these assumptions, we also agreed (students, teachers and affective forces) that theory is always already practice and viceversa. So, it was equally important to demonstrate how each researching process had a unique methodological approach. And, thirdly, the necessity to build “together with” instead of “against to”. Post-qualitative inquiry, specially new materialist approaches, is not interested in moving away from past theories, but beyond together with those theories based upon an “affirmative critique” (González & Revelles-Benavente, 2017; van der Tuin, 2015). Basically, an

affirmative critique consists in relating with past theories, or rather past-present theories (since they are mutually dependant on each other) by means of affirmation and not negation. Thus, in critiquing affirmatively we are relating and building with it and not against or beyond it. We have decided to construct upon our personal experience as teachers or moderators of a particular seminar and the multiple voices that students have generously offered to us, not only during the seminars but also after with their reflexions. Thus, conflating a past-past (in designing a seminar based upon post-qualitative strategies), with a past (the seminar itself) and the present (the reflexions that we can all share to see how it differs from normative pedagogies), we are trying to find the “wonder” (Stengers, 2011) of pedagogies, or rather the desiring movement (Hernandez, 2011) that turns pedagogies in becoming otherwise. Thinking through the concept of knowmadic pedagogy and the results that our students provided to us, it seems that this process can develop three different moments. This does not imply that these moments are excluding from each other, they can appear simultaneously and they share some characteristics of post-human pedagogies. These moments are the excitement and liberation, dubitation and respond-ability.

*3.1.1 [It] Breaks with the statistical demonstration and rhetoric strait-jacket. That is why; I decided to choose this path, which makes sense of pure becoming. (Hischochy)*

For the students, opening to the theories of post-qualitative inquiry liberated them from onto-epistemological ties that understand qualitative research as a result of “a detailed recipe” (Judith). This moment is an exciting moment, which means that they feel that almost everything is possible. For instance, Judith told us:

“Everything that I knew till that moment about research looked suffocating and senseless. It did not fit with what I understood for research or what should be research. That is, I understood it but I did not understand why it should be like that. If doing research meant a shopping list where everything was technified and classified, for me it did not have a lot of sense to do research.” (Judith)

This first moment of excitement is, at the same moment, the desiring moment that Fernando Hernández (2011) talks about. It is the initiation of the movement, a dynamic process and its capacity for social transformation. In Judith’s words, “this [pedagogy] gave me wings to fly, liberate myself from imposed corsets and the capacity to go beyond, to connect my understanding modes with new doors, to develop the rhizome.” This rihomatic movement is initiated through affect and developed across differing relations that go beyond human relations. Students identified these relations as spatial ones, thematic ones and less hierarchical ones and define these pedagogies (as if affects were) as adequate or inadequate ones: “the idea of post-qualitative research was to my own research a strong wake-up call at the adequate moment: start assuming that not everything is white, nor black – diffraction also existed.” (Joan Miquel).

*3.1.2 If the theory does not smell of the earth, it is not good for the earth. Adrienne Rich*

One of the students’ most frequent requirements is to situate theory-making with one concrete research. Albeit they do not want to follow the “recipe-format”, as the seminar is reaching its end, their anxiety of not knowing adequately takes over the collective knowledge. Therefore, students ask the teacher to master the concepts and put them together in a concrete methodology that helps their research. This is the second moment in the knowmadic pedagogy. Dealing with this moment is not easy, it is the hesitating moment. This moment is transitional and directs itself towards the

student's own process of learning. We identify it as a second moment in the knowmadic pedagogy: "At times, I felt a bit overwhelmed." (Fabiana).

This second moment is permeating the first one because precisely the minute that the surprising future opens or the excitement in the students start to permeate their embodiment as researchers is mutually dependant to the stage in their career. While those students at the beginning of their research see this opening as the multiplicity of possibilities; for those in the middle-end of their theses this opening provokes uncertainty. One of them told us how it "make him to rethink what is or what can it be the political emancipator orientation of the postqualitative epistemologies" (Aurelio). Our students are clearly committed to an ethics of research settled upon values aligned with post-colonial theories, feminisms, and traditional left movements. This movement is precisely what produces in them the need to see theoretical frameworks grounded on social problems. Albeit all of them were enjoying this opening of possibilities, critiques were also included to the abstractness that at times is present in contemporary philosophies. For instance, Aurelio pointed how "sometimes, [these theories] were too absorbed in their findings or their own genealogies, preventing this from producing enough dialogues with [other disciplines]. (In other words, these are still too philosophical without entirely reaching an empirical step)."

For us, as "teachers" (for a lack of a better word) this was the challenge. How could we demonstrate the affective steps of a particular research while remaining at a generic level? This was a very important step since, on the one hand, giving them instructions upon how to develop their researches pointed towards the "recipe" style that they disliked; but, on the other hand, without reaching to those researches that affected them individually we could not ground the theory on the earth. At this point, the third moment in the pedagogical relation appears.

### 3.1.3 *It is a seminar where you are responsible of your knowledge, your limits and your research. You become your own master and others' master. And viceversa.* (Yago)

Finding their research was the most important step for this relation to work out. Indeed, when the students realize that they need to master their own research to find how it is moving and how they are moving with the research's own becoming the knowmadic pedagogical relation actualizes. Judit establishes: "It is in the becoming, in the making process, that one starts learning and finding her own solutions [...]. This entails to distribute responsibilities, moving across the seminars and break through different places." The proposed knowmadic pedagogy necessarily entails the student's willingness to "take risks" (Haraway, 2008) of knowing something without pretending to know it all. This responds to what Aurelio indentified as the destabilizing impetus of the seminars themselves with a constructive sense. Once the affects permeating the relationship are identified, they realize that it is their own respond-ability to move with their research and not above it.

Nevertheless, this responsibility is not easy to embody since it requires the encouragement of facing texts, which sometimes were not easy to follow, and was felt differently by the students depending on how much time they were part of the PhD program. One of them told us how he "decided to seem like being lost in thought to escape from this responsibility, thing that ashames [him] because it situated him in a submissive, individualistic and selfish position. A position against the generosity that characterizes this methodology." Thus, for us this materialized something that needs to be taken care much more than we did, time. Even if how to dislocate the classroom is a topic that is widely extended in posthuman pedagogies, for a knowmadic pedagogy to work it is "spacetime" (Barad, 2007) frames what need to be considered. Frequently, we think of how much time do we have to prepare the seminars but not how much background (or time as a group) the students we are facing

have.

“Group bounding” was cherished and provoked a desire for consolidation. Thinking through affects, this is highlighted by itself. Nevertheless, as teachers sometimes we tend to forget how important it is for them to feel part of a group, to feel equally affected. Otherwise, the responsible act cannot be produced. If they are not affected by the group, they do not feel eager to be masters of their colleagues. Neither, do they feel that they can master their own research. Then, affects need to express their own capacity for self-transformation and transform the research, the relations happening in the classroom and chronological time into affective time. The need to start from zero in each seminar is a must so that they can feel to be affected transversally.

#### 4 CONCLUSION

The three themes differentiated in our knowmadic pedagogy correspond to three different moments in the process of learning. The pedagogical examples settled here explain how a pedagogical process framed under posthumanist lenses necessarily foresees the dynamicity present in these relations between students and teachers. The knowmadic pedagogy settles certain principles that advocate for the students-teacher relation self-transformation affectively. It materializes affectively, that is to say, they feel curious and excited once they reach this opening of possibilities to new theories framed under posthumanist lenses. Parallel to this feeling, the affect can take two formats. Either they are affected enough for this opening and try to settle their research under this frame; or they feel overwhelmed because the affect is so intense that it paralyzes. At this point, a knowmadic pedagogy needs to find the precise moment, the adequate time of each of the students so that they can feel carried away by it and not burdened by it.

A knowmadic pedagogy is a plea for a consideration of time as affective and responsibility as a collaborative work aiming at a relational capacity to respond to determined social problems. It materializes certain research processes as dynamic constructions that are permanently in movement. This movement is not only physical but affective because it materializes through a desiring pedagogical process in which teachers and students belong to a horizontal and transversal relation. Knowing subjects become knowing affective relations and the pedagogical process an affective movement.

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## **VISUAL AND TEXTUAL RESONANCES OF TEACHERS' CARTOGRAPHIES: RESULTS OF AN ANALYTICAL STRATEGY**

**Paulo Padilla-Petry<sup>1</sup>, Fernando Hernández-Hernández<sup>1</sup>**

*<sup>1</sup>University of Barcelona(SPAIN)*

### **Abstract**

In a research about secondary school teachers' learning trajectories in and outside school, we used visual cartographies to explore teachers' transitions and nomadic learning experiences. We invited teachers to build visual cartographies about their learning trajectories. Visual cartography is understood as a creative and artistic narrative epistemology and research methodology that allows to explore interstices, displacements, instable journeys, ways of knowing, assemblages and entanglement through which teachers perform their learning paths. The research was carried on in three secondary schools from the area of Barcelona with 29 voluntary secondary school teachers. A group of researchers interacted with and helped the teachers build their cartographies. The whole process was video recorded and field notes were taken. Upon finishing their cartographies, each teacher was video recorded explaining his/her cartography. Hence, all cartographies were accompanied by textual narratives that explained them and their elaboration process. Since we wondered about how much our analysis was being constrained by all the text surrounding the cartographies, one of the researchers, who had not participated in the first phase of the fieldwork or read the field notes or seen the video recordings of or about the cartographies, analysed 10 cartographies of one school. This analysis followed a double opposed perspective: systemic resonance and "finding strange". Systemic resonance aimed at empathising with the author of the cartography, supposing what were his/her intentions, what he/she was trying to say or represent through his/her cartography. The "finding strange" technique was the opposite of resonance: the researcher tried to be puzzled and emphasized the strangeness of some elements by questioning their possible meanings. The results of this analytical strategy showed that the difference between the resonance analysis and the texts that narrated and explained the cartographies was little. In most of the cases, the researcher ended up unknowingly repeating what the authors of the cartographies had said, which underscored the explaining power of many cartographies. When the researchers went back to the school to offer feedback, the "finding strange" analysis had two kinds of results: a) some of the researcher's questions could be answered through the authors' narratives; b) the other questions made the authors rethink some aspects of their cartographies. Overall, the analytical strategy highlighted the artistic features of the cartographies and helped the teachers come to new questions about their learning trajectories.

Keywords: visual cartography, teacher learning, systemic resonance, visual analysis, nomadic learning.

## 1 INTRODUCTION

This paper is part of the research project "How teachers learn: Educational implications and challenges to address social change" (EDU2015-70912-C2-1-R), where teachers were invited to generate visual cartographies of those scenarios inside and outside school where they learn, and to think about what they value as a source of knowledge and experience. We asked teachers to build a visual cartography about their learning trajectories and participate in conversations to generate forms of understanding their nomadic learning displacements [1,2], their tensions and expectations. In this research, we used visual cartographies as a thinking strategy to explore teachers' transitions and nomadic learning experiences. Visual cartography is understood as a creative and artistic narrative epistemology and research methodology that allows to explore interstices, displacements, instable journeys, ways of knowing, assemblages and entanglement through which teachers perform their learning paths [3-5].

The research was carried on in three secondary schools from the area of Barcelona with 29 voluntary secondary school teachers. A group of researchers interacted with and helped the teachers build their cartographies. The whole process was video recorded and field notes were taken. Upon finishing their cartographies, each teacher was video recorded explaining his/her cartography. Hence, in our data, all cartographies were accompanied by textual narratives that explained them and their elaboration process.

From the beginning, we adopted "an artistic form of the social sciences, a form of radically interpretive representation" [6, p.964] inspired on post-qualitative approaches [7-10], which shape a not unified movement that puts into question the very notion of research: it is no longer about getting results but generating concepts.

The fieldwork was understood as a possibility of encounter and not as a "place" where to collect data, it was carried out in two moments:

(1) During November and December, 2016, we went to three secondary schools around Barcelona, where we met with groups of 8-12 teachers. At the beginning, teachers were asked to introduce them and (our)selves, explaining why they wanted to participate in what most of them called a "training", and advance a bit their cartographic proposals. They were asked to think of them by capturing and relating three issues previously proposed by us: a) the learning places b) their moves between the inside and the outside of the institution, and c) the sense they made of the very act of learning. After that, our role as researchers was limited to accompanying one or two teachers and energizing –but never judging– the making of the cartography. In addition, they all explained afterwards what they had done and why in front of their cartographies. This account was video recorded.

(2) Six months later, between May and June 2017, we returned to the schools to share what the cartographies and videos had helped us to think about learning and our encounter. We started by recalling the first encounter watching a clip made with the videos of the first meeting. After that, we had individual conversations about their statements in front of their cartographies and, finally, we shared and reflected on our dialogues and thoughts on their cartographies, on what they had allowed us to think and the relations and entanglements we made.

Instead of applying a previous method to scrutinize them, our stand on the cartographies contents departed from the acknowledgement and the potentiality of "not-knowing" [11]. Thus, we were looking for a new kind of object of inquiry, "pulled out of shape by its framings" and, equally importantly, "framings pulled out of shape by the object" [8, p.639]. To this end, the cartographies,

the accounts teachers gave of them and our field notes were put together to produce an emerging conversation. Rather than meaning, this allowed us to open up to “unexpected readings of and listening to materials in what might be termed “fractal analysis” [12, p. 127].

## 2 TRYING OUT A DIFFERENT ANALYTICAL STRATEGY

The analysis of the data generated discussions about multiple issues. For instance, should we procure only a post-qualitative approach, or may we combine a post-qualitative approach by thinking with concepts with a qualitative analysis by thematising what teachers have done and said? Can images “speak for themselves” or are intrinsically linked to the teachers’ comments about them? How do we cope with or scape from the dualism of images and texts? Which kind of relationships (illustration, intra-action, complementarity and so on) are we able to generate between images and texts? The concurrence of textual (verbal) and visual data also made us wonder about the role and importance of each one in our analysis. Almost all cartographies mixed words and sentences with pictures and drawings. As part of the cartographies, these words contributed to the possible meanings of the images. Besides that, the teachers actively commented and explained their cartographies during their elaboration and at the final video recording. Since the cartography building sessions typically involved most of the research team, they had information not only about each cartography process of construction, but also about the teachers’ ideas, intentions, changes of heart, doubts etc. Thus, we started questioning whether a qualitative analysis of the cartographies could be mostly guided by all the text surrounding them. What was the importance of the visual aspects if at the end the teachers’ words about their cartographies were more important than the cartographies themselves? Were the visual elements mere elicitors of the teachers’ narratives?

Although we did not intend to ignore the teachers’ narratives, we decided to try out another analytical strategy. Profiting from the return of one of the researchers that was visiting another university and had not participated in any of the meetings with the teachers or read the field notes or seen the video recordings of or about the cartographies, the group asked him to analyse 10 cartographies of one school without knowing anything about the process or the authors of the cartographies. Even so, what kind of analysis would yield the most useful results in this situation?

Assuming that there were two opposed (or complementary) perspectives, we chose to do both. The first was to search for the maximum concordance with the author, which meant trying to figure out as best as possible what would be the meanings intended by the author of the cartography. To do that, the researcher used a modified systemic resonance [13] to try to “empathise” with the author of the cartography. Originally, systemic resonance is used by systemic therapists to comprehend how the people from a given group resonate and react, their behaviours and attitudes in face of some situations. Although the researcher was not trying to understand the dynamics of a group, he was trying to grasp why the author of each cartography did what he or she did. Each element of the cartography was linked to what the researcher thought were the intentions of the author, what he or she was trying to say or represent through his or her cartography. The resonance analysis generated a short text (between 200 and 500 words) in which the researcher described what he was seeing in parts of the cartography and in the cartography as a whole, as well as his thoughts about the possible meanings desired by the author. For instance, a fragment of a resonance text was like this:

“In the professional space, the layers or branches are more shut. The two layers that have more words are reasonably isolated. In one of them, the author seems to detail his/her learning: ‘to explain’, ‘to look at the other’ and ‘think like the other’. On the other layer, he/she seems to explain his/her work: ‘think with the others’, using psychology, following a method with passion without



forgetting to have fun. Between these two layers there is a quite open one that mentions 'to say no' and 'structure'. At the top, we find the work companions and the work itself with its problems and students. It calls my attention that the author is somehow saying that to explain something you must look and think *like* the other and that to work you must think *with* the others. It seems to me that the author gives considerable importance to the others in his/her own learning and is capable of differentiating the processes that occur. However, I think that the author subtly says that, in work, you must say no sometimes, but he/she carefully does not relate it (to say no) to the others, the colleagues or the students".

The second perspective was the opposite of the first one because it did not try to figure out possible meanings, it forced a strangeness toward the cartographies. Instead of trying to unveil the possible intentions of the author, the researcher tried to be puzzled and questioned many aspects of the cartography emphasizing their strangeness. The second approach produced a set of questions like these: "why are the students drawn like an undifferentiated mass of people? Which book (a book that was drawn at the bottom of the cartography) is this? Life like an open book?"

The two analytical approaches followed by the researcher were not meant to complement each other, although both were considered insufficient alone. Moreover, they were both exploring their own limits: the resonance would never be complete and the questions would never be enough. As we will see in the next section, they ended up having different consequences. The first approach (based on systemic resonance) tried to guess somehow the hidden (from the researcher) narrative. Not knowing what the teachers had said about their cartographies, the researcher did his best to try to guess the meanings intended by the teachers. This perspective was basically trying to answer one question: was the cartography saying the same thing than its author? The second approach was an intent of assuming little or nothing about the cartography. Instead of trying to guess, the researcher asked about the possible meanings of some elements of the cartography. When the research team returned to this school to offer feedback, the researcher's resonance text and questions regarding their cartographies were shown to their authors.

### **3 SOME RESULTS AND QUESTIONS: WHAT WE LEARNED FROM THE EXPERIENCE**

What started as a methodological try-out ended up with some interesting findings and questions. Facing the cartographies with no information whatsoever about their authors, the researcher felt somehow challenged. Soon, he had the sensation of looking at works of art with hidden meanings. So, the obvious reaction was trying to figure out these meanings through systemic resonance: staring at the cartographies as if they were paintings, examining every detail and wondering who was its author and what he or she was trying to tell him through his or her cartography. Then, the opposite: assuming nothing and asking questions that could have obvious answers, but maybe not. When discussing his process with the group of researchers, the group concluded that the analytical strategy followed by the researcher resembled one possible interpretation of a work of art.

The first results of the systemic resonance came from the simple comparison between the researcher's texts and the teachers' narratives. The similarities between them reinforced the coherence between the cartographies and the authors' narratives about them. Since someone who knew basically nothing about the authors of the cartographies and their creation processes could guess and interpret most of the meanings intended by their authors, it seems that they were quite obvious. The creative process behind each cartography was aimed at expressing the authors' feelings and ideas about their learning in and outside school, so it is fair to think that they were not trying to

hide anything behind some elaborated symbolism. Although their narratives could reveal intentions that were not obvious, the cartographies were apparently built to be self-evident.

While the teachers basically agreed with the researcher's resonance text, his questions had two different kinds of response. The first was a simple answer giving the researcher the requested information. The second was a reflection: some questions left the teachers thinking since most of them could not be easily answered. Some teachers appreciated the questions because they highlighted ambiguous aspects of their cartographies. The "finding strange" strategy was basically trying to avoid any incorrect assumption about the cartographies, but ended up generating new questions for their authors. As the researcher's doubts met the teachers' own uncertainties, it was clear that the creative process behind each cartography had not generated plain self-evident schemes of the teachers' learning. The cartographies were not just a visual method but an entanglement in which all these substances –bodies and things, texts and situations, ideas and manners of doing, etc. – remain assembled and a challenge we brought to the teachers and to ourselves.

The double process (resonance and finding strange) followed by the researcher made us think about the possible reactions towards arts-based research and art in general. Since the main goal of our methodological exercise was to compare the teachers' narratives with their cartographies, the researcher's procedure was quite rational and actively tried to exclude his feelings and recollections. It also avoided any comment that could sound disrespectful or resemble some sort of psychological interpretation. However, it could have been different because one may react to art in many ways. In another context, he could have openly expressed his own thoughts and feelings that were prompted by the cartographies or he could have even criticised the authors. The cartographies and the narratives surrounding them happened in the context of a research, the teachers were invited to help us better understand their learning trajectories. Although the researcher deliberately ignored everything that was not the cartographies themselves, he was still constrained by the research framework.

Finally, and following the comparison between the cartographies and works of art, we could discuss their context. They were produced in a group session with the researchers and teachers working together in the same room. Besides, since the teachers from each group were all from the same school, we could ask about their cultural background. Could the cartographies say something about that particular school's culture? The analytical strategy tried by the researcher treated all 10 cartographies as individual expressions, but, taking one step further, one could look for elements that would shed some light on the school culture.

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# MAKING A DIFFERENCE: CO-INQUIRING CONNECTEDNESS THROUGH ACTION RESEARCH IN A LOCAL CITIZENS' INITIATIVE

Bert Verleysen<sup>1</sup>, René Bouwen<sup>2</sup>, Marc Craps<sup>3</sup>, Styn Grieten<sup>4</sup> & Frank Lambrechts<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Universiteit Hasselt(BELGIUM)

<sup>2</sup>KU Leuven (BELGIUM)

<sup>3</sup>KU Leuven (BELGIUM)

<sup>4</sup>KU Leuven (BELGIUM)

<sup>5</sup>Universiteit Hasselt(BELGIUM)

## Abstract

Increasingly citizens take initiatives and start activities at a local community level as an antidote against the social exclusion and polarization that they observe in society nowadays. How can we, as researchers sharing these concerns, support these kinds of initiatives? What kinds of research practices can make a difference by connecting across differences within a community?

With this paper we aim to open up a reflection on possibilities for action research related to citizens' initiatives. We first describe a concrete case in which citizens start up various local community initiatives and the way one of the co-authors was actively involved as researcher, then we present briefly the main ideas of action research in general, and finally we explore the challenges for action research in this case.

Keywords: action research, connectedness, local citizen initiatives.

## 1 THE CASE

The case is about a citizens' initiative in Meeuwen-Gruitrode, a rural municipality in Limburg province (Belgium) with 13.000 habitants. Meeuwen-Gruitrode originated in the last century from the merger of five smaller villages. It is primarily a residential municipality. There is little immigration with only a few social housing estates. Until now, every village kept its own identity. In Meeuwen-Gruitrode, one can find a lot of local organizations with different activities. In the near future Meeuwen-Gruitrode, together with Opglabbeek, will merge into a new bigger municipality with the name Oudsbergen, referring to a moorland area spread over the different villages.

In this village, a new kind of citizen involvement originated around a local organization called *'Tochtgenoten'* (in English: 'traveling companions'). Five to six members of *Tochtgenoten* organized yearly a few events for people in poverty. The leading person in this organization is Jos. In his search for local support for a new kind of community center, what he called *'a house for solidarity and sustainability'*, Jos invited in April 2016 about 25 citizens to reflect on some broad challenges for the local community. In his very first invitation, he wrote: *"Our main goal is: taking a journey with people from our township who have 'too few' chances to belong to it. Meeting each other and dialogue are central levers. This means that we want to work with others towards a fair and inclusive society and towards a way of living in which everyone counts. This involves all areas of daily life: income, housing, health, education, employment, social integration. Justice and solidarity can only be realized in the long term if we also strive for sustainability. Sustainability means respect and good management of*

*our Earth (air, water, soil, plants and animals). We grow together in all life domains. Together we stand stronger” [1].*

Based on this invitation, Jos brought a new group of citizens around the table: Johan, Koen, Veerle, Erik and Jan. They were all triggered by the ideas brought up by Jos. Each one felt a personal connection with the problems of sustainability, especially with the search for local answers. Those inspired citizens started thinking on how to return to a ‘more social’ society, against the current flow, not one in which groups focus on themselves, but one that strives for openness and co-existence. They wanted to contribute to such a society by providing support not only with practical matters, but also with a listening ear, an encouraging attitude. They organized themselves in a not-for-profit organization, called ‘Tandem’ [2]. After several meetings, they formulated their shared goal: *“We want a society where people and the planet are central. We want an economy that is focused on the real needs of all people, in respect for nature. We want more tolerance, more kindness, more humanity. We want a society in which conscious life, freedom, responsibility, participation and art are important. We want a transition in all areas of life, locally, regionally and globally. We want to offer an alternative lifestyle. We want to bring all of this together in a community house”*[2]. During those meetings, the members got to know each other and spontaneously every member got the opportunity to take a suitable roll and task within the organization. In the search for translating the higher goal into daily activities they learned about experiences of the other group members. The different stories about these experiences opened up new ideas on what action could be undertaken today.

With a focus on their dream of a community center, the Tandem members aimed to start up some quick wins, small projects that can be realized without the involvement of many, but nevertheless with very visible results. In working on these projects, the Tandem members were challenged to find a form of cooperation with other local organizations, the local municipal administration, the mayor and the deputies. For some specific projects, they also needed the cooperation with the other neighbors.

A first project was to participate in ‘*Voedselteams*’ [3] (in English: Food teams). This is a delivery service of local farmer products. Local bio-farmers can sell their products to a central point and local consumers can, on a weekly basis, order a package of products. It is a form of short food supply chain, bringing together producers and consumers. The local community has to install a delivery point in the village where the packets of groceries, fruits, meat, cheese and so on can be delivered and distributed to the local consumers. The most important task for the local community is to organize this store house and engage some volunteers to coordinate the weekly distribution activities. After a first meeting in Meeuwen-Gruitrode several families were interested in participating in the project and committed themselves to buy the farmer products on a weekly basis. After several meetings with other local organizations, Tandem finally found a location for the delivery depot in the local youth center, where the products could be delivered every week and where the people could fetch their packet. In this search for a depot, the Tandem members experienced that it wasn’t obvious that other organizations cooperated with full enthusiasm in their projects. When discussing the possibilities to have a store house in a meeting room of another organization, they expected that the other organization would make its infrastructure available on their premises available for their community project. However, talking to members of other organizations, the Tandem members experienced that other organizations were not eager to make their clubhouse available for everybody. After these conversations, they had a feeling of disillusionment but also a lot of understanding for the own way of working of other organizations.

Another project was a so-called *'repair café'*. The idea of a repair café is that people bring their broken household equipment to a meeting room, where volunteers try to repair these broken items. It was Jan who told the other members about his positive experience with the organization of a repair café in another city (Ghent). At first sight, the other members did not believe in a possible success of a city-like repair café in their small rural village: *"In Meeuwen-Gruitrode, I don't see the woman next door bring her broken vacuum cleaner to our meeting room, while all the neighbors watch her walking with her broken vacuum cleaner!"*. But together, the Tandem members gave it a try. With a broad network of people within the village, Jos contacted several persons to take some task during the repair café. Some women were willing to come with their sewing machine to repair clothes. A retired ICT-specialist was found to help people with their ICT-problems. At the first repair café, 13 volunteers helped other people in repairing all kind of electric household equipment, sewing clothes, repairing bicycles and all kind of different things. The philosophy behind the repair café is to not merely repair something for someone, but to involve the client in the repair process, rather as a co-repairing moment. Jan emphasized: *"I always need to explain to the volunteers that a repair café means co-repairing. Someone can throw something in and then, after an hour, get it back when it is repaired. That is not the intention! The intention is to do it together, as much as possible. What it is not: they are the volunteers and they are going to repair it for you. It must be fun repairing it together."*

The Tandem added something extra to the idea of a repair café: during the repair café, other people worked together in the kitchen, preparing *a social dinner*. At the end of the repair café, about 60 persons enjoyed a healthy three course meal at an affordable social price. More than the meal, the social contacts were very important. The enthusiasm of the Tandem members spoiled over to the other people around the table. The repair café and the social dinner are now organized every month.

Another project that was already on the list of possibilities from the very first meeting was *'co-gardening'*. Co-gardening is not the idea of many small gardens on one piece of land (in Dutch: *'volkstuintjes'*), but is many people working together in one big common garden. They buy together the seeds for the plants; they discuss what, where and how to grow vegetables, flowers or whatever; they take turns in the maintenance of the garden. The Tandem members took a long time to prepare this project. They asked the mayor to make a piece of land available. The members then contacted the neighbors of that piece of land, to inform them of their plans and try to get some cooperation in the neighborhood. The challenge was to involve the neighbors in this gardening project. The Tandem members invited the neighbors for a meeting on the project. Some neighbors were against the project: *"not in my backyard"*. But with the open-discussion attitude of the Tandem members, neighbors were interested in knowing more about the project. At the end of the meeting, the neighbors told them that the provided piece of land was not suitable for growing vegetables, because it was polluted. At that moment, the Tandem members sought contact with other organizations that were involved in biological gardening in order to search, together with the municipality, another piece of land that was more suitable. With all these contacts with different people of the village, they made their first spade stitch the last Saturday of 2017, after more than one year of preparation.

While organizing these activities, and experiencing success and failure, there was an ongoing search to involve the municipal administration and other actors. In many contacts, the Tandem members experienced that other people hesitated to engage themselves in a new, not known project that never took place in their village. Therefore, the Tandem members made a lot of effort to inform other people about their projects. They had to bridge political and ideological differences within the municipality, where people prefer to keep things as it always has been. Within the small group of

Tandem, as well as in their contacts with other people, Tandem members were listening with an open mind, trying to avoid pressure on the others, and vindictive feelings when cooperation fails.

## **2 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

### **2.1 Information gathering**

In order to become more knowledgeable about the project in Meeuwen-Gruitrode, one of the authors studied the available written documents, such as the startup documents and the reports of meetings. Next, he conducted semi-structured interviews with six persons who worked together in starting up this citizens' initiative in Meeuwen-Gruitrode. In these interviews, he asked about the activities within the group and explored together different practices. Then, he took part in meetings with the starters' group in which the vision on the project and the further steps to realize its goals were discussed. Finally, he participated in activities, organized in the context of this project.

### **2.2 Action research**

Action research is meant as a conglomerate of research practices to create knowledge for social innovation [4]. It is a collaborative process between researchers and actor-practitioners, to discover a new space for shared meaning, bubbling up from an unique situation [5, 6].

In deploying an action research project, participants are confronted with a double challenge: (a) Defining the kind of collaboration between researchers and actor-practitioners, referring to the action part and (b) creating knowledge, referring to the research part. The kind of collaboration in action research can be defined as "partnership and participation" [7]. In that joint partnership, practitioners and researchers choose to work together in a task-oriented manner based on a certain quality of relationship [8]. Along the different moments in an action research project researchers and actor-practitioners are challenged to find an optimal mutual cooperative stance where researchers are participating in the action process and actor-practitioners as "co-researchers" can add a new dimension to the emerging knowledge [7].

As to creating knowledge, action research is stepping beyond the balancing on an equilibrium of action and research. Action research grows in a generative double helix of knowing and creating [9], of a theory of yesterday's world and tomorrow's possibilities [10], of building on the past and shaping the future [5], of knowledge-as-substance and knowledge-as-participation [11]. "Action research is a work in progress" [6]. The challenge is: "How we go about generating knowledge that is both valid and vital to the wellbeing of individuals, communities, and for the promotion of larger-scale democratic social change" [6]. It is about connecting micro practices and reflecting on them in order to co-create shared knowledge that can be validated. It is going through the process of the first person experience, a kind of "I-moment", along with sharing these experiences and feelings with a partner in the process as the second person knowledge, the "us-moment", towards a wider implication in third-person knowledge, a kind of "they-moment" [5]. This knowledge is always an inclusive knowledge merging out of a participating in a community of practice [11].

The role of the action researcher is quite different from the role of the evidence-based researcher as a detached data collector and interpreter, aligning and interpreting findings along predefined theoretical expectations. The evidence-based researcher is a distant actor communicating with his fellow researchers his "evidence-based" findings about a given outside material world. The action researcher is also documenting the given context data, but at the same time s/he is communicating with the actors in the context in a collaborative searching mode. S/he is engaging with the co-

inquirers and building relationships through questioning what is really at stake and creating the shared context. S/he is searching for practices by which the actors create and co-create with the researchers a shared social context. In the given data-context the action researcher is looking for practice-based understanding and practice-bettering theorizing. This action research practice is inspired by a relational social constructionist reading of human behavior in social context [12]. “Evidence –based” knowledge is extended towards “practice-based” knowledge. Gergen [12] suggests Descartes to extent his well-known enlightenment phrase “cogito, ergo sum” into a practice- based assumption “Communicamus, ergo sum”.

Today’s challenge in action research is to step beyond the methodology part of the research and entering a community of inquiry, turning away from “changing others out there towards an orientation of change *with* others” [13]. In the following paragraphs, we learn about a local community project. While reading about the case, the reader, as action researcher, is invited, together with the authors and with the actor-practitioners, to enter a world of relational inquiry practices. In a joint inquiry project, reader, authors and actor-practitioners, as involved parties, are urged to co-explore possibilities for a genuine action research where the researcher is not merely describing what the actor-practitioners are doing and where actor-practitioners are not merely objective data to be collected and documented by the researchers, as a finished story to be read.

### **3 CHALLENGES FOR ACTION RESEARCH IN COMMUNITY INIATIVES**

Within the context of a local community citizens’ initiative, researchers and actor-practitioners have to identify action possibilities based on commonalities among the involved actors, while respecting and even confirming their differences. Action research has the vocation to support this task by: (a) supporting the local actors in the exploration of their differences and commonalities; (b) stimulating the identification of action possibilities to embrace the differences within the community while connecting those differences in a richer and warmer community-life; (c) transforming these actions in action research to reflect on these micro practices in order to co-create knowledge that is “actionable” not only in this case but also in many similar initiatives elsewhere.

Although every research act has influence on and has to be considered as an intervention in the studied social reality, up to now the research in this case is still predominantly limited to traditional data gathering and analysis, independently from the process of the community initiatives. However one of the main aims is precisely to learn in the course of the research about the potential of action research for this purpose. This implies that the following considerations are systematically addressed throughout the research:

- Which research questions are generative for local community building initiatives, that is: favoring the involvement of local actors in joint activities?
- What are narratives that can mobilize and connect different local actors and how to use them in the action research?
- How to involve actively the local actors in the different phases of the action research process (problem formulation, information gathering, analysis, reflection, feedback, ...)?
- What are adequate research practices that are able to take into account the (social, economic, cultural, educational) differences between the local actors?
- How to set up research practices in such a way that they stimulate active participation in the community initiatives?
- How to reflect critically on the perceived position of the researchers in the community by the local actors? Which characteristics and actions of the researchers



favor the action research process? Which characteristics of the researchers complicate the research and how to take that into account?

- What are the pitfalls of action research for local community building and for knowledge creation about it, and how to avoid them?

By systematically addressing these challenges we want to develop gradually a research strategy for action research in community initiatives which is helpful to come closer to its ideal of coherent and lively local communities as building blocks for an inclusive and sustainable society.

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## ON THE BEAUTY AND HORROR OF SLEEPLESSNESS SLEEPLESSNESS AS LIVED EXPERIENCE

**Päivi Rantala**

*University of Lapland (FINLAND)*

### **Abstract**

*It's in your body, in your mind. In the stomach, or forehead, or temple.*

*It's the tired concentration, knowing, noticing the next day's duties, feeling the tiredness behind the eyes. Tiredness is dark blue, it's black. It's in contrast to the light of the sun. The light hurts.*

*Desperate, she knows the new day has started, although the day before this never ended. Where is the limit between the days if you don't sleep? How can you measure time, the days, nights, evenings?*

*What*

*is*

*a*

*morning?*

*It's beautiful.*

*It's horrible.*

*It's yours, it's all yours.*

This is a fragment of a text I wrote in a workshop with the focus on essaying as method, chaired by writer and teacher David Carlin from Melbourne. The title of the text was "On the Beauty and Horror of Sleeplessness". In that essay, which was written in twenty minutes, based on about an hour's processing, the emphasis was mostly on the horror side of sleeplessness: the uneasiness, awfulness, the pain. After writing that text in Spring 2017, I have tried to find other perspectives than that, too.

Sleeplessness: it is personal and yet shared, embodied experience but affects the mind. It can make you crazy or push you to the limit. Sleeplessness can make you see the border between you and the world, or lose the experience of that border. It can be a liminal state between real life and the unknown – it can be horrifying, and beautiful.

In this paper, I will present the findings of an ongoing research process about the embodied experience of sleeplessness. My presentation in European Congress of Qualitative Inquiry is a multi-artistic performance combining prose poems, songs, texts and "letters to the Production group of my dreams". The texts are based on autoethnographical notes and qualitative analyses of the research materials. Most of the texts are written in writing workshops or in writing dates with colleagues, and they describe either my own or others' embodied experiences about sleeplessness. This paper concentrates on the theoretical and methodological background of the performance. The research is situated in the fields of cultural historical and sociocultural study of sleep.

There are many kinds of sleeplessness: it can be talked as chronic or as a one night stand, embodied experience, scary or oppressive, or as an experience which enables creativity and concentration. In this presentation, I try to figure different ways to approach this phenomenon. The presentation is interdisciplinary, combining historical and current knowledge, social sciences, cultural

history and gender studies. Art is used both as a method of inquiry, a way of thinking, and as a result of the research and a way to indicate the variety of the research material.

Keywords: sleeplessness, autoethnography, creative writing

## 1 APPROACHES AND METHODS

My key interest is in sleeplessness as embodied experience. How does it feel? Where in the body it is situated? Can it be described? During the research process which is in a very early stage, I have concentrated on my own experiences, the stories of others – the colleagues, friends, family, people who I meet and who tell me their stories – and the cultural representations about sleeplessness. In literature, pictures, paintings, comic books, poems, and films sleeplessness is represented in many ways. My aim is to discuss with all these stories, both in history and in our days. Is sleeplessness timeless? Or, to ask more precisely: is there something typical for our time's ways to be sleepless, and how it differs from the ways in the past? What kind of cultural and temporal differences could there be in the embodied experience – and how the experiences in the past could be traced?

One of the theoretical approaches in my research is Cultural History. In cultural historical study, the phenomenon is examined in relation to time and place: thus, the norms, habits, ways of think and behave, ideologies are contextualized in the culture and time in question. Cultural history studies the cultural ways to understand, analyse and conceptualise the phenomena. Also, a crucial for cultural history is “how to be human”: what it means to be a human being, especially in relation to culture and cultural [1, 2]. Thus, this text adheres to the cultural ways of think and act concerning sleeplessness.

Another theoretical field of this study is the sociocultural study of sleep. It concentrates on the norms, practices, patterns and the social, societal and cultural aspects of sleep. Many of the scholars in the field have noted that sleep in social sciences has been neglected; it is evaluated to more less valuable than being awake, passive time. [3, 4] The research concerning sleeplessness or insomnia has widely been bio-medical and concentrated on the phenomena as a problem. I do not deny it is, or can be, a problem, both in individual and social and political levels. My aim is, anyhow, to look at sleeplessness as lived experience. My aim as researcher is to understand the different ways to live and experience sleeplessness – not to find solutions, ways to get rid of it, or “cure” it.

One of the methodological approaches in my research is autoethnography. Later on, I will continue with Memory work, which as a method can be thought as neither objective nor subjective but intersubjective. [5] Memories are individual, but as Annette Kuhn writes, “their associations extend far beyond the personal.” They can bring together “the personal with the familial, the cultural, the economic, the social, and the historical”. [6]

Also in autoethnography, the perspective and analysis take account both our personal, lived experience, corporeal being, subjective experience, and the cultural and structural levels. Thus, it combines the micro and macro level, a human experience in relation to the cultural, social and political world we live in. [7] Sleeplessness or the lack of sleep is a highly personal, corporeal, lived experience. At the same time, it is gendered, politized, shared: in statistics you can find information about the amounts of amounts of people with sleep disorders; especially women after menopause.

Sleeplessness costs money, it makes workers less effective, it makes us vulnerable. All this I know – and it does not help me.

Thus, in my autoethnographical diary and sometimes quite messy notes I try to verbalize the experience, the embodied, felt feeling of not being able to sleep. This is the first step: giving my own words. Also, I try to figure out how my writing affects the experience [7]: does the process of writing change my sleeping? One part of the process is to ponder what is important; not anything personal goes [7]. The next step is to start the discussion with others, the transition from monologue to dialogue, from my own experience to sharing, comparing. The aim of autoethnographical research is not (at least only) self-therapy of recognizing one's own feelings, but wider understanding of cultural phenomena; experiences, practices, processes. [7] I cannot speak for all middle-aged Finnish women, but I can discuss, make the phenomena visible. As Jacquelin Allen-Collinson writes, autoethnography is “a potent, challenging, and strongly relational research approach that offers a variety of modes of engaging with self – or perhaps more accurately, selves – in relation to others, to culture, to politics, and the engagement of selves in relation to future possibilities for research” [7].

Most of my texts, both autobiographical and fictional, I have written on “writing dates”, intensive writings sessions, with friends and colleagues. During the sessions, we usually start with some warming up exercise and use different forms of creative writing to start writing. As I mentioned in the abstract, *essaying as method* [8] was a useful tool for generating material. During the workshops, writing dates, and during the writing sessions courses I have taught to students, I have “produced the mass text”, raw material for the prose poems, flash fiction and short stories. We have for example tried to find opposite metaphors for the phenomena, described it with all senses, and situated it in different places.

Also, I have tried to start writing with different words: sleeplessness (in Finnish “*unettomuus*”), staying awake (“*valvominen*”), sleeplessness as a one night stand, lack of sleep, and so on. As professor Anu Valtonen writes, the words can open doors to different worlds, they have power, if you stop to think what they tell you [9]. For example “the lack of sleep”, “*sleepless/uneton*” means something is missing, away, out of sight, whereas “one night stand” or “sleeplessness as my secret lover” is a very different way to think of the phenomenon. Also, there is a difference in thinking of sleeplessness as individual, or shared, experience. When I started to write how my skin hears the voices of other women who stay awake in every part of the world, it not only got me new ideas for research, but gave me a feeling of comfort.

## 1.1 Results

In this section I will present the preliminary findings of the research – or, to be more accurate, I will ponder what I have learned during this process, in its first phase.

I have tried to make autobiographical notes every time I stay awake in small hours. And one thing is for sure: I cannot write when the sleeplessness is acute, when it is there, in my body and my mind. It is impossible to get a pen and a paper, start to consciously make notes, describe the experience. Anyhow, I do not give up: I will go on with trying. Maybe next time! And every time, after every night I have stayed up, I've made notes. Also my friends have started to use their own experiences to help me; for example, one of my best friends had occasional sleepless nights before her defence. She told

me about her experience: where and how the feeling of not sleeping was situated, what thoughts came into her mind, ect. She had thought: "I don't sleep and that's bad, but at least I can help Pälvi in her research, which is good." I probably don't have to mention she is also present in one of my poems.

Verbalizing the embodied experience is at the same time very hard, even impossible, and very easy. The lived experience is very personal and subjective, and at the same time, there are cultural symbols, words and phrases to describe our experiences. As Allen writes, "the voices and selves of others intertwine with ourselves and our stories, individual person's story is not completely and entirely her/his own" [7]. The language concerning sleeplessness is very similar in my own writings, in cultural representations, and in others' texts. Of course, there are exceptions – but still the stories about the verbalized experience is understandable.

Furthermore, there are symbols and characters like Sandman ("Nukkumatti", "Sleep-Matt" in Finnish) – a man who comes with the sleep, or lambs you have to count to get some sleep. In my texts, I have used this kind of symbols to find new ways to describe sleeplessness. For example a "simple" way of fictional writing, personification, helped me to understand different ways to react to sleeplessness. If it is The Secret Lover, it is exciting; if it is Sandman, at least in my mind and memories it is boring. Sandman was a character in Finnish TV's children's program when I was a child – an East German animated character with a stupid beard. Even at that time I did not like him; Sandman is definitely not a wanted quest! As a result of this pondering and personification, I wrote several texts. This is a part of one poem I wrote:

*Why don't I sleep?  
Well isn't it obvious?  
My Secret Lover is hot.  
Sandman is not.  
So simple.*

Before I started to make research about sleeplessness, I made a song called "Valvon", "I stay awake". In the lyrics, I tell about Sandman who doesn't come to meet me, despite his promise to do so. Perhaps he found a younger one? In the song there is also a notion about not-being-able-to-sleep as an inherited feature: mother and grandmother did that, too. Sleeplessness, inability to sleep well, reaches every chain in the link of women in the family.

I had of course read studies and articles about sleeplessness as women's problem: especially middle-aged women after the menopause have problems with sleeping. Pretty often the tone is judgmental: why don't you sleep? You cause problems to the society with your bad sleep! In my song, and also in the research, I want to open up different interpretations. Anyhow, sleeplessness is a gendered matter.

One more example of the writing exercises. A typical symbol for not getting sleep, especially in cartoons or caricatures, is a line of sheep a person is counting. When I thought of sheep, this came into my mind:

*Oh, so you cannot sleep?*

*Have you tried to count sheep?*

*Have I? Haven't I?*

*When I close my eyes, they are waiting in line.  
A line long as the road out of Eden  
White, white, white, grey, one or two black ones  
The sorrow-eyed sheep.  
Patiently, they wait, silent,  
but when they see me coming, it starts.  
Baaa!*

*Määäää!*

[“mää” in some Finnish dialects means “me”. It is also what the lamb says in Finnish.]

*The endless sound of their stories.  
If I don't listen to them, who would?*

*Have you tried to count sheep.  
Count sheep my ass.*

The huge amount of sheep telling their stories, talking at the same time, trying to get their voice through, could symbolize the endless fuzz of duties and thoughts which makes it impossible to go to sleep. That's one way of embodiment: you can relax your body, but how to empty your mind? Of course, there are ways to do that, but it is difficult.

With the creative writing rehearsals I have found my own way to tell about lived experiences. Anyhow, I also discuss with others in my texts: the differences, similarities, different kinds of affects and memories. Others' stories, all I have read, watched and heard, live in me. I can compare, deny, and accept other interpretations – and make re-interpretations.

Another rehearsal was to find metaphors for the phenomenon. After writing one metaphor the task was to change it to the opposite: for example, if I had written about sleeplessness as a skyscraper – a building with thousands of windows and stories, impossible to perceive in one sight – I then changed it to a mud hut with friable walls. One of the metaphors I wrote about was The Universe; sleeplessness as the Cosmic wind which makes the boundaries with me and the Cosmos disappear. It was a scary thought. I wrote:

*The Cosmos does not care  
if you sleep  
or not  
How does something who doesn't sleep  
know how it feels to not sleep?*

After that, I changed the metaphor into a tent on a beach. If you turn a flashlight on, the Cosmic Wind passes you without noticing.

