

## *Unplugged* - "Carte blanche"

Silvia GHERARDI (2017) : Which is the place of affect within practice-based studies?

In the original tradition of the "Unplugged" section, "carte blanche" grants a wild card to world-class scholars to share their own perspective on novel ways to conceive of management today. They may offer new avenues and draw up an agenda for a specific research question. Authors have to be invited to submit to the "carte blanche" series by one of the editors.

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**Abstract.** The turn to affect needs to assume a stable discursive position on its importance in relation to the literature on practice, nevertheless the issue is not whether affect is important, but why and how. In fact, all agency unfolds with a certain degree of affect and almost all social practices affect their participants in various degrees. Ordinary affects are the varied capacities to affect and to be affected that give everyday life the quality of a continuum becoming. Their significance lies in the way they pick up the intensities that they build and in the thoughts and feelings they make possible, rather than in 'meanings' encapsulated in an order of representations. The question that the article addresses is therefore how to preserve and report on ordinary affects while studying working practices? Through two episodes from fieldwork (an unbearable sweet music and cruel optimism) I argue that paying attention to affects is an active process of atmosphere attunement to the various embodiments of the field - the embodied researcher and the embodied practitioners - with their attachments to the object of their practices. The turn to affect may enrich the turn to practice with a sensibility for a form of embodied, affective knowing that put into discussion how research is written.

**Keywords:** aesthetics, affect, attachment, attunement, practice.

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### INTRODUCTION

Although specific cultural practices – falling in love or mourning a loss - are called 'affective practices' (Wetherell, 2015), all human agency unfolds with a certain degree of affect and almost all social practices affect their participants in various degrees. It is therefore worth inquiring about the place of affect in practice theories and the contribution that the turn to affect may offer to the turn to practice. Both 'turns' appeared contemporary but apparently ignoring each other. An outstanding number of Special Issues testify of their respective vitality: in the turn to affect we may refer to Ahmed (2007/8), Blackman & Cromby (2007), Blackman & Venn (2010), Davidson, et al. 2008, Fraser et al. (2005); in the turn to practice we refer

to Brownlie, et al. (2008); Buch et al. (2015), Eikeland & Nicolini (2011), Gherardi (2000; 2009a and 2009b), Gherardi, Nicolini & Strati (2007), Miettinen, et al. (2009), Schatzki (2007).

In both cases it is not easy to find a compass in the body of literature because of the polysemic vagueness of the very term 'affect' and 'practice'. Nevertheless it is necessary to frame both terms in order to establish a background against which to give form to my argument. In the first section of the article I shall provide a brief excursus on how to elaborate on the place of affect in practice theories. My purpose in the following section is to argue that the turn to affect has assumed a stable discursive position on its importance, and in relation to the literature on practice. As others have argued "we are in the moment after the affective moment" (Thrift, 2010: 289), meaning that the issue is not whether affect is important, but why and how.

For these reasons I shall narrow the concept of affect towards 'ordinary affect' that in my opinion is more attuned to empirical research. I shall introduce and explain it in the second section where I want to shift the ontological question of what affect 'is' to the epistemological question of what affect 'does' in working practices. Two episodes will illustrate this point. They allow me to perform the inseparability of the researcher from the practices on which s/he conducts research and write about it.

In the concluding section I propose a reflection on affective language and writing. The language of affect points to the sensible, to the aesthetic knowledge that practitioners and researchers develop through their senses while working. Affective knowing is the name for the embodied engagement of the researcher during the fieldwork and in the corporeal reality of writing.

## WHAT IS AFFECT AND WHERE IS AFFECT?

In organization studies, the turn to affect has come about slowly and only in recent years (Beyes & Steyaert, 2013; Kenny, 2012; Kenny, et al. 2011, Vachhani, 2013), whereas in other communities, mainly cultural studies, humanities, and psychology, discussion on the theme began much earlier, and in the same years when the turn to practice appeared. Its starting point was in the mid-1990s, when critical theorists, cultural critics, and human geographers proposed a substantive ontological and epistemological shift. To mention some major works, we can refer to Massumi (1995; 2002), Clough (2010), Clough & Halley (2007); Gregg & Seigworth (2010), Blackman & Venn (2010), Thrift (2007). Like the literature on practice, also that on affect has grown rapidly and in many different directions, thus it is necessary to make explicit –at the cost of oversimplify the debate - the background against which I propose to understand affect in relation to practice-based studies.