One part of the research is to figure out the places sleeplessness is situated in the body. In my own body, it is usually the temple, or the eyes – or the area behind the eyes – whereas in my friend told it

is the stomach. In cultural historical writings, for example in Medieval texts, the different parts of the body got different meanings. In future, this will be one of the themes I will focus.

We as researchers can study sleeplessness many ways: read the statistics, measure the length and quality of sleep, make surveys of the amount of sleepless people around the world, interview individuals or group of people. All this is important, every research increase our understanding about the phenomena. Anyhow, for me it has been important to find new ways to understand my own bodily experience, and at the same time, find ways to communicate about the subject in ways that are not so typical for traditional social scientific and humanistic research. With creative writing, we can find words for something nonverbal – and surprise even ourselves.

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# SECONDARY SCHOOL TEACHERS' LEARNING GEOGRAPHIES AND HISTORIES. EXPLORING MOVEMENTS, ENTANGLEMENTS AND AFFECTS

Juana M Sancho-Gil<sup>1</sup>, Fernando Hernandez-Hernandez<sup>1</sup>, Cristina Alonso-Cano<sup>1</sup>, Alejandra Bosco<sup>2</sup>, Raquel Miño-Puigcercós<sup>1</sup>, Judith Arrazola-Carballo<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Universitat de Barcelona (SPAIN)

<sup>2</sup> Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona (SPAIN)

## Abstract

This paper builds on a research project, which main aim is to explore how secondary school teachers learn inside and outside their work place. After discussing the difficulty of studying a phenomenon as complex and slippery as learning, we call for the necessity of using visual and creative research methods. Then, we explain the basic elements of the research process and claim the fundamental contributions of cartographies for dealing with existential territories -which imply sensitive, cognitive, affective and aesthetic universes.

Keywords: visual methods, inclusive research, learning experiences

## 1 INTRODUCCION

### 1.1. Expanding learning boundaries

In the last years, we have developed several research projects that put especial emphasis in the contextual and experiential dimensions of learning. In all of them, we have explored different aspects of learning not only *with* primary [1] and secondary school students [2] [3] [4] [5], but also *with* primary, secondary and university teachers [6] [7] [8] [9] [10]. We give a special stress to the preposition *with* for three main reasons.

Firstly, because following an inclusive research perspective [11], we do not do research *about* people, but *with* people.

Secondly, because working in the field of education and being profoundly interested in people's educational processes and their personal and professional development, as argued by John Elliott [12], we stand for the notion of "educational research" vs. "research on education"<sup>1</sup>. By understanding that research done in a field such as education that so deeply affects human being lives and their environment [13] for John Elliott [14] and for us "the overriding purpose of educational research is to bring about worthwhile educational change"; and "research is only educational when it is directed towards realising educational values in practice"<sup>2</sup>. And this end can be only achieved by

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<sup>1</sup> John Elliott, "Educational action research". In *Research, Policy and Practice, World Yearbook of Education* (London: Kogan Page, 1985), 243.

<sup>2</sup> John Elliott, "Educational research in crisis: performance indicators and the decline in excellence," *British Educational Research Journal*, 16, no. 1 (1990): 170.



involving participants in the research process and taking into account what they perceive as the “real” problems and the conditions for them to learn.

Finally, because by positioning ourselves in a post-qualitative perspective [15] and taking into account the new materialism and new empiricism turn “bodies which define the experimental conditions serve as both the endpoint and the starting point for objective accounts of our intra-actions. In other words, *objectivity is literally embodied*. According to agential realism, knowledge is always a view from somewhere - objective knowledge is situated knowledge”<sup>1</sup>.

The development of these projects made evident, firstly, the impossibility of separating personal and professional knowledge from the biographic, cultural, social, technological, and emotional and affective experiences of the learners. Because as D. C. Phillips [17] argues,

Learning is a phenomenon that involves real people who live in real, complex social contexts from which they cannot be abstracted in any meaningful way. [...] learners are contextualized. They do have a gender, a sexual orientation, a socioeconomic status, an ethnicity, a home culture; they have interests—and things that bore them<sup>2</sup>.

Secondly, the impossibility of restricting learning to self-contained formal learning environments, since today more than ever, in a digital and highly connected society, learning is not only life-long, life-wide and life-deep [18], but takes place across boundaries, times and spaces [2], [6], [7], [10], [19], [20].

Thirdly, the difficulty of exploring a complex and slippery phenomenon such as learning through the so-called traditional measuring instruments. So, in our previous projects, we have developed professional life histories, biographical accounts, ethnographical narratives and micro-ethnographical descriptions. These experiences led us to the position of developing creative research methods [21], [22], [23] to address the research on which we focus this paper.

## 2. THE RESEARCH PROJECT

### 2.1. Exploring secondary school teacher’s learning histories and geographies

Building on the above mentioned rationale, we are developing the research project: How do Secondary School Teachers Learn: Educational Implications and Challenges for Addressing Social Change-APREN-DO. Twenty-nine teachers from three secondary schools participated in workshops where a series of cartographies and conversations around them were generated. Prior to the workshop, during the negotiations process, which took place online, we suggested teachers to:

- Think of what a cartography about their own learning trajectories could mean for them.
- Look for examples that could help them determine the type of cartography they wanted to make. (We enclosed some developed by us about our own learning experiences).

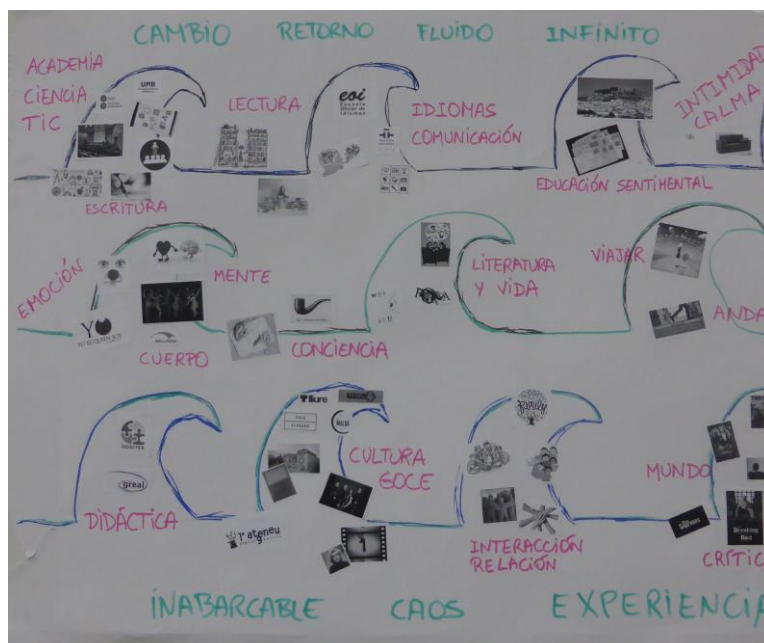
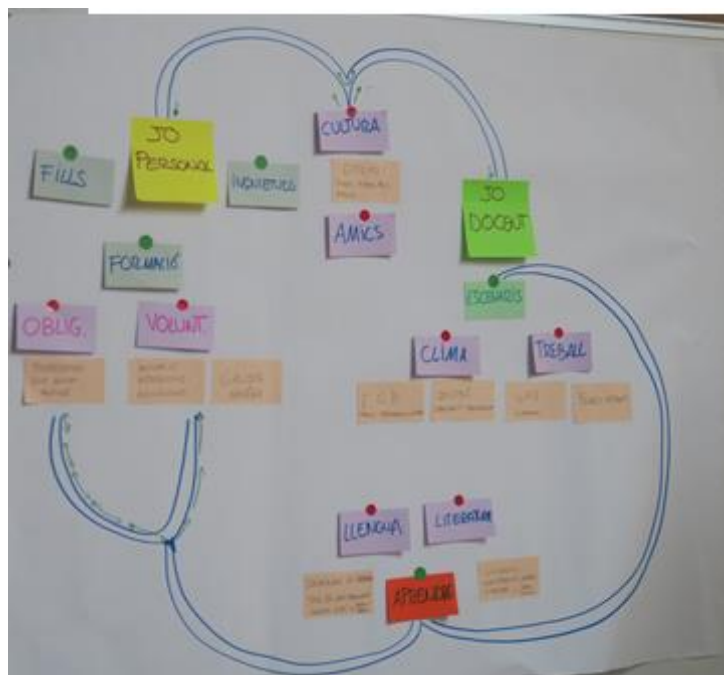
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<sup>1</sup> Barad, Karen, “Meeting the Universe Halfway. Realism and Social Constructivism Without Contradiction.” In *Feminism, Science, and the Philosophy of Science* (Dordrecht/Boston/London: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1996), 180.

<sup>2</sup> D. C. Phillips, “Research in the Hard Sciences, and in Very Hard “Softer” Domains,” *Educational Researcher*, 43, no. 1 (2014): 10.

- Make a first sketch (using the format they wanted) to show the ways they learn both inside and outside their work place.
- Search and select the materials and references they wanted to include in their cartography (photos, videos, drawings, texts, objects, documents, ...).
- Tell us what they needed in order to prepare it and bring it to the meeting.

Some of the participants brought different materials with them, some of them did not. However, at the end of the workshops, all of them developed their learning cartography and gave an individual account of their processes, meanings and discovering. Figure 1, shows a selection of cartographies developed by a teacher of each participating secondary school.



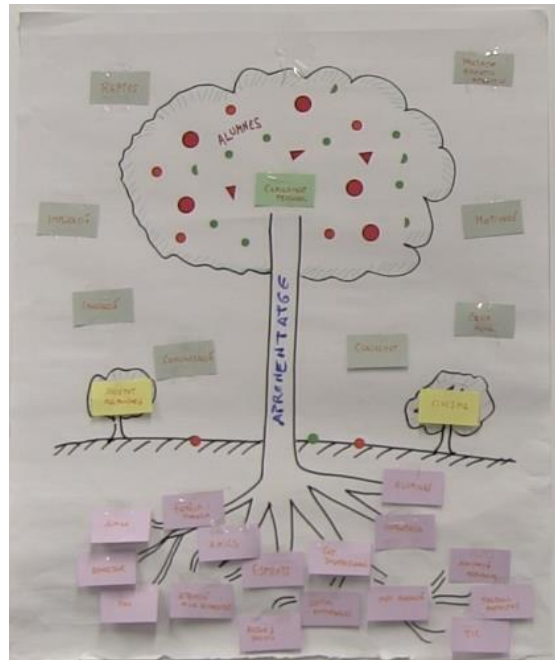


Figure 1. Learning cartographies of three secondary school teachers.

A few months after the workshops, the researchers shared with participants the dialog they established with the cartographies and the explanation given by teachers about them, stressing what had allowed them to think about learning. This new round of conversation provided new insights for the teachers learning histories and geographies.

### 2.1.1. Analysis and discussion

Developing cartographies to map out teachers' leaning moments, places and transitions gave participants the opportunity of exploring "the sensations, intensities and textures through which"<sup>1</sup> they experienced learning [24]. The multiplicity of teachers' learning worlds and the questions raised in the process not only 'caught' these realities but also made them. Taking into account that we are dealing with the cartography of existential territories -which imply sensitive, cognitive, affective, aesthetic universes, etc., and what it represents to approach the cartographies of concrete processes of subjectivation [25]. That, according to Masny [26]

Cartographies relate to mappings and mappings relate to the rhizome. Cartographies are captured through the rhizome, "movements *in diverse directions instead of a single path, multiplying its own lines and establishing the plurality of unpredictable connections in the open-ended smooth space of its growth*" (Semetsky, 2008, p. xv)<sup>2</sup>.

And that "rhizome and becoming cannot be controlled; instead they create unpredictable lines of flight"<sup>5</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> Rebecca Coleman, and Jessica Ringrose, *Deleuze and research methodologies*. (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2014): 3.

<sup>2</sup> Diana Masny, "Cartographies of Becoming in Education. Theory and Practice", In *Cartographies of Becoming in Education: A Deleuze-Guattari Perspective* (Rotterdam/Taipei: Sense Publishers): 4 -5.

However, it allowed to focus in the movements, entanglements and affects created around these learning cartographies, locating spaces, moments and experiences of learning. Cartographies tell stories about where and with whom secondary teachers learn, but it is unclear what they tell us about how they learn, because, as we have argued, learning is not something natural, but contextually constructed.

### 3. CONCLUSIONS

By inviting teachers to participate in a collaborative process to mapping out their learning trajectories, we challenged them -and us- to be involved in a process of learning that subverted the limits of academic relationships and enabled to generate and experience an event [27]

Most teachers involved expressed their satisfying surprise about how reflecting on their own learning using inventing methods gave them the opportunity of going beyond the “already known”, of thinking differently about students’ learning and exploring expression tools to fostering reflection beyond words. From the researchers’ side we have been able to think around the following questions:

- How to reinvent research methods [28] to deal with the fluidity, multiplicity and vagueness [29] of those learning experiences.
- How to understand the multiplicity of teachers’ learning worlds and the questions raised by methods that not only ‘catch’ these realities but also make them.
- How to map those relations where researchers are always involved.

Finally, our stand on the cartographies assumes the acknowledgement that they are not a prescriptive navigational formula, but a fluid, dynamic process for exploration and experimentation in research [30].

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# **EMPOWERMENT THROUGH THE CO-CONSTRUCTION OF NEW KNOWLEDGES: EVIDENCE FROM THE PARTICIPATORY ACTION HUMAN RIGHTS AND CAPABILITY APPROACH WITH HOMELESS FAMILIES IN DUBLIN**

**Dr Rory Hearne<sup>1</sup>, Dr Mary Murphy<sup>2</sup>**

*<sup>1</sup>Maynooth University Social Sciences Institute (Ireland)*

*<sup>2</sup>Maynooth University Social Sciences Institute (Ireland)*

## **Abstract**

The H2020 funded Re-InVest project developed a unique methodological approach, the Participatory Action Human Rights and Capability Approach (PAHRCA)[1]. Drawing from human rights principles of agency, participation, and voice, and the capability framework[2] PAHRCA is a transformative and participative methodological approach based on participatory action research. It aims to ‘co-construct’ knowledge across academic researchers, peer researchers, NGO’s and people directly experiencing social exclusion and injustice (vulnerable groups). In RE-InVest PAHRCA has been applied in 13 research sites across 12 EU member states to investigate the social damage of the crisis and social (dis)investment in services, with a special focus on rights and capabilities of vulnerable groups. This paper discusses the theoretical framework of PACRHA, its implementation in the case study of an assessment of the impact of marketisation of social housing on homeless families in Dublin, and critical reflections on PAHRCA as a form of PAR.

This PAHRCA case study research engaged three peer researchers (tenants of an Irish NGO housing association) and ten families living in emergency homeless accommodation over a six month period. It details how, through PAHRCA, new knowledge was co-produced in relation to the experience of homeless families of the marketisation of social investment in housing policy through private rental subsidies and their experience of a new form of emergency accommodation, Family Hubs.

This paper outlines how the PAHRCA process achieved key actions of empowerment and transformation in the organisation of a ‘dialogue’ between the homeless families and policy influencers along with the publication of the outcomes of the research in an accessible policy format in the public sphere. Significantly it revealed new insights, priorities, and definitions that challenged dominant housing policy narratives in Ireland and thus we argue it created a more democratic and inclusive form of knowledge. Critical reflection on our experience of implementing PAHRCA reveals challenges that require further exploration and consideration in the future application of PAHRCA, and provides an important contribution to the methodological and theoretical application of PAR approaches in qualitative research.

Keywords: participatory action research, vulnerable groups, policy influence

## **1 PARTICIPATORY ACTION RESEARCH & NEW KNOWLEDGE CREATION**

Participatory Action Research (PAR) refers to a social process where people engage in, examine and interpret their own social world, shaping their sense of identity. Closely related to experiential

learning, it incorporates both ontological and epistemological perspectives. As a form of qualitative research it seeks to understand human experiences, but goes beyond understanding to taking constructive action to ameliorate difficult, often oppressive, situations[3]. It aims to be an *emancipatory process* which helps people challenge and remove themselves from unjust social structures which limit their self-development and self-determination. PAR involves a process of critical reflection that enables people learn to theorise about the social structures which constrain them. It is recursive with ongoing reflection on the contradictions of the social world[4]. PAR draws on Freirian approaches that outline the universal right to participate in the production of knowledge:

*“In this process, people rupture their existing attitudes of silence, accommodation and passivity, and gain confidence and abilities to alter unjust conditions and structures. This is an authentic power for liberation that ultimately destroys a passive awaiting of fate”*[5].

Oakley [7], in a feminist critique of sterile models of research which seek to mine data for extraction, argues for egalitarian and reciprocal meaning making enterprises where the researcher travels as facilitator in an active relationship that leads to empowerment. In PAR researchers work collaboratively with the “researched” in an effort to achieve social justice in the form of improved conditions. Rather than conducting a study “on” a group of people, it is research “with” a group of people.

Cleaver[8] argues “there is a need to conceptualize participatory approaches more broadly, for more complex analyses of the linkages between intervention, participation and empowerment”. The next section explores how the Re-InVest approach, elucidated in this paper, has conceptualised human rights and capability approaches and the co-construction of knowledge to develop a particular model of PAR, the Participatory Action Human Rights and Capability Approach (PAHRCA).

#### *1.1.1 The Participatory Action Human Rights and Capability Approach*

Capability and human rights approaches contribute to a PAR framework by providing a comprehensive and flexible theory of wellbeing that can capture the multiple, complex and dynamic aspects of poverty. The capability approach as developed by Sen[9] and Nussbaum[10] defines a person’s well-being in terms of ‘what a person can do’ to lead a life one values and has reason to value. Nussbaum[11] directly links human rights and capabilities through ten ‘central capabilities,’ which are fundamental human entitlements inherent in the very idea of minimum social justice, and raises the question of how policy impacts on people’s capability, autonomy and choice. A PAR approach to human rights is visible in some Human Rights Based Approaches which are based upon the principles of accountability, participation. This approach has been developed in the Participation and Practice of Rights project based in Belfast and also implemented by Community Action Network in Dublin based projects. [12].

Elsewhere the Merging of Knowledge approach developed by the International Movement ATD Fourth World aims to enable the ‘co-construction’ of knowledge[13]. This understands knowledge as constructed from three parts: scientific knowledge as gained by researchers; knowledge which the poor and excluded have, from their firsthand experience, of the twin realities of poverty and the surrounding world which imposes it on them; and the knowledge of those who work among and with these victims in places of poverty and social exclusion.



Working in Re-InVest we have combined these theoretical approaches into an innovative methodological framework, entitled the Participatory Action Human Rights and Capability Approach (PAHRCA) to co-investigate how policy impacts on the rights and capabilities of vulnerable groups. The research process is a 'co-construction of knowledge between researchers, vulnerable groups and civil society organisations'. Seven flexible steps were developed to the (PAHRCA) methodology involving mixed groups of researchers, NGO's and people experiencing poverty in an iterative and ongoing process of action, knowledge creation and reflection[14]. These steps included developing relationships with the partner NGO and trust building, engaging research participants, developmental sessions with participants to develop an enhanced ability amongst vulnerable groups to talk about/understand capabilities and rights, co-inquiry identifying key issues and themes of concern. The final step focuses on an action incorporating 'voice - action - outcome' in the form of an initiative to address a concern of the group with active voice and participation of the group.

### *1.1.2 Research Method*

Recent changes in housing policy and homelessness in Ireland provide the context for the research. The Housing Assistance Payment (HAP) scheme – a subsidy paid to private landlords to house low income social housing tenants - was introduced by the Irish government in 2014 and became the primary mechanism for new social housing in 2016. This represented an intensification of the marketisation trend in social housing. This, combined with the impact of a severe austerity regime between 2008 and 2013 that decimated social housing construction budgets, and weak tenant protections from private rental sector evictions, resulted in a dramatic increase in family homelessness from 2014 onwards. In Dublin, where 78% of homeless families are located, there was a four-fold increase in the number of homeless families living in emergency accommodation (mainly commercial hotels and B&Bs) between 2014 and 2017[15].

In the context of failed social housing building targets, increasing homelessness, and longer stays for families in emergency accommodation, in early 2017, the government announced the development of a new type of emergency accommodation, Family Hubs. These were presented as a positive alternative to commercial hotels and B&B's. Our research aimed to apply the PAHRCA methodology to investigate homeless families' experience of this shift in policy towards marketization in the HAP scheme and the Family Hubs.

The research was undertaken by two principal researchers (one male and one female, both middle class academics with backgrounds in community based anti-poverty and housing campaigns), in a collaborative partnership with housing NGOs, three peer researchers (two female and one male, all with experiential knowledge of homelessness) who were tenants of an Irish housing NGO, and ten homeless families living in a Family Hub emergency accommodation in Dublin. The research team worked with the families over twelve weeks using the seven steps outlined in the PAHRCA culminating in a 'voice-action-outcome' initiative; a dialogue with senior policy makers and the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission. A weekly group session was held on ten occasions. The participant families were all female-headed families (9 of which were lone parents, seven were of Irish origin and three were migrants), all with young children ranging in age from six months to 13 years of age.

The first session with the families was introductory, explaining the aim and purpose of the research and providing an understanding of housing policy and the right to housing Trust building exercises were also undertaken. The initial session took place in a location nearby the family hub but all subsequent ones took place in a communal space in the family hub. The initial focus of the research

was to gather families' experiences of the HAP, however the families consistently raised the impact of the hubs on their wellbeing so this was also included.

The sessions introduced the families to recent trends in housing policy in Ireland and the right to housing. Participative methods (such as drawing and small group dialogue) were used to enable them to identify what the right to housing meant to them, to identify their key issues of concern, and to contextualise them in a rights and capability framework. As the sessions continued we discussed influencing policy makers and agreed to organise a 'dialogue' between the families and policy makers to try influence policy on HAP and social housing. We prepared the families for the dialogue through role play, enabling the families practice what they would say, anticipating responses and questions, while also co-constructing solutions aimed at transforming policy that could be proposed at the dialogue.

## **2 RESEARCH FINDINGS**

### **2.1 Co-creation of new knowledge**

The PAHRCA process empowered the homeless families to express their experiences in a human rights and capability framework and resulted in the co-construction of new and important understandings of the marketisation of social housing policy and new forms of emergency accommodation. These included issues such as market exclusion, ontological security and the damaging experience of therapeutic incarceration in Family Hubs.

The research found that families are experiencing *a structural exclusion* from the private rental market in Dublin, resulting in a denial of their right to access housing. The families identified how they were unable to compete in the tight rental market against professionals who had work references and could pay higher rents than statutory subsidy limits. They suffered a double stigmatisation in the market, discriminated against for being both single mothers and homeless. We found policy makers underestimate the inequalities inherent to the private market approach in HAP and the severe negative impacts on families' mental health from market rejection and failure to secure HAP accommodation.

A second co-constructed knowledge related to the impact of the inherent insecurity of tenure in HAP (it is in the insecure private rental market). Using methods of participative art the families described key aspects of having the right to a home as; security, stability, safety and freedom and identified their key priority was to have long-term and secure accommodation. Families are fearful of taking up HAP housing because they do not want to put their children at risk of becoming homeless again and identified how security of tenure is even more important for homeless families with children who have already suffered the trauma of housing loss. We found a sharp contrast between the absence of consideration of tenure insecurity in HAP by policy makers and its prioritisation as a core concern of the families. This new gendered knowledge co-constructed through PAHRCA revealed a fundamental flaw in HAP.

In relation to Family Hubs, the PAHRCA methodology revealed, in contrast to government and policy maker's portrayal of Hubs as positive developments, the difficult realities of day-to-day living in this new emergency accommodation. The process of multiple visits with the families and the supportive space provided in PAHRCA enabled an alternative knowledge to emerge. Families identified that rules and conditions attached to family hub type emergency accommodation translate into significant practical restrictions on the 'capability to live the life one chooses and values'. Conditions in the hub limited their capacity to parent effectively and caused down ward spirals of well-being.

## 2.2 Dialogue as Action

The key 'action' for empowerment and transformation was the organisation of a 'dialogue' between the homeless families and policy influencers. The dialogue was held in June 2016 with two senior local authority officials, a housing spokesperson of the main opposition party in the national parliament and the Chief Commissioner of the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission (IHREC). The principles of dialogue were explained to all participants. These included; creating a safe space to explore difference and co-create change, enable deep learning and listening; and the sharing of different types of knowledge, experiential, policy and expert.

The dialogue demonstrated how the families had benefitted from the PAHRCA process in terms of a deeper understanding of housing policy and the human right to housing. They effectively communicated their issues and asserted themselves to policy makers. The policy makers, after the families outlined their experiences, asked follow up questions which demonstrated genuine listening. Families then responded in a respectful manner, after which some of the families and the researchers dialogued.

The policy makers found the dialogue to be a powerful and unique approach which gave them new insights which they committed to inform policy development and practice. The families felt empowered through the dialogue process. One participant mother explained: *"At the dialogue I felt like they listened to us– that they had seen a different side of it – you could see it in their faces. They probably had been thinking before it that we are people just trying to get a free house."* One policy influencer explained how she was deeply moved by the courage and dignity of the families and their experiences. The knowledge generated by the research found an institutional home when IHREC subsequently took up the research recommendations.

A comprehensive policy brief[16] was then published to bring this new co-constructed knowledge and policy recommendations into the public sphere and influence policy and practice. This resulted in national media coverage, discussion in the national parliament and a subsequent invitation to discuss the findings with the parliamentary committee on housing in September 2017. Research findings were also discussed at NGO organized housing seminars and conferences (some of which were attended by research participants). The families, pleased to see the research published in the public domain, felt it was an accurate portrayal of their views and experiences.

## 2.3 Reflections on the implications and outcomes of PAHRCA

The PAHRCA implemented in this case study resulted in the co-production of new and important knowledge on the lived experiences of family homelessness that challenged dominant policy narratives on social housing marketisation and emergency accommodation. The unique combination of the human rights and capability theoretical framework, underpinned the transformative participatory methods involved in the weekly sessions with the families, enabling the co-construction of these insights. The focus on empowerment and participation of peer researchers and homeless families as equal co-researchers ensured that the research findings reflected their realities while also enhancing their capacity to understand their own challenges and the wider policy context.

The two female peer researchers played an important role in relationship building with the families. Formerly homeless themselves, the peer researcher chatted informally with the families before and during the sessions, they explained to them the various aspects of the sessions in non-academic language, thus enabling the families to feel comfortable and enabling them to engage fully in the sessions.

Importantly for policy-orientated research, the participatory human rights framework engaged the homeless families in a process of co-development of policy alternatives and involved them in leading action to influence policy in the form of a dialogue with policy makers and practitioners. Indeed it was the explicit aim within PAHRCA of influencing and changing policy to meet the human rights of the vulnerable groups that attracted the families to the research, and motivated them to continue to engage in the process.

Transformative impacts on policy are evident to a limited degree. The dialogue influenced the IHREC, while the policy brief achieved significant public coverage. Crucial in achieving this was how the PAHRCA process focused on the voice of the families and brought their reality into the public sphere in a way that captured the attention and interest of politicians and the media. Thus PAHRCA resulted in the voices, concerns and experiences of this socially excluded group of homeless lone parent families being taken seriously within the national political and policy housing sphere in Ireland. This new knowledge co-created now exists in the public sphere as a benchmark for assessing policy into the future. It continues to be effectively drawn on by various political actors and civil society campaigns. There was a genuine empowerment of the vulnerable group in the dialogue process, through the education sessions, and in the families and peer researchers experience of seeing their views expressed in the public sphere and in public policy documents.

At the more local level the families reported that the hub providers responded to some of the issues raised by the research. Nonetheless there is an on-going roll out of the Hubs. The Dublin Regional Homeless Executive (DRHE) has established a research budget to evaluate them and put in place regulations, however, in reaction to our research, service providers have been forbidden by the DRHE to allow researchers into state funded and NGO delivered homeless services.

### *2.3.1 Challenges in operationalizing participatory action research*

We found that qualitative PAR research must be flexible in working with those living in poverty and managing the complex relationship (and sometimes even tension) between trying to address the day-to-day reality of living in poverty and influencing macro level policy change. For example, the families' prioritisation of addressing conditions in emergency accommodation was not intended to be a focus of the research, and while the families understood the research was orientated towards influencing macro level policy, they also co-developed the research agenda to address aspects of their own current situation.

The short time frame of the research limited our ability to achieve a deeper level of participation and empowerment required to fulfil the aims of PAR. Even to achieve the level of empowerment within this case study was very challenging for the researchers and the families as it required significant personal input, research resources and time. Once the research was finished, there was no further work with the families as a collective group by either the researchers or the housing NGO. NGOs, as service providers, rarely engage in collective action empowerment of service users as a group. They focus on meeting the immediate needs of the homeless families through existing institutions. They seek to protect them as a vulnerable group from further stigmatisation or exclusion (from the public or negative treatment from state service providers), but are also mindful that engagement in public advocacy with homeless families may potentially undermine state and private funding.

### *2.3.2 Three pillars for the academic researcher to enhance empowerment in PAR*

This form of PAR research needs to give greater consideration to the navigation of relationships with such gate keepers and NGOs, who are cautious about and, in some cases, oppose their clients being

involved in public action. We see implementation challenges for PAR when engaging with NGOs concerned about perceived *negative* implications of empowerment. In addition, PAR has to address circumstances, such as in our research, where public action by vulnerable groups could potentially negatively affect their personal situation. Three potential ‘pillars’ can provide a coherent and specific way for the academic researcher to enhance empowerment and transformation in PAR. The first pillar is the researcher as a facilitator, educator, promoter and organiser of empowerment of the vulnerable group within the confines of existing NGO/state relationships, stretching those boundaries towards empowerment as much as possible, and finding innovative ways to bring the voice of the excluded directly into the policy making sphere. The dialogue process enabled this as it protected the families from public, state or NGO ‘disciplining’. The second pillar is in the co-construction of structures and relationships of empowerment that can continue transformation after the research. The peer researchers in this research, for example, were engaged over a much longer time period (almost two years), and were supported to find opportunities to participate and develop their capacity through an NGO committed to continuing to work with the peer researchers. However, this important individual capacity building does not involve the development of collective capabilities of the excluded groups. Successful PAR has been shown to require working over long periods intensively with communities to achieve lasting change [18]. Future PAR research, therefore, needs to give the issue of time, capacity and resources serious consideration and allocate it sufficiently to ensure participation is not mere tokenism, placation or manipulation[17], and avoid the limitations of *temporary* forms of empowerment in PAR (as was the experience of our families in our PACHRA case study). The challenge is how a collectively organised community can be left with the capacity and capabilities to continue to empower and organise even when the research is finished. This could include further follow up work with the vulnerable group, enabling them to raise their voice in collective public action and working with the NGO on this from the outset.

The third pillar is academic researchers playing a central role as public advocate in bringing the voice of the excluded into the public political sphere through new co-constructed knowledge and policy alternatives.

This is challenging and involves engaging in publically political acts that are often critical of dominant policy narratives. The researchers then must be prepared for and accept a potential political backlash, as we received in our case. Academics are in a much more privileged and protected position (though precarious researchers also face vulnerability) than vulnerable groups, a genuine form of PAR includes an ethical and ontological obligation to speak truth to power, to bring the PAR research closer to the transformative paradigm it seeks to achieve. The PAHRCA approach provides a solid theoretical and methodological foundation from which to do this. A truly public democratic sphere must make room to listen to and engage with such new (if sometimes critical) knowledge.

### *2.3.3 A need to interrogate the real meaning of empowerment in participatory research*

We need greater theoretical and critical interrogation of understandings of the key themes within qualitative policy-orientated research undertaken in a PAR framework such as PAHRCA – namely participation, empowerment and transformation, and an interrogation of research aims and methods that consequentially flow from such critical appraisal. We must honestly ask is the purpose of the research to simply gather the voices of those in poverty? Is it a temporary form of empowerment? Is it unwittingly maintaining the status quo of disempowerment by enabling policy makers fulfil their box ticking exercise of achieving a loosely defined ‘participation’. Is it placating vulnerable groups by manipulating them into believing they have in fact been truly ‘heard’? PAR needs to move toward a

deeper more genuine level of empowerment of the vulnerable group with power redistribution between power holders and citizens[19]. As Ledwith[20] argues PAR

*“commits to identifying and challenging unequal power relations within its process. It is rooted in dialogue, attempting to work with, not on, people, and intends that its process should be empowering for all involved. More than this, it is committed to collective action for social change as its outcome”.*

### **3 CONCLUSION**

By bringing the human rights and capabilities theoretical frameworks together with the participatory action research methodological approach, PAHRCA provides an important contribution to the development of PAR as a theoretical and methodological approach. Its focus on empowerment of the vulnerable group, with a policy transformation orientation through innovative methods such as dialogue, opens up new forms of policy orientated PAR with vulnerable groups.

In particular we found that PAHRCA process enabled the co-construction of new insights, priorities, and definitions and thus it could be argued created a more democratic and inclusive form of knowledge than the current dominant policy knowledge presented on marketization, HAP and family hubs in Ireland. Rich insights were revealed into the impacts on the human rights and capabilities of the families. This reveals the importance of local ontologies that can reveal a knowledge hidden from (and by) macro level policy and reveal the political, social class and gendered biased construction of the current dominant policy narratives.

The particular case study of PAHRCA in Dublin also revealed an important role for academic researchers within PAR to fuse local knowledge and theoretical concepts, and to bring the voice of those excluded into the public policy space.

The PAHRCA contributes to both public policy development and the PAR academic literature. It enhances capacity to empower socially excluded groups to co-create new knowledges that can develop their capabilities, both individual and collective. It points to the importance of participatory research in understanding new forms of poverty and social exclusion, in this case the specific impacts of policies such as marketisation and financialisation on producing and reproducing inequalities. It enables participation and citizen's search for inclusion and dignity in the context of post-democracy and greater exclusion of vulnerable populations.

We also highlight the limitations of knowledge as power and argue for PAHRCA and future policy oriented PAR research to give greater consideration to the empowerment of vulnerable groups beyond tokenism and manipulation and toward transformation. Three potential 'pillars' provide a coherent and specific role for the academic researcher to enhance empowerment and transformation in PAR.

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# EXPLORING NOMADIC RESEARCHER'S POSTURE THROUGH A VIDEO PERFORMANCE

Nicoletta Ferri<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>University of Milano-Bicocca, Department of Human sciences for Education (ITALY)

## Abstract

This contribute comes from a still ongoing Phd research on the thematic of Embodied teaching and it concerns a specific, methodological turn that occurred during my work.

My research project is based on qualitative methods and is related to the field of Embodied Pedagogy. I've involved a group of Primary School teachers in a research aimed at exploring their embodied way of teaching, combining a specific somatic approach: Experiential Anatomy, which focuses on the connection between the perception of one's own body and movement. I used auto/biographical methods in order to make visible participants' sense-making processes occurring during the different research stages.

After finishing the empiric part of the research, during the data analysis process, I turned into a more embodied dimension, taking a performative perspective. I decided to explore the early emerging results not only through a traditional thematic analysis but also through a more nomadic, embodied way, performing my own narrative reflexivity through a video performance. My hypothesis was that entering in a performative process could help me to see my research from a new perspective.

Keywords: Performative Research, Embodied Pedagogy, Experiential Anatomy

## 1 THE PERFORMATIVE TURN

During the last two decades performative research methods gained increasing relevance as a methodological approach across the arts, humanities and social sciences.

According to Y. Lincoln and N. Denzin the *performance turn* in qualitative research, with its instability and messy forms of research "has reshaped entirely the debates around 'appropriate' scientific discourse, the technical and rhetorical conventions of scientific writing, and the meaning of research itself" [1].

In 2006 Brad Haseman in his Manifesto for Performative Research argued the birth of a new performative research method –he had in mind practice-led researches especially in the arts, media and design, but not only- as starting point for an emerging paradigm of research: a third possibility along with the quantitative and qualitative ones: the performative one [2]. This epistemological



position of performative research methods was based on the primacy of the practice [3], the primacy of movement [4] and the primacy of human experience in the research process, as active motor of the research.

The performance paradigm privileges an “experiential, participatory epistemology”. “It values intimacy and involvement as forms of understanding. This stance allows the self to be vulnerable to its own experiences as well as to the experiences of the other” [5].

All these elements were fundamental to design the theoretical frame of my research.

My Phd thesis is about Embodied Teaching [6], [7], the basic assumption of this approach is to reconsider the role of Embodied Knowledge in educational processes, connecting areas that in children but also in adult education are traditionally separated like thinking and perceiving, speaking and acting, moving and teaching/learning [6].

In my research I wanted to design a specific research/learning setting where Primary School Teachers involved in the inquiry could explore corporeal dimensions involved in the teaching process, focusing on their own way to “embody” teaching (the research was articulated in six meetings, three hours each with a group of ten Primary School Teachers in a school of Milano, North of Italy, from November 2016 until March 2017).

The corporeal dimension in research involves many possible levels of implication and analysis.

“Body”, as Ivano Gamelli, introducing his viewing on Embodied Pedagogy is used to say, is only a word and its meaning appears inside a relational context [8].

The body is a *threshold*, an *original opening* [9] and it is characterized by movement and perception.

“So what we generally call *body*, is the progressive result of a so ancient story, made by stratifications of movement and perception” [9].

Focusing on these ideas, I tried to design a researching context, in which the corporeal experience could resonate at different levels: the Biological Body, the Perceiving Body, the Feeling Body, the Moving Body, the Narrative Body.

The design of the research took inspiration by some principles of Heron’s and Reason’s Cooperative Inquiry [10] and Laura Formenti’s further theorization - the “Spiral of Knowledge” [11] - when try to methodologically integrate different kind of knowing: Experiential, Presentational, Propositional and Practical knowing, combined in a cycle of four phases of reflection and action.

Exploring Biological Body, Perceiving and Feeling Body, in the first part of each meeting, during the Aesthetic Moment, I’ve used a specific somatic approach, Experiential Anatomy, in the peculiar declination that is the Body-Mind Centering, founded by Bonnie Bainbridge Cohen.

This somatic approach was born in 1970s in the United States and its main characteristic is to study the live and lively body through experience and perception; in the classic anatomy the body is studied as an object, compared to models, through atlas or skeleton observations.

In the Experiential Anatomy the body is not considered as a simply object, but primarily as a living system; proprioception, kinesthesia and interoception are used to identify, articulate, differentiate and integrate different tissues of the body, discovering the different qualities that contribute to the movement, how they evolved in the develop process and the role they play in the expression of the mind [12].

This practice is not exactly a technique, is an approach that opens to the possibility to study anatomy starting from a different epistemological perspective that integrates information coming from senses, touching and movement.

The Narrative Body was experienced in the moment of the Presentational Knowing. Through the use of auto/biographical writing techniques, the bodily experience was transformed in free personal writing and then shared in group. In this reflexive moment each participant could develop the

personal ideas emerging from their writings, framing them in relation with her own teaching style. The aim was to retrace one's own inner, sometimes implicit, Embodied Pedagogy.

The last part of each meeting was focused on announcing a purpose: a "deliberated action" [11], the practical knowledge [10]. The main task of comprehension is to open to new practices. Teachers then were invited to think about an action that they wanted to try to perform in the classroom context, taking into account the knowledge coming from the meeting. These actions had different forms and were developed in different directions, depending on the style of teaching that each participant had: these resulted in a change of the "posture" or in an attention to a particular didactic content.

I started analyzing my data collecting together all the different kind of materials I produced in my research: transcriptions of collective dialogues, teacher's personal writings and drawing produced during the meetings; written documentations of "deliberated actions", realized by some of the teachers in classroom with children –so I collected children's drawing and writings and pictures of the activities- and my personal notes as researcher of each meeting.

During the thematic analysis of the material, mapping and organizing it with N-Vivo, I realized that another form of analysis was necessary for some part of the data, the ones more referring to the Embodied paradigm and inspired at practice-led research.

Following Haseman, I thought that the research outputs and claims to knowledge should be reported through symbolic language and forms coherent with my practice [13].

"The argue that a continued insistence that practice-led research be reported primarily in the tradition forms of research (words and numbers) can only result in the dilution and ultimately the impoverishment of the epistemological content embedded and embodied in practice" [13].

During the analysis I also realized that my attention was driven by some themes, connected to teacher's professional embodied practices, that slowly I came to define as belonging to a "performative" perspective.

What do I mean with "performative" here?

First, the performative in my research is a paradigm of knowledge representation [14]. So speaking about "performativity" means a specific epistemological position: what is performative is that kind of knowledge emerging from embodied and embedded actions.

"Every performance becomes a form of kinesis, of motion, a decentering of agency and person through movement, disruption, action, a way of questioning the status quo" [15].

Second: reflecting on my position as researcher, I realized that my point of view was strongly influenced by my education in performative arts, and my practice as contemporary dancer and dance educator.

So the meaning "performative" reminded to me also the context of performative arts. During the data analysis, categories coming from performative arts, and in particular dance, became for me pivotal for the process of labelling, so I tried to make them more explicit, thematising this passage in my research.

I felt the need, as researcher, to explore more deeply this performative perspective, diving myself in a completely embodied and embedded research. "Performances and their representations reside in the center of lived experience. We cannot study experience directly. We study it through and in its performative representations. Culture, so conceived, turns performance into a site where memory, emotion, fantasy, and desire interact with one another" [15]. I also realized that the stories, the narratives, that I was collecting during the process were for me so "sensitive data" that I wanted to get in contact with them in the more sensitive and embodied way I know, as researcher, which is body practice, movement and dance.

So I began the challenge –as Robin Nelson says- of *housing the mix* [3]: exploring performative and textual practices alongside each other.

I started my practical, performative, research, going toward the production of a video (performance) to present to teachers involved in the research as final feedback moment.

## 2 SEARCHING FOR A METHOD

The methodological preparation of the performing research part took me a lot of time. No matter which form it would take the video, it was fundamental to document the process through a clear practical methodology, coherent with my assumptions and my theoretical frame. So I took two main directions.

### 2.1 Resonant Response

Having the willing to build a sort of “textual score” for the performing analysis of the data, I took the transcriptions of all the meetings and the in depth interviews I did with teachers and I was looking for themes that were for me connected with my initial question: the embodied dimension of teaching. Then I returned to the audio tracks: I selected some fragments, words, short sentences. With this audio material I composed an “audio score” that could represent for me a basis for the performative exploration. I tried to tune not only to the context, but overall to the musicality of the speech and punctuation: pauses, inflections and all the aspect that belongs to the prosodic aspect of the speech. Listening and listening again single small audio tracks I started becoming aware of new aspects, that in my view were more “sensitive” and “lively vibrant”.

“The development of a ‘corporealizing performativity’[...] in the sensual tension between the actor and the (external or self) perception of his/her actions is not normalized in advance, nor a sign for a sense that lies beyond the visible. It is thus also not representative [...] but rather constitutes a situation and its meaning “[14].

It was very clear to me that I didn’t want to represent data, but get in touch with them in a creative sense-making process.

Hermeneutic is the work of interpretation and understanding. “Knowing refers to those embodied, sensuous experiences that create the conditions for understanding”[16].

Patrick Leroux’s principle of *Resonant Response* was a valid guide line for this exploring performative research part.

“While traditionally *drama* names an action or act, *resonance* might describe, among other things, the effect of the action or act (whether immediate or on-going), its enduring relevance (whether affective or political), or its remediated enactments” [17].

I started looking for an echo, a movement of performative response linked with the themes I was locating.

I should say that the work was not exactly an ethnographic performance, but it had some aspects in common in the effort to enter in a personal and intimate dialogue with the text and in the intention to see how that work affects the creative approach and the researcher-creator’s reflections.

“Performative autoethnography exists in the nexus of personal experience and larger social issues. The writing process seeks to articulate that space, that meeting place, that intersection [18].

### 2.2 Searching for metaphors

To go deeper into teacher’s posture, I tried also to reach a deeper level of text analysis, intratextual, using Lakoff’s and Johnson’s theory of metaphors. Their “Motor theory of cognition” introduces the role of metaphor as a bridge between the body experience and concepts. They construct the notion

of “Kinesthetic image schema”, which posits the physical experience as a basic level, pre-conceptual, out of which concepts are structured. Brenda Farnell criticizes this approach arguing that the notion of “Image schema” is problematic, it restricts body movement to the role of a pre-conceptual precursor to spoken concepts [19]; but in her view, physical being and bodily movement are not only “motor programs”: they can be seen “to provide a medium other than speech that shares the conceptual stage and systematically employs metaphoric and metonymic conceptions” [19].

Following both these theories, I went to trace in the written texts explicit metaphors/images and more hidden ones, into verbal form. My idea was that going deeper into intratextuality I could get in touch with some aspects referring to active teacher’s postures [20].

So I selected, searching through teacher’s words and expression, that kind of metaphors and expression, but also verbal forms, used to speak about their daily work, that could be related to professional teacher’s posture. And I found grammatical elements that explicitly or more implicitly could give information about the teacher’s Pedagogical Embedded Theory and about their point of view on the learning/teaching process.

Similarly with the audio tracks, I produced a sort of “textual score”, that could be for me a valid starting point for my performative explorations.

### **2.3 The video performance**

The performative exploration took a large time in the research and had been documented in many video fragments. During that moment I was still fully inside the data and the focus of my research was on the change of view and perspectives related with the themes I was exploring.

After every exploration/dance improvisation I was annotating in my research diary concepts or images or feeling and perceptions connected with the theme I was engaged with.

Starting from all this video material, I came to compose the final video clip.

My idea was that this product could proceed with a not-linear logic, to give a cross-section of the research process, going through the different levels of knowing I met. I returned to the Biological Body, the Perceiving Body, the Feeling Body, the Moving Body, the Narrative Body.

During the video editing, Patrick Leroux’s concept of Resonant Response was for me a valid guide.

My intention was to avoid the idea of representation again. My intention was to create a multi-frame video where teachers could enter in resonant with some fragments, observing, contemplating, reflecting together: not an explaining video; a lively material that could get in resonance with the vibrant stories I have collected during the research.

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# FACING THE CHALLENGES OF STUDYING TRANSDISCIPLINARY FORMS OF CULTURAL ACTIVISM AGAINST VIOLENCE

**Katia Olalde Rico**

*KU Leuven (BELGIUM)<sup>1</sup>*

## **Abstract**

Since 2010 and in response to the increasing amount of victims of Mexico's 'war on drugs', several groups of civilians, artists, writers, journalists, and researchers have developed collaborative projects—which may be conceived as forms of 'cultural activism'—in order to make the figures of homicides and enforced disappearances appear publicly as irreparable human losses rather than abstract numbers or 'collateral damages'. These collaborative projects have involved the creation of different types of memorials through a variety of strategies and media, ranging from public space interventions and open embroidery workshops, to videos, podcasts, web blogs and Flickr albums.

Digital media have enabled these cultural activists to establish long distance collaboration and remote participation schemes, which do not require volunteers to be in the same place simultaneously, and therefore do not necessarily lead to mutual recognition or fraternization among them. Still, these projects share the desire to contribute to the construction of peace by establishing ties of empathy, comradeship, and solidarity, estranged from capitalist rationality.

The Embroidering for Peace and Memory Initiative is one of these projects. In this paper I explore the methodological challenges involved in its study in terms of (1) its relation to art; (2) its performativity and discontinuous development in time and space; (3) its aesthetic and affective dimension; and, finally (4) its role in the political struggles for justice.

Keywords: Community, public space, embroidery.

## **1 INTRODUCTION**

Over the last 10 years at least 235,000 persons have been killed [1], and another 32,200 have been disappeared [2] in Mexico as a result of the 'war on drugs'. In response to this situation, civil society groups have developed collaborative projects and media campaigns to denounce the increasing rates of homicide and enforced disappearance. In this paper, I will focus on the way I addressed the methodological challenges I faced while studying one of these projects: the Embroidering for Peace and Memory Initiative: One Victim, One Handkerchief. First I will present an overview of the Initiative and then I will examine the main difficulties I encountered during my research, as well as the strategies I applied in order to cope with these problems. Before I begin, let me just mention that the thoughts I am about to share are drawn from the experiences I had between 2012 and 2016 while I

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was doing my PhD research in the Art History program at the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México (UNAM).

## 2 EMBROIDERING FOR PEACE AND MEMORY INITIATIVE: ONE VICTIM, ONE HANDKERCHIEF

As the name indicates, the Embroidering for Peace Initiative (EPI) is a form of public protest, and it consists in embroidering homicide and disappearance cases on handkerchiefs. Most of the time, the needlework takes place in open spaces where embroiderers gather, not only to publicly display their fabrics, but also to encourage passersby to participate for as long as they wish [Fig. 1].



Fig. 1. Embroidery day organized by Fuentes Rojas. Centenario Garden, Coyoacán, Mexico City.  
Photo: Courtesy of Fuentes Rojas.

At first, only homicide cases were embroidered and only red thread was used, but afterwards the initiative was joined by groups of people who were looking for their disappeared relatives. Since red thread evoked the spilling of blood, they refused to use it and decided to employ green thread instead, symbolizing their hope of finding their relatives alive.

### 2.1 Inspired by art but outside the art system

The EPI was developed in June 2011 by groups of civilians, visual artists, journalists, and researchers determined to publicly denounce the damages and losses caused by the ‘war on drugs’. By doing this, they sought to challenge the governmental discourse according to which nine of every ten murder victims were involved in criminal activities [3].

Following the steps of some modern and contemporary art practices, this group of cultural producers—who eventually assumed the name of *Colectivo Fuentes Rojas* (Red Fountains collective)—sought to draw their audience’s attention and arouse public awareness by writing and distributing manifestos, and by performing actions intended not only to disrupt everyday life, but also to create situations where spectators would become active participants. Still, the ethical-political position

assumed by Fuentes Rojas was defined by their rejection of the principles characterizing the ‘modern system of the arts’, that is, the individual authorship, the notion of the artist as a talented genius, the originality and uniqueness of the work of art, the disinterested aesthetic contemplation, and the differentiation between Fine Arts and crafts [4].

Alongside women artists from the second half of the twentieth century, who vindicated needlework as a powerful means for aesthetic and political expression [5], Fuentes Rojas conceived the qualities of fibre arts —the same attributes which justified their exclusion from the realm of the Fine Arts (collective crafting, task division, use of patterns, reproduction of designs created by others [Fig. 2])— as the foundations of an ethical-political position based on which they could “create a time and space conducive to a sense of community and the furthering of a culture of peace” [6].



Fig. 2. Embroideries completed by several hands on canvas cloths. Fuentes Rojas, 2012-2013. Photo: Katia Olalde. UAM-Xochimilco, Mexico City, September 30, 2013.

In addition, and unlike some feminist critics who believed that embroidery’s temporality and embodiment —namely the stillness of the body, and the bending over the work with downcast eyes— promoted women’s confinement and submission [7], the people who joined the EPI saw these same attributes as conducive to states of calm, empathy, and openness [8].

In a country where public display of dismembered bodies and severed limbs had become a common practice [9], embroiderers decided to gather in public squares in order to encourage passersby to leave behind the coldness, artificiality, and distance characterizing ‘societal relations’, and to interact based on communitarian schemes defined by naturalness, stability, warmth, and a strong affective component [10].

The EPI’s aspiration to re-warm social relations made me question what “creating community” and “reconstructing the social tissue” [11] could mean in a context marked by violence and driven by the rationality of the ‘economic man’, described by Cornelius Castoriadis as resembling that of a computer aiming permanently at maximizing the profits and minimizing the costs [12].

In order to address this question I turned to sociology and political theory, but also to Latin American studies, since I needed to examine what the concept of ‘community’ could mean in a country with a significant indigenous population. This inquiry led me to conclude that, within the framework of the EPI, the concept of ‘community’ resonates as a utopian projection —“invested with positive



connotations which evoke warmth, protection, [and] wellbeing” [13]—, but also as an ideal model inspired by the Latin American indigenous way of life and collective organization [14].

Based on these considerations, I proposed that the EPI’s recourse to indigenous communitarian models is reflected in a number of the Initiative’s features: (a) pre-eminence of collectivity over individuality; (b) horizontal forms of organization and decision-making; (c) network collaboration — enhanced and expanded through the use of social media—; (d) participation conceived as a non-profit, non-tradable community service [15]; and finally, (e) the rejection of the concept of property, since indigenous communities do not relate to land and natural resources on the basis of ownership or property rights, but rather in terms of use, meaning that they can only claim to ‘own’ a piece of land as long and insofar as they cultivate it.

In practical terms, Fuentes Rojas’ aspiration to create communities estranged from capitalist rationality materialized in:

- (1) *The discouragement of individual authorship.* This can be seen in the way some of the handkerchiefs are embroidered: in relays and by several hands [Fig. 3], but also in the embroiderers’ signatures [Fig. 4], which only include first names, and therefore prevent us from knowing exactly who they were.



Fig. 3. Embroideries in process, worked in relays by several hands. Fuentes Rojas. Photo: Katia Olalde, UAM-Xochimilco, Mexico City, September 30, 2013.

- (2) *The rejection of the concept of ownership.* From Fuentes Rojas’ perspective, the handkerchiefs belong to everyone and to no one at the same time —which allows us to see them as a form of commons—;

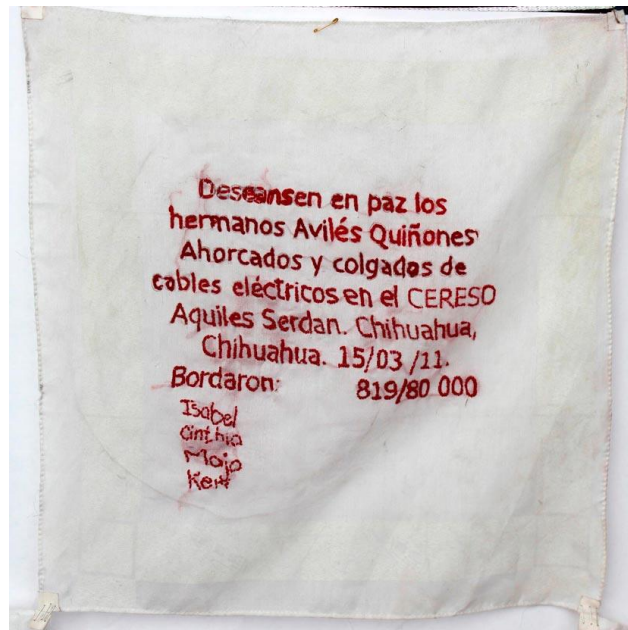


Fig. 4. Embroideries completed by several hands. Fuentes Rojas Collective (details of signatures). Photo: Katia Olalde, Mexico City, February 2014.

- (3) *The predominance of the communicative function* of the handkerchiefs over the impeccability of the needlework technique; and finally, in
- (4) The use of these handkerchiefs as tools for political expression. This means that Fuentes Rojas did not conceive these embroideries as objects of disinterested aesthetic contemplation, but rather to be displayed in open spaces, held as banners [Fig. 5], or worn by protesters during marches and public demonstrations [Fig. 6], even at the risk of compromising the handkerchiefs.



Fig. 5. Fuentes Rojas *et al.* Marching along Paseo de la Reforma on the first anniversary of the enforced disappearance of 43 teaching students in Ayotzinapa, Guerrero. Photo: Katia Olalde, Mexico City, September 26, 2015.



Fig 6. Fuentes Rojas' member marching along Paseo de la Reforma on the first anniversary of the enforced disappearance of 43 teaching students in Ayotzinapa, Guerrero. The handkerchief on her back reads: "It was the State". Photo: Courtesy of Fuentes Rojas, Mexico City, September 26, 2015.

Now let us turn to the difficulties that this kind of practice entailed.

## 2.2 A living and floating collection of things and words

Shortly after its beginning, the EPI became very popular. As a result, around 20 embroidery groups were created in Mexico during 2012, and another 20 abroad. At the time, every group shared a common goal: embroidering as many handkerchiefs as possible and displaying them all together in Mexico City's main square on December 1st, the presidential transition day. The handkerchiefs would, in this way, give shape to a civilian memorial dedicated to all victims of violence, regardless of their alleged guilt or innocence [16]. In this respect, it is worth mentioning that, by the end of Felipe Calderon's presidential term, at least 120,000 killings [17] and 20,000 disappearances [18] had been reported.

In addition to the scheduled final display in December, during 2012 many of the local and foreign embroidery groups organized public events to show the handkerchiefs they had completed so far together with the embroideries they had received from distant places. During my PhD research I took part in some of the events organized by Fuentes Rojas and other local embroidery groups. Additionally, I worked with the chronicles and pictures available in Facebook and Internet blogs.

Referencing the handkerchiefs turned out to be more complex than I expected, since I did not want my descriptions to emphasize the principles rejected by the different groups —i.e. authorship, property, talent, and technical impeccability—. Should I, for instance, indicate the type of cloth, the kind of thread, and the stitches being used when they were distinguishable? Should I list the first names written by participants at the lower part of the handkerchief as the authors of the embroidery?



As can be seen on the photo captions included in this paper, I decided to mention only the name of the group, not expanding on the details of the needlework technique and being as precise as possible with regard to the time and place where the photos were taken.

On the other hand, finding the ‘proper academic way’ to quote the texts transcribed in these small pieces of cloth was not easy either, since most of the time the original source remained unknown. In this regard, it is worth mentioning that the list of murder cases Fuentes Rojas has been transcribing from the beginning was taken from a body count begun by civilian volunteers on September 2010 named Menos Días Aquí (MDA) —Fewer Days Here— [19]. MDA volunteers keep track of the homicides reported by the Mexican media on a weekly basis, but without mentioning the original source. In addition to these murder cases, Fuentes Rojas also includes mottos, poems, lyrics, and statements in their embroideries, without necessarily mentioning their source either.

In the end, I decided to quote these texts by, first, mentioning that they were embroidered on a handkerchief; second, indicating that the transcriptions had been made from photos; and third, including the complete reference.

Regarding the cases transcribed in these handkerchiefs, it is also important to mention that during the embroidery sessions organized by local groups, some persons have approached participants in order to give testimony of events not reported to the authorities. Many cases go unreported in Mexico because people do not trust the authorities or the police —sometimes they have even been abused by them—, or else because the victims’ relatives have been threatened by criminal groups. For this reason, the handkerchiefs do not usually include the name of the person who provided the embroiderers with the details of the case, although they do bear the victims’ names as well as the date and place of their murder or disappearance. In this respect, it is worth considering that, in Mexico, some of the persons who have openly denounced perpetrators and put pressure on the authorities have been murdered —Fig. 7 shows a handkerchief dedicated to a mother who was murdered while investigating her son’s disappearance—.

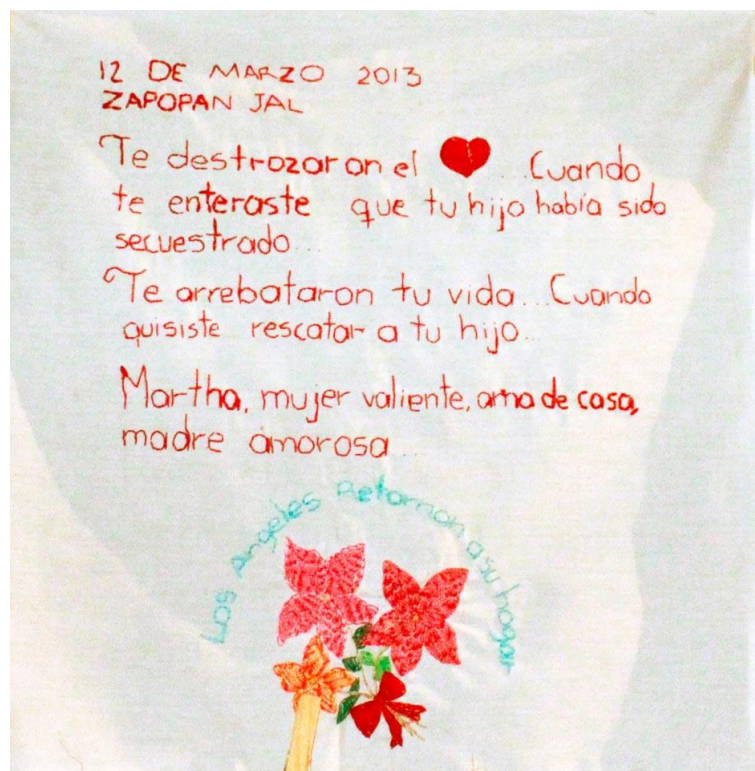


Fig. 7. “Your heart was destroyed... when you discovered that your son had been kidnapped. Your life was taken... When you tried to rescue your son. Martha, brave woman, housewife, loving mother. Angels come back home.” [20]

Embroidered handkerchief belonging to Bordamos por la Paz Guadalajara, 2012-2013 (detail). Photo taken by Alfredo Mendoza during the second memorial dedicated to the victims of war against organized crime Memoria y Verdad (Memory and Truth), Laboratorio Arte y Variedades, Guadalajara, Mexico, November 1st-3rd, 2013.

In my view, the fact that these handkerchiefs include non-reported cases means that —to a certain extent at least— the EPI has managed to give shape to memories that contest the government’s narrative of the conflict.

As I mentioned earlier, the original purpose of the EPI was to build a civilian memorial in Mexico City’s main square, or Zócalo, for the presidential transition on December 1st, 2012. However, on the expected day, police forces blocked the access to the Zócalo. Both local and foreign embroidery groups —including Fuentes Rojas— knew this in advance and most of them decided to display their handkerchiefs along the sidewalks of Avenida Juárez —a street surrounding the city centre— [Fig. 8].



Fig. 8. Civilian Memorial installed in Av. Juárez before the riots. Photo: Bordando por la Paz Puebla. Mexico City Centre, December 1st, 2012. Retrieved from <http://bordandopazpuebla.wordpress.com> on October 19, 2014.

From early in the morning, embroidery groups gathered in order to install their clotheslines. When I arrived at 2:00 pm I expected to find the handkerchiefs hanging from the ropes and blowing with the wind along Avenida Juárez. What I found, instead, were ruins [Fig. 9].

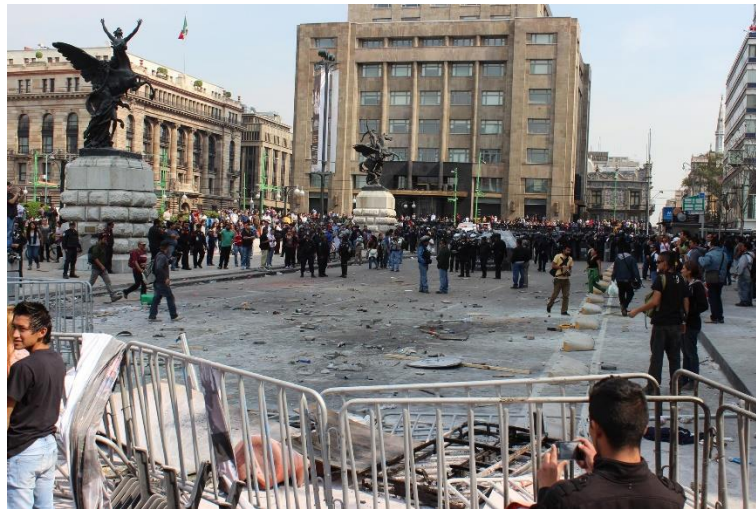


Fig. 9. Av. Juárez around 14:30 pm. Photo: Alfredo Mendoza, Mexico City Centre, December 1st, 2012.

Shortly after my arrival, I was told that around 1:30 pm a peaceful march heading to the Zócalo had turned into a riot just in front of the sidewalk where the clotheslines were displayed, and that embroiderers were forced to run away in order to protect themselves. Before fleeing, participants did their best to safeguard the handkerchiefs, but many embroideries were lost by the end of the day. Others ended up in the hands of a different group. Just as the people who experienced the riots, the surviving handkerchiefs suffered the effects of violence: they were plucked, trampled, wrinkled, spattered, and stained, and many of them still preserve these traces to the present day [Fig. 10].



Fig. 10. Embroidery completed by several hands. Fuentes Rojas, 2012 (detail). Photo: Katia Olalde, Coyoacán, Mexico City, February, 2014.

The violent interruption and dismantling of this civilian memorial made me turn to political theory once more because it made me question whether streets, parks, and squares are public spaces on their own right. This query led me to examine the meaning of the word 'public' very thoroughly, as well as to explore the relation of this term with democracy, citizenship, and political agency [21].

Now, thinking democracy and citizenship in a country where *de facto* states of emergency are constantly imposed in most of the territory [22], and where criminal organizations are neither clearly nor completely distinct from state security forces and government institutions made me realize that it was necessary to shed some light on the recent history of Mexico in order to outline a framework to understand the current situation. For even if violence and impunity prevail in my home country, there is no internal armed conflict recognized as such and we are not under a dictatorial regime either [23]. Moreover, we are internationally recognized as a democratic state.

### **3 AFTER ALL, IT WAS AN ART HISTORY THESIS**

During my meetings with my supervisors, I was constantly reminded of the fact that I was writing an Art History thesis [24], which meant that I needed to stay focused on the practice of memory I was studying —namely the EPI—, rather than expand on the 'war on drugs' or on the critique of liberal democracy.

A professor at the graduate program where I studied used to say that the specificity of a discipline lies where the research question is formulated, and I agree. Since the disciplinary approach encourages us to focus on certain aspects rather than others, it clearly influences the way we define our study objects. Thus, although I stress the relevance of philosophy, sociology, and political theory for my research, I also believe that my background in Visual Arts and Art History provides me with a toolbox of strategies that enable me not only to analyse multiple forms of visibility, materiality, and performativity, but also to make sense of those forms in connection with a broader social life and cultural history [25]. And it is precisely by applying these analytical strategies that I feel I can make some contribution.

Throughout my PhD, I decided to provide participants with a straight answer every time they asked what kind of research I was doing. However, I discovered that it was very difficult for them to understand what Art History could have to do with the topic, for the EPI was not an artistic project and the handkerchiefs were not works of art.

Artists and those familiar with contemporary art were particularly suspicious about the purpose of my study because they were inclined to assume that I was conceiving the embroideries as objects of disinterested aesthetic contemplation, namely, deprived of any social or political function.

When we consider that Fuentes Rojas define their ethical-political position by rejecting the principles of the modern system of the arts —which they relate to the rationality and selfishness of the economic man—, then it is easier to understand why those who believe art historians only study works of art consider that writing an Art History PhD thesis about the EPI somehow neutralizes the critical nature of this vital and dissident practice. Partly because of this, I now prefer to locate my area of research within the framework of Visual Culture and to view the practices I study as forms of cultural activism. Nevertheless, neither of these terms make sense to most people, so I still find it difficult to explain what I do to those unfamiliar with this area of study.



#### 4 SOME FINAL THOUGHTS CONCERNING THE ETHICAL CHALLENGES IN VISUAL CULTURE RESEARCH

I must confess that I was unfamiliar with the notion of sensitive research until a few months ago, probably because art history students are not expected to need any knowledge of the guidelines or of the coping skills required by psychologists, sociologists, anthropologists, lawyers, or physicians. However, while I avoided interviewing vulnerable subjects as much as I could, I ended up having informal conversations with people who would fit in this category, and even if I did not record those talks, I felt very insecure about how to approach their contents.

During the second year of my doctoral research, a young man who was —and still is— looking for his disappeared relatives posted a statement in Facebook which I did not transcribe at the time —a mistake I have deeply regretted ever since—, but which basically claimed that the relatives of victims of disappearance had organized out of necessity, and not to become the subject of books, thesis, or academic articles.

Although the target audience of academic production is small, and in many cases it does not include the research subjects —who, moreover, are in no way obliged to be interested in the research outputs—, I am still concerned about the meaning of “not revictimizing” in the framework of a research like my own; in particular, with regard to the way in which we represent ‘vulnerable subjects’.

If we take into account that when talking about ‘others’ we are implicitly defining ourselves as ‘*not others*’, we might be willing to consider that in research areas such as Visual Culture Studies, ethical awareness also entails being mindful of the position that we —as researchers— assume when, in order to emphasize the relevance of the public protests we are studying, characterize ‘others’ as, for instance, ‘voiceless’ or ‘invisible’. From this perspective, our ethical responsibility as researchers would involve not only carefully supporting our statements and protecting our sources, but also heeding the importance we attribute to our job and the position of authority we tend to assume as ‘producers of knowledge’.

To conclude, I would suggest that if doing research is not only about publishing articles in top academic journals and presenting papers in conferences, but also about giving something back to participants, then we should consider whether creating a more accessible output should be part of our task as researchers.

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# **IN BETWIX AND BETWEEN, AND IN PEACE: FRAMEWORK OF IDENTITY FROM PARENTS OF CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES IN CHINA**

**Weiwei Chen<sup>1</sup>**

<sup>1</sup>*University of California, Santa Barbara (THE UNITED STATES)*

## **Abstract**

This study was done in the face of a major focus on the educators' point of view of disability in China. Differently, a narrative analysis was given to the words of seven Chinese parents of children with autism and intellectual disability. What emerged was a framework of their perceived identity of their children as "normal" as others, whose disability/ability was constructed mainly by the larger society but also having inherently challenging problems in need of extra assistance. Meanwhile, the parents detached themselves and their children from the normal people, not as ones being opposed and exploited, but as a distinct group on an equal footing. Humbled as they might look like, their words also revealed a sense of dignity.

Keywords: parents of children with disabilities, inclusion, narrative analysis.

## **1 INTRODUCTION AND METHODS**

The mainstreaming educational practice of Learning in Regular Classrooms (LRC) in China is now in its 30's. However, throughout all the years, LRC has been described as being plagued with the lack of individualized supports for the students with disabilities which leads to no more than spatial inclusion for them in general classrooms <sup>[1], [2], [3], [4]</sup>. In addition, it was largely found that parents of students without disabilities and their teachers were more likely to regard segregated schools as the best places to be for children with disabilities, than parents of children with disabilities <sup>[5], [6], [7]</sup>. Therefore, fuelled by a philosophy of disability study--"nothing about us without us" <sup>[8]</sup>, I conducted a narrative study on the interview transcripts from my dissertation research of parents of children with autism or intellectual disabilities talking about inclusive education for their child, in order to see these children and their education from the perspectives of their parents.

Based on my understanding that "the telling is the "doing" of identity" (Kraus, 2006, p. 107) <sup>[9]</sup>, a few analytical lenses bound to lexical, syntactic, textual and intertextual elements were borrowed from past narrative researchers. Namely, Dancygier's (2008) <sup>[10]</sup> shifting in viewpoint, Labov's (1972) <sup>[11]</sup> evaluation, Tannen's (1979) <sup>[12]</sup> frames, and Baxter's (2011) <sup>[13]</sup> contrapuntal analysis were used to extract a framework of disability identity from what was talked about by my parent participants. In consummation, the parents were found to have expressed unique beliefs about their child, characterized by some vibrant, telling patterns in their speech.

## **2 FINDINGS**

### **2.1 Negation: Opposing the bigger climate for disability in China**

Each parent expressed their points also partly by making negations. Besides their specifications on what their child's education is and should be, what the parents think should not be also drew my attention.

1) *women daoshi xiwang...wo dao bushi xiwang ta...wo shi xiwang quan shehui you yige jiena zibizheng wawa de huanjing, wo hui gandao hen xinwei, erbushi ta yao biancheng shenme Yangzi wo caihui gandao xinwei.*

*We indeed hope...we don't merely want HIM to...I'm hoping that the whole society ends up embracing children with autism, then I can have so much comfort in it. I can only have comfort in this, not how my child will end up doing.*

2) *wo ziji houqi ye shi zai kaolv jiaoyu de fangxiang, baokuo wawa yihou daodi yao chengwei yige shenme ren. Qishi... zhege kan meige jiazhang lijie... Zhishao wo jue de ta shi yige duli geti, zhe dongxi buneng shuo women xiang rang ta chengwei shenme ta jiu chengwei shenme.*

*As time grows I'm trying to see where his education should go, including what type of person the kid needs to be. But in fact...other parents might think differently but... at least I think he is himself. The thing is exactly like.. it's not for us to say who he should end up becoming.*

Tannen proposed that “a negative statement is made only when its affirmative is expected” ([12] p. 44). Therefore, the negatives here tell what the other part of the Chinese society often holds true. Obviously, these speakers tended to see their child with disability in a different light from the one that they discredited in their claims of negating. Namely, there is a consensus in the mainstream society that children should be driven to meet some homogeneous, elitist standards. These parents' utilization of this syntactic manipulation fortifies their direct statements about social unacceptance largely coming from the public schools' or day-cares' refusal to enrol children with disabilities.

3) *chengji women dou meiyou guan ta. Yinwei women nazhong...weishenme meiyou guanta ne? bushi shuo tashi teshu wawa. Shijishang wo xiaoshihou de chengzhang jingli jiushi zhe Yangzi.*

*On his academic study, we don't make much fuss. Because we are like...Why we are paying no attention to his study? It's not because he is a kid with disability. In fact, when I was a small kid my path of growth was exactly like his.*

4) *wo shuo, yaoma ni xian qu yiduan shijian. Ni jue de women wawa keyi le, women jiu liu xialai, buxing jiu suanle ha. Nage yuanzhang jiu shuo haoma haoma. Jieguo hou lai shangle bangyue, ai, ta jude haihao, meide shazi ha. Yinwei J nage shihou hai duo guai de, bude daren, ye buhui maren zhexie. Ta xianzai xuehuai le.*

*I said (to the director of the day-care), “How about let him go to your day-care for a short time. If you thought our kid does fine, we'll stay. If not, that's it.” The director said OK, OK. Soon after half a month, he felt good about it, (because) nothing (bad) happened. Because J was a good boy at that time, not hitting and not cursing others.*

In example 3) and 4), the parents negated on the general assumptions about children with disabilities. Unlike what their parents are confident about on them, they are constantly believed by non-disabled people as inherently incompetent in learning knowledges (3) and interacting with the bigger world (4).

## **2.2 Repetitions, evaluative words and countering conjunctions—transformation in the face of challenge**

5) *En, houlai gongke shang qeshi ye genbushang a. houlai women gen laoshi ye chongxin goutong le. Yinwei gongke shang qeshi mei banfa...ta meitian neng*

*kandao tongxue men ta jiu hen kaixin...dan ta ye hen xihuan xuexi. Wo de dingyi jiushi shuo, jiushi ta zhezhong qingkuang...huxiang jiena, huxiang baorong...suiran shuo, ta chengji genbushang ba...zhishao ta haishi you ta de shangguangdian.*

*Yes, gradually he really started to lag behind. Then we came to talk about this with the teachers. Because his academic study was really problematic... he simply enjoys hanging out with his classmates on every school day. But he loves studying as well...My definition (for inclusive education) is that, based on his condition...his condition... it is mutual acceptance and mutual tolerance...although he can't catch on in his test scores...At least he has certain bits of merits.*

6) *ta yinggai, yinggai shi wang zhengchang fangmian zou ma ta haiyao. Buhui hen yanzhong, wo xiangdehua women de wawa. Zai women de gongtong, tiaojiao (voice unintelligible) ta jiu manman jiu biande, jibenshang jiu zhengchang le...fudao, duo fudao. Wo jue de yinggai gendehsang...ta benlai bishang renjia jiuyao wanxie ma, fayu a zhexie. Wo jiu bata, bata, jiushi shuo ne...ze, zai wo ne, henbude...xintou jiushi...suoyi ni ba...ba chengji nage, ai, nage jiu qu gen san, jinliang kending yao gen san, genbushang na yejiu, jiu zhiyou, jiu zhiyou, daoshudiyiming jiu daoshudiyiming na you shazi nan...fanzheng ni bushi daoshu diyiming haiyou lingwai yigeren kending shi daoshudiyiming san, nage yongyuan youge daoshudiyiming, bukeneng dou paodao qiantou qule. Shibushi ma?*

*He should...should be marching towards the normal side, he should...(Situation) won't be severe, I think like this for our child. Under our communication and teaching (mumbled words), he'll thus slowly become...become basically normal...tutor...we should tutor him more. I feel like he should be able to catch on...By design he is slower than others, I mean in such things like development. I can simply make him...make him...Gee...for me, I can't wait to see him...this is where my thoughts always lie...So you should...should make your own scores look...look OK. You should try your best to catch on. Yet if he cannot make it, then just...just...let the last one be the last one, it doesn't matter, right? After all, even if you are not the last one there's got to be a last one. There's always a last one. It's not likely that all (of the students) rank high up. Right?*

In his discussion on evaluations, Labov (1972) <sup>[11]</sup> identified repetition as one important device to intensify a narrative action. With the obvious repetitions, 5) and 6) differed in the beginning in that in 5), evaluative adverbial *qeshi* ("really") were mentioned twice to show the speaker's keen observation of her son's academic failure in the general school, while in 13) the speaker, probably because his son had not come in age for the elementary school, repeated the modal word *yinggai* ("should") in a much optimistic tone but also revealed a deep sense of uncertainty and worry.

However, in their later narrations, both speakers in 5) and 6) expressed relief from the previously stressful statements with conjunctions and evaluative words such as *danshi* ("but"), *zhishao* (at least), *ne...ye* ("yet if...then"), which were suggested by Baxter (2011) <sup>[13]</sup> to exemplify the "polemic-transformational" struggle and its resolution. In 5), the interviewee, keenly aware of her son's limited level of performance at school, made an effort to maximize his perceived suitability for learning in general schools by noting his strengths, however minimal they might look like from the perspectives of the general educators in China. It constitutes a form of transformation of standards for "good student" in the parent which would help her cope with her son's untypical learning process. Likewise, transformation happened when the speaker of 6) turned from his best expectation to a possible outlook (being ranked to the end in grades) which he used to dread most. By laying his son among a natural course of games where winners and losers are both necessary parts, he normalized on the originally disappointment-inviting gap of achievement between his son and others.

### 2.3 Unconventional use of pronouns—marking viewpoints and distances

Ordinary pronouns such as *wo* (“I”) and *ni* (“you”) are generally uttered by one side of interlocutors as an indication of him/herself and the one who is on the other side of the dialogue. On the contrary, *ta* (“he/she/it”) usually refers to some other persons and objects outside the interlocutor. However, During the interviews I observed quite a few occasions where these lexical elements were put to irregular uses.

7) *youxieren keneng shuo shuxue hen cha de, ta keneng bu zhidao, mei guanxi. Ha danshi wo yao zhidao... wo yao zhidao wo neng...wo chuqu gan shenme, wo zhidao qu na'er. Wo shang cesuo...wo yao chuqu...yihou wo xiang shang cesuo le, wo ye de zhao cesuo buneng suidi daxiaobian a, shibushi?*

*Maybe someone'll say he is so bad at math, but it doesn't matter. But, I need to know...I need to know that (what) I can (do), what am I doing there, where I'm doing that thing. Like I need to go to the toilet... (then) I'm going...if I want to go to the toilet, I have to get myself to the toilet, not doing business on the floor, right?*

8) *ta neng shengren shenme gongzuo wo bing bu queding. suoyi buyao dui ta denaxie shenme dongxi qiwan de tebie gao.... yihou qu zhao gongzuo ni ye zhineng qu shi. ni nengbuneng gande hao? ...wo gande buhao wojiu huanyige gongzuo.*

*I'm not sure what type of job would fit him. So I'd better not have high hope on him...You should just try everything out when looking for a job in the future. Are you able to do it right? ...If I'm not then I'd better just move on.*

In both example 7) and 8), the speakers did not follow through addressing their kid as a conventional *ta* (“he” or “him”) as in the beginning section of the passages. Instead, later they started to use *wo* (“I”) to speak like their kid was murmuring to himself about what the way to go should be. In 8), The pronoun *ni* (“you”) started to further settle in, as if the speakers were reminding the kid in person. Shifting of personal pronouns was discussed by Barbara Dancygier (2008)<sup>[10]</sup> as shifting in viewpoint. Therefore, the two speakers' withdrawal from pointing to their child as *ta* (“he/she”) as opposed to the real-time deictic pronouns *wo* (“I”) and *ni* (“you”) in these dialogues gives an indication of the parents' hard-pressed concerns on their children's growth in any skills that point to their independence. That the parents dialogically took the place of their own children also testifies to the past research finding that in China, the child's family took up core responsibility of arranging for his/her life (Fisher & Li, 2008)<sup>[14]</sup>. The care-givers, mostly the parents, instead of positioning themselves away from their children with disabilities, closely identify themselves with them.

Not restricted to their flexible use of *ni* (“you”) and *wo* (“I”), neuter pronoun *ta* (“it”) and relative pronoun *nage* (“that”) were used at a high frequency, embedded with an extraneous meaning by many parents. In these cases, both pronouns were often pronounced with a prolonged vow sound.

9) *zhonguo zhe fangmian youdian butaihao, zhende youdian canku, ta reile youshengyouyu nazhong dongxi ba, ta jiu pianmian de qu xuanchuan tangshizheng buhao de defang, jiu rang jiazhang shijishang jiu you hen da de xinli fudan.*

*China is doing something not quite good, really cruel, in this aspect. It (is) merely for advocating the policy of High-Quality Off-Springs so it publicizes only all the scary parts of Down's Syndrome. This literally stresses the parents out.*

10) *o tianbang wa'er, jiushi nazhong, zhe'er dajia a na'er tou dongxi a na'er qiang dongxi a...nage jiu yaobude le san. Nage kending jiu jue de hen nanshou de. ziran, dengyu jiushi fumu de shibai.*

*Oh so you are talking about naughty children, those are the ones fighting stealing robbing all the time. That is simply not acceptable. That definitely (makes us feel) very upset. (it) equals the failure of a parent.*

In 9) and 10), each sentence includes one of the pronouns mentioned above. Unlike the common way of using them, the second *nage* (“that”) in 9) and the first *ta* (“it”) in 10) serves a thematic rather than grammatical function. Both speakers deliberately positioned the pronouns where both offered a sense of distance from the immediate world of the speakers, in order to draw a demarcation between the negative assumptions about disability by the general public and their own imaging as parents of how their kids with disabilities would end up doing. Augmented by many other cases where parents used *ta* (“it”) and *nage* (“that”) in similar manners in this interview study, there appears a trend of the parents staying in the same camp with their child and rebut against pessimism and demonization of these untypically developing children in their designated “otherhood” represented by their use of the third-person deictics.

#### **2.4 Intertextualized indication of non-offensiveness to the others**

Although nearly all parents showed their favour for inclusive education, they were soundly aware of the bitter reality of the lack of social acceptance in China for the disabled. However, they showed tremendous empathy to the teachers, typically developing children and their parents. This message was both openly expressed and also strengthened by some undercover information activated in their conversations with me.

11) *ai, zhengti laishuo kending shi yao manmandi yao hao, danshi zhongguo zhezhong xianzhuang a, yinwei qeshi shi...dajia haishi...xianzhuang kanyikan, haishi you ta haoduo de wenti ma...zhongguoren shi shui youqian dajia shui...jiu jue de nage ren jiushi...shanguang ha. Meiyou qian wo jiu qiaobuqi ta. haoduo doushi zhezhong qingkuang...zhe ye meiyou banfa, dahuanjing ruci. Yinwei dajia ye yao shengcun ma, laoshi ye yao shengcun ma.*

*Man! Like many other things it (the situation) will surely improve more and more, but the current state in China...Gee! Because it's really... people still (see)...the current state...simply has many problems...People in China are like, whoever earning a lot of money is seen by others as...brilliant... I think. If you don't have money, I look down on you. There are many such things happening....Again nothing can be done. After all, the bigger climate is like this. All (in it) have to live on. The teachers have to live on.*

12) *kending women haishi yao zhan dao renjia nage tongxue de nage jiaodu, naxie wawa de jiaodu shang qu kaolv san. Yinwei ta suishi yisheng jiao, yinwei women jialitou haishi you nazhong...biru zhi'er lai a naxie, tamen doushi...yiban women dou xiaode tamen xuexi shi hen jinzhang de, erqie zhuyili shi xiangdang jizhong de...suoyi shuo...yudao zhezhong wenti kending jiazhang mashang ye yao ba ta dai chulai cai xing.*

*As necessary we must stand in those other classmates' shoes. Because once he (her son with autism) screams...like I saw how he did that to my nephew when he came to visit our home...they (the other kids) are all like...we all know how stressful their studying is, and how much concentration they need to have...so I say...when coming into this problem the parents (of the kid with disability) surely must bring this kid out of the classroom.*

Examined with Tannen's (1993) <sup>[12]</sup> frame theory, examples 11) and 12) illustrated how one simple device of omission can frame the parents' utterances as reasonable and gracious both on the level of the narration and the level of conversational relation. Noteworthy is that while both interviewees stated the helplessness of the intolerant and unaccommodating teacher and general parents under the influence of the bigger social or educational climate, on the other hand, they only covertly disclosed their observation of some abnormal, unnatural or even immoral actions that the teachers and general peers and their parents took. In 11), "the teachers have to live on" could have well been supplemented by a detailed description of what they have to do because of it, such as earning monetary awards through pushing the pupils for extraordinary academic test scores by ignoring the student with special needs, etc. Similarly, in 12), the speaker could also have elaborated on what the parents in general education must do to obtain unspoiled focus for their children in order to meet excessive learning goals, most directly, by pressing the school or the teacher to shut away anyone/anything that are disrupting the class in the slightest way. Instead, these messages were faded so that no competing narration existed against the main meaning of reconciliation and tolerance. These omissions indicate a positive feeling that the parents had towards the persons described, based on my cultural knowledge of the reasons for dialogical silence under Chinese culture. By these means, the interviewees effectively gave an impression that they had full empathy with the unaccepting others and respect their choice out of their limited options.

13 ) *women shouxian xiang rang ta wan shangxue...diyige shi, ta hui bi tongling de haizi...tongban de haizi da yiliang sui, zhishao renjia buhui shuo, qifu ta. Dui ba. Ta bi renjia ge'er gao, bi renjia shenti yao Zhuang yixie, zhishao buhui rang xiaopengyou qifu niba,*

*We both want to send him to school at a later time...the first is that then he will be one or two years older than kids of the same age...kids of the same class, so at least they're not, like, bullying him. Right? He'll be a bit taller, and stronger than them, so at least none of your friends're bullying you,*

In fact, like in 13), almost all of my interviewees, except for a mom who is solidly assertive of the rights and equality of children with disabilities, more or less used a Chinese word *renjia* to refer to people without disability. It is difficult to locate an English word to carry the same connotation. When *renjia* is used as a third-person pronoun, it is explicated by the literature <sup>[15]</sup> as having a meaning of respect and humbleness from the speaker. Again, my interviewees successfully passed across this implication to me as an added illustration of their regardless positive assumptions for the general public in China.

### 3 CONCLUSION

Under scrutiny with the narrative apparatuses described above, a "sandwiched" perception of the parent participants on their children with disabilities is brought to the surface. In the eyes of these parents, disability is viewed as a result both from certain standards imposed by the society and from functional impairments which individually impact the child. In this sense, the parents' thoughts appear to differ from the homogeneous, devaluing medical view <sup>[16]</sup> which now prevails the current Chinese society. Meanwhile, the findings demonstrate that the minds of the parents appear not to have fallen into a "dilemma" framework <sup>[17]</sup> much discovered in the mainstreaming practices in Western schools. Instead, the parents transformed the pity for their child's impairments into comfortable acceptance of the impairments as natural and unsurprising, as well as "forgiving" the misunderstanding or even mistreatment from the mainstream people around since they view their behaviours as dominated by the harsh reality of public education in China. Overall, they refused to assess their child's disability as a distressing failure, neither did they intend to take up an antagonistic



attitude towards the often perceived “exploitative” <sup>[16]</sup> mainstream world, but a concerting one. This is indeed a combination of rebellion and harmony.

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## AUDITING QUALITY CULTURE: AN AGAMBIAN APPROACH

Frank Vonk<sup>1</sup>, Gerdien Vegter<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>HAN University of Applied Sciences, Arnhem/Nijmegen (THE NETHERLANDS)

<sup>2</sup>HAN University of Applied Sciences, Arnhem/Nijmegen (THE NETHERLANDS)

### Abstract

Performing audits related to educational and research programmes is the authors' daily work. We try to find out about the key values of these programmes and to advise on the potential risks.

We found out, however, that auditing culture, more specific quality culture, is a complex job. Auditing culture implies on the one hand that there is a (educational, professional or research) culture being the object of the audit itself and on the other hand auditing itself generates a particular "audit culture" having its own values which should, ideally, be in line with the research or educational cultures the audits have as their object.

In higher education auditing is an accepted way to justify quality processes, content, and procedures according to a framework (quality standards) offering criteria to judge on these aspects of higher education in a positive or negative way. Auditing systems are therefore designed to reveal possible flaws (risks) in current educational and research programmes. We notice, however, that both cultural layers (the one of the educational or research programme and the other of the auditors) seem to operate in different worlds: the world of norms and criteria: risks, poor performance, low returns, and the world of education: designing learning arrangements, coaching, testing, preparing students for later professional performance, etc. We notice that both worlds often collide and hardly contribute to the other's improvement.

We are convinced that this "clash of cultures" is logical and necessary, when based on separate value systems, however, it offers a possibility as well to unearth potential causes of this clash (different worlds living in different discourses) and to address the challenges it offers for further developments.

To explore this challenge, we studied the work of the Italian philosopher, Giorgio Agamben, who started off with the idea that many social developments and improvements are based on exceptions, on different ways of approaching your own cultural value system and understanding the other's but not per se accepting it. Framing these cultural value systems imply different ethical, political, biological, sociological, linguistic, and aesthetic standards which quite naturally cannot be automatically transferred to different paradigms – let alone being understood.

Keywords: Agamben, auditing, culture, exclusion, framing, quality standards

*“MY GRANDFATHER USED TO SAY: LIFE IS ASTOUNDINGLY SHORT. TO ME, LOOKING BACK OVER IT, LIFE SEEMS SO FORESHORTENED THAT I SCARCELY UNDERSTAND, FOR INSTANCE, HOW A YOUNG MAN CAN DECIDE TO RIDE OVER TO THE NEXT VILLAGE WITHOUT BEING AFRAID THAT -NOT TO MENTION ACCIDENTS- EVEN THE SPAN OF A NORMAL HAPPY LIFE MAY FALL FAR SHORT OF THE TIME NEEDED FOR SUCH A JOURNEY.” (FRANZ KAFKA: THE NEXT VILLAGE)[1]*

## 1 INTRODUCTION

In this paper we will, from a methodological point of view, explore an alternative way of addressing and framing criteria in auditing quality culture in our University of Applied Sciences (UAS) in Arnhem and Nijmegen (The Netherlands). Our guide here will be the Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben (1942-) and some of his basic texts in which he shows different, methodologically relevant insights and approaches towards relevant political, economic and cultural issues involved in auditing quality culture. His ideas might help us to reframe the principles of auditing quality culture. The main question as starting point of our methodological reflections is:

In what way can auditing quality culture profit from Agamben’s insights and concepts and different approaches towards the way in which one might understand and reframe “one’s work”, i.e. auditing the cultural dimension of education and research programmes?

Quality assurance in universities of applied sciences has more or less fixed quality standards as have defined by the NVAO for all the educational programmes and The Netherlands Association of Universities of Applied Sciences (VH) for research programmes. The aim of UAS is that education, research and professionals work together on practical issues within different frameworks of quality assurance concerning external evaluations and accreditations. The way the educational and research programmes achieve the quality standards is highly determined by quality culture. Auditing the standards as such means that one can determine the achievements and risks (for example whether procedures have been pursued or not) but the root cause of control weakness can’t be addressed adequately. The traces then rather lead to human factors and culture. Thus, this observation changes the focus and approach of our way of auditing.

To get at the root cause of quality you need to get a grip on quality culture. Auditing of culture, especially quality culture, however, is a complex task. Every single educational or research programme has its own hidden “qualities” serving their specific (or informal/hidden) purposes (expressed in their mission and vision) and possible outcomes of learning and research processes.

Methodologically, the approach of auditing programmes is mainly about norming and prescribing how education and research, ideally, should “behave”, i.e. in line with ambitions and quality standards. One could, for instance, formulate a set of criteria, according to which concrete behaviour in educational and research programmes can be checked and superficially be made visible and be acknowledged by all relevant stakeholders – unearthing possible blind spots. One could also address the underlying values and “norms of behaviour” which determine concrete actions in e.g. designing a professionalized curriculum.

The first method is risk-focussed and meant to judge the quality of education and research programmes sufficient or insufficient – the auditor remains an outsider who tells and sells his message.

The second one rather aims at creating an atmosphere of trust and dialogue in which representatives of programmes are in charge and the quality culture is explicit in the picture. The focus is on relevant topics on dialogue, not on quality standards. This approach will ideally lead to more or less the same outcome as the first way to organize an audit.

To find an alternative way of auditing quality culture beside the audits aimed at when controlling it we have studied relevant philosophical issues of the Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben. In the next paragraph we will describe two key concepts taken from his ideas that are relevant in reframing auditing culture: “language” and “potentiality”.