While it is widespread the association between emotion and affectivity, especially within psychological studies, from my point of view it is important to keep a distinction between the two terms since emotion in working practices have been extensively explored (Antonacopoulou & Gabriel, 2001; Reynolds & Vince, 2007; Vince, 2002), while affect as intensity has been relatively unexplored. I shall rather follow the Deleuzian sense of affect as a-subjective and anti-representationalist, operating across the boundary between the organic and the nonorganic. That tradition has been continued mainly by Brian Massumi (who translated Deleuze in English). Following Massumi (1995:88), I wish to stress that 'affect is most often used loosely as a synonym for emotion. But [...] emotion and affect – if affect is intensity – follow different logics and pertain

to different orders'. In distinguishing between the two, emotion is said to pertain to biography, while affect pertains to biology (Nathanson, 1992). Some authors, for instance Grossberg (1992) and Probyn (2005), refer to affect as firmly rooted in biology and in our physical response to feelings. For Massumi (2002: 35), affect 'escapes confinement' in the body, while emotion is the capture of affect, i.e. a sociolinguistic fixing of the quality of an experience. Since emotion is the expression of that capture, this expression implies that something has always and again escaped. For this reason Massumi views 'affect' as the name for what eludes form, cognition, and meaning.

A similar definition of affect is in Ahmed, (2010: 29) 'affect is what sticks, or what sustains or preserves the connection between ideas, values, and objects', or in Anderson (2010: 161) 'affects are understood as impersonal intensities that do not belong to a subject or an object, nor do they reside in the mediating space between a subject or an object'. Nevertheless the disagreements on how to understand affect are quite widespread (is it innate or socially constructed? Does it require a subject or is trans-personal?).

A difference that is particularly relevant for the discussion that follows is in the tension between humanistic and non-humanistic ways of understanding affect and understanding practice as well. In the first case the necessity of affect for understanding the formation of the subject is assumed, while in the second case 'thinking is a practice that should extend us beyond the known forms of the subject' (Gibbs, 2010: 187). Nevertheless, despite disagreements and differences we can agree with Brown & Tucker (2010: 232) that 'the term affect, despite its polysemic constitutive vagueness, provides a way of engaging with "experience" shorn of some of its humanistic garb. It allows us to begin to argue that experience is not singular, that it is, following Bergson a multiplicity of intersecting planes'.

With few exceptions (Reckwitz, 2017; Gherardi, 2017) the turn to affect has rarely been put in relation with the turn to practice. While Reckwitz wonders what is the particularity of a practice theory perspective on affect, I explored, in my keynote speech to the 2015 OLKC conference in Milan, what the turn to practice and the turn to affect have in common.

Three underlying principles of a practice perspective are suggested by Reckwitz: i) affects are not subjective, but social; ii) affects are not properties, but activities; iii) affects are states of physical arousal, of pleasure or displeasures, directed at some definite person, object or idea. He distinguishes affect from emotion and considers affect as an ingredient of practice, as the property of the specific attunement or mood of the respective practice (as falling in love for example). In his discussion of the place of affect in practice theory he underlines the role of artefacts as affect generators and in particular two artifacts function as such: spatial atmospheres and symbolic or imaginary artefacts.

In my excursion through the literature on the turn to affect in search of commonalities and complementarities with the turn to practice I propose the three following elements: i) the same post-epistemological shift towards a 'becoming' epistemology; ii) the central place attributed to the body and aesthetic-embodied knowledge; iii) sociomateriality. Briefly, a post-epistemological sensibility means that becoming is privileged with respect to being, and 'in-betweenness' is explored as intra-connections both symbolic and material; the body is the interface with the world, and it is what we learn to use to become sensitive to the world, and within the post-humanist turn to practice sociomateriality is paramount, since affect is embedded in the material world – like architectures or technologies – it

affects human life and can be manipulated and become a commodity like any other. On this later element – atmosphere and its embedding in materiality -there is a strong converge that deserves a further specification, since atmosphere has been discussed at large within the turn to affect and it is a good example of a pre-personal and social affect and it easily illustrates the feeling of ‘intensity’ that a practice may assume for its practitioners and for the researcher participating in its study.