## **2 AGAMBEN’S PHILOSOPHY**

It seems, after studying some basic texts of Giorgio Agamben, that auditing quality culture might profit from his methodological reflections. It is not per se that the object of his methodological approach is our main object of interest. What we are interested in is his way of analysing basic philosophical concepts, covering our approach of auditing quality culture. The question then is: how can we use these concepts to frame, deframe and/or reframe the findings in auditing quality culture?

The findings, as a result of an audit, are basically meant to describe in a normative way what improvements need to be made, how these improvements must be made, what it will look like, etc. But, referring to Bartleby in Herman Melville’s (1819-1891) short story *Bartleby the Scrivener*: “We prefer not to,” because from our point of view that doesn’t contribute to audit culture in an appropriate way.

First of all we will construct a framework which characterizes Agamben’s work and necessarily brings about methodological reflections we will deal with in the next sub-section. The key concepts “language” and “potentiality” in Agamben’s work are not his own inventions but collected during the careful and sometimes intricate analyses of a broad range of domains in which these concepts occur. Some of them can be found in old philosophical, theological and literary texts but the way in which Agamben deals with them give them a modern, contemporary ring which is one of the reasons why we ended up with Agamben in our search for different approaches towards auditing.

### **2.1 Agamben on Language**

One of the main concepts to be found in Agamben’s work is that of language. Language is an individual and social phenomenon raising questions on how and where language emerges and develops in the individual and how language is used in specific social, professional and linguistic contexts (one might think of the cognitive or psychological development of language, the sociolinguistic dimension, the linguistic analysis of linguistic phenomena like sounds, words or sentences, its spoken and written dimension, and so forth).

Agamben uses one of the chapters from Emile Benveniste’s (1902-1976) main work *Problems in General Linguistics* (cf. Agamben 1993: 152ff.) to show in what way crucial insights in semiotics, the theory of signs, have occurred and what decisions have been decisive in its development. Especially the role of pronouns in language use (and written language) constitutes specific problems which Agamben extensively discusses (cf. Agamben 1991; 1993; 2009a and b; 2015a).

Benveniste, in his study on “Subjectivity in Language” (originally published in 1958 [1966]) distinguishes between language and discourse: “discourse is language put into action, and necessarily between partners” (Benveniste 1966: 223). Thus the context in which language is used becomes particularly important. Language is but an instrument, meant to enable discourse (initiated by enunciations). Only by ‘using’ language, making it ‘functional’, transmitting meaning, thoughts etc. we are able to communicate our understanding of states of affairs). Discourse then is broader than language as such (being tied to the traditional structuralist paradigm of de Saussure (1857-1913)) and in it the speaking subject(s) use(s) non-linguistic signs (gestures for example or mime) or social-cultural aspects of communication (particular culturally determined signals for instance, human beings agreed upon). Discourse and language therefore constitute different realms of language (*le langage*) as such in which (looking at the personal pronouns for instance) different relations are constructed between the subject’s perception of reality and how it can be put into words.

But then is language (*la langue*) only or just an instrument connecting men in discourse? Contrary to arrows, wheels or piano’s language is not a clear fabrication, a product manufactured by man although, and this is a paradoxical twist, it is in its current form human. It is not possible to go back in time that far that we can discover how language developed at all (in individuals or groups), because there is no evidence. We can conclude then that man and language have always been connected and language is therefore not fabricated.

Language has a property, Benveniste maintains, which makes it potentially possible to act as a means of transmitting meaning, without, however, becoming an instrument itself. In becoming a speaker of language man constitutes himself as a subject on a different level of analysis. Language makes it possible for human beings to establish themselves as a subject by using concepts like “I” or “you”:

The speaker posits himself as ‘subject’. It is defined [...] by the psychic unity that transcends the totality of the actual experiences it assembles, and that makes the permanence of the consciousness. (Benveniste 1958 [1966]: 224)

The person, or the ‘ego’ (subjectivity), is what in the act of individual speech is added to language as the “hidden” dimension, not its representation of the world of beings. If we discuss this on the level of speech, it is the complementarity of ‘I’ and ‘you’, which makes language something subjective, or related to the “permanence of consciousness”. By being complementary, ‘I’ and ‘you’ are not opposed, the one transcending the other, but the interior and exterior are “reversible”. There is no antinomy but subjects constitute each other in communication using language which offers subjects the possibility to take over (or ‘be’) the position of the other: thus language is the place where the category person resides. It is only in and by using language that means a subject has this possibility to take over.

Traditionally words like ‘I’, ‘you’, ‘here’, ‘there’ ‘now’ or ‘then’ are called shifters, changing with the position of speaker, listener, place or time. Benveniste, however links these notions to a steady consciousness which serves as a point of reference in these dualities. Only in language ‘I’ is used and here it does not exclusively refer to a particular individual or a concept, but it “is in the instance of discourse in which ‘I’ designates the speaker that speaker proclaims himself as the ‘subject’” (Benveniste 1958: 226). Personal pronouns (as well as other deictic expressions expressing the spatio-temporal relationships in human relations) bring out subjectivity in language and thus appropriates language to himself, “designating himself as I” (Benveniste 1958 [1966]: 226). These notions, therefore, do not relate to concrete objects (this person, that apple, etc.), but it indicates that “language is taking place” (cf. Murray 2010: 16):

If we compare this to our ways of auditing culture we see parallels in distinguishing hard and soft controls, objective and subjective evidence, risks and opportunities and mainly the meaning of quality culture as a subjective dimension of whatever quality criteria exist in diverse practices of education and research programmes and auditing techniques. It is more on the level of talking to each other, having dialogues, creating a secure environment in which stakeholders find themselves heard and seen. It is the auditor him- or herself then which in the end by using good techniques, judgment and communication skills can present solid evidence about the culture to executives and the board. Over time, the picture this evidence paints will become clearer and more persuasive. (Roth 2017: 37).

## 2.2 Agamben on (Im-)Potentialities

A second concept we came across in reading Agamben is that of potentialities and what this notion means regarding the dimension of impotentialities, the possibility or perhaps essential dimension of human beings to be inoperative, to not-work, for instance. If we read the text "On Potentialities" (from a collection of essays, cf. Agamben 1999), Agamben notices that the concept of 'potentiality' has a central meaning in Aristotle's *Metaphysics*. Potentiality (*dunamis*) and its "counterpart" actuality (*energeia*) are essential to Aristotle, because these notions explain in a clear way what it means "to become ....". Actuality and potentiality are two dimensions of movement or change (in general: development) which we see happening in nature as well as in technical settings. Examples are abundant but to name some: an acorn is potentially an oak tree (or can become an oak tree), if the conditions are favourable. A piece of marble can potentially become a particular sculpture, if the technique and instruments, including the ideas of the sculptor, are favourable to actually make or manufacture that particular sculpture. Or cold water becomes warm when it is heated by the sun or fire. Next to this, the initial positiveness and the new or actual positiveness, there is a particular substrate (the acorn, marble, water) which gradually changes into something which was not there before but was potentially there: the form of the substrate (stuff or matter, *hyle*), the substrate itself and the privation. The main concept of philosophy from Aristotle to Heidegger, B/being itself, is as such not existent but appears on two levels: the one of potential being and of actual being which enables the world of objects to develop or change, based on potential conditions which as such only arbitrarily or contingently come to be realized (or actual):

Every single reality is at the same time actual and potential, but not regarding the same. The aspect according to which an object is suited to not just be what it actually is now but capable to become something else is, is the potential or determinable aspect, matter [...]; the aspect, however, by which this determined object is now, is the determining and actualizing aspect, form [...]. (De Strycker 19873: 139f.; our translation gfv)

Agamben here takes up the Aristotelian discussion of the potential and differentiates between the 'generic' and the 'specific'. The first one is meant when dealing with the potential of a child for instance "to know, or that he or she can potentially become the head of a State" (cf. Agamben 1999: 179), but Aristotle is interested in the specific potentiality: the architect for instance has the potential to build, the poet to write poems, in general a person potentially having this or that knowledge or ability. A child has the potential ability to learn and thus to become, by alteration, a learned or knowing adult. But being an adult "having" this knowledge or ability, the necessity (or obligation) to learn is absent. Based on this capacity or ability the adult who knows is thanks to this *hexis* (possessing, having a particular disposition) also able to "not bring his knowledge into actuality (*mē energein*) by not making a work, for example" (Agamben 1999: 179). The architect has the potentiality 'to not-build' and the poet 'to not-write poems', and the lecturer 'to not-lecture'. What

the gist of these reflections are we will outline in the next section and connect it with auditing quality culture (or maybe 'not-auditing quality culture').

### 3 AGAMBEN'S METHODOLOGICAL REFLECTIONS

If we combine the above with methodological reflections by Agamben determining his philosophical work and way we see at least some conceptual and methodological perspectives for developing an alternative way of auditing quality culture focussing on the methodology which is rather strict in his work.

First of all it is the aporia which seems at work in framing the daily practices in education and research and using a system which is not really aligned with these daily processes using language or (not-to) decide to make plans or ideas real or effective.: already in Aristotle's opinion (cf. Book II of his *Metaphysics*) aporiae appear as a kind of dilemma, where opposing arguments have the same weight. Thus doubts may appear in these cases and it is but based on for instance cultural values and particular circumstances which alternative seems to be the most relevant one. However, the option chosen is not fixed and is changeable, based on new insights, alternative values, etc. In auditing quality culture, next to the meaning of these concepts being used in a particular discourses in higher education and research. It is important to qualify (to judge) this culture, where potentialities seem to be at work, but these are more often than not invisible within the particular discourse(s) of higher education: a complex conjunction of laws, rules, dilemma's, processes and procedures determine a domain of interest which has created an autonomous set of criteria which seems to address the visible as well as the invisible parts of this discourse.

Agamben in some of his articles explicitly describes his method of philosophizing and using concepts which can be transferred to different contemporary contexts, whether in politics, art or law. His main methodological principle concerns the capacity of being developed:

One of the methodological principles that I constantly follow in my investigations is to identify in the texts and contexts on which I work [...] the philosophical element, that is to say, the point of their *Entwicklungsfähigkeit* (literally, capacity to be [!] developed), the locus and the moment wherein they are susceptible to a development. (Agamben 2009a: 13)

Now, how does this methodological approach influence our approach in auditing quality culture: is it about unearthing the hidden choices, the potentialities which can be unearthed in the auditing process and how willing and skilled are stakeholders to address the issues at stake?

### 4 AUDITING QUALITY CULTURE USING AGAMBEN

Quality culture as such appears in a more or less defined way: it creates an closed atmosphere in higher education and research, where the individual has the possibility to actively participate in a process of continuous improvement and based on a shared vision. Or should it say: adaptation to the profane world in which participants are in a state of continuous dialogue or rapport from an appreciative point of view (prohibiting to unearth potential risks alone, whatever that may mean from an Agambian point of view). Instead of opting for a particular image of culture,<sup>1</sup> it seems more

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<sup>11</sup> 'Culture' as such, being the object AND subject of auditing, in our case, represents different layers with their own habits, terminologies, processes, etc. is one of the issues which auditors should keep in mind: researchers and lecturers, even board members, have different cultural perceptions which more often than not lead to conflicting positionings and misunderstandings. Without judging this one could also maintain that this is the build in paradox in addressing culture as an object of inquiry and investigation. Aiming at consensus her, like

promising to create a cultural platform which shows: innovation, tradition, humanity, system, specialization or collectivism and all present or at least potentially present, without excluding each other or stigmatizing particular decisions and which seems to be quite relevant to not-decide.

If there is no wrong or right in culture, meaning and bestowing meaning upon words or the language used, culture is in a permanent state of flux, and culture will be hard to grasp. It is not right or wrong but might be framed within a terminology which is more appropriate if this continuous flux has been established – paradoxically then established means what cannot be established. Nevertheless agreeing upon a framed substrate of particular values, a community implicitly makes use of, auditing quality culture seems to be a rather complicated activity which shows within a particular lapse of time how it is perceived.

Even the definition of what a quality culture ‘is’, is revealing here. Next to the Dutch-Flemish Accreditation Organisation which focusses on: a critical attitude and a continuous quality improvement the European Association defines it as:

An organizational culture that intends to enhance quality permanently and is characterized by two distinct elements. On the one hand, a cultural/psychological element of shared values, beliefs, expectations and commitment towards quality and on the other hand a structural/managerial element with defined processes that enhance quality and aim at coordination individual efforts. (Leest et al. 2017: 8)

Now because there is no real end or beginning in historical processes, seen from a contemporary point of view, this temporary approach towards quality culture needs a serious revision and reframing, because enhancing quality needs a clear, rather messianic picture<sup>1</sup> of what the end of contributing to a quality culture really means – and therefore there seems to be no justification for whatever decision to be made but what is part of human discourse. Therefore we should stay indifferent to this definition and prescriptions which opt for focussing on the threshold of the psychological or cognitive on the one hand and the managerial on the other (cf. Bendermacher et al. 2017: 39).<sup>2</sup> Is there a clear split of both and what does that mean to the immanent tension which lies

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it would be in a more rationalistic discourse, seems to be meaningless in advance and doesn’t do justice to the specific character of culture. And perhaps, auditing can facilitate this ‘impassability’.

<sup>1</sup> This messianic dimension relates to a notion of a happy life as a form-of-life in which political and ethical temporality are included:

‘This ‘happy life’ on which political philosophy should be founded thus cannot be either the naked life that sovereignty posits as a presupposition so as to turn it into its own subject or the impenetrable extraneity of science and of modern biopolitics that everybody tries in vain to sacralize. This ‘happy life’ should rather an absolute profane ‘sufficient’ life’ that has reached the perfection of its own power and its own communicability – a life over which sovereignty and right no longer have any hold.’ (in: Mills n.y.)

Here it becomes clear that a life of indifference lies at the heart of the aim of Agamben’s philosophizing. The happy life exceeds the original split of bare life as such (zoe) and political or socially constructed life (bios), cf. Agamben 1998).

<sup>2</sup> Bendermacher et al. (2017: 41) make a split between the structural/managerial element of quality culture and a cultural/psychological element. The first needs tools and processes to define, measure, evaluate, assure and enhance quality, the second on an individual level a personal commitment to strive for quality and on a collective level individual attitudes and awareness adding up to culture. Thus the cultural dimension has as well an individual as an organizational, transcending and thus hardly influential dimension. It is worthwhile finding out about the (im-)potentialities which are hidden in this notion of quality culture like leadership, hierarchy, policies and procedures, role awareness, communication or task requirements and the degree of clarity.



at the heart of quality culture: every participant is expected to do what he has to do; on the other hand he is responsible for his own well-being, a happy life, which is not included in the managerial dimension and neither in the psychological both excluding the specific (well-)being of human beings here: a personal identity is not linked to its connection to the managerial dimension nor to the psychological dimension.

Measuring and evaluating performance do not contribute to the quality of the culture as such. What is at the heart of a quality culture is its impotentiality, therefore it is hard, if not impossible, to judge on what a quality culture is or even what it should look like, instead of a coming society which implicitly creates thresholds as connecting the now and then without being explicitly fixed in advance: it is not a fixed road but a connection of a not-yet and a now. This connection which never happens and will never happen is the inoperativity (impotentiality) of a coming society or a coming duality culture in our particular case. It is perhaps only that what we do, whereas we might as well decide not to do.

## 5 CONCLUDING REMARKS

If we would combine auditing quality culture and Agamben's philosophical thinking it would be interesting to focus on his methodology, the awareness of historical developments based on historical splits and in this particular case on the capacity for development of potentialities. Quality culture then becomes a system of thought which is characteristic for a particular mode of being in which gaps or thresholds between traditional oppositions are predominant. They make us aware of the strength of being indifferent towards aporiae but to reflect on the sacred and the profane world in both of which we reside, thus being included and excluded in both worlds. There we will look for opportunities to be developed (potentialities!). Auditing then can be considered an intellectual practice where potentialities met and will lead to an understanding of past decisions and a certain degree of responsiveness to (un-)justified expectations should be careful about the outcomes of cultural developments but mainly look at the historical dimension and the appearance of potentialities.

A philosophical, archaeological method unearthing historical developments and splits within the cultural dimension of educational and research processes and procedures generates a discourse which is not aligned with what happens in daily practice: there is a gap, a threshold between the discourse of method and the discourse of educational and research practices.

There is an immediate relation between (im-)potentialities and auditing: using Agamben's method to find splits and thresholds between or connecting (or not-connecting) to the actualisation of possible choices (and if you have chosen to stick to the event and to be able to justify your decisions). Actualities as such (*energeiai*) do represent the work done and realized and the implicit changes in it, based on potentialities (*dunamei*) underlying changes or developments which inhere in contemporary educational and research processes. In auditing processes it means a careful account of the inclusion and exclusion of criteria which are used to judge the quality – and of course: who decides here? According to the auditor as a keen observer and a meticulous formulator of relevant questions it is within the educational and research programmes where this decision has to be made, based on what is relevant to them, and not to one or the other system which is an external referent most of the time hardly acknowledged by relevant stakeholders – then it would be interesting to find

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out how the game to be played is part of on the one hand the political dimension of higher education and the life time perception of the stakeholders (cf. Agamben 2015b: 98f.) .

It is obvious that inoperativity is one of the basic conditions of mankind and not the exclusion of being inoperative. And thus there are no universal norms and values which can be related to the human condition as such. It is but an arbitrary decision in politics that there is a kind of fixed norm for what possibilities should be considered valuable or invaluable. Thus for Agamben the non-essence of man (his inoperativity) is considered a promising option for the analysis of the human condition.

From an ethical point of view we, as auditors when auditing quality culture, could or might reflect on the actualizations used in our daily work and the possibilities we have not-to. A critical reflection on the choices made in the past might help to cross the threshold between our form-of-life and that of the “object” of auditing.

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# MOTHER, WOMAN AND SOCIAL DISTRESS: PSYCHOANALYTICAL INVESTIGATION WITH BRAZILIAN MOMMY BLOGS

Carlos Del Negro Visintin<sup>1</sup>, Tânia Maria José Aiello-Vaisberg<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Pontifical Catholic University of Campinas (BRAZIL)

<sup>2</sup> Pontifical Catholic University of Campinas, University of Sao Paulo (BRAZIL)

## Abstract

This study's objective was to investigate the collective imaginary concerning motherhood and is justified to the extent to which childcare is predominantly performed by mothers, a central figure in a child's or adolescent's psychological clinic. Methodologically, this study was organized according to the psychoanalytical method, using 17 posts addressing postpartum depression written by Internet users who identified themselves as mothers. Data analysis resulted in the interpretation of two fields of affective-emotional meanings: "I am a mother, therefore I exist" and "Exclusively a mother". The first field is organized around the myth according to which women are completely fulfilled only when they become mothers. The second is organized around the myth that the best care is exclusively provided by the biological mother. The general picture indicates that women are possibly feeling overwhelmed under this collective imaginary, leading to the conclusion that motherhood may be experienced as social distress.

Keywords: motherhood, social suffering, collective imaginary.

## 1 INTRODUCTION

Apparently, the concept of social distress was first used by Dejours [1] to designate painful emotional experiences arising from job insecurity associated with the loss of social objects, such as access to health, work and public policies that ensure the rights of citizens. Subsequently, Kleinman, Das and Lock [2] expanded this concept to include emotionally difficult life experiences engendered by the way social life is organized. Several situations may generate distress, among which are religious persecution, war, torture, racism, oppression against women, and other forms of prejudice. This expansion is an important advance that can contribute to a deeper understanding of the many problems addressed by social clinical psychology, which is why we agree with authors who define social distress as distress accruing from oppression, discrimination, or exclusion, which generates feelings of helplessness, humiliation, injustice, and/or guilt [3].

With this concept in mind, and based on clinical experience, we consider the possibility of understanding motherhood as social distress. This proposition is part of a larger chapter regarding concerns about the emotional dimension of human experience, which is socially determined.

It seems that a sociocultural structure that defines motherhood as an idealized target prevails in Western society [4,5,6]. In Brazil, Scavone [7] emphasizes that, in patriarchal societies, motherhood can be understood as a social production that signifies and determines the role of women.

Studies in anthropology and psychology reveal that childcare practices can be configured in a number of ways [8,9]. It seems that the idea that being cared for by the biological mother is the most natural and appropriate solution for the dependency of human infants prevails in Western society. We are

aware that the perspective that biological mothers are the best caregivers of children conforms to cultural and historical production. In fact, note that the adoption of this idea corresponds to the cultivation of a myth, that of the existence of a natural, isolated and abstract human. According to such a myth, human experience would be disconnected from wider social contexts, since human beings would have an essence prior to experience and, only with great effort, would they relate with the human world [10]. Therefore, the notion of the biological mother being the best caregiver, to whom the child would naturally attach, reveals itself as a perspective that disregards the cultural and social dimensions of human experiences, a view that is virtually unsustainable today [11].

The experience of mothers in a given social situation is affected, to some extent, by the current imaginary. That is, we know that all mothers are somewhat affected. Nonetheless, because society is complex and multifaceted, mothers are differently affected, depending on specific concrete conditions.

As researchers-psychoanalysts, we position ourselves theoretically and epistemologically in order to value concrete conditions, within which human drama takes place [10]. When we turn our attention to the dramatic lives of mothers, we intend to investigate psychoanalytically the collective imaginary concerning motherhood, which is justified as a search for comprehensive knowledge able to support the maternal and child psychological practices from psychotherapeutic and psychoprophylactic perspectives.

## 2 METHOD

This qualitative study uses the psychoanalytical method, which, from a logical point of view, predates clinical procedures and theories. As recalled by Herrmann [12], the psychoanalytical method is based on free-floating attention and free association of ideas. It is set into motion with the intent to interpret data. Such interpretation, which is from the results of a study, can be understood based on one of the two paradigms of psychoanalysis: the drive model or the relational model [13]. Placing ourselves under the aegis of the second option, we adopted a perspective known as concrete psychology, which demands greater detail.

Based on concrete psychology [10], which uses the clinical material generated by this method to produce knowledge according to a relational paradigm, we organized this study working with two basic concepts: collective imaginaries and fields of affective-emotional meaning.

We conceive collective imaginaries as conducts, with the precise meaning the term assumes from Bleger's work [10]. That is, collective imaginaries consist of a set of conducts, that is, thoughts, actions, cultural products, emotions, perspectives and/or expectations; the fields of affective-emotional meaning correspond to the conception of the unconscious forged by concrete psychology. It derives, therefore, from criticism and abandonment of a view according to which the unconscious would be an intra-psychic instance, in favor of a conception as inter-subjectively shaped unconscious, from which conducts emerge. Ontologically, the fields are formed from human acts, not being methodologically conceived as derived from the action of infrahuman forces, such as libido, for instance. Thus, these fields are configured as worlds dramatically inhabited by individuals or collectives, from which new conducts emerge.

In order to facilitate our communication with researchers who adhere to other methodological frameworks, we operationalized the psychoanalytical method in terms of investigative procedures. We did it to make the investigative path chosen absolutely clear:

1. Investigative procedure of survey and selection of posts;

2. Investigative procedure of recording material;
3. Investigative procedure of interpretation of material

The investigative procedure concerning the survey and selection of posts was performed using Google according to the following criteria:

1. Posts written by Internet users who identified themselves as mothers;
2. Posts contained in Brazilian personal blogs;
3. Posts addressing postpartum depression.

The third criterion concerning the selection of posts addressing postpartum depression corresponds to a methodological device based on the idea of research covert procedures, which are interesting alternatives to investigate sensitive topics. These criteria are based on the enunciation of an interest that does not exactly coincide with the study's objective [14]. Thus, we employ indirect procedures to collect posts by searching the term "postpartum depression blogs" in order to identify those that focus on distressful situations experienced by women-mothers. That is, we do not take postpartum depression to be the study's object or as a research problem. In fact, we chose to study posts addressing postpartum depression because these are a privileged locus to understand the link between motherhood and social distress.

We started searching Google in April 2015 after we established the inclusion criteria. The first 30 posts were selected considering these were the posts most frequently accessed – the search results were presented according to descending order of visits. After reading all the posts, we selected only those written by Internet users who identified themselves as mothers, which resulted in 17 posts. Then, only those that exposed the experience of post partum depression remained, that is, seven posts. Note that Google automatically directed us to a single post available on each page accessed. We explain, for the sake of methodological rigor, that we did not take excerpts of the bloggers' narratives; rather, the full texts were used.

The step concerning the recording of data was composed of transcribing the online posts verbatim. This transcription was intended to both preserve the material, in case they disappeared from the Web, and also to optimize the interpretation process.

The procedure concerning interpretation of the material included revisiting the posts numerous times in light of the fundamental rules of the psychoanalytical method, that is, using free-floating attention and free association of ideas. We read the posts welcoming all and any associations, emotions, feelings and/or remembrances, as the clinical method recommends. Hence, inserted into a transference plot of human meanings, we interpretatively arrived to emotional determinants underlying the conducts under study, that is, to the fields of affective-emotional meanings.

The study was finalized by elaborating reflexive interlocutions. This phase corresponds to a resumption of interpretations, that is, of the fields of affective-emotional meanings created/found, in light of the thinking of other authors, whose contributions can deepen our understanding of the phenomenon. In this phase of the study, generally called discussion, we abandoned free-floating attention and free association to perform theoretical-conceptual work.

### **3 FIELDS OF AFFECTIVE-EMOTIONAL MEANINGS AND REFLECTIVE INTERLOCUTIONS**

Based on the numerous times we read the material using free-floating attention and the free association of ideas, we interpretatively produced two fields of affective-emotional meanings: "I am a mother, therefore I exist" and "Exclusively a mother". The first field of affective-emotional meaning, "I am a mother, therefore I exist" is organized around the myth that a woman only achieves true personal fulfillment when she becomes a mother. The second field, "Exclusively a mother," is organized around the idea that the biological mother is the most qualified person to take care of a child and this should be her only mission in life.

In regard to the first field, "I am a mother, therefore I exist", we can refer to an excerpt of a post to better clarify it:

"In the first three months after Ivan's birth, I asked myself, almost every single day: Will this nightmare ever end? And every time this question popped up in my head, immediately I also experienced a tremendous feeling of guilt. After all, I've just had a baby, I should feel like the happiest and most blessed person in the face of earth, but it was not exactly like things were happening."

In regard to the second field, "Exclusively a mother", the following excerpt came to mind:

"I got home exhausted because I had not slept for 48 hours, or could it have been 78 hours? I do not remember; well, I guess after the first 12 hours without sleeping at all, nothing made sense to me. I felt like a zombie. The first thing I wanted to do, as soon as I got home, was take a shower. Getting into the bathroom was like being out of a prison, back to home, where I could sit and cry all the tears I had held up to look strong in front of the other mothers. I wanted to stay under the shower forever, but soon a voice reminded me of my current obligation:

-Come feed your son, he's crying and hungry – my husband yelled outside.

My son. That phrase kept repeating itself in my subconscious. But why did I not feel like a mother?

The fields suggest the prevalence of a collective imaginary in which motherhood demands that women be both fully and exclusively dedicated to children and feel totally fulfilled and happy with motherhood. It becomes clear that we have encountered a situation that shows that the distress that affects mothers occurs through the idealization of motherhood.

Keep in mind that it is a fact that human infants are born requiring care without which they cannot survive. We should, however, note that a birth marks an important condition, to the extent that, having primary care, a newborn gains the possibility of surviving, even if the biological mother dies.

Based on his clinical practice, Winnicott [15,16] states that initial care may either favor or harm primitive emotional developmental processes, which are essential for an individual's future mental health. Therefore, he teaches that human infants are born with absolute dependency, requiring other devoted adults who can actively and sensitively adapt to infants' needs.

We know that human babies necessarily require care not only to survive but also to overcome milestones and mature so they will develop a sense of self based on their own point of view [15]. For Winnicott [17], the best kind of care would be that provided by the biological mother, who, in his view, would be in a specific psychological state he called primary maternal preoccupation. This psychological state, which would emerge at the end of the pregnancy, would extend for some weeks

after birth, helping the mother to adapt herself to the baby and meet her infant's physical and psychological needs.

This theory, however, requires careful thought, considering it is primarily based on biology. Bleger [10] warns us about reductionist approaches when studying human conducts. This author defines some myths, which correspond to views of the human being from an abstract, natural perspective, isolated from social contexts in which human life takes place, in the biographical meaning of the term. Such myths would reflect some assumptions of Western thought, according to which, human beings are originally not social beings, having a pure and essential nature that precedes experience. We propose that the concept of primary maternal preoccupation can be considered an expression of such myths, as it shows a conception of motherhood disconnected from the drama mothers experience, since infrahuman forces would cause such a state. Therefore, acknowledging that the initial postnatal environment may play a relevant role in a person's self-constitution does not imply any necessity in associating good care with the biological mother.

In our view, both fields of affective-emotional meanings established/found here can be considered expressions of such myths. The first field, "I am a mother, therefore I exist," sells women a belief that their lives should be completely fulfilled once they became mothers. The second field, "Exclusively a mother," is linked to the first, added to the idea that the biological mother would be the best caregiver for an infant and that should be her mission in life. Thus, the fields of affective-emotional meanings express fantasies, according to which a mother would be a being of incredible gift-giving ability.

Supported by Gottlieb [8] and Rogoff [9], we note that a birth opens up the possibility of several cultural arrangements to deal with the dependency of human babies. Thus, we feel confident that the idea of the biological mother being the best caregiver would be a social construct, while the dependency of babies is not. For this reason, approaches that consider motherhood to be a biological and abstract phenomenon, isolated from human relations and macrosocial contexts, do not seem accurate.

In conclusion, we recall that Badinter [11] emphasizes that the biomedical sciences played a role in the creation of beliefs that deny the different social possibilities of childcare, in addition to having reinforced certain ideas, such as natural motherhood, maternal instinct and "the good mother". According to this line of thought, some ideas, such as that pregnancy and childbirth would, by themselves, ensure a bond is established between mother and baby, disregarding the importance of psychological and social dimensions of human phenomena, seem to be misleading.

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## PROFESSIONAL GENOGRAM, A DISCOURSE ANALYSIS

Manojlovic Jelena<sup>1</sup>, Nagulic Desanka<sup>2</sup>, Calovska Nevana<sup>3</sup>

AST, Centar za edukaciju (SERBIA)

### Abstract

Family genogram, mapping ones' family tree', has become one of the essential tools in a tool box of most Systemic therapists giving them information about family roots, history and fabric. Professional genogram, mapping one's professional 'family tree', is a specific tool geared to discover important people, ideas and experiences that have influenced one's professional journey. It can give valuable insight into development, values, theoretical orientations and present positions of practising professionals as well as trainees. In addition, it can be used as a good basis for supervision, facilitating to clarify stances of supervisees and providing supervisors with sound basis for guiding supervisees' understanding and reflections. When doing professional genogram, we can do it on a variety of ways and include different levels of detail descriptions. Professional genograms could be repeated over time, providing additional information of one's professional landscape and development. Unlike family genogram, professional genograms can and usually will change over time, leaving space for incorporating new influences and developing new comprehensions. If used in groups, discussing professional genograms enhances group process, encourages reflections and provides outlook for future professional growth. It is a good forum for professional dialogue and a stage for grasping new and emerging themes and creating new understandings. Use of professional genogram permits exploration and comprehension how context shapes professional development and opens up new perspectives for evaluating different influences affecting psychotherapy process as well as process of psychotherapy training.

We have been using professional genogram as an important instrument in the process of training of future Systemic therapists. We use it as a vehicle to discover and understand where trainees are coming from and to assess their professional starting position, as well as a follow-up tool, a way of monitoring their progress and change in the course of training. Obtained material from professional genograms of trainees in return influences our work and further shapes training process. By applying discourse analysis of gathered material, we identify dominant themes, theoretical stances, values, learning styles and requirements and apply this information to adjust our teaching approach to better accommodate identified training needs, address gaps in skills and knowledge and to enhance trainees' preparation for challenges of the future practise.

Keywords: Professional genogram, training, discourse analysis

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From early days of development of family therapy, family therapists have been using genogram as a structured way to learn more about a family, their cultural roots, ancestors, composition, important events, losses, gains and relationships. Monica McGoldrick and Gerson (1) have introduced this tool that has become a very popular and one of the basic ways how we systematically discover important family stories. Surprisingly, the first idea to use 'professional genogram' as a way to discover our professional stories, is only described in 2000 by Magnuson in her short article "The professional genogram, enhancing professional identity and clarity" (2). Regardless of 17 years since first publishing, this concept remained relatively unknown to the majority of professionals. In her original proposal, Magnuson outlines that we should identify our professional 'ancestors' and relatives (2) by identifying authors and ideas that have influenced our professional stance, as well as professionals who have been our trainers, mentors and supervisors and whom we recognise as people who have influenced how we work, how we think about profession and how we see ourselves as professionals.

Recently Stratton and Vertere (3) have drawn attention to this technique stressing that it is a very good way to follow (and influence) someone's continued professional development. They invite professionals to locate themselves within 'the historical thread' (3. p.3.) of their professional lives. In their proposal, they are using analogy with family genogram 'as a way of making a similar type of examination of relational, theoretical and other factors that shape a professional's approach to their practice over time (3. p.3).' They are giving instruction for graphic positioning of three segments – list of the key mentors and supervisors in historical sequence; the key theoreticians and master practitioners that have shaped one's thinking and professional activity; theoretical influences and general perspectives (such as psychoanalysis, existentialism, humanism...) with possibility to expand and add new things over time.

In our practice, in addition to the originally proposed three segments, we have added description of crucial experiences that have in some way contributed to the choice of profession and one's subsequent decision to commence training in the systemic therapy. This additional information can be extremely valuable since it can point towards one's vulnerabilities and strengths, highlight a need for more support or need to putting more emphases on developing particular skills and knowledges.

We evaluate material obtained by professional genograms by applying discourse analysis. We use discourse analysis in its' broadest sense and conceptualise it as an interpretative framework, way to detect ideas, themes and ways of expression. In coding we transfer elaborate answers in pre-designed themes, using narrative data as illustrations (4.; 5.). This broad and somehow non-specific approach to discourse analysis is of the prime importance as we are dealing with very heterogeneous groups where too many different specific information could emerge, making it relatively pointless to separately code more specific and detailed descriptions and create too many coding categories.

We introduce professional genograms in different professional settings and for different groups, but mostly we use it in the training of systemic therapists. We introduce it at the beginning of the training and then as a yearly follow-up to the end of training. Usually in the group of trainees we have people from different professional backgrounds, different work settings, different work and life experiences and different theoretical orientations. We could have psychologists, psychiatrists, social workers, special educators or nurses and they can range from beginners to very experienced professionals.

Some of them could have a previous psychotherapy training or strong adherence to some theoretical model, while others could be very eclectic in their thinking and with no preference for a particular

school of thought. Use of professional genogram helps in discovering commonalities and adjusting training to reach a better fit with the whole group without disregarding individual needs.

Recent move in the approach to training with shifting away from focus on personality of therapists to emphases on core competences, has somehow blurred our direction, while examining professional genograms of trainees has given us an opportunity to look into both and help in integrating them. For example, personal stories that have influenced choice of profession and professional direction often stress importance of some people or some relationships, which in return could indicate significance of work with attachment; one's highlighting experience of personal therapy could steer us towards paying more attention to individual issues and personal vulnerabilities. On the other hand, stating that major influence for the choice of profession is due to reading psychoanalytic literature, could indicate a need to expand theoretical knowledge from other approaches and create connections with the systemic field. Statements like 'I was always interested in other people and wanted to help' or 'I have been told that I'm a born psychologist' would require further elaboration and unpacking to help trainees to give up possible grandiosity or role of the rescuer. One of our trainees has recently listed two important experiences – her mother's illness, hospital treatment and mother's subsequent death from cancer, which occurred when she was just on the beginning of high school, and her internship in psychiatric adolescent unit during her studies. In her further reflections, she connected illness of her mother with her decision to study psychology, while experience of seeing adolescents suffering as much as she had at the same age, has motivated her to want to help them. She emotionally recalled that she and her family didn't get any help when they needed it, and that she has heard that systemic therapy is the best way to do so. Further reflection led her to make connection and to say that no one helped her family to deal with the loss, so that now she understands the importance of helping adolescents and their families to resolve their problems and worries.

Introducing 'events and experiences' as another way of thinking about profession, usually helps in connecting professional with personal narratives and contributes to 'more profound understanding of power of narrative (that) rests in its capacity to re-relate the events of our lives in the context of new and different meaning.' (6. p.164). Individual professional genograms usually offer several different themes and may point towards possibility of having multiple influences in one's professional choice and development. All themes need to be explored and reflected upon either in individual meetings or in small groups. Group discussions tend to create new themes or new joint understandings and an increase in motivation and the group coherence.

For most of our work we use the following categories/themes:

### **Themes / Categories:**

- **Motivation –**
  - doing something with people,
  - helping others, being useful,
  - getting to know others,
  - curiosity about life,
  - learning about oneself,
  - learning about different points of view and perspectives,
  - searching for meaning (authenticity, connecting with others, doing something meaningful...)
  - being a psychologist/psychotherapist on TV/film...

- **Influences:**
  - o Fascination with books and theory (psychoanalysis, Yalom's books, existentialism, feminism...)
  - o Media (TV, film, fiction on psychological issues...)
  - o Influential people (teachers, colleagues, supervisors, friends, relatives, parents...)
- **Personal issues:**
  - o insecurity,
  - o anxiety, losses,
  - o attachment issues,
  - o previous experience of therapy,
  - o dissatisfaction with previous career...
- **Family issues:**
  - o family pressure,
  - o parental separation/divorce,
  - o family economic/social hardships,
  - o illness in the family,
  - o loss of parent or sibling,
  - o family cut-off...

Although we tend to maintain 4 major categories, sub categories can change depending on the particular group we are working with. Some categories, and particularly sub-categories, can overlap and it is occasionally difficult to decide the most appropriate fit for a specific description. In a majority of cases there is more than one theme/category that dominates one's professional development story. For example, trainee we have mentioned before, had personal and family issues although she has found the answer of what she needs to do by watching TV series portraying different psychologists in action. During the training, she needed a lot of support and reassurance and was asking for frequent supervision. In relation to theory, she needed to be given reading lists and a lot of guidance on how to make connections between theory and practise, personal and professional. Only with all this in place was she confident enough to start working with clients.

Another example can be found in the case of a few trainee therapists who had previous careers in some very different fields. In one way, they would stress their lack of preparation for psychotherapy in their previous life and career, while having high expectations that a career in psychotherapy will provide answers and meaning for their future. They tend to show impatience to start working with clients, as if wanting to catch up for the lost time, or, regardless stressing lack in preparation, would show too much (unfounded) confidence derived from their previous experiences.

Our work is in some ways an action research, it is work in progress, something changing and evolving all the time, but it gives us a guiding tool to keep us on the track to provide training that offers, at the same time, good basis for practise and that takes into account individual needs of trainees and practitioners.

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# REFLEXIVITY IN RESEARCH INTO RURAL WOMEN IN LATIN AMERICA FROM A FEMINIST DECOLONIAL PERSPECTIVE<sup>1</sup>

María Eugenia Ambort

*CIMECS-IdIHCS, CONICET - UNLP (ARGENTINA)<sup>2</sup>*

## Abstract

In this work we aim to shed light on the process of reflexivity involved in the construction of a qualitative research project designed to explore the labour and migratory trajectories of rural Bolivian women working in the horticultural belt of Gran La Plata, Buenos Aires, Argentina. Specifically, we pose questions regarding the way in which they represent their self-perception as women, peasants and Bolivian migrants in the narration of their life histories, and how this changes following their migratory experience and participation in a feminist organization.

We begin by addressing the coloniality of power, situated knowledge and feminist epistemology, given that social relations in Latin America are strongly influenced by colonial considerations, with race and gender acting as determining factors in the construction of subjectivity. This is followed by an overview of the socio-productive context of horticulture in La Plata, characterized by a strong tradition of migrant labour currently hegemonized by the Bolivian community. The third section problematizes the precarious and vulnerable living and working conditions of the Bolivian community in horticulture, highlighting the particular situation of women, and the various forms of violence embedded in their bodies and their lives, traversed by their experiences of gender, race and class. Finally, we carry out an exercise of reflexivity regarding the way that led us to pose these questions on race and gender, the context that opened up channels of communication and trust with these peasant women, and how the perspective of the coloniality of power allows us to generate locally ingrained and socially committed research processes.

Keywords: Reflexivity, Decolonial perspective, Rural women.

## 1 INTRODUCTION

This paper aims to explore the process of reflexivity involved in the construction of a qualitative research project that aims to trace the labour and migratory trajectories of Bolivian rural women living and working in the horticultural belt of Gran La Plata, Buenos Aires, Argentina. Specifically, we pose questions regarding the way in which they represent their self-perception as women, peasants and Bolivian migrants in the narration of their life histories, and how this changes following their migratory

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<sup>2</sup> Centro Interdisciplinario de Metodología de las Ciencias Sociales (Interdisciplinary Centre for Social Science Methodologies) – Instituto de Investigación en Humanidades y Ciencias Sociales (Humanities and Social Sciences Research Institute), Universidad Nacional de La Plata (La Plata National University) – Concejo Nacional de Investigaciones Científicas y Técnicas (National Council for Scientific and Technical Research).

experience and participation in a feminist organization. Our intention is to contribute to raising the visibility of the role played by women in family production and comprehend their productive and reproductive roles at home.

We begin with a theoretical presentation on the perspective of the coloniality of power and feminist epistemology, based on the understanding that social relations in Latin America are heavily permeated by colonial considerations, with race and gender acting as decisive factors in the construction of subjectivity.

This is followed by an insight into the socio-productive context of horticulture in La Plata, in which the trajectories of these women are inserted. This productive belt is characterized by a strong tradition of migrant labour, hegemonized today by the Bolivian community.

The third section problematizes the precarious and vulnerable living and working conditions of the Bolivian community employed in horticulture. It highlights the specific situation of women, and the various forms of violence embedded in their bodies and their lives, traversed by their gender, race and class life-experiences. We also pose several questions related to how gender relations and women role may have changed with migration and with associative processes.

The final section offers an exercise of reflexivity about the way that led us to pose these questions, the context that helped to establish communication and trust bonds with these women, and how the perspective of the coloniality of power supports us to generate locally situated and socially engaged research processes.

The paper ends with a series of final considerations about the contributions we believe the project could make to scientific knowledge in this subject.

## 2 COLONIALITY OF POWER AND FEMINIST EPISTEMOLOGY

Since the late twentieth century a sector of the Latin American academy has begun to rethink the framework in which the development of peripheral capitalism is analyzed. In contrast to culturalist postcolonial points of view<sup>1</sup>, this perspective, known as the "decolonial turn" – and whose leading exponents are, among others, Anibal Quijano, Walter Dignolo, Enrique Dussel and Catherine Walsh – posited that colonialism in the South did not end with the independent processes and the formation of nation-states. These authors argue that we are witnessing a global coloniality in which relations of domination between centre and periphery persist, following a process of transformation. Consequently, they refer to *modernity/coloniality project* as an articulated system of power which has operated until the present day, in which colonial invasion and its consequences are constitutive of the processes of modernization and Eurocentric domination that have characterized capitalism over the last 500 years [1].

One of the central tenets of this perspective lies in the assumption of the invention of race as a biological justification for modern/colonial domination [2]. Race as an instrument of hierarchical

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<sup>1</sup> Postcolonial critiques of colonialism emerge mainly from the independence experiences of former colonies such as India or Middle East countries after the Second World War. Its main exponents are Anglo-Saxons from humanistic fields such as literature, history and philosophy (key figures in this sense include Spivak, Said, Fanon or Dignolo). Although the decolonial perspective shares some of the main postulates with the postcolonialists (criticism of European evolutionist ideologies and the dichotomous lectures of society), they differ in the sense that with the end of colonial administrations and the formation of nation-states in the area, we now live in a decolonized and postcolonial world. Broadly speaking, "While the critique of postcolonial studies focuses on colonial discourse, the world-system approach points to the endless and incessant accumulation of capital on a global scale as 'ultimately' determining. And although postcolonial critiques emphasize the cultural agency of the subjects, the world-system approach emphasizes economic structures" [1, 15] [my translation].



division of humanity was the cornerstone of exploitation as labour under inhumane conditions of colonized peoples after the conquest of America. It is rooted in the notion that European white men are biologically and culturally superior from the “others” – namely non-Europeans and non-whites (Blacks, Indians, mestizos, etc.). In this sense, racial classification sets a new pattern of global power, which articulates "all historical forms of labour control, its resources and products, around capital and world market" [2, 202] [my translation].

Capitalism and racism are associated and mutually reinforced in this system, creating a racial labour division which expands worldwide, creating new historical identities. This status quo is maintained through the construction of capitalist hegemony and the universal imposition of Eurocentric rationality. This process involves the creation of a new subjectivity, a new space / time in which America is established as otherness, and European civilization as the arrival point of the history of human civilization. Within this evolutionary perspective, anything that is different from the Western European development is considered primitive, backward and therefore inferior. This Eurocentric thought universalizes the hegemonic institutions of social existence (such as the nation-state, the bourgeois family, business and scientific rationality), whilst at the same time installing a binary vision of reality associated with colonial domination.

## **2.1 Rethinking gender and coloniality from feminist epistemologies**

The decolonial perspective has been fed by multiple contributions from feminist critics<sup>1</sup>, pointing to the need to incorporate gender as a constitutive dimension of colonial domination and the construction of race as a vector for the hierarchical division of humanity.

In addition, feminists have produced an epistemology, a form of analysing and understanding social reality, in which traditional rational scientism does not represent a form of restraint. The commitment to developing more egalitarian relationships is also reflected in the way we view the world and construct knowledge. It is in this sense that Haraway [4] advocates the privilege of partial perspective, building located knowledge where the scientist is not external or omniscient, but engages and connects with the people taking part in the research. For Segato [5], all imposition of modern/colonial domination up until the present day is intersected by patriarchy as a means of imposing male superiority on society, preventing women from participating in decision-making processes and politics. Politics based on a bureaucratic state administration is extremely masculine-centred (and masculinising) to the extent that while feminist struggles are advancing in the conquest of rights for equality, modern patriarchy takes the form of a veritable "war against women" [6]. This is expressed in high rates of femicides, the feminization of poverty, ablations and other abhorrent crimes against human rights that occur in twenty-first century society. Alternatives will emerge as a result of drawing attention to inequalities that have been naturalized by binary thinking, denaturing them and challenging men and women to work towards the construction of a more plural world. "(...) so living in a decolonial manner is an attempt to breach a territory totalized by the binary scheme, which is arguably the most efficient instrument of power" [5, 70] [my translation]. There is a need to include other relationships, boost community ties, and repoliticize domestic spaces in order to create ways of exercising power in which there is room for plurality.