Brennan (2004) broadly conceptualizes ‘affective atmosphere’, as the shared ground from which affect emerges. The expression denotes an experience that occurs before and together with the construction of subjectivity across human and non-human materialities (Sedgwick, 2003; Anderson, 2009). Atmospheres surround people, things and environments: on entering a room, we can feel a serene or a tense atmosphere; an atmosphere ‘surrounds’ a couple, or one finds oneself ‘enveloped’ by an atmosphere; atmospheres ‘radiate’ from one individual to another; atmospheres are contagious, they appear, and disappear. Anderson (2009: 80) stresses that ‘atmospheres are interlinked with forms of enclosure – the couple, the room, the garden – and particular forms of circulation – enveloping, surrounding and radiating’. For Anderson, ‘the term atmosphere presents itself to us as a response to a question; how to attend to collective affects that are not reducible to the individual bodies that they emerge from?’

Atmospheres therefore constitute an aesthetic experience (Strati, 2009; Mouriceau, 2016) and they are sensed through the body. And Latour (2004: 205) writes: ‘to have a body *is to learn to be affected*, meaning ‘effectuated’, moved, put into motion by other entities, humans or non-humans. If you are not engaged in this learning you become insensitive, dumb, you drop dead”. The dual movement between being affected and affect is also a movement between the voluntary and the involuntary implicated by affect, as I shall illustrate through the first episode about an unbearable sweet music.

Nevertheless, before presenting the episode I introduce a more narrow concept - ordinary affect – in order to illustrate how noticing an affective atmosphere can deepen our understanding of what happens when we interview people, when we encounter these people as embodied beings, and when we use our common affective knowing both for ‘being with’ (Kenny and Fotaki, 2015) and for conducting research.

## ORDINARY AFFECTS IN WORKING PRACTICES

Within the variegated debate on the turn to affect the concept of ordinary affect has a specific meaning that has been defined and illustrated by Kathleen Stewart (2007: 4):

‘Ordinary affects are the varied, surging capacities to affect and to be affected that give everyday life the quality of a continual motion of relations, scenes, contingencies and emergences. They’re things that happen.’

Their significance lies in the way they pick up the intensities that they build and in the thoughts and feelings they make possible, rather than in ‘meanings’ encapsulated in an order of representations. Therefore the question is where they might go ‘and what potential modes of knowing, relating and attending to things are already somehow present in them in a state of potentiality and resonance’ (Stewart, 2007:6).

Paying attention and noticing ordinary affects means to devote an analytic attention to how affect in working practices creates an atmosphere in a workplace or create 'worlding' - as Heidegger (1962) named the dwelling in spaces that spawn worlds and the charged atmosphere of living in and through things. An analytic attention does not mean a search for rationalistic explanations of what escapes cognition, neither does it mean a refuge in a mystical or ineffable reality. Rather it implies a search in noticing and writing in a non-representational language, in what Trift (2007: 2) has named the geography of what happens, and it is therefore "a work of description of the bare bones of actual occasions". Lorimer (2005), who prefers the term more-than-representationalism to avoid dichotomist thinking, describe the work of description in the following way:

'The focus falls on how life takes shape and gains expression in shared experiences, everyday routines, fleeting encounters, embodied movements, precognitive triggers, practical skills, affective intensities, enduring urges, unexceptional interactions and sensuous dispositions'. (Lorimer, 2005: 84)

Writing about ordinary affects imply therefore an effort to find the language for communicating out from the schemes and Stewart (2011: 446) propose the description of random cases of atmosphere attunement that 'are meant to suggest something of the plasticity and density of lived compositions now proliferating in ordinary scenes of living through what is happening'.

I shall follow the idea of describing two cases of atmosphere attunement in order to set the scene for discussing ordinary affects in working practices. The first case is extracted from the book *Organizational Aesthetics* (Strati, 1999)<sup>1</sup> and describes the author's entry into a workplace where he had a date for an interview. The second is the description of a story told to me during a research meeting. In their diversity both atmosphere attunements illustrate how ordinary affects circulate, accrue, sediment across bodies, discourses and spaces.