It is from this feminist and located perspective that we begin our study, trying to understand through a longitudinal point of view how “being a woman” at home and at work change over time. This question

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<sup>1</sup> Gender studies in Latin America are gaining strength contributing to the construction of the decolonial perspective, in which gender is thought to intersect with other categories, such as culture, ethnicity, class, race or sexual orientation. On the other hand, and in contrast to hegemonic western feminism, these studies contemplate both the subordination of women to men, as well as hierarchies among women depending on their social origins and life courses. Key authors in this sense include Silvia Hirsch (Argentina), Rita Segato (Brazil), Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui (Bolivia), Ochy Curiel (Dominican Republic), Marisol de la Cadena and Maruja Barrig (Peru), Sonia Montesino (Chile), Rosalva Aída Hernández Castillo and Marcela Lagarde (Mexico) [3, 136].

is particularly significant in a context such as family-based agriculture, where both spheres are deeply embedded.

### 3 THE LANDSCAPE OF HORTICULTURE IN LA PLATA, ARGENTINA

Argentina is located in the far south of South America (Fig. 1), characterised by myriad climates and landscapes. Historically, it is known particularly for its temperate regions (*pampas*) which are particularly suited for the production of food (mainly cereals).



Fig 2.: Metropolitan area Buenos Aires



Fig. 1: Argentina in South America. Source: Google maps image.

More than a third of its total population is located in the urban conglomerate that surrounds the capital city: the Metropolitan Area of Buenos Aires (AMBA) (Fig. 2). Our study area, the horticultural belt of La Plata city (Fig. 3), is located to the south of the AMBA. It is currently one of the most competitive and dynamic vegetable production regions in the country, as it supplies fresh food not only to this major agglomeration near Buenos Aires, but also to other urban centres nationwide.



Figs. 2 and 3: AMBA in Buenos Aires province, and La Plata's horticultural belt in AMBA. Author's own based on Google maps images.

It is one of the densest horticultural areas in the country, both in terms of the number of farms and labour intensity. Although there are no official data (the last census was conducted in 2005), field technicians estimate that the productive area covers some 5,000 ha in the peri-urban region surrounding La Plata city<sup>1</sup>. Almost

<sup>1</sup> The peri-urban area is a border between what is properly urban and what is not. It is the object of major disputes regarding land use, due to conflicts of interests in terms of industrial, recreational, agricultural, logistics and residential activities. These boundaries, towards which large sprawling cities are spreading with little or no planning, thereby lacking any provision for basic services or restrictions in terms of possible land uses, have formed an area in which real estate and financial speculation have free rein [7].

one third of this area is taken up by greenhouses, with more than 4,000 active enterprises, employing some 10,000 people [8] [9]

Traditionally, the horticultural belt that surrounds the city has been occupied by farming families of foreign origin, who settled in the urban periphery to grow vegetables for local supply. The first were of European origin (Italians, Spaniards, Portuguese), who arrived in the region with early twentieth century migratory flows [10]. Since the 1970s, there has been a replacement process across the country, whereby Bolivian families are positioning themselves at the centre of the horticultural industry [11] (Fig. 4). This "Bolivianization of horticulture" [12] has formed and reproduced an ethnic segmentation of the labour market in Argentina [13], in which lower-paid, more hard-working and more precarious jobs are hegemonized by workers from the north of Argentina and mainly from bordering countries (such as Bolivia, Paraguay or Peru) where the majority of the population descend from indigenous communities such as the Incas or the Guarani.



Fig. 4: A Bolivian farmer in La Plata's horticultural belt. Source: Author's own (November, 2015)

Bolivian families' insertion in Argentinean horticulture has been analyzed by Benencia [14] [15] based on the metaphor of the "Bolivian ladder". The author describes the process of social mobility in horticulture by replicating the "farmer" model of the United States, explained by Lynn Smith [16] as an *agricultural ladder*. Bolivian peasants enter this activity as labourers, positioned on the rung of employees for other producers (initially, Italian or Spanish employers, subsequently other Bolivians), temporarily and interspersing seasons in Argentina with the return to Bolivia, until they finally settle down in the country. They manage to ascend economically, accumulating certain capital and know-how in order to begin to produce on their own, first as joint ventures with others in tenancy, and finally producing autonomously through leasing or buying land and even entering wholesale and retail marketing chains (Fig. 5).

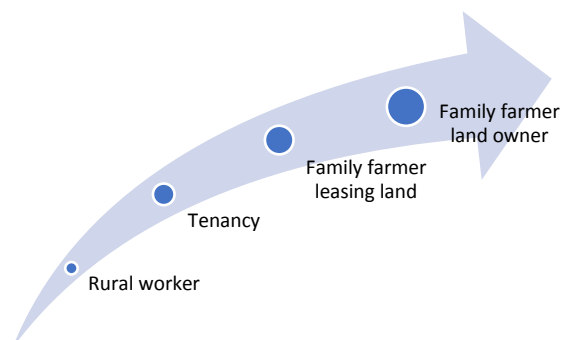


Fig. 5: The Bolivian ladder. Source: Author's own based on Benencia [14] originally in Ambort [17, 47]

This process, albeit with different nuances, is replicated in most of Argentina's horticultural areas, where a process of social mobility can indeed be observed. The Bolivian families manage to accumulate capital and gain a sufficient degree of autonomy in order to engage in production and settle down in the rural areas. However, this social mobility does not necessarily imply any substantial improvements to living and working conditions. Indeed, the entire productive and commercial chain of horticulture is characterised by poor working conditions that include long hours, remuneration below production costs or the minimum wage and practically no access to established labour rights (pension contributions, social benefits, paid leave, equal rights for men and women, trade union representation, etc).

#### 4 THE VULNERABILITY OF THE BOLIVIAN COMMUNITY IN HORTICULTURE, AND OF WOMEN IN PARTICULAR

The vulnerable situation in which Bolivian families find themselves stems from a series of intrinsic circumstances and structural factors. The former include their status as migrants, material poverty (expressed, for example, in their spending power or housing conditions) and families' low cultural capital (associated with illiteracy or lack of familiarity with local institutions). The structural factors are related to the various actors involved in the productive chain, who exert greater power than the peasants who are therefore subordinate to them (Fig. 6). They include firstly **the real estate market**, since land leases are both costly and short-term, making permanent settlement almost impossible; secondly **agro-inputs and the financial market**, given that intensive cultivation requires multiple external elements, acquired by taking out private loans at high rates of interest; and thirdly even the **vegetable market itself**, because as almost all production is perishable, the farmers are price takers and do not have control over the sale of their own produce when dealing with intermediaries [17].

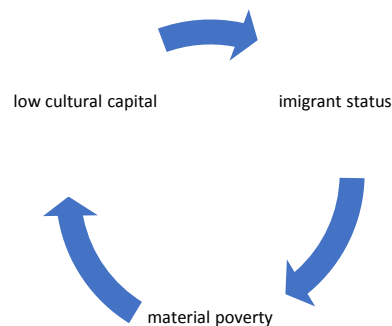


Fig. 6: Vulnerability of Bolivian families in the horticultural chain. Source: Author's own, originally in Ambort [17, 60]

##### 4.1 The vulnerability of being a woman

In this framework, influenced by the colonial/modern structures discussed in section one (which make up the ethnic segmentation of the labour market whereby manual labour –and particularly food production– are materially and symbolically devalued) rural women are far more vulnerable than man.



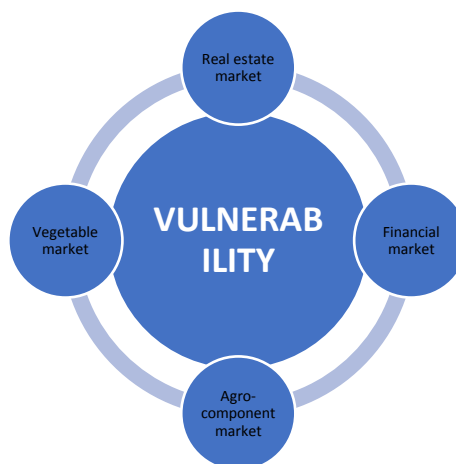
This is due firstly to the fact that their contribution to productive labour (carrying out all the tasks involved in tillage and cultivation with men) (Fig. 7) is invisible; an imaginary is constructed whereby "the peasants" (men) do the most important work and generate the financial income for the household.

Fig. 7: Heavy work done by women. Source: Author's own (August, 2017)



Men's control of the productive (public) sphere in the family economy determines that they hold control over the money (fruit of the collective work of the entire family, including the children), causing the women to be financially dependent, with practically no access to cash and forced to ask their husbands for permission whenever they want to spend some money. This is

compounded by their dual working day, since in addition to working on the farm they are responsible for all household and caring tasks (cooking, washing, attending the children, etc). The naturalization of the mother and wife role within the family has made it normal (or even "natural", biologically speaking) for all these reproductive tasks to be performed by women, within their role as carers for their husbands and children.



The material poverty that peasant families experience (both in Bolivia and Argentina) means that in most cases young people start working at an early age. As a result, their trajectory in the education system is cut short, which in turn leads to many couples forming new families at a very young age, with women becoming mothers during adolescence. This early motherhood, in which women quickly move from being girls to "adults" (or mothers and wives), limits their personal development and the possibility of undergoing different experiences in terms of forging friendships, sexuality, creativity and the definition of their own interests that shape their character and personality. Being a wife and mother in a context of poverty and precariousness –in which families try to save as much as possible (Figs. 8 and 9)– confers a series of tasks and responsibilities on women that confines them to the domestic (private) sphere. As a result, moments of leisure or personal care, and even opportunities to relate and share experiences with others, are limited.



Figs. 10 and 11: Precariousness and poverty in living conditions in La Plata's horticultural belt. Source: Author's own (May, 2017). The proximity of the productive (greenhouse in the background, left) and domestic spheres (wooden box on the right, right) is clear. Wood is used for cooking, without utensils, and work items (vegetable boxes) are used as tables and chairs.

As a result of this quasi-biological association of women with the domestic-private-reproductive sphere, the care work provided by women receives little or no recognition or value from their male partners. Indeed, it is assumed (even by the women themselves) that this is a natural female function. However, women's assimilation of their female functions generates an appropriation by men of the sexuality of "their" women, which translates into feelings of possession, harassment through jealousy, control and restriction of their social lives, and even reactions that transcend psychological, economic or emotional manipulation, venturing into the realms of physical and sexual violence. The responsibility of being a mother, low self-esteem, guilt, fear of how others will react and "what people will say", economic dependence and lack of material options for separation or divorce, the absence of support networks and the ineffectiveness of state assistance in the event of rare reported cases of violence all contribute to women's scepticism regarding the possibility of transforming their lives in any way. As a result, they learn to live with these situations of oppression throughout their lives, devising strategies to mitigate the violence they are exposed to.

In this sense, the questions posed in our research from a biographical perspective include the following: In what way does migration alter gender relations within the family? What are the differences and similarities for women and their roles as wives and mothers in Bolivia and in Argentina? Furthermore, is it possible for women to renegotiate roles within the family when they begin to consider the perspective of gender? How do they go about this?

## 5 REFLEXIVITY IN THE RESEARCH PROCESS: THE PRELUDE TO A PARTIAL PERSPECTIVE

This final section includes an exercise in reflexivity regarding how these questions arose; the context that allowed for communicative and trust bonds with rural women to be forged; and how the decolonial perspective and feminist epistemology enable us to generate situated and socially engaged research processes.

### 5.1 Rethinking research in the light of the bonds forged during the fieldwork

Reflexivity is a practice with multiple meanings and considerations for the social sciences. Following Bourdieu [18] [19], we consider that it is an individual and collective process of objectification of the subjects involved in a research process. From this perspective, the explanation of the way in which the research is conducted, the decisions made at each stage, the power relations involved and each of the contexts that make up that particular process, are crucial for the construction of objectivity in social sciences.

It is interesting to note that the definition of the theoretical and methodological "starting point" of research has been rather a "point of arrival" after a long process of involvement in the territory and with the social actors. The definition of the object of study and the way to approach the research issue stem from reflection and exchange with rural women regarding the problems that most affect them and the construction of bonds of trust with them. It is important to highlight that our first research objective was focused on the processes of social mobility of Bolivian horticultural families as a whole, from a qualitative and biographical perspective. However, our contact with the women and the insight obtained into the particular way in which gender relations develop within their families and at work led us to narrow and refine the focus of our study, centring attention on women's trajectories.

The bonds with the peasants were forged within the framework of a social organization we are involved in and where we share the collective project of transforming the reality in which we live. This experience "affects us" [20]—in the sense of transforming us subjectively and in our relationships with others. Although this occurs in different ways, there is a clear focus on issues such as gender inequality, violence, discrimination and xenophobia as relevant and constitutive themes of their trajectories (Figs. 10 and 11).



Figs 10 and 11: Rural women preparing materials for a protest activity against violence towards women. Source: Author's own (June, 2017). Left: "We are peasant women"; Right: "Let's not self-discriminate or minimize ourselves. We are women. We want to stay alive".

## 5.2 The context: the organization and the "Women's Rounds"

Within the social organization we are involved in, whose aims are to defend the rights of excluded / informal workers in the countryside and the city, women have created their own spaces where they can meet, take time out for themselves, get to know one another and simply do things they enjoy, as well as reflecting on their life experiences as women from a gender perspective. These "Women's Rounds" were initially proposed by the "militants" (who have a longer trajectory of participation in women's organizations and also access to university education tools). The intention was to spotlight feminist-based discourse and gender equality for rural women.

Their initial reaction to the proposal was one of doubt. *What's a meeting "only for women" for? Will my husband give me permission to go? What shall I do with the children in the meantime?* We saw that calling a meeting only for women implied not only women's willingness to participate, but also the need to consider and guarantee a series of logistical issues to prevent the space from interfering with their role as mothers and wives. Saturday afternoons is the only free day of the week in the horticulturist's routine, when men generally play football, meet friends and drink beer, while women take care of their children and tackle household chores. To attend the Rounds, they must carry out these tasks at another time, and be sure that they can take the children to the meeting. Thus, the Rounds usually include the preparation of a snack and some games to entertain the children.

Over time, the Rounds, which take place on weekends every fortnight, became a space of trust in which the women could confide their thoughts and feelings, as well as play, dance, laugh and make friends,



building up relationships. The meeting is organised in the style of a workshop, proposed by the "militants", with the aim of addressing specific gender issues, followed by a recreational activity agreed on by the group (dancing, playing board games, playing soccer, craftwork, cooking, etc.). The workshop themes include the following: Autobiography; Sex and gender; Childhood and education; Sexuality; Sexual and reproductive education; Desire; Migration and Discrimination; Gender and work; Gender and politics (Fig. 12).



Fig. 12: A Women's Round. Presentation dynamics "weaving a network". Source: Author's own (May, 2017)

Through these activities, conducted in a context of active listening, trust and respect, a number of situations that had previously remained deeply buried began to emerge. These included not only the women's wishes and longings, sense of humour, creativity and complicity, but also tensions related to domestic violence: abuse, harassment, abandonment, lack of appreciation, jealousy, control, manipulation and dependence. Simply naming these experiences confers another perspective to the women's experiences: they can no longer remain hidden, constituting the first possible phase in the transition towards change. On the other hand, the construction of bonds of trust between women involves the creation of a network of support and containment, and an initial preventive measure against violence.

### 5.3 The decolonial and feminist perspective: towards the domestication of politics

In her book *La guerra contra las mujeres* ("The war against women") Rita Segato argues that we can no longer think of history as a project to be executed from the State. Indeed, this approach has historically failed in its attempts to construct emancipatory projects. She therefore proposes "reweaving community from its existing fragments" [6, 27]. In other words, recovering a politics that is not part of modern bureaucracy and rationalism, but which can be found "in the domestic reason, with its own technologies of sociability and management" [6, 27] [my translations]. Close and binding management, based on an ongoing obligation of reciprocity, anchored in the historical memory of the pre-colonial approach to politics.

In this experience of creating a decolonized and popular feminism, based on women's self-recognition and the construction of networks of love of the self and others, we have identified great political potential in the negotiation of new roles within the peasant family and their organisation. This situated knowledge seeks to understand the trajectories of these poor, migrant, rural working women within the historically and contextually situated communicative situation in which they occur.

The challenge lies in using the tools of "ethnographic listening" to be able to generate instances of situated knowledge and "anthropology on demand" [5, 70] that help us understand the current ways



in which patriarchy, coloniality and racism intertwine, and also how resistance to them is articulated at various levels.

## 6 FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

This paper attempts to account for the processes of reflexivity involved in a research project with rural women in horticulture in Argentina, highlighting how involvement, trust relationships and the "partial perspective" [4] enable us to construct situated and socially committed knowledge. The research is intended to shed light on the transformation of women's productive and reproductive roles during the course of their lives, principally in the light of their migration from Bolivia and their participation in a feminist organization.

Historically, rural women and their work have remained invisible to their own families, as well as to scientific research into horticulture in Argentina. We therefore consider that our research contributes to understanding how gender relations are articulated in rural contexts, and also highlights and enhances the value of women's position. Furthermore, within the framework of a socio-community and feminist project, our research contributes to the reflexivity of rural women as workers, transforming their points of view, social imaginaries and even their standing in the world.

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## THROUGH THE SIGHT OF SYMBOLIC ART: THE IMAGINAL RESEARCH IN EDUCATIONAL SCIENCES

Marina Barioglio<sup>1</sup>, Paolo Mottana<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>University of Milano Bicocca (ITALY)

<sup>2</sup>University of Milano Bicocca (ITALY)

### Abstract

Most diffused research attitudes in the field of education are marked by approaches, ideas, representations, that “scientific disciplines” use to analyse main themes and problems of Pedagogy. This certainly contributes to grant Pedagogy a scientific status and provides researchers and educators with clear interpretation patterns and useful educational tools, but often it limits their sensibility, forcing them to assume a rationalistic, reductive and judging attitude towards the complex educative phenomena they face. To compensate for this fashion this paper propose an “imaginal research” that is an artistic and poetical approach aiming to recognise and include imagination among comprehension procedures of Educational Sciences. Following several thinkers who promoted the revival of imaginative thought and called for “poetic reason” the imaginal approach seeks to extend its knowledge basis in a similar way to the imaginative and artistic disciplines. It is a highly reflective perspective which explores educational culture and its theoretical constructs, problems, objects and practices through the medium of collections of artistic images; Specifically, we look to the world of art to identify works with a particularly rich symbolic content; then, following a conservative respectful and nomadic hermeneutic approach in line with the procedures of symbolic-imaginary enquiry, the symbolic works of art are encountered, not so much to “illuminate” them but to understand them and to participate in the symbolic mythical tissue of them. Contemplation of these images, which are particularly rich in meaning, also promotes deeper knowledge of the phenomena under study, it reveals the various sedimentations of sense underlying them and ultimately facilitates a deeper, more detailed and shared understanding of them. This approach does not claim to uncover a single definitive meaning in experience and will not have a rapacious and greedy grip on the world but, on the contrary, turns to it, in a bewildered position, in a continuous research always open to possible interpretations and meanings. In this sense imaginal research approach has also a deep pedagogical aim that is to promote a more sensitive attitude towards symbolic dimension of the world and to enhance participants’ sense of belonging to an “animated” reality which they may consequently approach with renewed “fondness” and sense of responsibility.

Keywords: research; imagination, art

### THE IMAGINAL RESEARCH IN EDUCATIONAL SCIENCES

The most diffused research attitudes in the field of education are nowadays marked by approaches, ideas, representations and interpretations that “scientific disciplines” (especially Psychology, Sociology and Neurosciences) use to analyse main themes, aspects and problems of Pedagogy. This certainly contributes to grant Pedagogy a scientific status and provides researchers, teachers and educators with clear interpretation patterns and useful educational tools, but often it limits their sensibility, forcing them to assume a rationalistic, conceptual, reductive and judging attitude towards the complex educative phenomena they have to understand and to face every day.

To compensate for this fashion this paper propose an “imaginal research” (Mottana 2002; 2004; 2010, Barioaglio 2010; 2014) that is an artistic and poetical approach aiming to recognise and include imagination among knowing and comprehension procedures of Educational Sciences. Following several thinkers (such as Gilbert Durand, Carl Jung, James Hillman, Henry Corbin, Gaston Bachelard, Jean Jacques Wunenburger, Maria Zambrano) who, in the course of the last century promoted the revival of imaginative thought and called for “poetic reason” and “contradictory rationality”, the imaginal approach seeks to extend its knowledge basis in a similar way to the imaginative and artistic disciplines. Indeed, starting with the ancient tradition of symbolic imagination of the hermetic philosophy, the studies of these authors restored and supported the power of “creative”, “active” or “archetypal” imagination as a more affective and participative way of building knowledge and they often underlined that it is still alive in arts. Starting with this idea, imaginal research aims to learn from arts. It is a highly reflective perspective which explores educational culture and its theoretical constructs, problems, objects and practices, not in terms of theories and disciplinary categories (be they critical, social, historical or psychological) or the genealogy of how they have been determined and interpreted over time, but through the medium of collections of artistic images. Specifically, we look to the world of arts (cinema, poetry, literature, music, dance, picture and plastic arts) to identify works with a particularly rich symbolic content. Obviously, in the complex scenario of our so called “civilization of images” the notion of “symbolic content” (or coming from the “imaginal world”) is very important and it lead us to distinguish images really able to generate knowledge from something else. As Wunenburger underlines, the “imaginal” is an important region of what we usually call “imaginary”. A particular zone in the great field of all imaginative forms made of visions, dreams, mental and artistic images whose main character is given by its specific collocation between rational intellect and sensible perception. It is an intermediate world in which we meet imaginative forms coming from the passive cognition of a subject who does not create them but “finds” and fixes them without recognising completely their origin and destination. That is, in other words, what we can call a “vision”, or a visionary apparition, a vision of objects, figures, landscapes endowed with a mythical and symbolic echo. Images in which we can see and perceive a sensible content of the common experience but charged by a symbolic “aura”. In other words those “objects” release a constellation of analogical correspondences that appears as a deeper rooting. They are shapes and figures standing on the edge, on the border or better at the threshold, situated between visibility and invisibility, between a given phenomenal appearance that, for the particular way of their apparition (i.e a mountain in which we can observe, and perceive, the dissolution and the fluctuation of its matter such as in Cezanne’s *Saint Victoire*) seem to lay in an order of reality different from the usual one. As a matter of facts it refers to a series of different meanings belonging to the relative invariant repertoire of the collective imagination (myths, archetypes, symbols and so on). When artistic works preserve, in their presentation, such an openness on the symbolic order they are certainly forms of imaginal world. Be it in a poem, in a picture, in a music or in a movie the imaginal images is emigmatic and powerful. Its deep roots, its theme coming from somewhere else, coming from the past, from the myth realm, re-presents through the forms of the present, manifests itself in an unexpected and surprising intertwining that introduces us to the deep meaning of experience. In it each visible trace situates on an invisible background that offers itself in an allusive, slanting and enigmatic way. From this point of view the imaginal is not static, is not aesthetic, is not imprisoned in an ideal concept of beauty and forms as some critics assert. The imaginal is dynamic, its visionary receptiveness is open on all the artistic scenario, without any prejudice, but only according to an orientation. It asks the art works the ability to symbolise, to resonate a network of correspondence, it stimulates in artistic creation a moving and preferably trasgressive energy to produce images that can be vehicles of revelation, of knowledge and gratitude of the inwardness of the world. That *Weltinnerraum* that Rainer Maria Rilke invited us to safeguard and that, in some way, also did Marcel Proust, Martin Heidegger and Carl Gustav Jung. And at this point of our discourse, the term “sym-bolising”, a beloved word by Henry Corbin, indicates that the task of an imaginal art, as well as the imaginal operativity of who wants to enjoy it in a transformative (ad educative) way, is to retune our deaf and rootless sensibility to the

symbolising activity of the whole world. Because in the hermetic vision, which the imaginal refers to, everything symbolises with everything else even if not necessarily drained or pacified, rather very often shattered, wounded and discordant, but anyway in an living and interconnected organism. The imaginal work allows each particular thing of the world to be acknowledged in its symbolising *virtus*, by others, thus permitting us to interiorise our symbolic living in the world. Through the “vision” offered by the imaginal art our dwelling the world can re-discover itself as participative and inextricably connected with any other, even infinitesimal, element of a universe that, from the very origin, share the same fate. And it is just against this universal symbolisation that the separating and dominant rationality of Western culture fights and has been fighting for the last centuries, preventing us from perceiving the deep resonance interconnecting all the elements and our specific role of receivers and transmitters of such an intimate psycho-material irreducible sympathy. As an expression of a symbolic knowledge (and research attitude) not involved in Western rationality, the imaginal remind us, and at the same time prescribes, the way of our dwelling, our role of participants with some privileges (and some responsibilities) of the integrity of a huge living organism. To cultivate the imaginal sensibility researching and finding imaginal art works, through the exercise of a contemplative attitude towards them, through an attitude able to remind us our place in life and world, appears a pressing and unavoidable educative task. In a certain way what is imaginal is always “outdated?” in the sense of Friederich Nietzsche’s assertion, but always topic, always current in our time just because of its paradoxical extraneousness. It is a spring that emerges from many sinking points, it is the synthesis of silent underground torments, it is the confluence of floats and undertows. Otherwise how could we define, from a similar point of view, Joseph Beuys’, Anselm Kiefer’s, Hermann Nitsch’s art works, without a reference frame that witnesses the persistence of such a transformative, effective “outdatedness”? To say nothing of music, drama, dance in which entire geological ages of creation seem sometimes to gather in unpredictable and glowing works like Arthur Schnittke, Meredith Monk, Pina Bausch or Giacinto Scelsi ones. A research attitude matched to lend hear and attend the imaginal, is an office to the world, is a way to repay the world with the feminine, cyclic, obscure, ambiguous living forms that the calculating rationality has repudiated (Durand, 1993). Elements of a rejected imaginary but fertile, fruitful and indispensable for the comprehension of vulnerability and inextricability of a miraculously united living body. From this point of view educate to an imaginal means most of all to create occasions to explore symbolic works in which the very voice of the works can be heard, in which the works can speak, in their own language and according to their particular attitude, without any prejudice, any classification, any subjective and anthropocentric projection. It means to stop, to stay in the vision and in the interpretation of the symbolic recalls that their outlines radiate. The interpretation of such images is very difficult, nomadic and thorny. As it lays before any categorisation the image is a troublesome subject to any effort of conceptual grasp, and even to any hermeneutic attempt engaged in testing the genealogy of the sign or of the symbol. But, to tell the truth, since when the image has become an “aesthetic object”, as Hegel told us in a definite way in his *Estetica*, since when it has lost its integrity of vital experience, since when it has become the object of a separate discipline, the image seems to have been buried under a charming, but also oppressing, flood of words. The imaginal research approach, proposes to come close to the art work, at least at the beginning, without any screen, filter or particular aesthetic category in order to allow the observer (or the listener) to explore the texture of the image the most directly as possible, in its radical nakedness. The naked image, the image as much as possible cleaned out by the deposit of supposing expert knowledge is what we, first of all, need to experience. In these conditions the imaginal world manifests as a living one. A world provided by an inner animation of its own, a face, a feature able to invest the observer of all its material meanings. When we approach the work imprisoning immediately it in a cage made of biographical, formal, contextual, critical information we have to know that what we are going to see will inevitably be compromised, muffled, reduced, shaped into the coordinates of a modest preliminary process. To restore the meaning power of image means, first of all, that the experience of the image is at the beginning without any presence of a specific knowledge. It has to be a silent and total experience. Something like a real contemplation. At the same time it is better to reset the contribute of the specific artistic knowledge too. Just to make an example, to know technique

and technology of cinema or the language of a music score in the imaginal experience surely leads to a lignification of the access into the visual or sounding matter. Of course it is possible that a certain musical shape has had, during a certain period, a particular meaning (“madness” or particular “ilits”), but for the imaginal exploration of the sounding universe of a composition, are we so sure we need to recognise this form or shape? At least at the beginning we can consider that it is unnecessary or even harmful and damaging because it prevents us from a direct and intense vision. What we are trying to say is that we need to dwell, to live and experience directly the image, to recognise it as it offers in its material aspects perceivable by our senses and then to describe it in a plain or even metaphoric language. Renouncing any pre-constituted formula, the description is obliged to find exacter, more adequate words, words phonologically more stickier to its matter, instead of taking refuge in quotations. In this sense, imaginal hermeneutics invites us to restore a primigenial relationship with the art work, a contact before any introduction and any specific cultural technical projection. Then we need to stay, we need to have a long and “extroverted” dwelling into the work in order to perceive and reflect, receive its feature its geography and its specific geology. To dwell the work listening and listening to its voice, looking and looking at it in order to allow it to show itself. We need to walk in it with the interest and passion we could have for an unknown, mysterious and charming place, looking for what is less visible, for what is fleeting, for the connections of its parts, for the details, for shapes and figures. This is the imaginal hermeneutic experience at its first step. But it is the most important one: we have to allow the image to communicate directly without any obstacle its figurative and sensitive richness. We need to “return to images?”, just to resound the slogan of Phenomenology, we need to learn to see again using a patient and persistent sight as much as possible similar to the contemplative sight of the artist who made the work restoring the surprising symbolic texture of all the objects he devoted to. Nevertheless the imaginal interpretation is not only an appreciation and description activity or a participation to a particular world. We have to pick and comprehend the symbolic and analogical allusions that a particular matter expresses. Not to come to a definitive explanation but just to try to identify some possible meanings, to name those resonances, the reticular correspondences between the explored matter and the world of shapes, symbols, archetypes the work refers to. When the work is really symbolic this job inevitably leads to feel the constitutive ambivalence and contradiction of meanings, the multiplication and dissemination of any meaning “trace”. Such a loss in the work, that slowly will lead to a certain number of possible way of interpretation, will produce an inevitably moving, plural, ambiguous knowledge. Each element in the image will certainly reconnected with all the others but according to iridescent perspectives always unsettled in a definitive way. So this research route allows us to draw an open knowledge, matched to the multiplicity and the ambiguity, that contradictory, amphibole, analogical knowledge about which, symptomatically with one voice, some inspirers of imaginal thought talk about: from Gilbert Durand (1993) to James Hillman (1998), to Jean-Jacques Wunenburger (2002). A kind of *acknowledge* that, we think, can be a good medicine against the raging of a calculating and objectifying rationality so widespread, and with so dramatic effects, in our contemporary civilisation. From this point we can start to promote an education through images, an education to acknowledge the world as a united organism, animated and provided of its own, undeniable, subjectivity. In this sense imaginal research approach has also a deep pedagogical aim that is to promote a more sensitive attitude towards symbolic dimension of the world and to enhance participants’ sense of belonging to an “animated” reality which they may consequently approach with renewed “fondness” and sense of responsibility.

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# DISPLACEMENTS AND MOVEMENTS IN A RESEARCH PROCESS: LEARNING FROM A POSITION OF NOT KNOWING

Sara Carrasco Segovia<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>University of Barcelona (SPAIN)

## Abstract

This paper emerged from my doctoral thesis and presents a perturbing turn experimented after a long and exhaustive coding and analysis process through the second generation of the Grounded Theory. It endeavors the description of some of the ways that emerged from the complex displacements and becomings lived not only experienced by me as a researcher, but also how the initial focus of the study is displaced generating a shift in the main question. As a result of the continuous onto-epistemological movements, the focus of the research moved towards others expanded meanings of the body and its presence in the educational relations. At present, the body is understood not only as a social “construction” but also as a circulating experience that goes through the entire educational spectrum constituted by material, human and non-human forces. Considering the above, this proposal invites the reader to move it through the challenges of this research as an imperfect process in continuous movement, where it is possible to learn from the uncertainty and the not knowing. Therefore, I'm not oriented to look for final and conclusive results but reveal and problematize the process through which it has been conformed the research in order to open new questions and think the body in formal education and teacher training.

Keywords: displacements, movement, body, coding and analysis process, grounded theory.

## 1 INTRODUCTION

This paper -emerged from my doctoral thesis entitled ‘Displacements and movements in the process of research relating to locations of the body within trajectories and the initial training of teachers in artistic education’- presents a perturbing turn experimented after a long and exhaustive coding and analysis process through the second generation of the Grounded Theory (constructionist perspective [1], [2], [3], [4], [5], [6], [7]). It endeavors the description of some ways emerged from the complex displacements and becomings lived, which not only show my movement as a researcher but also how the initial focus of the study is displaced causing a transformation in the main question and methodology.

Although the Grounded Theory (GT) as a methodology is against many decisions that I adopted along the research process, and also does not dialogue with the act of constructing data or thinking about it, the rigor of this analysis method along with a post-qualitative perspective led me to other territories from where I could reflect on the narratives in a different way and from other places. I made a reinterpretation and constant revision of the itinerary of the research process, and as a result



of the dialogue I settled with what emerged from data, I made a series of discoveries in terms of the multiple spaces that the body uses inside the educational spectrum.

In terms of the displacement experienced in the focus of the research, firstly the research focused on the emphasis on making questions about how a group of art teachers in training was “building” their corporealities and performative actions in their formative process. Nevertheless, as a result of the continuous onto-epistemological movements, the focus of the research moved to an expanded meaning of the body and the space occupied by it in the educational relations. At present, the body is understood not only as a social “construction” but also as a circulating experience that goes through the entire educational spectrum composed by material, human and non-human forces.

These displacements and new paths in relation to the body contributed to the rise of different notions and spaces occupied by the body in the initial teacher training and formal education in overall. To show and explain what I was trying to tell about the body and the being of teachers, in the writing process I employed visual maps and photographic collages.

### **1.1 Research Framework: before the displacements and movements**

From the beginning of the research I attempted to understand *how a group of art teachers in training were building their corporealities and performative actions in the educational process*. For that I developed the research in a public and state university in Chile and I decided to develop a collective case study attended by a group of teachers in training composed of five women and three men between 20 and 27 years old. I put the focus on the repercussion that could be the practices and pedagogical discourses over the body constructions. But this problem was focused only in the symbolic sense of the body and besides, the body was understood only as a social construction.

This issue puts the emphasis in how could be acting the practices and discourses carried out in the formal education by professors and classmates over the ‘body constructions’. This not only makes to consider the body as a social construction, but also that it is constituted exclusively by human forces.

One of the principal aims of the research was to make visible the traditional ways of seeing and performing the body in the initial training of art teachers, querying the naturalized practices and looking for alternative strategies to unlearn them in the formal education system. However, as the research progressed, while the intention was still focused on the practice of visibility, I was no longer interested in what was happening but in the way, it was happening.

Many of these naturalized and seemingly 'harmless' practices can still be seen operating in formal educational institutions where the bodies are subjected through different techniques as surveillance, standardization, classification and totalization [8] to maintain the control and dominion of all subject. However, it is also common to see children and young people resisting to the limiting norms established by the institution through the performativity of their bodies, using voice, laughter, unexpected movements, disrupting architectural areas that limit them, promoting student protests, artistic performances, etcetera. All these methods of empowerment are talking about a resisting body not completely controllable, so it can act as a space of confrontation and response [9].

The body studies from contemporary social theory ([10], [11], [9], [12], [13], [14], [15]) helped me to find a coherent positioning with what I was trying to research initially. While this theory involves the development of many relevant perspectives, in order to analyse the body in this research and begin to put together the theoretical framework that would support it, I focused on feminist post-structuralism ideas related to performative studies and social constructionism ([16], [17], [18], [19], [20]), by its special emphasis on the social understanding of the body as a constitutive and subjective

part of the subject; a construction that is created in relation to "others" in specific contexts, in a dynamic and unfinished way.

## **2 THE BEGINNING OF THE DISPLACEMENTS AND MOVEMENTS**

Currently, the focus is no longer on research questions or what students said in response to them, but on what emerges (concepts, notions, ideas...) when they talk about the body and their own educational process. This disruptive turn in the research process was an ontological, epistemological and methodological displacement experienced after the coding and data analysis process through the second generation of the GT, used as analysis method not as a methodology. The exhaustive process obtained by using some tools of the GT, helped me to go deeper into the participants' narratives and to identify some aspects related to relationships, empties and concepts that I had not previously thought about it.

The coding and analysis process following the second generation of the GT was not used to generate theory, but to create ways of dialogue and understanding about what the participants said to me. The focus was being on how I could dialogue with those narratives to develop new concepts to assembling them through the writing process. As Alecia Jackson [21] proposes, we can use ontological becomings on data reading in a rhizomatic and entanglement way [22] to argue against the positivist practices of coding and analysis data. However, even when my intention was to try to capture the dialogue with emerging concepts in a rhizomatic way and assembly them, it is very important to clarify that my position is not against the traditional coding process of the GT. I just tried to make a review of some specific methodological issues through some ideas proposed by post-qualitative feminists which led me to a more expanded notion of the coding process, research process and the body presence.

To clarify, when I am referring to the body's presence in education I am not trying to discuss if it occupies a neglected or predominant position in educational practices and discourses. I aim to make visible how the body flows through the educational spectrum, how teachers are moving in their training process, what is revealed about the educational institution, what is revealed about the teacher profession, what kind of relationships are established when we talk about the body in formal education, what could be reveal about the curriculum, etcetera.

### **2.1 The role of the Grounded Theory constructionist**

While the coding and analysis was ending I lived a series of changes in my training process as a researcher, thanks to the acquiring of conceptual thinking from the post qualitative, post humanist and new materialism perspectives. These tools allowed me to expand my vision about what I was studying and to be able to read what emerged from the narratives in a different way and from a new location. For me, the research come to act as a space from where I can reconstruct trajectories, visualize the full process of the analysis and discover the multiple drifts and positions that this involved.

I reused and re-defined some steps of the Grounded Theory already reviewed and reformulated by the second constructionist generation. Thus, my research is more linked to Kathy Charmaz's constructionist viewpoint than to the positivist approach of Barney Glaser or Anselm Strauss. In addition, some of the choices I took are considered unacceptable by the first generation. These choices include starting from a previous theoretical framework with a determined vision and position about the body and education; use the GT as a method of analysis after finished the research in the field; a continuous dialogue with the literature and previous inquiries; introducing the meaning and

reflective strategies as a researcher, among others. In this sense, the use that I make of the GT is not epistemological but strategical.

This was a long and rigorous process because I decided to develop it in an artisanal way without a software that could bring together and generalize the information obtained by the interviews and the narratives of the participants. I did not want to lose the streaks or nuances that only a manual process can capture. The software organizes information and groups them by topic without distinguishing the wide range of differences that it can have in the same content or matter. As proposed by Kathy Charmaz in the interview carried out joint Reiner Keller [23], it is important to know and understand precisely each one of the steps that one takes during the analysis process and which has been one of the limitations of specialized programs such as MAXQDA or ATLAS.ti.

Although everything started from a traditional coding system that followed the rigor of the GT, at the end of the analysis process, my position as a research facing the displacements and movements allowed me to see new questions emerged from the body issue, new concepts that allowed me to dialogue with the entirety of the research frame, go beyond data and expand the knowledge that was being built from narratives. This is why it is important to clarify that if I had not used the GT as analysis method and taken the decisions that I took, maybe I couldn't have done what I did. Through the constant revision and reinterpretation of data and the research itinerary, I could establish a dialogue with what emerged from the data and made a series of discoveries related with the multiple spaces uses by the body in the entire educational spectrum and the different ways of inhabiting the institutionalized spaces offered by the body.

It is very important to state that these changes, re colocations and displacements do not place the previous work (fieldwork; direct observations; development interviews, conversations and dialogues; coding process; analysis process, and initial findings) in a subordinated position, and I do not conceive it as an unimportant stage. On the contrary, everything that emerges from this related to the contribution of the body in the initial teacher training is very valuable for me, because through GT I made a lot of new discoveries about different spaces used by the body in formal education and teacher training. Specifically, the contribution to thinking the body as a place of exploration in the educational relationships not only as a social construction but also as a circulating experience. This also makes visible what is normally invisible behind any educative experience, facing to unexpected issues in the process of research and learning from a position of not-knowing.

Some post-qualitative views proposed by feminist authors such as Patti Lather, Maggie MacLure, Lisa A. Mazzei, Marg Sellers y Elizabeth St. Pierre, helped me to think "why do we see as we see" and the influence that tradition has over this, about the formative experience of every one of us and the course of our researches. We never started at point zero and that is why it is so necessary to understand that research is part of this itinerary. From this question, I started to think that to do another kind of research it is necessary to be reinvented and to rethink our position as a researcher. Thus, Therefore, doing usual and traditional research that only showed the "visible" process and answered the research questions was not enough for me. I wanted to position myself in unsteadily place to see what could emerge from the experience to research in other ways.

Finally, I decide to talk about the movement and my own instability as a researcher along the development of the research, understanding that write about the other requires a different colocation. The encounter with the other is an entanglement; so, writing it is also a process of tangling and untangling in the attempt to build knowledge. I suggest this movements and displacements as ontological, epistemological and methodological turns, because it changed my

perspective on what I was studying, the knowledge that was building and consequently the way to approach it.

### **3 ONE OF THE DISPLACEMENTS: THE BODY AS A CIRCULAR EXPERIENCE**

In the last decades, the body has been understood as a social construction that is not given naturally, but it is socially and culturally elaborated, characterized by each historical-political period. Therefore, it is an aspect that joins in everything we do, and extends beyond the physical and organic limits ([14], [13], [11], [24], [25]). However, this social conception of the body still seems that stay only in the prevalence of the human being, ignoring the materiality/matter and physical spaces in this performative and movable articulation, where the existence of both is subordinate to each other in the same relation level.

The beginning of this research referred to a normative notion about the body due the strong tradition exists behind the body studies in social sciences. Considering the initial problem of study, I placed my exploration in a classic point of view about the sense of body, understanding it only as a social construction constitute only due to human forces. This body had to fit in every single aspect of the social lives as a separate construction of the educational process in which all of participant were to be conscious of its presence. Besides, this understanding was generating a body that was possible manipulate and convert. Nowadays, the notion of the body in my research is expanded and was emerged from participants' narratives.

The participants understand the body not only in a physical, cultural or symbolical level (corporeality), but also as a circulating experience placed in the whole territory of the pedagogical relationships and educational spectrum including the materiality that constitutes it. Namely, an expanded notion of the body that is not close to dualist representations. The body is an experience always present in their teacher training process and goes through the whole educational spectrum (pedagogical practices, educational relationships, professional development, teaching identities, teaching process, furniture, physical spaces -classroom and outside the classroom-, initial teacher training, power relations, performativity, among others) in a circulating and movable way. This expanded notion of the body causes a displacement from the initial issue in the research, because the body is no longer only something to build by human forces.

The following maps helped me to organize this circular sense of the body and the educational experience, both formed by specific elements emerged from data. In the case of the first map (Fig. 1), the educative experience is compose by different layers that comes from the outside to the inside, that is to say from a general social context -cultural, familial and socioeconomic context- to the formal institutional context and finally concludes with the elements that collaborators conceive as part of their formative experience: different pedagogical practices, educative relationships that are built, relations of power present in the pedagogical process, the early professional development as art teachers, the performing practices acquired and repeated, the physical spaces inside and outside of the classroom, the furniture that gives shape to the different educative institutions. In the second map (Fig.2), built as a round shape too, the borders that frame it are constituted by the symbolic, organic and physiologic sense of the body, initially conceived. But then, these senses spread out when connecting with notion of experience through a direct relation with matter and physical spaces, deriving in a wider sense of body as a place of exploration in the educative relations of these collaborators. There it is possible to find different concepts as Körper, Leib, experience; furniture; physical spaces; institutional architectures; exploration; corporeality and relations.

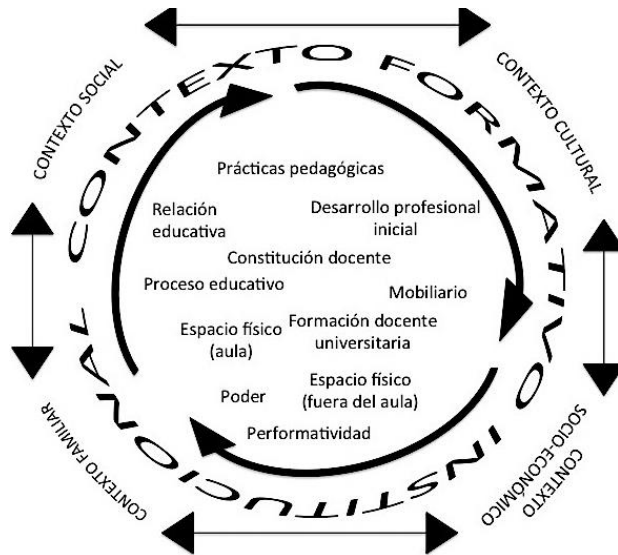


Fig. 1: Map of the body as a circulating experience



Fig.2: Map of the educational spectrum

In order to support these findings, I will present two fragments or scenes (Fig.3) of different participants discussing about the role of the body in their initial teacher training. Emerging categories are only meant to briefly introduce the reader to some of the issues raised in the analysis.

Fig.3: fragments of Carla and Claudia and emerging categories

<p>“As a future teacher, the education has influenced the construction of my corporeality. However not the academic training but the <b>environment</b> and the <b>informal relationships</b> that we are establishing here. Namely, the <b>university context</b> in general such as <b>the gardens and the physical spaces</b> that we have to <b>share with our friends and classmates</b> and finally, <b>the body freedom</b> that we have to do things that we couldn't do before”. (Carla. Second round of interview)</p>	<p><b>Emerging codes/categories:</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The agency of the informal education in the construction of the corporeality.</li> <li>2. The body as a tool of expression and communication.</li> <li>3. The body and physical spaces.</li> <li>4. Liberal context.</li> </ol>
<p>“From the <b>teacher's spot</b> is where <b>authority</b> is exercised. The kind of <b>furniture</b> that they make us to use is very uncomfortable and it is a way <b>to repress us</b>. They leave us in a <b>space where we can't move</b>, and besides, we have to <b>be quiet and listening</b> to the teacher, mandatorily (...). <b>the formal educational institutions are not innocent</b>, they seek <b>the control</b>”. (Claudia. Third round of interview)</p> <p>?</p> <p>?</p> <p>?</p> <p>?</p> <p>?</p> <p>?</p> <p>?</p> <p>?</p> <p>?</p> <p>?</p> <p>?</p>	<p><b>Emerging codes/categories:</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. An encyclopedic approach. The teacher's role: an expert and owner of the absolute truths.</li> <li>2. Power relations and control: authoritarianism.</li> <li>3. Discriminatory and differentiating systems throughout the body. Role differentiation</li> <li>4. The body and physical spaces.</li> <li>5. The traditional layout of furniture and space.</li> <li>6. Immobility of the bodies.</li> <li>7. The body as an authority and control tool.</li> <li>8. The hierarchical organization of formal education.</li> </ol>

In these fragments of Carla and Claudia we can see how the notion of the body was expanded. If we note on what they told me and we dialogue with this beyond the initial problem of the "built body", we can note different concepts arise from how they conceive their training as teachers and the place the body occupies inside it. This also ignores the primacy I was initially giving to educational practices and academic discourses over the construction of their bodies and teaching processes.

The body is not only in a physical or symbolic level it is transforming in an experience that occupies the whole territory of the pedagogical relationship and educational spectrum including matter, materiality and institutional architecture. Here we can see multiple places and spaces occupies by the body; others expanded meanings of the body in educational relations.

This new thought about the body questions two principles about it. Firstly, it discusses the dichotomy of social constructionism due to not only social and human intervention in this construction but also the body now constitutes a kind of entanglement by means of relations, frictions and mediations given among social, human, not human and matter in a same level of relation. Secondly, through this expanded sense of the body it has been possible to notice another ability of the institutional architecture and physical spaces over the body's physicality different from the habitual way of controlling and correcting them. Although I have chosen an example of each meanings by way of both fragments, here is not only present the negative sense that matter and architecture have over them, but also the constitutive ability over them.

#### **4 CONTRIBUTIONS TO KEEP THINKING ABOUT THE BODY**

The body is usually considered from the carnality and the symbolical feature, but not from the idea of an expanded body, from the living body, vibrant and that it constitutes itself entangled with the material, the human, the non-human and the more than human as an enactment.

The sense that collaborators have given to the body from different focus, frameworks, experiences, times, background and environments, place it as a transit experience through the educational spaces, relationships and institutions. This place the body in the middle of the research because the position that occupies in educational relationships: an ambiguous place that is configured as a territory of exploration within the whole educational system.

The Ontological turn around the body. Initially I was looking to understand how the body acted and now how it's been thinking; the different ways and places from where it can be thought. The body as a constant becoming and performative experience that creates and participates in events. This performative and circulating experience constituted in relation as an interweaving of human, non-human and material forces at the same time is composed by its own action as a constant becoming.

Even though the participants had not previously paid attention to the presence of the body in its educational training due to the little habit we have of thinking and reflecting on it, because it is always there with us present in the various aspects of our daily life. Throughout their narratives the body emerged as an experience that generates a multiplicity of connections with potentialities of all kinds. This was due to the importance and significance that the participants gave to the material, the physical spaces and the architectures (institutional and not) in its process of constitution of the sense of being teacher. Hence, this thesis contributes to think of a more expanded notion of the body, where it is no longer only physical, symbolic and cultural, but also, in the physical/biological/animal, material, cultural and symbolic at the same time.

Although the beginning of this study was focused on coding process following the basic notions of the GT in a normative way, all these displacements and becomings gave me the possibility of establishing dialog tactics and comprehension from the collaborators narratives. Such a rigorous analysis process was not a masochist exercise, but the possibility of turning the initial aim of the Grounded Theory. I did not use it to develop a theory of data, but to go beyond them and explore the 'in between' space crossed by the body. This also turned the role of the interview in the research acting as a place of transit between 'the expected' and 'the unexpected'.

Among all these movements and displacements experienced in the investigation, the relevance of post qualitative, post-humanist and new materialism perspective have been fundamental because these ideas allowed me to understand the research process in a different way, as something unexpected and where it is possible to learn from the unknown.

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# **SUPERVISION: AN OBJECT OF INQUIRY AND A CHALLENGING META-REFLECTIVE PRACTICE TO STRENGTHEN EDUCATORS' PROFESSIONALISM IN CONTEMPORANEITY**

**Francesca Oggioni**

*Department of Human Sciences for Education – University of Milano-Bicocca (ITALY)*

## **Abstract**

The dynamic transformations of contemporaneity make an impact on educational events and new emerging needs, by increasing their complexity. Therefore, social educators perceive the opportunity to adopt a multidisciplinary approach, in order to extend their framework of analysis to include a range of possible interpretations, meanings and forms of intervention. In order to move in this direction, multiple meta-reflective practices are in use in socio-educational services: counselling, training, coordination, supervision and research processes.

Educational professionalism needs supportive reflective tools that stimulate the exercise of self-assessment skills, increase awareness of personal and professional limits and resources, doubts and resistances, disclose thoughts and values to which educators refer in their practices.

Supervision is a challenging object of inquiry: the constant intersection between personal and professional dimensions, problems and reflections involved in social work require both a psychological and a pedagogical approach. They are differently focused on individual and collective feelings surrounding an educational experience, or on educators' agency and the coherence of actions within educational design and planning frameworks.

Key words: supervision, social educator, reflective professionalism

## **1 EDUCATIONAL PROFESSIONALISM IN CONTEMPORANEITY**

The observation of the dynamic transformations of contemporaneity calls for a positive critical analysis of their implications for the educational field, starting from a focus on the aspects considered as essential in defining the educational professionalism and the quality of educational work. In particular, the increasing level of personal fragility, linked with difficulties in connecting multiple identities produced by a socio-political system that creates not unitary subjects and produces an economic and educational poverty, modifies the outlines of the area of educational interventions and the framework of skills (often uncertain) required to educators in order to respond, in an intentional and proper pedagogical way, to emerging educational needs [1].

Contemporary society is rapidly changing through the raising of the average age of the population, the erosion of the social fabric, the growing incidence and distribution of precarious work, the constant economic and welfare state crisis [2][3], the difficult processes of dealing with migration and ethnic discrimination etc. People intertwine their lives, passing through different contexts, activities and relational involvements; because of the fact that they finally tend to attribute subjective significances to individual and collective experiences, the informal dimensions of education have to be taken into consideration as well as the intentional and institutional ones because everyday life offers occasions of learning and constructing personal and professional identities in a widespread, social and territorial way.

The complexity of educational events challenges educators to maintain an “ecological sensitivity” [4] in order to manage a wide range of possible interpretations and meanings, to connect technical skills and pedagogical competences, to recognise educational needs in multiple contexts, and then to design appropriate interventions and provide suitable responses to contemporary social problems. The transformative goal can be pursued through a professional agency that “consists in the coordination of imagined sequences of actions to achieve intended objectives in practice [...] and, more importantly, it implies an “as if” attitude [...], that is the envisioning of alternative actions, through the reorganisation of the cultural resources of a practice” [4].

Therefore, educators are required to negotiate and find sustainable links between the institutional mandates, planned on achieving specific objectives, and the subjective initiatives, related to personal interests and decisions, past experiences and motives. In their daily work, educators become deeply aware of the relevance of social context on human activity and make use of specific strategies and repertoires of practice, through which interpret the ongoing situation and act with intentionality, moving from the recognition of limits and perspectives of the settings.

### **1.1 *The process of constructing educators’ professional identity***

Educational professionalism, by virtue of the constant evolution of its contents, is the result of a process of continuous acquiring of theoretical knowledge, methodological tools and experiential skills, acquired over the course of one’s professional life. The mastery of pedagogical and educational skills comes out from a continuous process of in-depth study and integration of “general culture, psycho-social-pedagogical skills, competences towards particular sectors, and skills related to investigation, observation and research” [5].

The academic programs are designed to convey theoretical and practical knowledge that can support a functional analysis of social, cultural and territorial realities, as well as to develop pedagogical and design skills, methodological and operational abilities, organizational and institutional competences, in order to enable students to carry out complex programming and planning tasks (such as the needs analysis, the structuring of educational interventions, their organization and ongoing monitoring, the evaluation of the results achieved). They develop the capacity to analyze the emerging problems that arise in the course of educational work, using methods based on reflection, observation and communication, through which they are able to examine the phenomenology of education in relation to specific characteristics and needs of settings and people, focusing on normality as well as on disadvantage, marginalization, individual fragility and cultural integration.

Furthermore, as professionals, they should be able to carry out promotional, preventive, rehabilitation activities and to assume different functions in relation with people requiring support, accompaniment, facilitation, assistance, treatment and recovery (often in collaboration with other professionals). They also could take on the role of coordinator and/or manager of projects, activities and services through the integration and enhancement of local resources.

A period of training can be considered the starting point of a lifelong learning process: it offers to students the opportunity to come in contact with social work and its complexity, but above all to exchange knowledge and negotiate its sense with professionals, in order to examine opinions and expectations related to the professional profile [6]. The experience of training provides the basis for the development of professional reflective skills, by analysing educational phenomena and bringing into question the significance of actions, in order to go beyond the technicalities and reach deeper levels of understanding. The different learning contexts, experienced both at university and in the field, introduce students to the observation of educational actions and their experimentation, but also stimulate a reflective elaboration – through a pedagogical supervision proposed in different forms: informally or structured, individually and/or in groups – so that they can unearth implicit expectations and theoretical assumptions underlying the practice.

Thinking about educational professionalism, in terms of learning and training opportunities, highlights the opportunity to work in team, in a dialogical and fair exchange among colleagues (in training and in service), drawing up a gradually shared and transmitted professional knowledge and culture, in order

to develop the quality of educational work. Besides, the adoption of a systemic approach to problems can bring them in an overall framework, that increases the possibilities to design coherent and sustainable strategies of intervention.

### **1.2 *Meta-reflective experiences in socio-educational services***

The complexity of contemporary society requires a multidimensional approach to individual and collective needs and requests emerging from territories. Thus, social educators' professionalism has to be based on a solid theoretical preparation – referred to pedagogical, philosophical, psychological, sociological, anthropological, organizational disciplines – and supported by methodological tools and reflective abilities, through which improve transversal and specific knowledge and skills in relation to different areas of intervention.

For this reason, in socio-educational services, multiple meta-reflective tools are in use: counselling, training, coordination, supervision and research processes. These practices are able to activate and oversee reflective and dialogical processes of (self-)evaluation, practical transformation and development of theories. They are related to each other, with (potentially confusing) areas of overlap, in that they share some functions, such as enhancing professional identity and role, developing skills and generating connections between theory and praxis. They mainly have in common the aim of giving professional support to social workers and the tendency to be made up of transversal elements, related to problem-solving, activating connections among different organizational and institutional levels, recognizing the potential to change educational experiences [7]. Despite these similarities, the different practices are modulated and structured differently, as a function of the role of the actors involved in the process (which defines the type of intervention), the objectives and expected results.

For example, a coordinator's professional function is close to an organizational function; the task of monitoring the effectiveness of working practices is effected by examining in depth how work methods are analyzed, evaluated and implemented. It may be argued that coordination should replace pedagogical supervision; however, it seems that institutions are not conscious of the risks that such a policy would bear in terms of control effects, by virtue of which organizational objectives might be given priority over educational ones.

Furthermore, social workers need to hone their ability to recognize the potential of their peculiar way of working and to fill the existing gaps in their theoretical and methodological approaches; they therefore turn to various other professionals seeking specific pieces of information or tools, that are useful for interpreting the environment in which they operate, or identifying different possibilities for correction. Supervision, counseling, training and research all meet these needs [8], so they should be viewed as complementary elements within a single supportive macro-practice. Alternatively, it's possible to distinguish between different meta-reflective settings, objectives and activities, so that these practices become instruments with specific differences that are appropriate for use in different situations.

## **2 SUPERVISION**

Supervision is a challenging object of inquiry. The supervisory dialogical setting facilitates the process of comparing multiple viewpoints on events and educational problems: fragmentation may be reconstructed into "partial and temporary knowledge" that reduce the distance between representations, proposed objectives (sometimes not realistically achievable) and possibilities of active engagement in creation of sustainable alternatives.

Pedagogical supervision supports the negotiation of common criteria for the interpretation of social problems and educational issues, by thinking over what happens, looking for different meanings; so, educators dynamically reach different levels of knowledge, more or less explicit and conscious, in the intersection between multiple planes: personal and professional, emotional and rational, theoretical and practical, specific and transversal, cognitive and operative ones [9]. Not directly focused on

practical problems, educators assume a research posture: they are invited to take observational notes on their agency in action and to gradually engage the focus on relational competences with an attention to educational design and contextual dimensions, to the development of reflective skills, to the awareness of the political meanings, implications and value of their work.

In social work personal and professional dimensions, problems and reflections are constantly intertwined, calling for both a psychological and a pedagogical approach, in case of need for a focus on individual and collective feelings surrounding an educational experience, or on educators' agency and the coherence of actions within educational design and planning frameworks.

Undoubtedly, educational professionalism needs supportive reflective tools that stimulate the exercise of self-assessment skills, increase awareness of personal and professional resources, limits and resistances, disclose thoughts and values to which (more or less consciously and firmly) educators refer in their practices [10]. A functional balance in the emotional involvement inherent to educational relationships can safeguard the characteristics of authenticity and asymmetry, through a highly complex combination of respect, awareness of limits and responsibilities in caring for (not invading) individuals' personal freedom to make plans and decisions. A psychological approach, focused on individual and collective feelings surrounding an educational experience, is functional for the process of analysis of personal and relational dynamics, in order to point up their effects on personal and professional choices and actions. However, the differences between disciplines in the way of interpreting educational events – in reason of their own specific identity and theoretical framework – and envisaging different possibilities for transformation have not to be underestimated; as well as the consequent indirect effect of evaluation on the job. The risk of tacitly invading the area of another discipline or discouraging it from being itself is real and the choice of a psychological supervision, without a parallel pedagogical one, as the unique form of support request or given by organizations can be considered a warning signal: when emotions and affective implications of educational relationships are perceived as a potential problem needing to be brought under control, social workers risk to be more focused on this fear than on the educational subjects' needs and transformative objectives. On the other hand, pedagogical supervision looks for a balance, by stimulating the analysis of educators' agency, enabling them to observe, analyse and critically reflect on their own work in pedagogical terms, identifying the elements that can make sense within an educational design and planning framework.

## **2.1 Pedagogical supervision**

The economic and welfare crisis that is currently undergoing forces social work to take charge of multiple and increasingly complex problems, despite scarce resources. The welfare approach, tending to provide widely available but standard assistance, risks to lead to a focus on techniques and managerial aspects rather than on the quality of intentionally educational experiences. Consequently, the scope for thought and experimentation are reduced, with weaker development of "reflexivity" [11], communication and re-elaboration skills.

Pedagogical supervision, therefore, can be a valuable resource for the routine maintenance of quality standards in social services and for their continuous redesign, in terms of defining their social mission, educational transformative objectives and coherent structural organization.

In order to develop a deep and transferable pedagogical knowledge, processes of communication, "reflection in action" [12] and interaction among colleagues and professionals are fundamental because they enhance levels of collaboration as well as "reflective thinking" [13]. Through reflection, educators can "gain a deep understanding of the underlying intentionalities in educational agency, and [...] to identify the generative elements of their practices and therefore to modify and revise them" [11]. Making conscious of ethical and contextual, cultural and social implications in educational agency, pedagogical supervision can play a strategic role in the process of constructing professional identity and educational competences, making them visible and communicable.

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# **A QUALITATIVE SOCIAL PEDAGOGICAL RESEARCH ON NEW VULNERABILITY: BETWEEN INDIVIDUAL STORIES AND SOCIAL CONTEXT**

**Matilde Pozzo<sup>1</sup>**

<sup>1</sup> *Department of Human Sciences for Education - University of Milan Bicocca (ITALY)*

## **Abstract**

In the last years, recent studies from different perspectives have drawn attention to new kinds of vulnerability and new forms of widespread distress, that are not placed within the traditional boundaries of marginality and exclusion. Within this “grey zone” different types of social suffering are intertwined: new existential struggles due to problematic aspects of the contemporary society and new conditions of urban suffering linked to growing inequalities and increasing risks of exclusion.

New forms of poverty are one of the expressions of this new vulnerability. The “new poor” are suffering from sudden processes of impoverishment due to the economic and welfare state crisis, due also to the increased insecurity and precariousness of living and working conditions and to the erosion of the social fabric. This vulnerable population is struggling because of straitened economic circumstances, but it is also likely to experience multiple needs, where the economic difficulties are complicated by social and relational fragilities.

The present work intends to focus on a pedagogical research approach to the new forms of poverty. According to the perspective of Italian Social Pedagogy, the aim is to look at new poverty as an educational experience, combining individual and public dimensions of vulnerability, linking the educational-pedagogical aspect to the political one. This approach enables to read the relationships between individuals and society and to connect social phenomena with personal experiences, linking private and singular aspects to social, cultural and educational contexts.

This dissertation will be supported by an example of an ongoing doctoral research that tries to study risk and protective factors in the life and formation stories of the “new poor”. The research intends to explore educational paths that have led people in situations of fragility and vulnerability, paying attention to the turning points in their life courses. It also tries to explore poverty as a result of informal education and as an educational experience itself.

The transformative vocation of the pedagogical research involves firstly the research participants, promoting awareness and critical thinking on their own stories. Secondly, it engages the social services and policy area, building together knowledge about these new phenomena in order to promote effective interventions. Finally, it involves the broader social context, in order to reduce the invisibility of these new forms of vulnerability. Furthermore, the attention will be focused on audio-documentary, as a tool to achieve some transformative repercussions of the research.

Keywords: Qualitative Research, Social Pedagogy, Vulnerability, New Poor.

### **3 THE “GREY ZONE” OF NEW VULNERABILITY**

In the last years, recent studies from different perspectives have drawn attention to a “grey zone of distress” [1], [2] where different forms of suffering are intertwined, giving rise to new kinds of vulnerability and new forms of widespread distress, that are not placed within the traditional boundaries of marginality and exclusion [3], [4].

Social studies and researches that analyse the transformation processes of the contemporary society have characterized it as uncertain, liquid [5], at risk [6]. They identify some problematic aspects of post-modernity [7], [8], [9], [10], [11], [12] that lead to define it as a “society of uneasiness” [13], a society of “discontents” [14]. The disease they describe is deeply rooted in our social and cultural context, embedded in our present, and it’s no more relegated to the usual categories of outcasts.

Since Freud’s reading of the uneasiness of the civilization [15], also psychological and psychoanalytical studies have focused on the link between social and cultural changes and the spreading of new forms of malaise and discomfort, new struggles due to an existential uneasiness intertwined with our present [16], [17], [18], [19], [20].

The city appears as a privileged context to study these new forms of suffering, because the urban population grows rapidly [21], and because urban context concentrates the dynamics that stress present biographies, increasing inequalities and risks of exclusion [22], [23]. Urban Mental Health Studies, for example, are focused on the relationship between mental health and city’s features, analysing its social, economic and urban-planning characteristics as risk and protective factors for mental disease as well as for individual and social well-being. They show that living in urban areas is associated with increased risk to experience mental health problems [24], but they also draw attention to the fatigue aspects that are not necessarily linked with the future development of mental disorders, but from which “city distress” [25] arise. The migration processes, the ageing of the population, the job insecurity, the erosion of the social fabric, the ethnic discrimination, the concentration of the lower socio-economic status population, the high level of perception of insecurity, the poor quality of housing, are all factors that link the urban dimension to multiple forms of fatigue, widening the ranks of an area of fragility and vulnerability [26], [27], [28].

The “paradigm of urban suffering” [29] helps to problematize the link between life stories and cities as contexts of life and education: it underlines the relationship between private and public dimensions of suffering, thus counteracting the widespread dynamics of individualisation and psychologisation of social problems and answers. It promotes a broaden focus not only on the extreme forms of exclusion and marginalisation, the “last” of our society, but also on the “penultimate”, the “second to last”, the vulnerable population, people “at risk of fallen” [30].

World Health Organization [31] also invites to pay special attention to this area of vulnerability, not already taken into care of services. WHO defines mental health as “a state of well-being in which the individual realizes his or her own abilities, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to his or her community” [32]. In view of that definition, it underlines social determinants of mental health [33] the weight of social, economic and environmental risk factors on the well-being, such as poverty, low education, unemployment, social isolation, scarcity of social services, social and health inequalities, insecurity and the quality of the so-called “social capital” [34], [35], [36]. Population-based approaches are



favoured over high-risk approaches, and the research that intends to identify causes, risk and protective factors for mental health across the lifespan is defined as a priority [37].

In the “grey zone”, social injustice, structural and personal crises, insecurity, social and economic disadvantage intersect with the challenges of living in a post-modern world with its new struggles and its growing inequalities. The concept of “vulnerability” can well describe this multifaceted area, meaning with this term not a universal human condition but an individual experience resulting from material disadvantages, “socially determined and necessary shaped by the environment (...) which determines to what extent this potential vulnerability actually manifests itself and consequently affects well-being and life chances” [38: 485]. In this area of vulnerability, the so-called “new poverty” [39], [40], [41] are also placed: new forms of poverty suffering from sudden processes of impoverishment due to the economic and the welfare state crisis, due to the increased insecurity and precariousness of living and working conditions and to the lack of support networks. This vulnerable population is struggling because of straitened economic circumstances, but it is also making experiences of multiple needs, where the economic difficulties due to the lack or the insufficient income are complicated by social and relational fragilities. According to dynamic poverty studies and researches, poverty is assumed not as a static condition, but as a transitory situation: the “temporary poverty” approach [42] allows to focus on “silence” and “overlooked” poverty, that is less recognizable and more differentiated, and to give importance and attention not only to the critical events that increase the likelihood of falling into poverty, but also to the positive events, the resources and the strategies that can offer opportunities to deal with and to emerge from this situation.

The paper intends to focus on a pedagogical research on the new forms of poverty. In the following sections, I will focus on a social pedagogical approach to this subject, that especially makes possible to look at vulnerability as an individual experience as well as a public and political issue. The dissertation will be supported by an example of my ongoing empirical research, illustrating the initial questions and the methodological starting points and underlining the transformative vocation of the research. I will, furthermore, mention audio-documentary as a tool to achieve some transformative objectives.

## **4 A SOCIAL PEDAGOGY RESEARCH ON NEW POVERTY**

### **4.1 A social pedagogy research approach**

Social Pedagogy, passing through different definitions [43], [44], [45], [46], can be recognized as a field of study and research that especially focuses on the relationships between education and society and that analyses societal influence on men and women pathways of life and society's educational dimensions. It inquires contemporaneity as educational experiences [2] and its significant results and repercussions on well-being and suffering [47], on risks and opportunities for subject's biographies. Social Pedagogy enables to read the links and the relationships between individual stories of men and women and social and cultural contexts they live in.

The pedagogical approach draws attention to everything that concern education. If we adopt a definition of education as every experience that produces learning [48], we have to recognize also the informal education, considered – also institutionally – as a “learning resulting from daily life activities related to work, family or leisure [...] often referred to as experience based and [...] accidental learning” [49]. According to the Italian tradition of Social Pedagogy, informal education can be considered a “widespread, relational, not intentional, spontaneous, unconscious, territorial,

social education” [48:8], that “occurs” throughout people’s lives, that takes place in every context, not only in the ones dedicated to, and that is not only virtuous.

Under this assumption, education can be adopted as a key to interpretation also of vulnerability and new poverty: conditions to which people are trained, and from which people are trained. Adopting the pedagogical view also enables to read attitudes and behaviours that men and women adopt to cope with difficult situations (e.g. sense of adjustment and resignation, or demanding positions, or dependent attitude...) as result of – mostly informal – educational processes.

The social pedagogical perspective leads to question the condition of vulnerability and new poverty as an educational experience itself: an outcast of the complexity of the subject’s educational biographies that are placed – by their very nature and by definition – at the crossroads between purely individual and private dimensions and social and cultural aspects. Social Pedagogy assumes the condition of new poverty as a “formative situation”, deeply connected to the current socio-cultural context, rooted in the everyday life of contemporary society, created in the interaction between the individual with his/her own characteristics and the context in which he/she lives and acts, which is, in turn, influenced by economic conditions, cultural orientations, tensions, contradictions, ambivalence that distinguish our contemporaneity [50].

This research approach aims not to reduce vulnerability and poverty to an individual and economic problem that needs only individual and economic support measures, but to connect the individual and the public dimensions of the issue, to intersect the educational-pedagogical aspect with the political one.

For professional education and educators, this research approach is important in order to promote awareness about the complexity of the life stories of a vulnerable population, to recognize the informal education’s influences and in order to act intentionally, supporting or discouraging it. Through the awareness of the deep link between individual and political aspects, between individual factors and social determinants of vulnerability, and through the attention to the educational biographies that lead subjects in situations of fragility and poverty, it is possible to design and implement effective educational projects, capable of supporting people giving meaning to their vulnerable condition, situating it in their existential paths and at the same time in the social, cultural and territorial contexts.

## **4.2 Research questions and methodological starting points**

My ongoing doctoral research moves from these assumptions and studies stories of life and formation of the “new poor people” living in Milan. The research questions aim to investigate educational and pedagogical dimensions of vulnerability and new poverty, through a social pedagogical approach. The initial research questions that the study tries to explore are the following:

- What are the characteristics of the educational paths that lead people to situations of fragility, vulnerability, new poverty? What are the characteristics of educational biographies, of life-courses and turning points that mark a lowering of quality of life?
- Which are the risk and protective factors in the stories of life and formation that play a part in “slipping into” fragility situations or, on the contrary, in preventing and “softening” it?
- What is the education to and from poverty? Which are the learnings produced by experiencing vulnerability? Which sort of learning can generate it? How do the subjects live, give meaning, rework their condition?

With those premises and questions, the research project is placed into the ecological and naturalistic paradigm [51]. The methodological design is suggested by some points: the focus on “what’s going

on” in this population from a pedagogical point of view, the attention to the psycho-social processes, the intent to connect individual stories to social and common ones, the importance of social justice themes. For these reasons, a “methodological melting pot” [51], a sort of a mixed method of biographical [52] and Grounded Theory approach [53], [54] could be useful; more specifically, the Grounded Theory constructivist version linked to Social Justice Inquiry [55] seems to offer important tools in order to combine the attention for the peculiar and singular stories and the purpose of reaching an interpretative and theoretical dimension, overcoming a purely descriptive function of the research.

The research design provides for different moments and tools for data collecting, but the core of data will be the stories of life and formation of the new poor, collected through biographical interviews. To reach this population, the interviews will begin among users of the project titled “Ruben – Solidary Restaurant” implemented by Fondazione Pellegrini, a Milanese charity whose target is recent poverty.

Other data will be collected through semi-structured in-depth interviews and focus groups with privileged witnesses of the new poverty and urban suffering, who belong to social service and policies world, including professionals, volunteers, scholars, researchers, policymakers.

According to Grounded Theory’s Theoretical Sampling, the scope could be extended in a recursive process of collecting and analysing data.

## **5 TRANSFORMATIVE VOCATION OF THE RESEARCH**

Pedagogical research necessarily involves a transformative vocation [56]: it should be at the service of educational practice and its needs, producing useful results for this one, and, thinking bigger, being relevant for social changes.

The transformative tension in this research firstly consists of the purpose of improving knowledge about educational dimensions of new poverty, an under-explored issue in Italian Pedagogy, that risks being excluded from educational service interventions. The primary transformative repercussion concerns, therefore, the implementation of knowledge that can be useful for planning interventions able to come into contact with fragile lives and to change some elements that maintain and reproduce conditions of vulnerability. The choice to analyse the educational biographies of vulnerable subjects aims to define theoretical and methodological guidelines to implement “restart interventions” able to support men and women to “think themselves differently” and to promote possible alternative paths for and with them.

Another possible transformative repercussion of the research involves the research participants directly. The opportunity to talk about themselves can offer to the subjects the chance to cultivate a reflexivity approach and to discover the complexity of their life course, spinning and waving the threads of their biographies. The self-formative value of the self-narratives can lead subjects to re-read their own stories and to individuate limits and resources of their own condition, promoting critical thinking about their own life as well as about the intertwined influences of the social context.

Finally, the social relevance of the research engages the broader social and cultural context. Giving voice to those who live new vulnerability and risk being left out of public discourse can contribute to tackling the invisibility of this population, sort of “second to last” of our society. The aim is to promote knowledge and awareness about this area of social suffering that risks being marginalized even more than the “traditional outcasts”. Furthermore, the widespread hostility against the “last” often finds a breeding ground in this “grey zone of second to last”, that can see in the “last” a further

threat to their own already vulnerable condition. The suspicious context, the discriminative behaviours, the racist attitudes, can take root among those who have to deal with recent relational, social and economic difficulties. Promoting awareness and implementing interventions in this area are, therefore, an urgent act to tackle inequalities and to promote equality, rights, and democratic education.

### **5.1 Audio-documentary as a transformative tool**

The transformative vocation of the research, therefore, involves three subjects: the research participant, the social and educational services, and the Italian society in general. At the first level the methodological tool, the biography interview, can promote awareness of their life stories and critical thinking about the intertwining of their own life and the broader social and cultural contemporary context, with its ambivalent dynamics and its contradictions. At the second level of the social services and social policy work, the dissemination of the research results – through articles, congresses, workshops and training moments – could develop in the professionals a more situated knowledge of this population and give suggestions for implementing contextual interventions and for designing projects and services able to reach these potential users. Referring to the third subject, the Italian society, the research can give a contribution in developing a better knowledge of this underestimate issue, and promote public and collective responsibility towards a group potentially at risk of social exclusion.

In order to reach this third aim, the creation of a narrative tool able to report the research beyond the scientific and scholarly community could help to reach the population and promote the meeting with stories of vulnerability and fragility. The choice to produce audio-documentaries on this topic goes in this direction: the artistic product combines narratives and information, and makes possible to give back to the community the voices collected through the interviews. The chosen tool seems to be an effective way to promote the meeting between who listens and who narrates his/her experience; the lack of images can, on the one hand, make easier the collection of the stories – in a non-judging setting, in a “safe place” where talking about themselves is not complicated by video-recording instruments – and, on the other, it can promote an encounter, not mediated by the images, with the alterity, that could be authentic and generative of not-stigmatizing knowledge.

The audio-documentary is a mix between the tale (with some fictional aspects) and the reportage (with some news reporting aspects). This medial product is easy to access, to share and to diffuse, especially individually on the web, but in the form of “collective listening” too. For its characteristics, the audio-documentary is particularly suited for promoting awareness and culture about topics and subjects that are often excluded from traditional means of communication because they seem to be part of a neither spectacular nor sensational everyday life.

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# **AFFECTS AND EMOTIONS OF THE MENTAL HEALTH PROFESSIONALS WORKING IN THE REFUGEE REGIME OF GREECE: A REFLEXIVE PHENOMENOLOGICAL EXPLORATION**

**Georgios Kesisoglou<sup>1</sup>, Aiki Metallinou<sup>2</sup>, Philia Issari<sup>3</sup>**

*<sup>1</sup>Department of Philosophy, Pedagogy and Psychology, National and Kapodistrian University of Athens (GREECE)*

*<sup>2</sup>AKMI Metropolitan College, University of East London (GREECE)*

*<sup>3</sup>Department of Philosophy, Pedagogy and Psychology, National and Kapodistrian University of Athens (GREECE)*

## **Abstract**

This presentation aims to reflexively explore the impact of the affects and positive or negative emotions of mental health professionals working with refugees in the Greek context. We will also venture to contribute to the debate on whether affects of apprehension, compassion or fatigue can ultimately result in personal development and resilience, reinforced by clinical supervision depending on the professionals' needs.

The sample of this study consisted of six Greek mental health professionals, aged from 25 to 55, selected with purposeful homogeneous sampling from non-governmental mental health services. The data were collected through in-depth, semi-structured interviews. In the presentation, we will discuss data analysed with the methodology of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), focusing on the embodied reflexive becoming of the interactions with the participants.

The main findings indicate that the experience of affect and positive or negative emotions of mental health professionals in their work with refugee clients can have an intense emotional impact which is conducive to the development of psychological resilience, while fostering greater self-awareness and meaning attributed to their work and life in general. In the interviews conducted, by listening with reflexive embodied empathy the dramatic accounts of the participants and the refugees' hardships, the researchers were also affected, feeling emotions ranging from helplessness to joy. This emotional roller-coaster of the researchers' resulted into the development of psychological agency, building of psychological resilience through the process of witnessing and acknowledging the situation while fostering a feeling of making a difference and a desire to contribute more in the refugee context. Another important finding involved an urgent call advanced by the participants for supervision by experienced on the field professionals in order to cope with the affects in the field. An important reflexive finding of this study was exactly the apprehension the researcher(s) couldn't help but feel when the mental health professionals were asked to participate in the data collection. This in turn affected the researcher in a number of ways such as being a bit hesitant or worried before meeting with the participants. Therefore, we propose reflexively that both the precarious work conditions in the refugee context of Greece and the intense

emotional impact of participants can affect the participants into assuming an apprehensive stance concerning their participation in the study and self-disclosing, which in turn brings to light the many ways that precarious work conditions in Greece can influence the research procedure.

Keywords: working with refugees, mental health professionals, reflexivity, IPA.

## **1 INTRODUCTION**

Greece in the past three years has been put in a dire position to address a massive influx of refugees migrating from the war afflicted areas of the Middle East. In the midst of the most severe financial crisis of the last 40 years, the influx of refugees crossing the Greek borders became overwhelming as of 2015. According to data by the UNHCR (2015) provided by Gkionakis (2016), by the end of November 2015 the total arrivals reached 703,374. According to a recent data snapshot by the UNHCR (2017, June 8), as of 19 December 2016, the total number of Persons of Concern (PoCs) in Greece was 62,455, of which 31,414 were residing in official and unofficial sites on the mainland. Greece is similar with other Southern European countries, who are characterised by an inability to develop a well-organised system of reception due to the lack of support by the public sector (Puggioni, 2005), resting on N.G.Os to fill the void and cover the refugees' urgent needs (Mestheneos & Ioannidi, 2002). This situation opens up many issues for qualitative inquiry both with the mental health professionals and the organisation of psychosocial services, their needs, their attitudes and feelings vis-a-vis supporting the refugees.

### **1.1 Experiences of mental health professionals working with refugees**

There is limited amount of recent qualitative studies that focus on the experiences of mental health professionals working with refugees (Schweitzer, van Wyk & Murray, 2015; Guhan & Liebling-Kalifani 2011; Robinson, 2013; Century, Leavey & Payne, 2007; Papadopoulos, 2002). In the following paragraphs, we will attempt to critically summarise the available literature, focusing on findings regarding a) the impact of work to the professionals; b) matters of context; c) participants' needs to sustain the therapeutic practice.

As to the first issue, all studies confirm that there is profound personal impact for mental health professionals. Both in Robinson (2013) and Schweitzer, van Wyk & Murray (2015), all participants recognised that they had experienced 'burnout', 'stress' or 'vicarious trauma' brought about by clients' trauma histories. Guhan & Liebling-Kalifani (2011) advance the metaphor of the 'emotional rollercoaster' to describe this impact. Many participants in the study of Century, Leavey & Payne (2007) spoke about the frustration and the sense of powerlessness they experienced, due to the 'overwhelming demands' of the high workloads. In Guhan & Liebling-Kalifani's (2011) study, feelings of sadness, depression, feeling let down, helpless, flat, demoralised were commonly reported, as well as feeling anxious, frantic, stressed. On the other side, there were also accounts of positive impact, such as feeling happy, overjoyed, excited, exhilarated and uplifted by the work (Guhan & Liebling-Kalifani, 2011). Such a profound impact leads the mental health professionals in a transformative process (Schweitzer, van Wyk & Murray, 2015) of personal changes, where they have gained an increased appreciation of their personal circumstances and awareness of global issues, human rights and social justice (Guhan & Liebling-Kalifani, 2011).

Lack of funding and resources was constructed unanimously as the most fundamental context issue impacting the therapeutic relationship. For Century, Leavey & Payne (2007), one issue affecting work



was the limitation of resources in primary care, i.e. the limited number and time-frame of sessions provided. For Schweitzer, van Wyk & Murray (2015) as well as Robinson (2013), funding issues were aggravated by constant changes in the governmental immigration regulation. Lack of funding leads to increased workloads and caseloads, which in turn result in stress for the staff (Guhan & Liebling-Kalifani, 2011). Century, Leavey & Payne (2007) also mention the contextual difficulty of employing interpreters in the therapeutic setting, due to communicative and cultural disparities. Schweitzer, van Wyk & Murray (2015) further stress the importance of everyday difficulties in the process of resettlement (e.g. accommodation, food), on top of the issue of war in the home country of the refugees impacting the lives of their extended families. Such contextual obstacles lead mental health professionals to question the effectiveness of their practices, creating frustration which affects the therapeutic relationship.

Given the prominence of the contextual factors affecting the therapeutic relationship, as well as the impact of the work difficulties on mental health professionals, supervision and training were advanced as the most fundamental needs. Schweitzer, van Wyk & Murray (2015) further stressed the need and practice of self-care, of practical techniques and strategies to manage the emotional impact of the work such as playingsports, relaxation, etc. The importance of arrangements and frameworks of supervision were particularly stressed by Schweitzer, van Wyk & Murray (2015), Robinson (2013) and Guhan & Liebling-Kalifani (2011). It is evident thus that the experiences of mental health professionals revolve around the gravity of the emotional impact of the work with refugees, the difficulties contextual factors create for the therapeutic practice and finally the need of supervision, support and training. Given the distinction of North and South refugee reception and integration systems (Puggioni, 2005), it would be useful to explore whether such findings of Global North settings (U.S.A. - U.K. - Australia) are coherent with the experiences of mental health professionals of countries in Southern Europe. In the context of Greece, there is a lack of studies exploring the experiences, the affects and the impact of mental health professionals working with refugees.

## **1.2 Affect & Emotions**

This study will attempt to examine and reflect on the affective impact of working with refugees, drawing from the theories of Seigworth (1995), Russell & Barrett (2009) and Brennan (2004), while taking into account the theory of positive emotions by Fredrickson (2001).

Seigworth (1995), acknowledges affect as a prelinguistic language, a learnt quality prior to being able to make sense of words. Affect is described as a circuit between our bodies and souls and is found at a prior to conscious thought state forming a bridge between our bodies and the outside world. Affect functions both as a precondition and a conditioner of our ability to feel happy, sad, angry, etc., encompassing all these accumulated every day affective insignificances that go unnoticed and register with no particular emotion attached to them; Whereas in reality, these insignificances make up of who we are or how we act in a certain context.

Russell & Barrett (2009) confirmed that “core affect” is a fundamental, neurophysiological, primitive state referring to the most elementary consciously accessible affective feelings that are not directed to anything in particular. It is ever-present even when the individual is in a neutral state (Russell & Barrett, 2009). One way to see it is as a neurophysiologic barometer of a person’s relationship to an environment at a given point in time with the person’s self-reported feelings serving as the barometer readings (Barrett & Bliss-Moreau, 2009). Brennan (2004) suggested that affect can be

transmitted from one person to another in a given environment. The transmission of affect, whether it is happiness, grief, anxiety, or anger, is originated socially or psychologically. The transmission of affect is also responsible for bodily changes; some are brief while others are longer lasting altering the biochemistry and neurology of the individual.

Fredrickson (2001) suggests that positive emotions serve as markers of flourishing while the overall balance of people's positive and negative emotions has been shown to predict their judgments of subjective well-being. The "broaden-and-build theory of positive emotions" states that certain emotions such as happiness, joy, interest, contentment, pride and love are able to "broaden people's momentary thought-action repertoires and build enduring personal resources, ranging from physical and intellectual resources to social and psychological ones" (Fredrickson, 2001, p3). In specific, the broaden-and-build theory argues that "multiple, discrete positive emotions are essential elements of optimal functioning while positive emotions (a) broaden people's thought-action (b) undo lingering negative emotions (c) fuel psychological and (d) build psychological resilience and trigger upward spirals toward enhanced emotional well-being" (Fredrickson, 2001, p 227).

## **2 METHOD**

This was a descriptive pilot study, part of a wider post-doctoral project, employing a reflexive qualitative methodology. Its aim was to explore the mental health professionals lived experience working in the Greek refugee regime, focusing on the ways they are emotionally affected, as well as on the supervision needs they articulate. On this paper, we will solely address the research question of the emotional impact experienced by the participants, as rich and complex accounts of sense-making, within the context and the adversities of the economic crisis. Taking a reflexive embodied empathetic position (Finlay, 2005), we will employ an Interpretative Phenomenological perspective (IPA - Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009) to analyse those accounts.

### **2.1 Participants**

According to IPA dictates (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009), we opted for 'purposeful sampling' in this milieu, in order to better grasp the experiences of the participants. There were 6 persons in the study, employed as mental health professionals (psychologists, psychotherapists, psychiatrists and social workers) three women and three men. We contacted the participants informally through professional and social networks, personal contacts, as well as through snowball sampling. A prerequisite for their participation was having rich experiences working with refugee populations.

### **2.2 Data Collection**

After an informal personal inquiry on participating in the study, the researchers sent the participants brief information regarding the research and an invitation to participate. The participants that responded to the invitation were given thorough information about the research. Subsequently, an interview schedule was developed, and each person was accorded a date of interview. The interviews took place in their preferred locations, enabling their undivided expression in a safe and familiar setting. Written consent was obtained from each of the participants before each interview, while it was made clear that they had the right to withdraw at any time and request their interviews to be destroyed. Next, the researcher and the participants together agreed on a code name such as ( $\Psi_1$ ,  $\Psi_2$ ) and the participants were assured that their true identity would be kept private. The data were collected through hour-long, in-depth, semi-structured, open-ended interviews while the interview topics covered a comprehensive description of their actual experiences working with refugee populations, how they made sense of them and the emotional impact of those experiences.

Participants were treated as experiential experts and any novel areas of inquiry they opened up were followed, hence the questions were used to guide rather than dictate the course of the interview. Data collection lasted approximately 2 weeks (June 2017) and resulted in about 6 hours of data. The interviews were recorded onto a professional digital recorder. The researchers after each interview elaborated on field notes their thoughts and feelings during the data collection, aiming to record their reflexive embodied empathy (Finlay, 2005) of the interviews as notes to enrich the analytic process. All interviews were immediately transcribed verbatim using a simplified form of transcription.

### **2.3 Data Analysis**

The analytical method of interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA; Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2006) used aims to explore in detail participants' personal lived experience and how they make sense of that personal experience (Smith, 2004). Nevertheless, it is acknowledged that it is not possible to access an individual's life world directly because there can be no clear and unmediated window into that life. Investigating how events and objects are experienced and given meaning requires interpretative activity on the part both of the participant and the researcher (Eatough & Smith, 2006). It is phenomenological (Giorgi, 2016) in its concern with individuals' perceptions of objects or events, but it is also strongly connected to the interpretative or hermeneutic tradition (Palmer, 1969).

In this study, the analytic process involved the following set of stages: both the transcript and the field notes were read several times and the left-hand margin was used to make intuitive, reflexive and empathic notes recording anything that appeared significant and of interest. With each reading, the researchers became more and more "wrapped up" in the data, more responsive to what was being said, developing an empathic connection to the participant's experiences, their emotional impact, and most of all, the embodied affects they produced. The second stage involved returning to the transcript afresh and painstakingly using the right-hand margin to transform through abstraction initial notes and ideas of the accounts into more specific themes. This was a process between inductive and deductive analytic positioning, in dialogue with the reflexive embodied notes of the previous stage. At this stage of analysis, caution was exerted so that the link between the participant's own words and the researchers' interpretations and embodied feelings was not lost. The third stage consisted of further reducing the data by establishing connections among the preliminary themes and transforming them into appropriately named higher order themes.

## **3 FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

We will present and discuss the two higher-order themes from the study focusing interpretatively on the 'becomings' of the participants and the researchers. They indicate that the experience of affect and positive or negative emotions of mental health professionals in their work with refugee clients can have an intense emotional impact, seen as a transformative process (Schweitzer, van Wyk & Murray, 2015) conducive to the development of psychological resilience, while fostering greater self-awareness and meaning attributed to their work and life in general. Further, we will demonstrate two core ways that, in the research interviews conducted, by listening with reflexive embodied empathy (Finlay, 2005) the dramatic accounts of the participants and the refugees' hardships, the researchers were also affected, feeling emotions ranging from helplessness to joy. This emotional roller-coaster of the researchers' resulted into the development of personal agency, building of psychological resilience while fostering a feeling of making a difference and a desire to contribute more in the refugee context. These were feelings that mirrored those of the actual participants. We opted to omit, due to the word limit, the discussion of the important finding of the urgent call for supervision. Finally, an important reflexive

finding of this study was exactly the apprehension the researcher(s) couldn't help but feel when the mental health professionals were asked to participate in the data collection. This in turn affected the researcher in a number of ways such as being a bit hesitant or worried on meeting with the participants.

### **3.1 The mental health professionals' experiences: impact of working with refugees and coping strategies**

We will first address the super-ordinate theme on the ways mental health professionals were impacted by working with refugees: they elaborated on grave experiences of intense personal impact, which called on ways of coping. At first, participants described the intense emotional shifts they felt in their workplace, their difficulties in balancing life and work, but also the ways they were able to grow as persons through those experiences as well as the inherent value of such experiences in finding life's meaning. Guhan and Liebling-Kalifani's (2011) informants provide the resonating metaphor of an 'emotional roller-coaster', to describe the intense emotional shifts the professionals face, vis-a-vis the difficulties, the responsibilities and the challenges of their practice. Feelings of despair, anger, stress and frustration are common, as evidenced in the following extract:

«the feeling is extremely heavy.. anger for my own self and anger for the whole situation and a feeling of helplessness.. what I mean to say is that I often feel helpless.. and that really ruins for you the all-powerful impression you have of yourself» (Ψ1)

Another grave aspect of the impact was the difficulty in balancing professional and personal life. The workload consumes the time of the day, as the needs of the persons served are felt as imminent, a finding in accordance with Guhan & Liebling-Kalifani (2011). Participant Ψ4, working with unaccompanied minors, attests:

«I don't work in an office, no. I don't specifically work at a place. I don't wake up in the morning and go to somewhere specific. I go where the children are and the children could be anywhere in the city [...] And the time I spend is not set.. What I mean is that the work hours are never set and if you don't set your boundaries you can end up being stand by all the time[...] Because you are the only person they can turn to...» (Ψ4)

Nevertheless, they also attest to experiences of positive feelings, mostly associated with the warmth of proximity and trust they feel from the refugees. Such is the extract from another participant:

“Those experiences enrich you, I mean, they make you want to... they are very rich experiences and very compact. Through these experiences you get very close to people” (Ψ3)

On such a note, one core feature of the accounts of the participants on the impact, was the strategies they had to put in practice in order to cope with it. In brief, as a part of the personal transformation they attest, they spoke about becoming more cynical and professional and about finding ways to let off steam. All this, in a process of 'becoming' resilient. For instance, participant Ψ1 elaborates on developing a more professional distance vis-a-vis people's problems, thus becoming harder.