## THE UNBEARABLE SWEET MUSIC

The researcher walks along the narrow street of a medieval Italian town to reach the person with which he has a date for an interview. He passed by a street musician playing a heart breaking music. Once in the office, while he was waiting to be introduced, he made a casual comment on the music, since he noticed:

'Music can be heard from the street below. It is sweet music, and it is played well, but it never stops. The walls and windows fail to block it out; they merely reduce its volume. The person playing the music has the right to do so; it is his job. But the two women inside the building at work in the secretary's office are also entitled not to be disturbed. The music is sweet, but the initial pleasure that it aroused has faded, and the pleasant surprise felt by the two secretaries when they first heard it has now changed into obsession'. (Strati, 1999:1)

In fact, as a response to the initial comment, the two women confide their secret wishes that the music would disappear, and that the player would disappear along with it. Joking, they admit that "we cannot wish him

1. I acknowledge Antonio Strati courtesy in discussing with me the episode with which he introduce his book and giving me further details. The responsibility for any mis-interpretation rests solely on me.

away”, however much they may want to, the two secretaries can do nothing to blot the music out: they cannot stop their ears from hearing, any more than they can stop their eyes from seeing.

Strati mentions this little and casual encounter to introduce his book on organizational aesthetics, pointing to the importance of a human sensory faculty - hearing - and a human faculty of judgement - namely the aesthetic judgement - whereby what practitioners perceive through their senses may provoke pleasure or repugnance, strike as palatable or disgusting, prompt surprise and intrigue, or obsess and pollute our everyday working lives. In fact sensible knowledge has to do with the senses; it is a bodily affection on which aesthetic judgement is expressed. Nevertheless, it is not yet an organizational problem in the episode that is narrated above, but it becomes a matter of organizational aesthetics when the story continues:

The two secretaries could turn the radio on, or they could play a compact disk in the computer CD-ROM slot and listen to music which would drown out the music coming from the street. But, the office manager has warned, they are not allowed to transform the office into a discotheque; even less are they allowed to work with their ears plugged. From aesthetic-personal the problem has now become organizational, not because the organization is listening - an organization can neither listen nor hear - but because the two secretaries and their boss have translated the problem into organizational terms. Yet the source of all the difficulty is the essential fact that these women’s sensory hearing organs are unable to defend them against the obsessive assault of the busker’s music. Their ears are only able to filter the music, thus in some way protecting them against it, but they cannot block the music out entirely. The organization has nothing to do with all this, given that, as said, it does not have ears and cannot hear. The people who work in the organization, however, are indeed involved in this process of hearing a sweet sound, being pleasantly surprised by it, enjoying it, but then coming to hate it, feeling that their acoustic territory is being invaded and violated, finding that their everyday lives are being spoilt by the incessant sound’ (Strati, 1999: 2).

I quote at length this episode as an illustration of what ordinary affect ‘does’ both on practitioners’ bodies and working practices – how ‘normal’ working rhythm is affected by an external happening out of practitioners’ control – and on research practices, when the researcher notices the small serendipitous happenings that subvert the orderly and rational planning of ‘data collection’. Ordinary affect is expressed in the researcher’s surprise that an idle comment – part of the social practice of ‘being social and polite’ when entering the field – may generate an unintended insight into organizational life. Therefore in this episode we may see how a state of potentiality, for reflecting on organizational practices, opens up for the researcher when the feeling of a heart breaking music, that he perceived while walking in the street, is transformed in an obsessive sound for somebody else when he crossed the street. The intensities, which the researcher noticed in the busker working practice, were turned upside down when he perceived the intensities of the very same music on another working practice. An ‘unresolvable’ organizational problem is generated by the coexistence of different practices in a contiguous space that host two different ‘worlding’. The researcher for a fleeting moment is bodily affected by his sensorial participation in both social worlds.

In giving an illustration of how ordinary affects produce an atmosphere around working practices – both for the busker and the pedestrians in the road and for the secretaries and office manager – I argue that the researcher's atmosphere attunement affects research practices and the way of writing.

Similar episodes of ordinary affect in research practices may be a common experience in our life as organizational researchers, they are not exceptional happenings, nor critical incidents (in professional terms) and most of the time they pass unnoticed and if noticed then discarded as irrelevant (just a color note) or not fitting with the general tone of scientific writing. I shall illustrate this point in the following episode that relates a personal research experience.