«So when I first came here and the doctors were talking about the medical conditions different people suffered from and were talking about how this or that person had that medical problem and how they feel and what they've been through and I was dumbfounded, I lost my appetite, I couldn't eat, I didn't want to do anything because I was in distress. Since then I've become exactly like them, we sit in the morning meetings and chat or even have a laugh with situations that if someone were to hear would certainly

think «how on earth could they be laughing about that?» And we do laugh with things and it may not be the best way to deal with things but IT IS a way. We may be talking about a very serious medical condition while having our breakfast at the same time» (Ψ1)

Another set of coping strategies used was exercising the body and distracting oneself, by sharing a laugh, similar strategies to those found by Schweitzer, Wyk, & Murray (2015).

«What I do to blow off steam is work out at the gym. What is also helpful is what I've already told you, walking 1,5 km from one camp to the other is also very helpful to me[...] plus that we have an hour break every day when we all gather together and just hang out, talk, tell jokes» (Ψ2)

Another cluster of this higher-order theme on the emotional impact of the professionals' experiences are the accounts of being benefited by working with refugees. One emergent theme is being privileged to witness the person's change in the therapeutic process:

«and at some point she started getting better with the help of the medication and psychotherapy and I remember that day that she came to the clinic and she had combed her hair nicely, she was from Africa, and she had that hairdo and she was wearing her hat, and we hardly recognized her [...] we couldn't believe that it was her, it was a transformation, as if it were a totally different person that entered the clinic.. and that gave me such joy and... Satisfaction.. that in a sense I have somehow contributed to all this» (Ψ1)

Listening to the professionals' accounts with reflexive embodied empathy (Finlay, 2005) the second researcher found herself understanding the participants in a deeper level. Since the body is the vehicle for being and understanding the world (Merleau-Ponty, 1962, p.82) the second researcher could not help but notice how she became affected, her own embodied reactions to the experiences described by the participants. Listening to participant Ψ1 vividly describe the instance of a patient overcoming their problems and the joy that this positive transformation brought to everyone involved moved the researcher as well. The light and joy in the eyes of the participant, the compassion that she communicated, the way she smiled while narrating the incident, her openness and humanity affected the researcher greatly. The contagion of joy and smile contributed to the researcher's feelings of instant happiness as if being there herself experiencing the situation firsthand, the researcher started smiling too and actually felt that joy that great change brings about. This is an important finding, as it documents the magnitude of the emotional impact of refugees' experiences, as well as the importance of the therapeutic relationships. In fact, this research experience led the researcher to reflect on the importance of the personal contribution in order to make a difference, which in turn contributed to the decision of becoming actively involved in the refugee regime. The participant's emotional becoming affected the researcher's personal change. Another emergent theme was the affect of gratitude felt by mental health professionals, as narrated by Ψ2.

«you get a positive response for that child, an official permission to be sent to a boarding house and you tell that to the child and the child may smile, may get emotional, may even jump for joy and when the departure day comes the child might feel sad for leaving instead of feeling happy, and will kiss you goodbye as if you were family.. that gives me great joy.. that I have managed to build a trusting relationship in such a challenging and tough environment.. that makes me feel good about» (Ψ2)

Participants then, on speaking about the impact of their work, stress the aspect of deep personal transformation (Schweitzer, van Wyk & Murray, 2015).  $\Psi 2$  elaborates on such a *quest* of personal growth.

The reason why I decided to quit my previous job and work here was my need to understand, to see with my own eyes how bad things are and what enduring hardships really means, what problems really are and what it feels like to be happy while having next to nothing [...] You end up re-evaluating what you already have, your own demands, your own high standards and all this can lead you to not lower your standards but set them even higher but in a more essential way, feeling inner peace and being at peace with yourself..» ( $\Psi 2$ )

While on such a quest, participants time and again attest that their intense work provides them with answers in a personal search for meaning against the everyday frustrations.

«and I got to thinking that if this were the only thing I have ever accomplished, just one child saved, not being on the street any more, having a totally different perspective and a chance to live a better life, then I'm more than OK with what I do.. What I do is enough» ( $\Psi 4$ )

In such a process, mental health professionals can learn more about the complexities of human's psyche, about the resources of strength, about resilience, thus finding ways they can cope with their own difficulties (Guhan & Liebling-Kalifani, 2011) and enrich their professional practice.

«..you learn a lot about people and about yourself, about the different cultures.. about the strength that people have, the resilience that people have» ( $\Psi 1$ )

«as a mental health professional you learn not to be so sure about the things you think you know, you learn to challenge what you already know, the stereotypes of what it is to be in pain, or what it feels like to be a victim, or a Muslim, or an Arab. You learn to adopt to all these different situations, reality teaches you all that» ( $\Psi 4$ )

In this higher order theme we briefly discussed the positive and negative impact of participants' experiences of working with refugees, as well as their ways of coping and the benefits they suggested.

### **3.2 Becoming affected: emotions of mental health professionals**

The second higher-order theme to be presented focuses on the ways such experiences affected the participants and the emotions they elicit. According to Seigworth (1995), affect functions both as a precondition and a conditioner of our ability to feel happy, sad, angry, etc. Participants vividly described such experiences of becoming affected, as the refugees 'transmitted' (Brennan, 2004) their distressful hardships and/or their positive change. The whole experience feels physical, having an inexplicable embodied aspect to it.

«Physically you feel kind of lighter, you can see it in the way I move my hands right now that I'm describing it to you, you breathe a little better, you may smile a little, you get a bit more emotional without it being too much. That's how it feels physically» ( $\Psi 6$ )

Affects may be experienced as distressful and traumatic, agreeing with the existing literature that exposure to refugees' trauma on an ongoing basis can have significant negative effects on both physical and psychological well-being (eg. Cieslak et al., 2014).

«..after the session I feel as if I've been beaten up myself or feel very, very sad.. as if someone punched me in the stomach.. you may feel many different things, mostly tension at the back of the neck or you may feel something not exactly physical but nevertheless traumatising. It is traumatising, it leaves you in a state of disintegration. Sometimes as I'm driving home from work I feel that something has happened to me and that I'm traumatised too..» (Ψ1)

It is noteworthy that as the researcher listened actively to the participant accounting this negative experience, she leaned forward in order to better hear as the participant had lowered their voice and the effect of describing the feeling as being punched on the stomach crossed over. The intensity of the participant's description and the way she relieved the moment affected the researcher as the actual experience of being hit in the stomach felt real. The image portrayed by the participant of driving home feeling out of place in a way, the sadness, frustration and melancholy the image conveyed felt like watching a film and being so caught up in it that you identify and in a way merge with the main characters. In fact, the researcher needed a few seconds to regain composure and move on with the rest of the interview since the feelings of sadness and frustration, as well as the physical sensation of having being punched and the bitter after taste were all overwhelming and difficult to handle. The trauma that the participant had referred to was an experience the researcher could now relate to. Such an 'emotional roller-coaster' of the researchers is also indicative of the affective power of 'vicarious trauma', since the transmission of traumatic affective experiences in the interviews is so intense that such accounts affected the researchers in embodied ways (eg. Cieslak et al., 2014). Other negative emotions elicited in the interviews were: anger, sorrow, frustration, disappointment, fear, anxiety, despair, helplessness.

«And almost always after the therapy session with that man I am left with such a deep sorrow, an existential kind of sorrow, because in essence I am watching a man fade away little by little, and he is completely alone, it almost shocks me how completely and utterly alone this man is» (Ψ6)

Becoming affected indicates the importance of intersubjectivity and empathy in the therapeutic relationship. On the other side, many participants offered a positive aspect of being affected by their therapeutic practice with refugees. Positive emotions named in the interviews were: joy, bliss, pride, relief, enthusiasm, impatience, satisfaction. According to Fredrickson (2001) such emotions contribute to the quest for personal meaning and nurture the person's resilience.

«And we felt so anxious and overjoyed of what we were about to announce to him and we couldn't wait to see his reaction... I dare to say we might have felt even happier than him» (Ψ3)

«What I've felt was relief, relief because I was able to help him and great, really, really great joy. I don't know what more to tell you, I don't know how to put it in words» (Ψ2)

Becoming affected and emoting is conducive for the participants' search for meaning, as it is a form of becoming self-aware of the limits of therapeutic practice vis-a-vis the reality of the refugees' hardship.

«the feeling is extremely heavy.. anger for my own self and anger for the whole situation and a feeling of helplessness.. what I mean to say is that I often feel helpless [...] and when you realize the gravity of the problem the frustration that comes with that is just too much to withstand» (Ψ1).

Such a process of becoming aware leads on to resilience, it forms a transformative positive response to refugee trauma defined by Papadopoulos (2007) as Adversity-Activated Development. Being exposed to the hardships of the refugees, mental health professionals can change and grow, both personally and professionally. For us, sharing the feelings of the participants in the interaction of the interview was an embodied revelation of their affective power.

The final focal finding of the researcher becoming affected was some participants' feeling apprehension concerning the disclosure of their personal details, which also distinctly affected the research process. Although the participants had already been officially informed and ensured in writing that no personal details or data were to be disclosed and were also aware of the fact that they were protected under the standard of privacy and confidentiality of the code of ethics, they still felt nervous and apprehensive. Some participants felt so apprehensive that they needed to interrupt halfway the interview to ask for further confirmation, causing them to lose their train of thought and appear somewhat lost in their thoughts for some minutes. Accordingly, the researcher literally felt the weight of responsibility heavier than ever before causing instant headache in an effort to remind the participants of all the above and try to act as catalyst of tension in order to move on with the interview. As a result the researcher felt apprehensive herself each time before meeting with the different participants, taking extra care in maintaining formality, questioning herself whether she is doing everything by the book. When some participants asked to see the interview question list before the actual interview it became clearer that the said apprehension was intertwined with the precarious work conditions in Greece, causing the participants to even check the questions beforehand in case they were asked questions that would cause them to disclose information concerning the non-governmental organizations they worked for threatening them to lose their job. After the completion of the interviews that sense of grave responsibility was unarguably passed on to the researcher causing distress, tension and a feeling of carrying a heavy burden. The researcher's embodied response to such apprehension by the participants is a finding further underlining the emotional impact of the mental health professionals' work.

Being a pilot study, its aim was to focus on the Greek case of mental health professionals working with refugees. Despite the small sample, it affirmed that the experiences, the emotional impact and the negative and positive affects were similar with those of professionals of the Global North. The study also attested to the need of group supervision, for the support of the professionals and the incitement of the process of Adversity-Activated Development, a finding that we did not elaborate. In fact, our study attests to the importance of positive emotions and personal transformation for the development of AAD (Papadopoulos, 2007) against the 'deficit model' of refugee and vicarious trauma. Finally, we have to note the affects of the working conditions of mental health professionals in the Greek refugee regime, such as the embodied feeling of apprehension the second researcher couldn't help but sense and the ways they inadvertently structure the behaviour and the therapeutic practice of participants. Thus, one further analytic step we intend to take is to analyse psycho-socially the emergence/transmission of affect and emotions as social practices (Wetherell, 2012) carried within the community of practice of the professionals working in the Greek refugee regime, within the social milieu of economic recession in Greece.



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# **ANALYZING COMMUNICATOR ACTION: CONTENT AND COMMUNICATION PROCESS**

**Gloria Awad**

*Université d'Artois – Textes et Cultures (FRANCE)*

## **Abstract**

This contribution proposes a hybrid methodology to analyse a diachronic random journalistic corpus. The studied corpus includes mediatisation of actions, coproduced by institutions and journalists. The method adopted is based on communication theories and models and on content analysis. Mathematical information theory and agenda building studies allow a monitoring of mediatisation process, with its actors and with its original substance wrinkled from a source to a public. Semiotic and functionalist communication models allow the analysis of the significant materiality where mediatized action is framed.

Keywords: Mediatisation, Journalism, Content Analysis.

## **1 SECTION**

This contribution started with researches and seminars conducted in the framework of communication lectures on media framing of action and actors, individuals and collectives, what was labelled as intermediality between media contents and the realities to whom it refers, and what can be called in other words the journalistic institution of action and identities. This institution by journalistic mediatisation is in tension between two poles. The first one concentrate the routines of corporate-media relationships or sources information and the other is made by the breaking off journalistic events with variable intensity, with the crisis communication as highest level.

In addition to the pedagogical anchorage, the scientific starting point and certainly the relevance of this proposition of a hybrid methodology to analyse journalistic corpuses is the interrogation about the process of mediatisation of journalistic messages and their crystallisation in contents where can be shaped factual events chains and lines, as well as institutions and corporates images. This mediatisation process articulates communication structures and functions, what we can finally call the social reasons of contents, precisely in their journalistic and social bipolarity.

### **1.1 Journalistic Contents as a Pragmatic Action**

Retrospectively, the notion of content can be considered as a media production and can be compared to the actual notion of digital big data. It appeared as an undifferentiated ordinary and expanded textual continuum, generated by the mass media rising in the beginning of the last century, and was defined as the negative of the others textbooks, contained and confined by their own materiality, holder of authority and questioned by methods like hermeneutics or exegesis. But content can be also approached as a scientific paradigmatic concept, according to Michel Foucault definition of the new basis of scientific knowledge, grounded in:

The significative power of the perceived and its correlation with the language, in the original forms of the experience, the organization of subjectivity from sign values and the structure secretly linguistic of data.[1]

Content analysis used in its own specific and mixed manner methods from poetic, like metrics, semantics and stylistics, from rhetoric, like working on speeches and tracking their effects on audiences, from statistics with counting and correlating indicators related to variables, from linguistics and from semiotics. Its scientific ambition combined with the media contents proliferation produce reliable and accurate standardized methods. The aim of these methods was to be used simultaneously and longitudinally by different researchers, to obtain identic or, in less, comparative results, but also to be operated by computers and algorithms.

Charles Morris introduced the concept of intermediality, in an extension of the pragmatic dimension framed by the semiotic of Charles Sander Peirce. With this concept, Morris developed the continuum between cognition, communication and action in the interactionism behaviourist perspective, where stimuli can be actions issued from purposes or projects. In addition to the commutation or semiosis between signs and their objects and between signs themselves, Morris pointed the loading of chains and semiotic possibilities not only with languages and codes, but also by general instrumental significations of events, ideas or contents. In this viewpoint, cognition is defined as a semiosis generated by contact in presence with an object or a subject; communication is considered as the implementation of a semiosis by languages and codes where are embedded absent referents; and communicative action produces a semiosis stimulated by a “communicator” who uses the pragmatic operating of contents and messages dealing with the “biotic aspect of semiotic”, made up of the psychological, the biological and the sociological phenomenon produced with the functional interoperability typical of the use of signs. It is from this position that Morris defined the communication content as the process of materialization of signs and meaning spurred of by a “communicator” and updated by a “communicatee” or interpreter, as named by Peirce.

The user of signs who effects communication is the communicator and the organism in which the sign-process is aroused by the signs of the communicator is the communicatee. The communicatee may be the same organism in which is the communicator, as when one writes a note to oneself to be read at a later time. The signs used are the means of communication and the signification made common by these means is the content of communication.[2]

Bernard Berelson used this definition of content to formalize his model of content analysis.

In the communication process a central position is occupied by the content. By communication content is meant that body of meanings through symbols (verbal, musical, pictorial, plastic, gestural) which makes up the communication itself. (...) Since the content represents the means through which one person or group communicates with another, it is important for communication research that it be described with accuracy and interpreted with insight.[3]

This model was built in response to a social, political and economic demand for scientific description and measure of media contents. In its early works, Berelson adopted a qualitative definition of content analysis, based on Alfred Schutz proposal to consider its scope as a “description of human behavior, particularly linguistic”, which still dominant in its general uses, like in the study we conducted by questioning journalistic contents.

In a sense, of course, content analysis is as old as reading itself. Whenever someone reads a body of communication content and summarizes and interprets what is there, content analysis can be said to occur. (...)

Systematic content analysis attempts to define more casual descriptions of the content, so as to show objectively the nature and relative strength of the stimuli applied to the reader of listener.[3]

It is possible to argue that the latest “quantitative turn” taken finally by Berelson and other media discourses analysts was a specific response to this demand of scientific interventionist precision. If descriptions of phenomenon’s qualities concern what affects their essences and substances, quantities descriptions provide discontinuous countable pluralities and continuous measurable dimensions: in the two cases, we have a produced series and judgments about an order [4]. This Aristotelian statement reminds in Gaston Bachelard definition of measure as a description with a specific symbolization [5]. Written series are enumerations and listing with infinity of possible encoding, especially because there written characteristic. Writing allows to fixe listing of qualities and of quantities and to intervene on the fixed items. And the basis of linguistic content analysis is the description by the elaboration of categories system, inferred by first reading – spin-off – from the content itself or produced according to the analysis objectives. In the two cases, the analyst deals with semiotic isotope sequences where meaning is embedded in fables or wholes of redundant semantic categories. By extension Roland Barthes puts description on the basis of semiotic analysis of images, in a dynamic commutation between their linguistic, plastic and iconic dimensions, their denotation and connotation [6].

## **1.2 Journalism as Objective and Realistic Media Discourse**

Journalistic contents have a strategic position in the process of social construction of reality. News as journalistic contents are the place where is materialised the discourse – objective and realistic – about the present and the real. As an objective and realistic discourse, news occupied a medial position in the continuum of knowledge configured by scientific discourse, legal or juridical discourse, testimony, description ... or accountability. For all these discourses, objectivity doesn’t mean an absolute knowledge, but is understood as a referential knowledge, marked by its degrees of faithfulness with its referent and of impersonality or stipulated distance with the subjectivity of its producers. Political and socioeconomic justification of journalism as a media phenomenon, anchored in modernity, inherent to modern social issues and in communication machines, is precisely located in its participation in a new economy of real and present. What makes journalism a modern mediation model, operating by coagulation of common present and real in the news as a visible materiality, and by the media configuration of a junction between interaction and diffusion, presence and absence, reality and imaginary [7].

This specificity of journalistic discourse makes it, by definition, different from fiction and from promotion and auto-promotion discourses, even if all of them can provide knowledge and can share the same media as vehicle and support. In the same time, this same specificity gives the journalistic discourse its social anchorage: journalism as institutions and as actors refers to social stakeholders among many others; it is not an overhanging social device but an economical structure dealing with the dissemination of news to large audiences. What makes journalistic contents a targeted place where to appear – or disappear – for other social stakeholders and an inscription space where societies configure the utterance of their “system of records” [8].

As a targeted place of visibility or invisibility, journalism discourse interconnects news agenda builders and readers, shaping public opinions and notorieties. According to Berger and Luckmann expression, it operates as an objective externalization of world reality, internalized by audiences, and as a gap between social structures and social interactions [9]. But even if this discourse failed in connecting readers, even if it remains as a gibberish monologue, it also operates by the simple fact of being “self-evident”, expressive by its own existence, more than by its information content [8]. Tweets and other posts give digital examples of public and ambitious soliloquies, even of “low expectation”, to be shared and distributed by journalists and their audiences. What shows that in digital media age, as in the classical one, journalistic discourse accumulates the double bias of communication, as defined by the Canadian economist Harold Innis.

A medium of communication has an important influence on the dissemination of knowledge over space and over time and it becomes necessary to study its characteristics in order to appraise its influence in its cultural setting. According to its characteristics it may be better suited to the dissemination of knowledge over time than over space, particularly if the medium is heavy and durable and not suited to transportation, or to the dissemination of knowledge over space than over time, particularly if the medium is light and easily transported. The relative emphasis on time or space will imply a bias of significance to the culture in which it is embedded. [10]

In our study, rather than effects of journalistic messages, the analyzed contents were expected to allow us to reconstruct a posteriori their project or purposes and its embodiment in a mediatisation process. So, from contents fable or algorithm and from their lexical disseminated redundancy or “isotopies” [11], our project was to go back to their referential system, which distinguishes journalism as realistic discourse from the free discourse of fiction and from the promotion discourse [12]. The studied diachronic random corpus includes articles from online and outline editions of daily and weekly press titles. It was the statement made about the difficulties of the students in building a category system to spread corpuses elements that lead to the introduction in the analysis of the mathematical theory of communication and the linguistic functional model built by Roman Jakobson [13].

In their well-known mathematical information theory, where they gave a modelling of communication process, Claude Shannon and Warren Weaver produced a summary of the mediatisation process grounded in the duality of codification, transmission and reception generated by the new media technologies of their time [14]. The distinction they made about the duality source/emitter, allows underlining the ventriloquism resulting from the interlocking of sources and emitters and in the same time to investigate the first actors and purposes where started mediatisation process. The hypothesis of the operability of the functions on the content as process and as materiality, and the agenda building theories provided categories ready to use in analysis and permitted the elaboration of typologies.

Our conclusions put in light two patterns for journalistic contents, produced by “representance” and caesura, according to their referential system and its identity with the reported facts in their configured realities or its contiguity with the same facts, produced by context elements like press titles positioning, their socioeconomic contexts and the social temporalities. What can be applied to articles as identic contents of their realities facts, or as contiguous contents of these realities; contiguity content is also a pertinent type to qualify the grounded logic of the pull-out supplements, the weekend editions and the casual occasional journalistic books.

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## THE POWER OF COLOUR LANGUAGE IN LEARNING CHILD

Annamaria Poli<sup>1</sup>, Franca Zuccoli<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *University of Milano-Bicocca  
(ITALY)*

<sup>2</sup> *University of Milano-Bicocca  
(ITALY)*

### Abstract<sup>2</sup>

This contribution introduces the study of a research project on the relevance of colour role in the learning child. Our presentation would take explicit several reflections, regarding a path of activities, actions and experimentations related the education of colour as a language in the school and preschool contexts. The research group on *Play and Colour Education* take reference from two courses degree: Science Education and Science of Primary Education of Department of Human Science “Riccardo Massa” at University of Milano-Bicocca, Italy. The study examines the opportunities for children to use colour experience not only as pigment paint, but also as colour significant experiences of the colour light, through emotional and cultural perspectives. The idea was founded on the colour can to become an opportunity of discover and education experience oriented on perceptive and sensorial training and communication act. The first questions are: what kind of activities we could designed as significant learning experiences trough an education of colour? What are the positive effects of the knowledge of colour since the early age of children? The first results indicated positive effects in the child’s development on perception, emotion, language, basic of arts and scientific, using the colour exploration with play and other ways of learning. The research aims for children are:

-Contribute to increase knowledge of children’s development, from 0-6 years, before school age, in the areas of perception, logic, social skills, motor skills;

-Knowledge on the child’s language before the age of six (0-6);

-Contribute to increase knowledge of children’s development, from 6 to 10 years, of basic skills for reading, writing and arithmetic, art and perception in school age.

The research aims for educators and teachers has founded to contribute an increase of competence on the teaching color experiences with children. Colour language is a language closely linked to artistic and communicative research. There are numerous artists (Itten, 1961; Kandinskij, 1989; Klee, 1918, 1925; Rothko, 2007, ...), art historians (Zuffi, 2013), critics and researchers (Ball, 2013; Pastoureau, 2006; 2008, 2013, 2016) who have tackled the colour theme as a research perspective. In this

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<sup>1</sup> The article is the product of a common research, but the paragraphs are as follows: abstract, paragraph 3, 5 conclusion are by Annamaria Poli, paragraphs 1,2,4 are by Franca Zuccoli



sense, research done with children and with teachers and educators is based on the modes of artistic creation.

Keywords: Colour, Educational Research, Preschool, Primary School

## **1 COLOUR AS A FEATURE THAT REMAINS TO BE DISCOVERED AND EXPLOITED IN THE FIELD OF EDUCATION**

### **1.1 Background**

Colour is undoubtedly a key feature in the life of young children, as numerous studies have shown [1], both due to the emphasis placed on choosing colours and on account of how children use it in their drawings, and indeed in their expressive products in general (whether two- or three-dimensional). *Play and Color Education*, a research group based at the University of Milan Bicocca, and founded by Annamaria Poli and Franca Zuccoli, professors at the Department of Human Sciences and Education who teach on the degree courses in Primary Education and Educational Science, respectively, has spent many years investigating how the theme of the colour is approached in early childhood education and schools (nursery and primary) with children aged between 0 to ten years. The group based its initial analysis on field observations, interviews, and questionnaire data, going on to design experimental approaches for implementation with children, educators, and student and in-service teachers. The researchers' initial reflections led to further study and theorizing and the generation of new hypotheses. Their work has been reported in a series of publications addressed to the Italian and international scientific communities, which have been concerned with the theme of colour for many years, approaching it from many different disciplinary perspectives. [2] One of the group's main findings, from 2012 to date [3], based on studies conducted with both individuals and groups, is that colour is viewed as extremely important by both educators (working with 0-5 year-old children) and teachers (6-10 year-olds). However, despite teachers' great interest in colour, they are increasingly confused about how best to approach it, both from the personal and the educational points of view.

### **1.2 Reviewing the work of great educational thinkers from the past**

The group's field investigations in schools and ECECs have been informed by the work of educationalists from the past, who at different times, and from different perspectives, have approached the theme of colour in relation to children. Indeed, historically, a number of scholars recognized the potential for colour to play a key role in the educational sphere. We here briefly overview their extensive work, focusing on a few of the better-known figures. The first of these, however, is not an educationalist but Corrado Ricci, a renowned art critic and historian, who was one of the first in the late 1800s in Italy, to take an interest in children's drawings. In a short work published in 1877, "Children's Art", he discussed very young children's relationship with colour, reviewing the thinking of contemporary scholars on the theme. Some authors (including William Gladstone) believed that the ancients perceived fewer colours than us, and that this peculiarity was shared by categories of modern humans viewed as limited, such as savages and children. Hugo Magnus and William Thierry Preyer, among others, for example, claimed that children can initially only see red and yellow, later also learning to discern green and the blue, though often confusing them with grey. Ricci was not persuaded by these theories, arguing that: "Certainly we need to

educate children's chromatic sense just as we educate their hand to draw well. Not because it is true that they cannot perceive colours, but so that they may be able to harmoniously match them with reality. For just as they are initially well able to see things but unable to represent them using signs, so they can see colours but are unable to and disinterested in identifying them on the palette." [4("The child and colour", pp.74-75) At the end of this passage, Ricci invited teachers and parents to guide children in observing and correctly perceiving reality, and especially to focus on shades of colours because "[...] many children perceive colours, but often inaccurately and discordantly." [4, p.75] The theme of educating to colour was also treated by three famous figures in Italian education, albeit from different perspectives: the Agazzi sisters (Rosa 1866-1951, Carolina 1870-1945), Giuseppina Pizzigoni (1870-1947), and Maria Montessori (1870-1952). Carolina and Rosa Agazzi devised methods of working with objects and trinkets (brought to school by the children or by the teachers themselves), which were to be divided by colour: "*The Educator's Museum*. For each colour the educator presents, she will collect a set of objects in a suitable box. In a red box, she may place: a poppy and other red flowers: (pinks, carnations, geraniums etc.); red fruits and vegetables: (tomatoes, bell peppers, currants, strawberries, apples, etc.); miscellaneous objects: (thread, paper, tape, ball, powder, earrings, necklace, clothes, hat, parasol etc.). The lesson. When presenting these and the other things making up the museum of the colour red, precedence should be given to the object that is most characteristically of that colour; that is to say, the object that by its nature cannot be of any other colour. For each of the main colours, only a few things will meet this criterion: let us seek them out and exploit this special characteristic to accustom the mind of the child to investigating and understanding." [5] Giuseppina Pizzigoni encouraged observation of the world of nature in which the colour is a key feature, for this reason devoting much time to the copying of real-life subjects as well as to more ornamental drawing. "d) *Copying from Real Life*. I always approach drawing in terms of directly copying the real-life subject, not a drawing on the blackboard or a model. Right from first grade, I bring children in front of a barren tree and, after getting them to observe it, I invite them to draw it. On another occasion, I will get them to look at an evergreen, such as a pine tree, and then invite them to draw it. The first grader knows no hesitation, and draws both trees, just as, without hesitation, he or she draws men, homes, and ships. [...] e) *Colouring*. The use of colour plays a large part in drawing lessons; from kindergarten to the highest grade, colour is applied, although it may be obtained by different means. There is a progression from the knowledge of basic colours to the composition of colours and their various hues. Colour is obtained using crayons, coloured pencils, watercolours, oil paints and other special paints that are ideal for painting toys. It is used to make geometric figures stand out and to copy real-life subjects; it also enlivens spontaneous drawings." [6] Maria Montessori, in contrast, approached colour via three different types of educational activity: a set of visual discrimination exercises, which also serve to check the child's eyesight; attending to materials and furniture from the point of view of their chromatic quality (notably in all the Montessori materials, colour is present as a key variable); direct experimentation by children with the creation of the colours and different shades of colour. The following is a first mention in Montessori's writings of the importance of attending to colour: "Aesthetics. Another characteristic of objects is that they are attractive. The colour, brightness, and harmony of shapes are aspects to be attended to in everything that surrounds the child. Not only the sensory material, but the whole environment is thus prepared to attract him/her [...]. And the child obeys the object that corresponds in that moment to his or her deepest need to act." [7] A second passage refers to the actual work to be carried out with the children: "To appreciate colours (children), have a particular sensitivity, which begins to develop in the earliest years of life, through sensory exercises. [...] Regarding colour, note that right from the "house of the child" stage, the children learn to prepare their own paints, making them up themselves to obtain different shades, etc. and they are greatly

motivated by this. When they are older, it is fascinating to observe the care they take in striving to prepare colours that correspond exactly to the natural shades: they try again and again with varying proportions of the different colours, diluting them, or increasing their concentration, until they achieve the precise hue they are after! And it is wonderful to see how the eye is able to appreciate finer differences in colour, and to reproduce them, frequently with wonderful precision." [8] To bring us up to the present day, we may include in our review the work of Loris Malaguzzi and the *Reggio Children Approach*, in which colour (both pigment and light) is the focus of a series of workshops designed to offer a different way of getting to know the world [9].

## 2 EDUCATION THROUGH COLOUR

Coming back to the contemporary educational context, among the data collected and analysed by our research group over the last number of years, one key finding concerns the kind of use that is made of colour in educational contexts. "For example, questionnaire data collected in 2015, showed that of 49 student teachers who had just completed a period of teaching practice in nursery schools, 71% had observed the implementation of at least one educational activity related to colour, based on the use of tools and materials such as markers, crayons, paints, pencils, sheets of paper or cardboard, and involving actions ranging from colouring shapes with pre-set contours or free painting. Similar activities were reported by student teachers who had done their teaching practice in primary schools (but less frequently, in 27% of cases). The themes ranged from: an in-depth exploration of a single colour, warm versus cold colours, primary and secondary colours, and colours associated with emotions or sounds. This cross-section of observed activities, which has remained stable over the years, has led us to conclude that there is an implicit and almost inflexible tendency to choose colours of pigment and the related experimental activities." [10, p.506] Thus educational activities in schools are focused almost exclusively on colours of pigment. We explored the reasons for this preference by discussing it directly with teachers, who have reported that, given the complexity of colour, working with colours of pigment is the only tried and tested approach of proven success, while alternative approaches, such as working with colours of light, falls outside their area of competence and they would be reluctant to try them without the support of an expert. We thus set out to identify new opportunities, within teacher education programmes, to foster a culture of colour that would make teachers feel more competent and less inclined to restrict exploration of colour with their pupils, as we will describe in more detail in the next section. Paraphrasing the title of a famous book by Herbert Read: *Education Through Art*, [11] which set out to situate art in education not so much as a discrete subject, relegated to a small number of hours a week at each of the various levels of schooling, but as an operational approach to knowledge construction and social sharing, we have interpreted colour as a possible interdisciplinary path with infinite potential, which has in great part yet to be discovered in the field of education.

## 3 COLOUR AS LANGUAGE

As implied in the previous paragraph, teachers often underestimate the effects of failing to provide the cognitively developing child with the opportunity to engage in exploration; yet a lack of exploratory experience may prevent the child from enriching and expanding its capacity to learn. In this regard Tomás Maldonado, drawing on the work of Jacques Mehler (1974), has written: "It would seem indeed that our brain needs, at a certain point, to sacrifice neurons that are never (or rarely) used, and this for the purpose of making available, so to speak, more space for the most frequently used neurons. It is thus evident that the sensory and motor experience that we encourage (or discourage) in children during the early years of their lives is not without consequences. Such experience may, in some cases, foster or inhibit intellectual development, promote or block certain skills. [...]" [12] The emotional meaning of a trace of colour, a creative expressive, material, artistic, and aesthetic sign, may also bear the value of a symbolic expressive linguistic experience. [13]

With regard to the use of colour in schools, it is rarely used as a functional language in educational praxis, for example as an aid to the memorization of linguistic meanings, or the identification of relationships of meaning. [14] The Bliss method is one of the numerous systems of AAC (Augmentative and Alternative Communication) that already use colours to facilitate learning and

recognition of the syntactic components in an utterance and the logical relationships between words. However, the educator and speech therapist only use colour as an aid for students who have difficulty communicating verbally. [15] Thus, this particular use of colour is not extended to the entire class, although it is unknown to what extent this might facilitate the linguistic learning of the other pupils also. Colour is also seriously overlooked in the school setting as a possible language of geometry and mathematics: from the analysis of the elements forming geometric figures to the recognition of sets, and from the relations governing geometrical transformations to the use of colour to illustrate mathematical theorems.

Frequently, but not in all cases, colour is used in schools as a language of geography, as well as in relation to listening to the music and to exploring emotional experience. However, our experiments in the last-mentioned areas, have led us to conclude that in these cases too colour is explored timidly and in a partial manner. We should especially note how little attention is devoted to the use of the colour as a basis for sensory exercises designed to foster children's perceptual sensitivity from the early years.

And we need to ask why this aspect is overlooked, given that, as mentioned in paragraph 1.2, in the first half of the twentieth century, Maria Montessori had already initiated a debate on the perceptual-sensory use of colour in education, contributing profound and modern reflections on this theme.

Also of interest is the work of Johannes Itten, who studied how people subjectively experience colours, both on their own and in combination with other colours. Itten conducted key experiments on the relationship between sound/music and colour, an interest shared with other scholars and artists, also studying subjective colour propensities and habits. His research on the perceptual effects of the depth of different colours formed the basis for his famous abstract compositions. [16] Despite the numerous studies devoted to the relationship between colour and sound in the course of the twentieth century, the theme has yet to spark significant debate or interest in the field of education.

#### **4 COLOUR-BASED ENQUIRY**

As suggested above, colour is a theme that is constantly approached from multiple perspectives in early childhood and primary education. The range of approaches is broad, although the most widely adopted are based on colours of pigment and to a lesser extent on colours of light, two modes of experimentation that may be implemented with children and on which this paper has focused. In relation to these paths of discovery, key feedback received from educators and teachers, however, suggests that they are somewhat intimidated by the complexity of a theme that offers countless variables, generally sticking to established practices that they have already implemented and avoiding ones that are very different to those learned during their initial training. Our own proposed approach, which is informed by *art-based enquiry* [17, 18], draws on the work of artists who have used colour as a key element of their aesthetic enquiry. And who can thus offer expert guidance and encouragement to teachers setting out on previously unexplored learning trajectories.

Two examples may be drawn from books by Alberto Boatto [19] and Stefano Zuffi [20], respectively, who trace the key role of colour throughout the history of art. Throughout the various chapters of his book, Boatto recommends approaching one colour at a time, drawing on the work of individual artists to explore the myriad possibilities offered by each colour. For example, in relation to the colour red, the author summarizes the journey that it has allowed us to make in the following terms:

"The journey of red that I have reconstructed here, starting from the lightness of the pure colour in Matisse and the magic of Klee, passing through the gravitational heaviness of the material colour in Burri, and winding up with the typographic version of Lichtenstein and the building construction colouring adopted by Segal. From the *joie de vivre* of the French master, via the drama of Burri, we have arrived at the squalor stripped of any psychological resonance of the American pop sculptor." [19, p.48] Thus the different "reds" are presented to us as paths of enquiry, initially unknown even to the artists themselves. After ranged through a selection of colours, Boatto eventually addresses polychromic colour. A similar form of enquiry may be carried out by directly comparing the work of multiple artists, using colour as a magnifying glass to explore how their art developed and changed. Figures such as Klee, Kandinskij, Mondrian, Pollock, and Rothko, may be "used" as masters accompanying us on our journey of discovery through colour. Such an approach offers endless opportunities for experimentation.

## 5 CONCLUSION

If educators and teachers are to meaningfully approach colour from a broader perspective, overcoming their fears about how abstract knowledge that is distant from their personal and scientific backgrounds may impact on their pupils, they will require training in exploratory learning paths for early childhood education settings. Both the educators and students who participated in our research reacted enthusiastically and expressed the desire to further experience colour, not only as a pigment, but also as light, when offered the opportunity to attend ad hoc training on the theme. The general lack of training in this area constrains educational offerings within the parameters of the better-known colours of pigment, often in the limited terms of asking the children to stereotypically transcribe the colours observed in reality, with the result of inhibiting over time both children's and teachers' curiosity and desire to experiment with colour.

In conclusion, we invite teachers and educators to use colour with children, and, as adults, to embrace it themselves as an infinite interdisciplinary experience that is rich in cultural potential to be sought especially in the field of art. By extending the boundaries of our experimentation, it is possible to approach the work of past and contemporary artists in a very simple manner, and to move from the materiality of pigment to the intangibility of light.

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# **COLLAGE-MAKING AS A CHANCE FOR EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH WITH HEALTH PROFESSIONALS**

**M.Benedetta Gambacorti-Passerini<sup>1</sup>, Lucia Zannini<sup>2</sup>**

*1 University of Milano-Bicocca (ITALY)*

*2 University of Milan (ITALY)*

## **Abstract**

The contribution aims at providing a reflection on the use of “collage practice” in educational research involving health professionals. The paper seeks to explore the use of collage as an investigation strategy in connection to narratives, referred to an arts-informed perspective in qualitative research [1]. Using images can allow a new comprehension of the world, based on imaginative functions. Similarly, narratives are a paradigmatic way for creating comprehension of the world, using metaphors. For this reason, the use of collage can be a valid research instrument especially when participants involved are adult professionals, in order to break the “fixed versions” of their stories, built during their lifetimes and working experience: the collage will be an instrument to introduce something unexpected that allows them to re-think their stories, producing different narrations [2]. The paper will discuss the collage technique, proposed as an instrument that can help participants to go deeper into the process of meaning construction, before, after or beyond narrations related to lived experiences, as usually done in narrative inquiry [3], and biographical research [4].

With particular reference to health contexts, collage, accompanied by narration [5], can be an instrument to allow professionals to reflect and give meaning to their everyday complex practice with patients. In order to clarify this issue, different examples of qualitative research, carried out by the authors [6] [7] in health contexts will be presented and discussed. The search for visual and imaginative metaphors based on images and verbal narrations can create forms of meaning about everyone’s experience, which otherwise would not be discovered.

Key-words: Collage making, educational research, health professionals.

## **1 Collage-making as a chance for generating reflective and narrative thinking**

The artistic technique of collage-making born as an oriental way of decoration, based on composing different materials upon a rigid surface.



Developed also in western culture, collage-making is adopted in contemporary art, with different ways of realization: from Picasso's purpose (*Still Life with Chair Caning*, 1912), to Matisse's *papiers gouachés découpés*, to Dadaism photomontage, and to various experimental forms in the last decades.

In every collage, the used material has been produced for other purposes and it has to be re-composed in a new framework, where it conquers new meaning, created by the author. In this sense, collage-making requires a process of de-construction (choosing and selecting the material) and, subsequently, a work of re-construction, composing the chosen material in a new form.

Those aspects allow to thematize the educational possibility of collage-making, related to developing reflective thinking. Butler-Kisber, in her studies about using visual methods in human sciences, underlines the possibility to propose collage as «a reflective process, as a chance for thinking, writing and/or discussing» [8].

Going further, collage-making can generate a gaze that is built on a not canonical use of image, allowing the author to conquer unusual representations of the theme on which the collage is based. Biffi & Zuccoli [2] underline these aspects, discussing the educational chance offered by the collage, which makes visible a new comprehension of the world, also using metaphors. Similarly, the narrative is a paradigmatic way for creating comprehension of the world, using metaphors as well. For this reason, the use of collage can be a valid research instrument especially when participants involved are adult professionals, in order to break the "fixed versions" of their stories, built during their lifetimes and working experience: the collage can introduce something unexpected that allows them to re-think their stories, producing different narrations [2].

While using reflective thinking, creating a collage is an activity that enhances a personal work, exploring everyone's meaning and helping participants to go deeper into the process of meaning's construction, as usually done in narrative [3], and biographical research [4]. With particular reference to health contexts, collage, accompanied by narration [5], can be an instrument to allow professionals to reflect and give meaning to their everyday complex practice with patients. Moreover, narrating and sharing the meaning inside the collage allow to consider other professionals' point of view, enriching everyone's ideas and professional practice.

## 2 Methodological aspects of collage-making

From a methodological point of view, a range of different practices may be used to create a collage; the research procedure and its goals will be different in each case, because each practice involves a different way of thinking about the artistic creation.

The material required to produce the collage is, of course, supplied by the researcher, and special care is required in preparing it. When we use this practice in our educational research, we normally provide participants with a white A3-sized sheet of paper: this is the space that they can use to create the collage on. A rich set of materials is usually made available for the production of the collage: colored pencils and markers, sheets of colored paper for cutting, and a wide range of magazines from which participants can select images to cut out and paste onto their white sheet; in this regard, it is crucial to provide magazines with pictures related to different aspects of life.

The researcher presents those materials and lays them out on the table, in such a way that it can be reached easily by everyone, together with scissors, glue and sticky tape (the quantities of these materials must be well thought out, in line with the number of participants, in order to facilitate their work and avoid situations in which individual participants must wait their turn to use scissors or glue). When the material has been presented and suitably laid out, the proper phase of collage-making

may begin. It usually lasts at least thirty minutes, but the researcher must monitor the time by keeping an eye at the participants' work. Sometimes their progress may be checked by asking "How are you getting on with the task?". The idea is to create a "flexible" time period, that is neither too long nor too short, in which each participant can find the space they need to create their collage, without feeling either rushed or bored. In the current study, when all participants had completed their collages, the researcher invited each participant to show his/her collage to the group, presenting it in a few words. Thus, the collage-making session terminates with a brief moment of "collage-sharing": each participant shares a very short narrative, describing his/her collage and its meanings to the rest of the group.

### 3 Proposing collage to professionals in the mental health area

We refer now to an empirical study we carried on, involving two Mental Health units, with the aim of exploring the interaction between medical and educational interventions in two different contexts, in which health and educational professionals carry out their daily practice as a team [6].

The research design is informed by a qualitative approach [9], based on a hermeneutic-phenomenological method [10]. Data were gathered using a range of instruments: ethnographic observation [11], semi-structured interviews [3] and the practice of collage-making [8] that was used to explore the representations the participants attributed to the multi-professional interaction.

Instructions provided to the participants, as stated above, was: *Create a collage representing the collaboration between the different professionals on your team.*

Analysis of the collected material pointed out a recurrent use of images to describe and narrate educational work in the context of multi-professional teams, as illustrated by the following examples.

Narrating educational work may be challenging, due to the difficulty of describing educational actions, which are often neither visible nor tangible [12]. Thus, in the context of the current research, collage-making allowed participants to use images to represent peculiar aspects of educational work, and to make visible intangible aspects of education in the area of Mental Health.

First, educators chose images to represent the concept of "proximity", which is descriptive of different aspects of their work.



*«This is the classic symbol of the educator's role, focused on helping and staying close to people. Here [in the community] the educator is close to patients 24 hours a day, the educator is the professional who really knows the patients, a person who is always with them» (Narrative accompanying Collage 7*

*Picture 1 (Detail of Collage 7 Context 1))*

The idea of "closeness" resulted crucial in defining the educational work in the area of Mental Health, coming to bear on different aspects of it, such as an emotional, relational, empathic closeness to patients, and a closeness related to sharing everyday life activities with them.

The use of images offered an opportunity to make these aspects visible, to name them and attempt to speak of them. Relational closeness, in fact, was described as the educator's total engagement in the relationship with each patient. Furthermore, this relational proximity is strongly based on sharing daily-life: the educator is the professional who is responsible for the practical aspects of patients' life.

Arising from the images chosen during the collage-making, these aspects were further explored by participants during the interviews. These conversations yielded insights into the difficulties associated with the image of “closeness”, such as dimensions of “heaviness” and “attrition” inherent in the educators’ constant proximity to patients.

The images chosen by the participants revealed further challenging aspects of educational work in Mental Health. For example, the collage making provided them with the opportunity to make visible and to name the fear of mental illness and the effort required to cope with it on a daily basis.



*«This is S. when he becomes angry and unapproachable...» (Narrative accompanying Collage 4 Context 2)*

*Picture35 (Detail of Collage 4 Context 2); Picture 4 (Collage 4 Context 2)*

These images reveal a first key aspect of the complexity of carrying out educational work in Mental Health contexts: mental illness itself, and the strain of daily encountering and dealing with it and its expressions. This is a specific challenge for educators, because, as noted above, their work is carried out within a close and continuous relationship with patients.

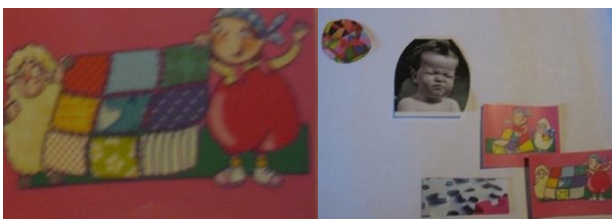
Another thematic group of images portrayed the complexity of conducting educational work within a multi-professional team: these pictures represented the difficulties arising due to conflicts among different professional figures:



*«Our ideas are always clashing in a constant war...» (Narrative accompanying Collage 12 Context 1)*

*Picture 5 (Detail of Collage 12 Context 1); Picture 6 (Collage 12 Context 1)*

Participation in multi-professional teams is a specific characteristic of educational work in the area of Mental Health that generates additional complexity as we have just seen. Conversely, when the group functions well, educators note the value of their contribution to the collective effort:



*«This image represents our satisfaction when we find a way to collaborate and create something good for the patients, together with other professionals» (Narrative accompanying Collage 5 Context 2)*

*Picture 7 (Detail of Collage 5 Context 2); Picture 8 (Collage 5 Context 2)*

The images just presented illustrate some of the thematic symbols that emerged during the collage-making phase of the research: these themes capture and support narration of the fundamental and peculiar characteristics of educational work in Mental Health, which the participants were able to identify with the help of the images. Furthermore, the pictures were frequently recalled and mentioned during the interviews, when the researcher and participants were engaged in a conversation that was not based on the use of symbols and pictures.