## **CRUEL OPTIMISM**

The second episode that I chose for illustrating ordinary affects in working practices concerns a story that was told to me by two women working for a scientific research institute and engaged in a large project for supporting women scientists' careers. At the time I was consulting the institute on a project of organizational change and the three of us met for an interview. Gender equity was one of the topic we were supposed to discuss but the story I was told was unexpected since the institute had a good reputation on gender and diversity awareness and the group of scientists lead by the two women was very active both in the institute and at National and International level.

The main character in the story is the leader of the center for gender equity, but the story was told by her co-worker while she remained silent all the time and only at the end of the story she said: 'let's do not talk any longer about it! It does not do good'. The story, as I annotated it afterwards, has the following storyline:

'I saw her in the corridor, passing in front of the door of my office and she had a face like somebody who has stumbled over a ghost. I took her arm and forced her to get into my office and sit on a chair while I poured her a glass of water. I closed the door because I did not want somebody else could see her in such a state. She could not open her mouse for at least ten minutes and then she told me that she was coming out from the annual evaluation meeting with the head of the unit and she received a negative note. The motivation was that the project on gender equity - for which she had applied and that brought to the institute a very large grant and that she was leading in the last three years - had distracted her from her 'normal' work as scientist and therefore her performances in the other projects were not as good as in the past. She could not believe that the same man, who in public talks was always mentioning the gender equity project as the symbol of the institute engagement for an open and democratic culture, could be the same man that, at the management level, was disregarding the work implied by the project and assuming that she had to do the double work, since the project was 'just organizational citizenship' and not a time consuming 'real work'.

The story had a dramatic tone, underlined by the material details of a white face, a door that is closed, a glass of water that is handled, the idea of somebody/something that is shirked from the public view and guarded in a closed, protected space. Nevertheless, this is only the incipit

of the story since later on the storyteller is going to present me the resolution of the affective tension thus created and the moral of the story:

‘for both of us it took quite a while to be able to go back to reason and decide what to do and how to handle the event face to the other women of our group and to the other women who engaged themselves in the project. After a difficult discussion we decided to keep silence and to avoid that the news spread in the institute otherwise the project would have lost legitimacy and the scientists who were engaged in it would have withdrawn since their career could be jeopardized by their association with claims of gender equality’.

What affected me as a listener to this story is its end and not so much the dramatic tone of what was presented to me as a managerial misbehavior or as the ‘usual’ dual morality hypocrisy between public scenes in which gender is presented as an organizational value and a scene of everyday operational reality in which it is devalued or overseen. Organizational hypocrisy – a well-known phenomenon – is defined as a situation in which organizations act contrary to their talk or decision (Brunsson, 2002). Since organizations have to handle increasingly inconsistent norms in their environment (and gender equality is a good example of it), talk, decisions and actions are not necessarily aligned with each other. Brunsson (2002: 176) argues that hypocrisy is not an accident nor it is caused by individual duplicity or incompetence, but is a necessary and beneficial part of organizational life: ‘organizations sometimes make decisions in order to avoid action, [...] decisions may relieve people of the burden of acting, and decisions may obstruct action.’

What I felt like a punch in the stomach was the feeling of helplessness, powerless and injustice that resonated in me as a woman and a feminist. I was speechless and terrorized that my interlocutors would ask my opinion on the episode. I was feeling coward and happy to accept the invitation to pass this episode under silence. Nevertheless this story stayed in me for long and writing about it could be a mode for reliving the tensions and the affective implications that the fieldwork provokes.

For me this is a story of ‘cruel optimism’. With this term Berlant (2010: 94) names ‘a relation of attachment to compromised conditions of possibility whose realization is discovered either to be *impossible* (italics in original), sheer fantasy, or *too* possible, and toxic. [...] Cruel optimism is the condition of maintaining an attachment to a problematic object *in advance* of its loss’. Optimism is therefore considered as an affective form and viewed as a cluster of promises forming an object of desire. To frame the object of desire ‘as a cluster of promises is to allow us to encounter what is incoherent or enigmatic in our attachments, not as a confirmation of our irrationality but as an explanation for our sense of *our endurance in the object* (italics in original), insofar as proximity to the cluster of things that the object promises, some of which may be clear to us while others not so much’ (Berlant, 2010: 93). A cluster of promises can be embedded in a person, a thing, an institution, a text, a smell, a good idea, in whatever insofar the proximity to the object means proximity to the cluster of things that the object promises. Therefore ‘all attachments are optimistic’ (Berlant, 2006: 21) but not in the sense that make us feel optimistic, rather that we keep magnetized to the promises that we want someone or something to make to us or to make possible for us. Cruel optimism implies also that we make affective bargains (more or less conscious) with our attachments most of which keep us in proximity with the scene of desire/attrition.

In the story that I was told I recognize the cruel optimism of the attachment to the cluster of promises labelled 'gender equity' and how the endurance in the object of desire reflects the fear of its loss. Nevertheless this is not much a story about practitioners' attachment to their practices, as it is about organizational practices that construct a cluster of promises – more or less explicit – while construct a toxic context in which the conditions of possibilities are denied.

To look at ordinary affects in working practices implies an attention to how practitioners affect working practices and how they are affected by them. The methodological suggestion that we can learn from Berlant is to inquire into aesthetics attachments and into optimistic fantasy in reproducing and surviving in zones of compromised ordinariness.

## **DISCUSSION**

In the following section I shall resist the temptation to pass too easily to the language of representation, rather I shall take up the invitation by Stewart (2007: 7) 'to slow the quick jump to representational thinking and evaluative critique long enough to find ways of approaching the complex and uncertain objects that fascinate because they literally hit us or exert a pull on us'. At the same time I accept the challenge to theorize about the intricacies of ordinary affects, practitioners' attachment to their practices and the presence of the researcher both in the field and in the text here presented.

I shall start by stressing how affects are here treated not as the object of research or reflection and the reason is avoiding what Moriceau & Paes (2013: 373) defines as the paradox of researching affect: 'to take them as the object of study risks to strip their power, whilst to stay in the language game of affects risks to make difficult to think of them'. For the same reason I preferred in the introduction to keep affects as separate from emotions. In fact, if we want to think of affect as what colors an episode, an experience or a working practice, or as their intensity, or as the energy circulating within them, then we cannot think of affect as an element of a practice in the same way that practitioners, tools, knowledges, technologies, rules are elements of a practice that can be analytically identified. On the contrary the language of affect points to the sensible, to the aesthetic knowledge that practitioners develop through their senses while working and becoming competent practitioners, to the aesthetic judgements that sustain 'a certain way' of practicing and on their collective activity of taste-making (Gherardi, 2009) in framing their aesthetic judgements.

Does the language of affect add something more to what has been already elaborated within the literature on organizational aesthetics (Strati, 2009) and in relation to sensible knowing within practice-based studies (Gherardi, 2012; Gherardi & Strati 2012)? It is difficult to give a straight answer, also because the literature on affect has paid more attention to art and cultural studies and less to ordinary aesthetics, especially in the context of working and organizing. The language of affect is particularly powerful in translating the senses and the sensorial knowledge that goes with them and that somehow pertain to the individual (who has a nose, hears, eyes and so on) in more collective, sensible and situated concepts like atmosphere, vibrations, radiation, energy, contagion, circulating social feelings, regime of sensations and so on.

The presence of the body, the meaning of being a body (à la Merleau Ponty, 1947), the idea that the body is always 'more than one' (Manning, 2010) has once more a central stage, but the language of

affect has allowed me – in the two episodes that I chose to illustrate - to perform the inseparability of the researcher from the practices on which s/he conducts research. The questions ‘is affect external to practices or is it internal’ and ‘is the researcher external or internal to the studied practices’ lose meaning when we go back to the two episodes.

In the first episode the music in the street produces a sense of beauty and pleasure in the body researcher who passes by and prompts him to comment on it assuming to share a common experience with the secretaries. The same music was a disturbing element in the working practices of the two women and an unresolvable organizational problem since the organization had not control on it, nor the secretaries’ bodies could close it out. A practice is affected by another within the same time and space. The aesthetic experience of the researcher is suspended in-between pleasure, surprise and the sudden change of atmosphere. The multiplicity of intersecting planes of experience is made available to the researcher first – and through him to us readers - not only through his embodiment and the embodiment of the two women, but through a process of affective attunement that is realized through his writing first and my re-telling/re-writing of the story in this text.