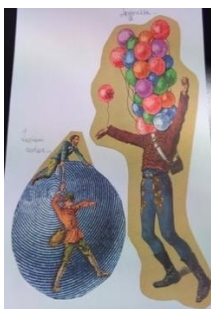
#### 4 PROPOSING COLLAGE-MAKING TO PROFESSIONALS IN THE PALLIATIVE CARE (PC) AREA

During the Master Programme in PC of the University of Milan, in the Academic Year 2015-2016, a research project was carried out, in order to explore participants' development of competences [7]. Referring to a qualitative approach to research [9], the project was based on the Grounded Theory method [13]: in this sense, the project explored aspects that hardly can be measured using quantitative instruments, as validate scales to monitor the development of competences in the PC area [14].

Participants were divided in three groups, according to their professional profile (one group of physicians and two groups of nurses, where also the social worker was inserted) and each group participated in 3 focus-groups (at the beginning, in the middle and at the end of the Master).

During the second focus-group, participants were asked to create a collage, in order to explore the symbolic dimensions related to the concept of "good death" [15] [16], fundamental for PC area. The request was to create a collage to represent everyone's idea of "good death".

A first aspect emerging from this experience is that the proposal of collage-making, based on the use of images, allowed participants to reflect on their personal idea of "good death". As literature underlines [17], PC professionals often internalize the key-concepts of PC caring in an idealized way, and rarely stop to critically reflect on those concepts. This risk also regards the concept of "good death", when professionals don't reflect on the deep and personal meanings that it recalls. The proposal to think about the concept of "good death" using images offered a chance to work about the personal meaning and concepts, as outlined by a nurse's collage:



Picture 8 (Collage 3)

*I chose these two images: a man falling in an oblivion with another man trying to stop him. I wrote "let me go", because in my opinion, an essential aspect for a good death is that people let you go at a certain moment... Then, I inserted another man with a lot of coloured balloons: I associated him to an idea of lightness that characterizes the good death for me (Narration of collage 3)*

It seems that the proposal of collage-making has allowed participants to find a room to reflect on personal concepts of "good death", having the possibility to let emerge "not idealized" significances of it. Participants was incited to explore personal beliefs and meanings, which are fundamental aspects in order to define your own idea of "good death" [15]. The following collage, for example, shows the

effort undertaken by a physician to explore her deep ideas of “good death”, highlighting that these concepts are really linked to professional practices:



Picture 9 (Collage 15)

*I chose a room, because we often only offered a room for a good death, trying to adapt it, making it more personal as possible, so that the person can feel as “at home”. It is important, I think, the place where you die. Then I inserted an image of a shared walking, in a condition of reciprocal pleasure. Finally “love and not war”, because for me good deaths are the ones without conflicts*

Proposing collage-making, in this sense, was an educational chance that allowed participants to produce a personal work, experimenting creativity and using unusual languages. Furthermore, narrating and sharing collages, allowed them to consider other professionals’ point of view and to start a dialogue with them.

The experience has also allowed participants to critically think about the strong link between the personal meanings and professional practices: this is a very crucial aspect for health professionals, in order to reflect and give meaning to their everyday complex practice with patients. In this sense, creating the collage could have represented a new chance in PC training, which is committed in preparing professionals the challenging work of accompanying people to death.

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# CINEMA AND DIGITAL TECHNOLOGY AS RESOURCES OF TEACHING AND LEARNING

Annamaria Poli<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>*Università degli Studi di Milano Bicocca (ITALY)*

## Abstract

The educational potential regarding the analysis of motion picture language using the digital technologies remains little understood and little explored, while Italian educators/teachers at all levels of schooling enjoy limited access to digital tools. Likewise, the value and educational benefits of using film as an educational resource at school are largely unappreciated.

This contribution presents the research project titled *Cinema at School* regarding the proposal to introduce the cinema at school oriented to promote the media education and enhance the teaching of digital tools dedicated to the film editing and the film language analysis.

Film is the first multimedia object that, from its origin, served to overcome the limits of the human eye. The use of cinema in educational context can reinforce the learning of single topics, and at the same time, it produces a contribution to interdisciplinary learning approach when the use is specially oriented to explore other topics. Film at school can act as an analytical-documentary resource and as a creative teaching resource, by virtue of its versatile and multidimensional nature. We should not forget the magic lantern, a device precursor of the cinema, it has been not only used for entertainment purposes but also to deliver lectures on several topics from science to arts and literature. Film is a teaching resource characterized by the power to “transport” the class into any possible spatial-temporal or interdisciplinary dimension.

By the representation of visible and invisible reality and imaginary worlds, the fiction dimension of film supports the aim of multiplying the perspectives available to the students and guides their attention to countless forms of narrative from near or distant place in the space and time of human culture in the past and future. With similar modality, the digital technologies for animation picture and others experimentation visual techniques transport the observer/student in other spaces of learning.

Keywords: Cinema Education, Interdisciplinary Approach, Innovative Teaching Methodology, Learning Space.

## 1 CINEMA IS AN ART.

At the dawn of the history of cinema, in the period spanning the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the show of *Cinématographe Lumière* was mainly shown at fairs or amusement parks and was

viewed as a freak in a sideshow, a touring show, a form of entertainment that was expected to principally elicit amazement, curiosity and amusement. [1]

The early film theoretician Ricciotto Canudo was officially the Italian scholar who first studied cinema as a form of art: he compared it with the other arts and concluding that cinema, in that it recapitulates all the other arts, may be defined as "plastic art in motion". [2]

The definition of term "cinema as the fifth art" was coined by Louis Delluc [3], while the "Sixth Art" label was defined by Ricciotto Canudo on his manifesto titled *La naissance d'une Sixième Art* in 1911. Subsequently he opted for the better known "Seventh Art" and he founded, in 1921, the first cineclub. [4]

In a famous letter written in 1948 for the magazine *Bianco e Nero*, the writer Benedetto Croce recognized and accepted that cinema might be considered a work of art, insofar as a work of art is free and a manifestation of the human spirit. [5]

The work of art is an output of human inventiveness that issues from the attempt to aesthetically create an artistic product of great and recognized value.

Anyone can create, but not all creators are artists: the artist is he or she who receives a superior quality intuition and is endowed with a refined sensibility with which to express their feelings. Marcel Duchamp and Man Ray were both convinced that art is first and foremost a mental phenomenon whose physical realisation can take place in any medium.

In the period spanning the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, advances in technology and new techniques of representation facilitated the invention of instruments, the daguerreotype and cinematograph, with the capability to record real-life images. The reproduction of reality via moving images and the creation of animated images encouraged both the growth of and interest in new forms of art.

Gilles Deleuze wrote that "the great directors of the cinema may be compared not only to painters, architects, musicians, but also to thinkers. They think with movement-images and time-images instead of concepts", and precisely for this reason Deleuze himself argued that film belonged to part of the history of art and thought. This claim elevated cinema to the status of the place where images are transformed into visual concepts and directors into thinkers. [6]

According to the French critic Jean-Louis Baudry, film is an instrument of representation similar to the representation of perspective in painting. [7] In fact when studying the origins of cinema, it is natural to examine the kind of pictorial art that had already been present in the pre-cinema era. The period between the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries saw the birth of the realistic or visionary landscape painting, the painting of views, and panoramic painting. Artists such Viviano Codazzi and Michelangelo Cerquozzi with their paintings of "realistic" views of the city and later Gaspard Van Wittel, Jean-Baptiste-Camille Corot, Bernardo Bellotto and Francesco Guardi with their grand and true to life views of the city, created new visual spaces. [8] [9]

These pictorial spaces were radically different to those that had gone before and greatly expanded the production of documentary pictures.

Eric Rohmer studied the relationship between painting and cinema. He theorized on the artistic value of cinema, this value doesn't stem from others arts, but artistic is the way in which the cinema produces the film. The cinema is a new art for its ability to faithfully reproduce reality and also create fantastic worlds. This singular character of cinema, Rohmer observed, has undermined the traditional constitutive elements of a workart. [10]

Arthur Edwin Krows wrote "...the work of art is not made with marble, with the pen, the paper and ink, or with the coordinated intervention of the playwright, the actor and the theater building, but from the reactions of the public to which it is presented and for which, presumably, it is produced." [11]

With the passing of time, film has become a narrative language with its own conventions of grammar and style. It is a language that is related to literature, given that its characters can speak and that its aim is to tell stories.



However, from its birth, cinema has been described as an art, the art of motion or more appropriately the art of time, because it induces spectators to experience feelings and emotional reactions by totally immersing them in the dimension of filmic time. [6].

The moving images of film facilitate experiences that are not direct experiences of reality but are equally rich, sensory, and exciting, and can therefore compete with objective and intelligible reality. Albert Michotte wrote that filmic experience generates the union of the real and the artificial, in that spectators live out the emotions elicited by the filmic narrative, while remaining aware that the story they are watching is not real. [12] Lucilla Albano has also described film as an experience that is both real and not real, true and at the same time false, likening it to the dream. [13]

In the opinion of George Sadoul, "the cinema, first, is pastime, but it is also, although we don't have awareness, a media for education. Thanks to it, without to move from little town or the village where the audience lives, he/she can learn, know something of the farthest places, about their traditions, landscapes, buildings, civilization. The cinema, since shows the things, it teaches with more efficacy compared to books and papers; while a writer describes the waves of sea, the film shows them in their real life. But the cinema is also art.[...] therefore the cinema is, at the same time, pastime, instrument of culture, art, industry, commerce, technique". [14]

Antonio Costa provided an effective synthesis, stating that film is as a set of many things, but for him it is above all simultaneous narration and representation. [15] At the same time Antonio Costa explored, in depth, the relationship between cinema and the visual arts, particularly between painting and architecture. [16]

Gian Piero Brunetta, on the other hand, wrote with accurate foresight that in the third millennium, with the advent of digital and interactive telecommunications media and virtual reality, the cinema would remain a valuable resource: as a medium of expression, a mode of communication, and a "privileged place in which the unconscious beams out its rays of light to make the invisible visible". [17]

## **2 CAN CINEMA ACT AS A RESOURCE FOR SCHOOLS?**

Brunetta's definition, cited at the end of the last paragraph, prompts a few remarks on the use of film as a space of learning, given that it can offer a valuable resource to schools.

Most teachers have been making use of film in the classroom for many years now, but often without knowing how to exploit the key methodological approaches that ensure its effectiveness in fostering learning and teaching processes.

When we think about the use of film in the school setting, it is almost always in relation to some kind of "cineforum" or film club formula, involving the showing of a series of films on a common theme, followed by classroom debates among teachers and students, sometimes with the input of outside experts.

However, in the digital and Internet era, the filmic and media education provided by schools needs to go somewhat further: describing media contents is no longer sufficient. The objective is to promote and develop among the new generations a critical approach to the language of images and an informed use of the media. [18]

Learning the language of film can help students become more critical and mindful consumers of filmic products. At the same time, students may be trained in new skills, especially digital citizenship competences. [19] According to Le Boterf, competence lies in the mobilization of individual resources (knowledge, skills, attitudes, and much more), rather than in the resources themselves: it may be defined as knowing how to act (or react) in a given situation in a given setting, to attain a given level of performance, which will be rated by other subjects. [20]

The growing importance of developing new cognitive skills implies the need to help teachers design and deliver innovative educational paths and to provide them with alternative tools and applications exploiting the benefits of digital technologies, in line with pilot projects introducing interdisciplinary educational paths that have already been implemented in a number of schools.

What is the function of film in the classroom? How may we exploit its educational potential? What film education trajectory is achievable with children and what trajectory with adolescents? These are only some of the currently open questions that must be answered before introducing any film education project in a school.

The world of film constantly offers new material for reflection on both current and futuristic "socially acute" themes, and if interdisciplinary film education projects are being considered, increasingly rich and stimulating ideas are continuously flowing from the field of art amongst others.

The key thing is to develop an understanding of cinema not just as a pastime or form of entertainment, but as an art that can become a resource for educational and training processes. Film education means teaching about the educational value of the film language, aesthetic taste, and how cinema works from a technical point of view.

Scholars in the field of film education have theorized that film may be introduced at all levels of schooling via two main routes: an analytical-creative route that is critical and descriptive and a productive-creative one that is critical but also operative. These paths may be viewed as either independent or combinable. Both can generate further interdisciplinary teaching or learning paths. [21]

Which of these two options is it better to choose: Film as a supplementary teaching-learning resource (analytical route) or the cinema workshop as a means of developing creativity (productive path)? Alain Bergala suggests that "the experience of creation is essential", specifically direct experience of making film. [22]

## **2.1 Cinema in schools: an experimental approach between digital technology and languages for teaching and learning.**

The research project on film education entitled *At School with the Cinema* was initiated in 2014 at the "Riccardo Massa" Department of Human Sciences and Education of the University of Milan Bicocca, is still in progress, and is aimed at promoting the use of film in schools as an educational and training resource.

To date, introducing film culture and language in selected Italian classrooms has led to the construction of meaningful teaching-learning paths/experiences. Each path has been designed on the basis of specific objectives defined by the participating schools such as:

- . Reinforcing the teaching of some disciplines;
- . Facilitating interdisciplinary educational activities;
- . Fostering intercultural communication;
- . Fostering inclusion and integration;
- . Enhancing students' awareness of their right to be children;
- . Reinforcing the critical use and awareness of the language of images as part of students' broader digital media education.

The research project is underpinned by an alternative approach to using film in school setting. First, it is characterised by an interdisciplinary approach [21] and informed by F.M.R. theory (*Fragments mis en rapport*) which advocates relating fragments of film to one another by organizing them around a theme. [22]

Part of the project has involved guiding student teachers on teaching practice to make innovative use of film education methods in order to transcend the rigid disciplinary boundaries that constrain conventional methods of teaching.

The idea for the project was generated by experimental action research previously conducted in collaboration with Prof. Fulvio Benussi at the Liceo Carlo Tenca High School in Milan with the aim of developing and refining active and interdisciplinary teaching methods via the use of film and digital technologies. [23]

The experimental programme's key educational aim is to test new and alternative methods of using film in education and training so that the full educational/training potential of filmic language may be recognized and harnessed with a view to enhancing teaching and learning.

To implement this project, it was first necessary to identify together with the teachers of the participating schools, suitable shared themes, to design and present to the teachers the proposed teaching-learning paths - which reflected the previously established goals - as well as the selected films. The occasions on which film would be used to generate a novel space of learning and interdisciplinary resource were also defined in advance. The researcher and teachers worked together and agreed on how certain transversal themes, or connections with other disciplines, could be drawn out more effectively to enhance learning.

The proposed educational paths were intended to offer the participating students a comprehensive yet open-ended introduction to the main themes in the art of film.

Multiple approaches were used, all of which drew on the theme of cinema's roots in art, science and technology to enrich subject-specific learning.

The main learning objectives included introducing students to film culture, fostering their appreciation of world film heritage, and offering them a basic knowledge of filmic language and of how films are made from a technical point of view. The digital technology provided was used both as an analytical tool for developing students' ability to watch and critically analyse and interpret a film and filmic images, and as a creative (operational) tool during the production and post-production stages.

The outcomes of the first year of the project include the key observation that film has many features in common with the humanities, the sciences and the arts. Specifically, numerous connections were identified with literature, philosophy, history and geography, economy and law, the natural sciences and mathematics, foreign languages and above all the other arts. [24]

Film is an interdisciplinary and multicultural resource by nature and unites people thanks to its power to reveal concepts and perceptions that otherwise would not be visible to the naked eye. [25]

### **3 CONCLUSIONS**

The reflections shared by the students who have participated in the project to date suggest that it has helped them to acquire the capacity to analyse a cinematographic work and an understanding of the multiple elements contained therein. The majority of the students that took part in the programme acquired the ability to view a film critically. Specifically, the participants were found to be more mindfully aware of drawing connections between ideas and knowledge from different areas, Cinema, Arts, History, Literature,, Technology and Sciences.

Feedback collected via the administration of entry and exit questionnaires documented the students' observations concerning the positive and critical aspects of the interdisciplinary teaching-learning paths offered.

In sum, knowledge and mastery of the language of film may be instrumental to acquiring other abilities and supportive of interdisciplinary learning.

Learning observational skills through the use of film allows the student to explore the history of cinema and the nature of film, the relationship between film language and other expressive languages, and the social and cultural roles of cinema.

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## ART AS A TOOL TO REFLECT ON EDUCATIONAL PRACTICES

Franca Zuccoli<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *University of Milano-Bicocca (ITALY)*

### Abstract

In the school and educational institutions often art is used to create projects dedicated to children. Many authors have reflected on this aspect (Dewey, 1995; Munari, 1981; Ricci, 2007; ...), identifying what can be the most meaningful content for these proposals. Materiality, experimentation, research, production, communication and sharing with others are fundamental (Pugliese, 2006; Bordini, 2007). In this proposal, however, the artistic proposal, while retaining the features previously mentioned, is intended for adults: educators, teachers, future teachers, as a way to deepen research (Schön, 1993, 2006). An instrument of investigation, which deepens further aspects, different from the more objective ones, but they are not abandoned. Observation protocols, seedlings, discussion and discussion protocols, tables, checklists, and observational videos can provide an important breakdown in school life needed to better understand what is happening and to design new educational actions (Mantovani, 1998; Liamputtong, 2013). But as Sullivan observes (2009), the current reality is so complex that another way to accommodate reflections, anxieties, fears and change wills that would otherwise be lost should be used. That's when this research begins, proposing the use of tools freely chosen by future teachers art-inspired to reflect on their didactic paths and their classroom and section proposals. The question asked by this research is to understand whether a different form of documentation, inspired by the modes of contemporary art research, can be significant within the educational world.

Keywords: Art research, educational practices, teacher, student, thoughtful teacher, reflexive practitioner

### 1 ART FROM NURSERY THROUGH PRIMARY SCHOOL

Educational contexts, whether early childhood education facilities (infant-toddler centres for 0-3 year olds) or educational institutions for older children (kindergarten, primary and lower secondary schools), have long seen a focus on art-related themes that is reflected in a diverse range of approaches and procedures. In this paper, we briefly examine two of the ways in which this interest in art is expressed during the period spanning early childhood education and primary school. First, art is an integral part of the educational setting itself. The preparation of educational spaces requires aesthetic forethought, and is usually the prerogative of the adult, who chooses colour schemes, natural and artificial décor, the layout of purpose-specific areas, and educational materials, sometimes incorporating the children's own work in his or her scheme. In some educational contexts, this aesthetic planning can become very sophisticated indeed, thanks to an awareness that

setting and materials represent - as Loris Malaguzzi has argued - "the third teacher" (after adults and other children), with a key role to play in supporting intentionally imagined and designed educational actions [1]. In such cases, it is nevertheless of value to ask what concept of decoration has underpinned the design of educational space, and what it is intended to offer at the educational level. This immediately requires, as this paper sets out to make explicit, that adults with responsibility for educating children become more consciously aware of their own educational action and their current relationship with the notion of art and design. What action by the children is prompted or enabled by a given material or by a given type of layout/furnishing/décor? Is it independent action or does it require constant intervention on the part of the adult in charge? Does it enable just one type of action or does it offer multiple opportunities for experimentation? Let us turn now to a second key way in which art may be present in schools, in addition to the presentation of educational space, which as we have seen characterizes educational settings up to the primary school level. This further presence of art is found at all levels of schooling and consists of art education programmes for children and teenagers. Art education is implemented through the organization of a set of activities spanning: drawing [2,3,4,5], painting, use of expressive codes and languages [6], reworking of visual signs, collage, handling of soft materials [7], assembly of objects, design of artefacts, experimentation with the body, spatial installations, use of new technologies, and engagement with cultural heritage [8,9], as well as many other opportunities for direct experience that are often delivered by means of laboratory methods. In relation to this aspect of art education in schools, further insight is provided in the Italian national curricular guidelines published in 2012, which regarding nursery school, state that: "Children express their thoughts and emotions in imaginative and creative ways: art fosters this propensity, educating them take pleasure in beauty and aesthetic experience. Their exploration of the available materials constitutes initial artistic experience that stimulates creativity and carries over to other learning. [...] Children's encounter with art offers them the opportunity to look at the world around them from another perspective. Exploring materials through their senses, experimenting with and sharing techniques in the art workshop at school, and observing places (squares, gardens and landscapes) and works of art (paintings, museums, architecture) will enhance their perceptual abilities, their enjoyment of consuming, producing and inventing art, and their appreciation of culture and artistic heritage." [10, p.20] In relation to primary education, the national guidelines provide further food for thought, for example in relation to the definition of art as a school subject: "The aim of the subject entitled 'art and visual education' is to foster and reinforce students' ability to express themselves and communicate in a creative and personal way, observe images and other artistic creations with a view to interpreting and understanding them, and develop a personal aesthetic sensibility and an informed interest in artistic heritage. [...] Education in art and image, delivered using a workshop-based approach, develops student' capacity to observe and describe, critically read and understand works of art. The development of these skills is a necessary condition for creating an attitude of curiosity towards and positive interaction with the artistic world." [10, p.73] In sum, the national curricular guideline focus on: materiality, experimentation, enquiry, production, communication, and sharing with peers and adults, as the key elements of teaching-learning paths in the domain of art.

## **2 A REFLECTION ON TEACHERS' THINKING ABOUT ART**

In light of this brief summary of the legislative guidelines, let us return to the first question posed in this paper. Namely, what idea of art and art education, we might say of the epistemology of this subject, is held by teachers and educators, and how does this inform the teaching-learning activities

offered to students? [11,12]. This is a crucial point because different ideas about art education and art itself on the part of the teacher can lead to different types of educational activities. We have frequently observed, over many years' involvement in initial and in-service teacher education at the nursery school and primary school levels, a failure on the part of teachers to reflect on their own attitude to art in the broad sense and a tendency to focus instead on specific art education activities to be implemented in the classroom. When, during the visual education module offered as part of the Degree Course in Primary Education, student teachers are asked when they last visited a museum, the majority cite a high school field trip, with only a small proportion, XX%, reporting having attended a museum on their own initiative or having taken part in (not necessarily high-profile) art events, which would reflect personal cultural engagement. Given this initial state of affairs, the module is designed to activate student teachers' artistic sensibilities by offering guided visits to contemporary art or design museums, as well as lectures by curators of exhibitions/museums and contemporary artists. This programme invariably elicits a strong level of engagement and enthusiasm on the part of the students. Similarly, in-service training modules for teachers (from nursery through upper secondary school) have been conducted in contemporary art museums (see for example the training course "School and contemporary art: new forms of shared design" which was run three times in 2015-2016 at Pirelli Hangar-Bicocca, during the exhibitions: "Hypothesis" by Philippe Parreno (October-November 2015), "Doubt" Carsten Höller (March/April 2016), "GDM - Grand Dad's Visitor Center" of Laure Prouvost (October 2016-April 2017), as well as at the Triennale Design Museum. For the first of these courses, 70 applications were received although only 25 places were available, and despite the fact that the module was not recognized by the Regional Education Office. Again, 90% of the teachers in attendance had never previously visited the HangarBicocca Pirelli, despite its status as a renowned contemporary art museum[13]. These findings about students and in-service teachers suggest a reluctance on their part to spontaneously engage with contemporary art or art heritage, as though permission or assistance were required to access this form of culture. This is even more strongly the case in relation to contemporary art, which is often perceived as alien or incomprehensible. Another key finding concerns the common perception on the part of teachers that art and education are separate areas following different or even diametrically opposed paths.

### **3 THE PERSPECTIVE OF JOHN DEWEY**

Our reflection on this last-mentioned point may be enriched by some citations from John Dewey, an author who displayed a consistent concern with the theme of art throughout his work. In "Art as Experience and other writings", Dewey had this to say about painting: "Is the art of painting so foreign to education and the education so foreign to art that they should be kept distinct and separate, or is art intrinsically educational, due to the very fact that it exists and not by virtue of any educational purpose to which it may be put?" [14, p.440]. He thus posited a powerful connection between education and art, going on to clarify that he understood art as a form of everyday experience, and to criticize those who wished to relegate it to an ivory tower reserved for a small elite of connoisseurs. Many were his arguments against the position of those who wanted to: "Put art on a pedestal, making it into something esoteric, separate from the values inherent in all experiences of things in their full integrity: and also something separate from the everyday needs of man." [14, p.441]. For example, he claimed that: "We might conclude that, after all, what we call aesthetic experience, if only we could live it often enough, and in the normal way, would not need to be defined as aesthetics. It would be recognized for what is truly is - simply experience - that is to say



having experiences of great value in the fullness of their meaning." [14, p.460]. In other words, Dewey saw art as inextricably bound up with experience and the act of putting into practice. He placed major emphasis on a key concept, to which we will return in the second part of the paper, which is the crucial role of aesthetics and art in helping us to gain a deeper understanding of reality: "While understanding all about the sun, the atmosphere and the rotation of the earth, we can nevertheless fail to notice the splendour of the sunset. Nothing can substitute the direct perception of an object in its current actual mode of occurring and manifesting itself. We need concrete fact whose quality and value are illuminated by a bright and elevated light. [...] Aesthetic appreciation and art thus conceived are not added on to the real world, still less are they precious ornaments. They are the only means by which we may perceive individualized elements of the natural and human world. [...] In the absence of aesthetic appreciation, we miss out on what is most characteristic and most precious in the real world." [14, pp.438-439]. This insight of Dewey's informs the second research question addressed in this paper. Broadly stated: can art, with its power to capture experience in the educational sphere, as in any other, represent an alternative and supplementary means of narrating, documenting, and fostering meaningful reflection on children's educational experience?

#### **4 FROM THE QUESTION ABOUT ART TO THE SEARCH FOR A NEW FORM OF DOCUMENTATION**

To further develop our line of reflection let us initially return to our first question concerning educators' and teachers' idea of art education and art itself and the direct impact of these ideas on the art education they offer to their students. In exploring this issue, we may turn to Piero Bertolini, who defined art education as follows: "In the not so distant past, this term was understood to mean the union of two elements: the study of the history of art, and learning to draw or play an instrument in an exclusively reproductive manner, that is to say, copying previously recognized masters or artistic products. Today this pattern is challenged by a redefining of the very concept of art. As the philosopher and art critic Dino Formaggio has written, 'Art is everything that human beings call Art'. [...] It should further be emphasized [...] that the mental phase of the educational process can never be divorced from the manual and productive phase. Finally, we also need to forcefully affirm that education (artistic and non) should not consist of an exercise in talent-scouting aimed at identifying a painter or pianist among the student body; in other words, for an educator, it is preferable to discover that all the students are capable of 'entering' and 'culturally participating' in processes of artistic production and communication, than to discover that one of them is able to produce a perfect copy of the Mona Lisa." [15, pp.29-30]. This definition explicitly frames art as bound up with individual societies' approach to and tastes in production. It thus removes the risk of theoretically distancing art and viewing it as the prerogative of a select few, before going on to situate art education at the intersection of theory and practice, and to advocate an emphasis on culturally engaging all students rather than exclusively valuing those who are particularly talented. Another point to be made concerns the specific features of the contemporary art scene [16, 17], which is vastly different to the more classical art of other periods, offering infinite modes of action that may also be incorporated into school art education programmes to good effect. Indeed, as Angela Vettese reminds us: "Persons, things, animals, places, and emotions: since the twentieth century, visual art can be done with anything. Thus, the language of contemporary visual art offers a spectrum of expressive possibilities that encompass every imaginable means. These novel experimental modes of executing works of art have placed new emphasis on inventiveness, yet they are not meaningless

games but a natural reflection of the way in which people currently live, produce, consume, and exchange information. In the space of a hundred years, an entire new tradition has been built up." [18] On the basis of the two perspectives just outlined – which view art as productive and reflective for children, and contemporary art in particular as facilitating open-ended exploration – we set out to use expressive art methods not only with children, but also with adults, as part of broader documentation and reflection processes. We introduced these methods with student teachers taking the Visual Education Module as well as final year students taking Art and General Teaching Methods modules, with a view to investigating whether such an alternative form of documentation, used together with traditional methods already familiar to the students including: observational protocols, plans, protocols for conversation and discussion, tables, checklists, video observation [19, 20] etc., would help them to gain insight into aspects of reality that are sometimes overlooked, as well as giving them an opportunity to develop a more personal relationship with the world of art. Indeed, as Graeme Sullivan puts it, current reality is so complex that need to find other ways of capturing the reflections, anxieties, fears and desire for change that would otherwise be lost. "[I realize] that in an uncertain world there is a need to develop more widespread means of exploring human comprehension and that visual arts can play a key role." [21, p.XXIII] This experimental introduction of art-based documentation methods with trainee nursery school and primary school teachers, which is still at the preliminary stage, has involved inviting the students to freely choose their preferred artistic tools as a means of reflecting on their learning paths, their teaching practice, and their own study of art. The key research question here is whether an alternative form of documentation that is informed by contemporary artistic enquiry can be of value in education. We are currently collecting preliminary data comprising the materials produced from the students and their responses to interview questions and questionnaire items. Tentative preliminary analysis of this data suggests that the use of art-based documentation helps student teachers to become more at home with artistic methods in general, as well as inspiring novel perspectives and a more enquiring approach to certain aspects of education.

## 5 CONCLUSIONS

In this paper, we have outlined the rationale for, and the early stages of, a line of enquiry which, in light of the difficulty traditionally displayed by student and in-service teachers in engaging with art and art education, is designed to explore the potential benefits of introducing broadly defined expressive-art-based documentation into teacher education. The aim is to reactivate students' capacity to engage in a different kind of communication to that conventionally used. It appears that inviting student teachers to freely record their observations, reflections, or learning using a different method, allows them to rediscover languages that they might otherwise use for personal purposes only, and to activate a completely novel approach to analysing educational situations. As Loretta Fabbri has argued, these different languages may also help to: "gradually turn [teacher] education into a "place" and a "time" for reflecting on and redesigning one's action in view of one's new professional mission [and] help teachers to recognize their own professional expertise, as the bearers of unique and valuable knowledge, as a prerequisite to acquiring new professional scripts" [22]. Indeed, to borrow the words of Melisa Cahnmann-Taylor, "[...] the arts have much to offer educational researchers - challenging us to think creatively about what constitutes research; to explore even more varied and creative ways to engage in empirical processes; and to share our questions and findings in more penetrating and widely accessible ways." [24]

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## READING LITERATURE DURING TROUBLED TIMES: RESEARCH AND INTEGRITY

Dr. Tanja Cvetković

*University of Niš, Faculty of Philosophy, Serbia*

### Abstract

Living in the times when Margaret Atwood's novel *The Handmaid's Tale* is the most commercial and awarded book of the year, we may ask ourselves how and what literature can guide us in the right direction to fight all the obstacles, manipulations, challenges of everyday life, or, how literature, or a good book, can be a "forecaster" of things to come. In this presentation as part of the seminar on ethics and integrity in qualitative research, we discuss the lessons we may learn from these insights as qualitative researchers.

This presentation will focus on how we can read Whitman, Emerson, and other humanist writers and poets and translate their ideas to everyday life whilst facing limitations, bans, restrictions, even "fake news", and implement these lessons into our ethical considerations when doing qualitative research on these societal concerns (being a researcher with a scientific interest and at the same time being a human being personally affected by these issues). How can we communicate these ideas and transcend ideological (mis)conceptions? Amongst others, these issues will be addressed in this presentation whilst emphasizing the idea that literature, as a work of art, may make a good relation between man and his community. Referring to some of the ideas that great authors such as F.R. Leavis, T.S. Eliot and Terry Eagleton have talked about, in this presentation we elaborate on the question why now there's a need to go back to and review these ideas.

Key words: literature, humanist sciences, qualitative research, ideas, ideological (mis)conceptions

Margaret Atwood's dystopian novel *The Handmaid's Tale*, published almost thirty years ago, in 1985, has experienced its own success in 2017. It has taken many forms. It has been translated in forty or more languages and was made into a film in 1990. It has been an opera and a ballet. In April 2017 it became a television series. The novel depicts life, primarily of women, under totalitarian regimes, but it is not only a „feminist“ [1] novel. It is a speculative fiction about the future and a kind of warning. When asked in the interview to *The New York Times* in March 2017, if the novel is a prediction, Atwood answers that it is a warning rather than a prediction. *The Handmaid's Tale* in 2017 is less „alternative reality“ [2] and more of a warning about what might actually happen if those who fight for equal rights are not vigilant. Written in 1984, the book continues the long tradition of speculative fiction which warns and guides humankind in the right direction. When Atwood says in the book: „I'm ravenous for news, any kind of news, even it's false news, it must mean something“ [3], she seems to anticipate „the fake news“ phenomenon, but she explains in the interview in *The Daily Beast* that it was George Orwell who predicted the fake news; she just warns us about the attempt to control the news in her book.

Many treatises and essays have been written on the function of literature in society. I still remember my fourth year reading article about Terry Eagleton's essay „The Rise of English“ which describes the role of literature in modern society. The essay was followed by F.R. Leavis's *New Bearings in English Poetry* to complete the reading list to the introductory modern English literature class. The concept of literature was not always confined, as it is today, to „creative“ and „imaginative“ writing. It also embodied certain social values. It gained great importance, especially from the eighteenth century on, as it expressed the need first „to incorporate the increasingly powerful but spiritually rather raw middle classes into unity with the ruling aristocracy“ [4], then „to diffuse polite social manners, habits of 'correct' taste and common cultural standards“ [4]. Literature is one of the few enclaves in which the creative values, when expunged from the face of society, can be cherished, celebrated and affirmed. A literary work is spontaneous rather than traditionally calculated, creative rather than mechanical. The word literature does not refer simply to the way of writing only; it has deep, social, political, and philosophical implications. It has become „a whole alternative ideology“ [4], and the „'imagination' itself, as with Blake and Shelley, becomes a political force“ [4]. According to Eagleton, „its task is to transform society in the name of those energies and values which art embodies“ [4]. Many writers and critics were also political activists who saw „continuity rather than conflict between their literary and social commitments“ [4]. It could be a powerful weapon against „political bigotry and ideological extremism“ [4]. It could point to the potential problems and crises in society, it can be prophetic and visionary, it can „uninvent“ reality, to use Robert Kroetsch's term, and tell us the truth.

Literature works primarily by emotion and experience. The „experiential“ nature of literature is also ideologically convenient and it can perform an ideological task as well. Whereas scientists, philosophers, political activists are burdened with analytical thought and conceptual inquiry, the pursuers of literature occupy a much prized place of feeling and experience. Eagleton argues that „literature from Arnold onwards is the enemy of 'ideological dogma'“ [4]. Though it conveys beliefs and attitudes, the truth and falsity of the same, are not as important as what it feels like to experience them. Whether blacks are inferior to whites is less important than how we experience them. And often the beliefs of a literary work of art are „reasoned positions“ [4] rather than ideological dogmas. Though literature does not communicate beliefs and truth directly, its task could be „to convey *timeless* truths, thus distracting the masses from their immediate commitments, nurturing in them a spirit of tolerance and generosity, and so ensuring the survival of private property“ [4]. It can offer a reader a feeling of vicarious self-fulfilment. If you can't experience directly life of nineteenth century America, you can always experience it second hand by reading Hawthorne, Whitman, Emerson or Thoreau. If you don't have money and leisure to visit the Far East, you can read Conrad, E.M. Forester, Ondaatje. Nowadays, the impoverishment by social conditions can be supplemented by literature. Reading Austin Clarke's Toronto trilogy, sometimes is more real than walking around the city. However, the vicarious fulfilment of someone's desire for a full life is often at the expense of working to change such conditions, but could be very practical, useful, supplementary and educational.

Thus, nineteenth century transcendentalist Henry David Thoreau made an experiment and went to live on the shores of Walden Pond according to the primary laws of nature to rediscover the meaning of human existence by reducing his life to the simplest terms. He didn't abandon society completely, but led a life of non-conformity for two years and compressed his personal experience into his work *Walden*, published in 1854. The work is considered to be the most important literary expression of transcendental thought. It is his spiritual biography, a story of his spiritual development and growth, of his sincere exploration of the reality of the self that results in self-knowledge and,

consequently, the knowledge of the external world. Reform and spiritual rebirth of both his own self and the society at large is the final goal of *Walden*. The spiritual father of American transcendentalists, Ralph Waldo Emerson, in his essay „Self-Reliance“ said: „Whoso would be a man, must be a nonconformist. He who would gather immortal palms must not be hindered by the name of goodness, but must explore it if it be goodness. Nothing is at last sacred but the integrity of his own mind. Absolve you to yourself, and you shall have the suffrage of the world“ [5]. Emerson believed that the spark of divinity existed in every person, and that all human beings had the potential to achieve perfection. Man is made a law unto himself and whatever good or evil that befalls him comes from himself. He is a responsible being who must, by the power of his mind, penetrate into the nature of things and act accordingly. Instead of passive acceptance and obedient submission to moral laws, man will become active, will start judging himself, his thoughts and actions, and bring them into harmony with the nature of things, establishing thus the balance between his real self and the world. Though Emerson's focus is upon the individual, he views society in terms of „a joint-stock company, in which the members agree, for the better securing of his bread to each shareholder, to surrender the liberty and culture of the eater. The virtue of request is conformity. Self-reliance is its aversion. It loves not realities and its creators, but names and customs“ [5]. Social and moral laws are in contrast to individual laws and if anyone wishes to truly be an individual with integrity, he must be a nonconformist declares Emerson.

In the nineteenth century another great American writer Walt Whitman published his epic work *Leaves of Grass* in 1855. In the first poem „Song of Myself“, Whitman presents himself to the reader and celebrates the individual self. The subject of the poem seems to be a self-discovery of a poet and the development of the poetic sensibility. The „I“ of the poem is representative not only of America but of humanity at large and the poem deals with the becoming of a poet in general. The „I“ of the poem is a part of the mass but with a distinct personal identity. He is a representative American „born here of parents born here from parents the same“ [6], he is „a Southerner soon as a Northerner“ [6]. He is „one of the Nation of many nations“ [6], he even transcends his national identity and becomes „Walt Whitman, a kosmos“ [6]. The „I“ of Whitman's poem speaks the world that he sees, and sees the world that he speaks, and does this by becoming the reality of his vision and his words, in which the reader also participates. Most of Whitman's poems are more or less voyages in this metaphysical sense. In his poems, as well as in *Leaves of Grass*, we can trace the beginnings of democratic principles for both the individual and the social self.

The examples given provide many ideas and guide us how to be better persons. The only dilemma is if they are too idealistic or if they can be communicated easily and transformed into practice. But the point is that they are here and it depends on us, the readers, what we are going to do with them. Many critics, writers, theoreticians asked the question: „Why read literature?“ And the answer could be brought down to a simple sentence – that it could make you a better person, as Eagleton suggests as well [4]. If reading literature made you a better person, then in doing so, it addressed questions of fundamental value, questions which are or were of vital relevance to the lives of people and a society. Reading literature, especially within academic institutions, as part of educational process, has, without doubt, transformative power. Alerting students to the manipulative side of the popular press, advertisements, is equally, or even more important, than making them learn by heart Matthew Arnold's poem *The Scholar Gypsy* (1853), for example:

Before this strange disease of modern life,  
With sick hurry, its divided aims,  
Its heads o'ertaxed, its palsied hearts, was rife – [7]

Arnold's poem is about the modern age marked by depression and monotony. The Oxford student, who learned from the gypsies another way of learning, the one based on the power of imagination, which the traditional way of learning lacked, gives an account of these secrets to the readers. The poem really symbolizes Victorian poetry and Victorian time, and anticipates the age to come – the modern age, in F.R. Leavis's words, but in its essence it offers nothing but the relaxation from the pains and troubles of the time to the reader.

With Arnold here and Whitman earlier in the paper, we have slid over into poetry. While discussing the role of literature, many critics stretch very often to the poetry instead of the novel. The New Critics, whom I'll briefly refer to here, were very much concerned with poetry. The American New Criticism which flourished from the late 1930s to the 1950s encompassed the works of T. S. Eliot, I.A. Richards, F.R. Leavis, as well as a number of American critics such as John Crowe Ransom, Cleanth Brooks, Allen Tate, R.P. Blackmur. John Crowe Ransom writes that the poem was „like a democratic state, so to speak, which realizes the ends of a state without sacrificing the personal character of its citizens“ [4]. The shift into poetry is of particular significance because in poetry „sensitivity“ shows in its purest „least socially tainted form“ [4]. Eagleton, Ransom, Leavis, as well as Arnold, advance literature as a powerful tool for reconstructing social order. Ransom compares a poet to a democratic state whose existence should not be at the expense of the personal uniqueness. In like manner, Leavis concludes that poetry

must be the direct expression of simple emotions, and these of a limited class: the tender, the exalted, the poignant, and, in general, the sympathetic. [...] Wit, play of intellect, stress off cerebral muscle had no place: they could only hinder the reader's being 'moved' – the correct poetical response [8].

For Leavis, poetry matters, and a poet is more alive than any other man in his own age. The poet is the most conscious person who has the power to communicate the most subtle emotions. He is unusually sensitive, aware, more sincere and more himself than the ordinary man can be. According to Leavis, poetry is the medium for the expression of simple, sensuous, passionate emotions, but it lacks its cerebral and intellectual expression. The poet should speak from his experience which is not separable from his interest in words. By way of words, the poet sharpens his awareness of his ways of feeling, so making them communicable. But, „if the poetry and the intelligence of the age lose touch with each other“ [8], poetry will cease to matter much and the age will be lacking in finer awareness. As I've already mentioned, some critics advance literature as „a conscious ideology for reconstructing social order“ [4] and it does so in the socially disruptive, economically decaying, politically unstable years.

A well-known American writer Annie Proulx, when awarded The National Booker Award in November 2017, gave a speech about „the troubled times“ and the importance of literature. The contentious times we live in, Annie Proulx calls a Kafkaesque time. We cannot look away from the pictures of political manipulations, sexual harassment reports, hurricanes and fires, terrorist threats, or even threats of nuclear war. Though this is the time of brilliant technological innovation, the troubles and challenges are many and serious. During transition from representative democracy to something that Proulx calls „viral direct democracy“, we bump into a tsunami of raw data, without a guide what to do or where to turn to. On top of everything, for Proulx, the most distressing circumstance of the new order is the fast destruction of the natural world. In the world where somehow the old discredited values and longings persist, though they do not fit the times, we still have tender feelings for such outmoded notions as truth, respect for others, personal honor, justice,

human rights. Sometimes we turn back to old guides and books hoping for a happy ending that we can save ourselves.

This is the age marked by the split between thought and feeling, experience and reality, as it was more than a century ago. T. S. Eliot called such a state in literature and in society the dissociation of sensibility. As long as language was in direct touch with sensory experience, there was a unity of sensibility and an easy fusion of thought and feeling. When language separated from experience, or was just reduced to abstract thinking, Eliot calls this phenomenon the dissociation of sensibility. That's a society which had lost collective belief and declined into an errant individualism. Eliot's solution was to sacrifice our petty identities to an impersonal order. In the sphere of literature the impersonal order is Tradition. In his essay „Tradition and the individual talent“ Eliot explains that a literary work that is produced will be absorbed as valid only by existing in the Tradition, only if the Tradition happens to flow through it. The Tradition, or the „European mind“ [9] as Eliot sometimes call it, allows you to feel both authoritarian and humble if you are part of it.

If the aim of literature is to reveal the truth, or point out to the truth in our lives, then different approaches and trends have been employed to inform us, the readers, about the truth. In the contemporary world where ideology prevails over common truth, many critics point to different means to change and decipher already codified views. In his book *Mythologies*, Roland Barthes gives an example of what the image of a young black man in a French uniform saluting the tricolor means to the readers of the magazine *Paris-Match*. According to Barthes, the image does not signify the idea that France is a great empire and that people without any colour discrimination serve under her flag. This codified image, or mythical concept, has its form and meaning. As form, there is a qualitative poverty of the image of the black man giving the salute. If we read the black man-saluting as a symbol of imperialism, we must renounce the reality of the picture. If we decipher the black man's salute as a sign of coloniality, then we shatter the myth of imperialism. The saluting black man is the very presence of French imperialism signifying that those who were colonized and oppressed now serve and salute the oppressors. This is Barthes' famous example of how myth becomes part of an ideological view when perpetuated. Such an acceptance of myth can, in fact, define the whole of traditional literature. According to Barthes, „literature is an undoubted mythical system“ [10]. And he explains this idea in *Writing Degree Zero*, which is nothing but a mythology of literary language.

Wallace Stevens in his essay „Art as Establisher of Value“ claims that in the age of disbelief, it is for the poet to supply the satisfactions of belief. Poets become figures of importance enhanced by the requirements both of the individual and of society. They help people to live their lives. They are

that the artist transforms us into epicures; that he has to discover the possible work of art in the real world, then to extract it, when he does not himself compose it entirely; that he is *un amoureux perpétuel* of the world that he contemplates and thereby enriches; the art sets out to express the human soul; and finally that everything like a firm grasp of reality is eliminated from the aesthetic field [11].

Stevens anticipates also that the poetic process is psychologically an escapist process, but only if the poet is not attached to reality. The need of a poet to express his, but also our thoughts and feelings, are all the truth that we will experience. If we have that experience then the world of poetry is indistinguishable from the world which we live in. What makes the poet a powerful figure is to create the world to which we turn without knowing it. Poetry and art enriches us and the world we live in, especially if they are tied to the real world, or express the truth about the world we live in and help us find out our way there. However, the truth can be contested or (mis)used to establish control and order as it is suggested by Atwood in *The Handmaid's Tale*. Maja Ćuk suggests that Atwood „in the



novel *The Handmaid's Tale* parodies and re-inscribes the truth in a different way"[12]. The artist can conceal the truth in an aesthetic way. It is for us, the readers, to know how to decipher it both in literature/art or in society. That's why we resort to different techniques of „uninventing“ the world.

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