Writing is a corporeal activity – writes Probyn (2010: 76), in relation to her research on shame – ‘we work ideas through our bodies; we write through our bodies, hoping to get into the bodies of our readers. We study and write about society not as an abstraction but as composed of actual bodies in proximity of other bodies.’ Therefore affective attunement in research practices is more than looking for a form or a meaning or a cognitive sense and it does not begin or end in the fieldwork by paying attention to ordinary affects. Affective attunement rests on embodiments, and the sense of the body in relation to the literature on affect is influenced by Spinoza - his distinction between *affectus* and *affectio*, the force of an affecting body and the impact it leaves on the one affected (Watkins, 2010) – and by Deleuze (1990) understanding of the body as a non-unified entity but composed of many moving elements. The embodied nature of knowledge and the corporeal reality of writing have been discussed more in anthropology than in organization studies. For example Okely (2007) illustrates, through her extended conversations with anthropologists about their research experiences, a process of physical labour, bodily interaction and sensory learning as constituting the foundation for the production of written texts. I prefer the definition of affective knowing to name the embodied engagement of the researcher during the fieldwork.

The second episode offers the opportunity to theorize on how researcher’s participation in the fieldwork entails bodily engagement in the form of affective resonance with the intensity of the practitioners’ attachments to their practices.

The concept of affective resonance was first introduced by Erin Manning (2010: 118) in relation to the body as always *more than one*, “more assemblage than form, more associated milieu than being”. By stressing that affect is not situated in the individual, Manning elaborates on Deleuze’s (2007) concept of “life”, which goes beyond any lived experience. From this perspective, life expresses itself when it goes beyond what has occurred, when it overcomes experience, and it does so as resonance, as affect. My affective resonance with the story told by the two women left a durable impression in my body and, in presenting their story in terms of cruel optimism I wish to stress how attachments to what people do overcome the instrumentality of working practices.

While psychology has traditionally framed attachment (and attachment theory) in terms of relationship with other humans (caregivers

or beloved ones), a sociology of attachment sees it also in relations to the object of a practice, as it is the case for 'gender equity' in the second episode. Attachment is here understood as the reflexive result of a corporeal, collective and orchestrated practice regulated by methods that, in their turn, are ceaselessly discussed (Gomart & Hennion 1999) within the community of practitioners.

The practitioners' attachment to the object of practice – be it of love or hate, or of love and hate – is what makes practices socially sustained by judgments related not only to utility, but to ethics and aesthetics as well. Moreover the affective category of 'cruel optimism' shed light on how practices may be sustained by competing forms of attachments that sometimes may enter into open conflict and negotiation and some other time may coexist along a multiplicity of intersecting and non-communicating planes. Working practices are carried along also in toxic contexts and they, in their turn, create toxic contexts.

## **CONCLUSION**

The aim of this article is not simply to argue that the turn to affect may contribute to the turn to affect, but that the specific contribution is seen in the relationship – embodied and affectively embedded - between the practitioners' attachments to their practices and the researchers' attunement to ordinary affects in the fieldwork and how they are made present in the practice of writing. Affective attunement is an intentional activity that presumes the researchers willingness to engage with all the sociomaterialities of the practices under study.

Affects are not just another ingredient of a practice, are neither internal nor external to that practice. They circulate, color, vibrate, surround and envelop bodies and things that happen to hang together in what is seen as a practice. At the same time they may pass unnoticed because the orthodoxy of doing fieldwork either suggests they are not meaningful or they may be discarded as irrelevant. They constitute a symptom in the orthodoxy that points to the position of the researcher as a disembodied and external observer of life. Moreover it points also to the limitations of the researchers' vocabulary for getting in touch with the sensible and to the poor language that 'scientific' style has for describing the sensible world of practitioners and researchers.

The argument of the paper is not that 'ordinary affects' are part and parcel of the working practices of practitioners and researchers as well; rather ordinary affects are made present by a process of atmosphere attunement and embodied writing that call for experimentations in doing fieldwork and writing about it.

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