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# Flesh-and-blood knowing

## Interpreting qualitative data through embodied practice-based research

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data

371

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### Abstract

**Purpose** – This paper aims to offer a perspective to interpret qualitative data drawing on the introduction of the notion of “embodied practice-based research”.

**Design/methodology/approach** – Drawing on a comprehensive literature review to support a meta-theoretical approach, we developed a theoretical essay.

**Findings** – The body is not only a field of studies but a mean of study as well. The embodied practice-based research is an inquiry style to access the tacit texture of social action and cognition.

**Practical implications** – Embodied practice-based research may impact qualitative researchers’ education and the way to report methodological proceedings and data report.

**Originality/value** – The core contribution of the paper is the introduction of a new research style able to change how researchers’ bodies may be used in qualitative management research.

**Keywords** Qualitative research, Interpretation, Affect, Carnal sociology, Embodied practice-based research

**Paper type** Conceptual paper

### Introduction

Qualitative research is heavily focused on researcher’s interpretations upon the phenomena under investigation. The researcher’s interpretation process is always mediated by performative judgements (Bispo, 2017) aiming to make meaning in a reasoning way on the data produced in the field. However, the notion of reasoning in organization studies is highly based on a mentalist perspective wherein the mind and the body are treated as two distinct entities (Gherardi & Perrotta, 2014).

Organization and management scholars usually neglect the practical and embodied knowledge enacted in the real activities that they carry out in their research practices. Management researchers usually overlook what Wacquant (2015) calls “carnal know-how”.

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Marcelo de Souza Bispo lead on writing the original draft and contributed equally with Silvia Gherardi to the conceptualization and reviewing and editing the work.



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Impacted by the intensive rationalism as well as the methodological jails (Bispo, 2017), we still know little about the role of the body in the researcher's judgment, interpretation, and affective processes in the production of understandings of qualitative data. Nevertheless, the discussion on embodied research methods is gaining moment (Thanem & Knight, 2019) in a number of fields and disciplines that begin to reflect about how researchers are involved with their bodies in the research they do. As Gherardi (2018, p. 4) points out, it remains to grasp "what we can do with our embodied capacity to affect and be affected".

Inspired by, but not limited to, Merleau-Ponty (1962, 2004) perspective of "habitual knowledge of the world", Noë's (2006) perception as an action, Wacquant's (2015) carnal sociology, and Gherardi's (2017b) notion of affect, we advocate that all researcher's judgments and interpretations draw on an affective process that supports the researcher meaning making of organizational phenomena. We hold that the qualitative researcher is always in a position of "becoming-with-data" (Gherardi, 2018).

In this article, we aim at offering a perspective to interpret qualitative data that we name "Embodied Practice-Based Research". Epistemologically different from the humanist positions of Merleau-Ponty, Noë and Wacquant, we assume a post-humanist positioning aiming at performative methodologies able to "produce different knowledge and produce knowledge differently" (St. Pierre, 1997, p. 175). It means to assume the complex entanglement between human and non-human (or more-than-human in Braidotti's [2013] term) and discourses that decenter the human subject as the central seat of agency.

Embodied practice-based research is the upshot from the intertwined of the researcher's interpretation, judgment, and affect performances. All interpretation, judgement, and affect are actions (Gherardi, 2017a; Shotter & Tsoukas, 2014; Stake, 2010) wherein the researcher cognition is not separated from his/her perception and its capacity to affect and be affect by humans and non-humans—including the research data. There is no coherent interpretation without perception and affect. Noë (2006, p. 1) advocates that "[p]erception is not something that happens to us, or in us. It is something we do". For him, feeling is not a state is an action. As an action, perception is used by researchers not only to have sensations but to understand them. What we do defines our perception (Noë, 2006). Affect also is not a "thing", rather it refers to entangled processes, which are not easily seen and which extend across time and space (Blackman, 2015).

The researcher's interpretative capacity drawing on perception, judgments, and affects is relevant to meaning making upon subjective organizational phenomena involved in a complex web of (inter and intra) actions. We advocate that understanding organizational phenomena relies on the researcher's ability of becoming-with-data and not only be in "touch" with them. To interpret data is not limited to personal/cognitive skills; it also is to be bodily able to engage in affective manner in the research practices. Instead of a traditional perspective focused on a method that drives the researcher through technical set of procedures to be employed in the "right" way, the embodied practice-based research is a "style" of doing research wherein the researcher is able to recognize or identify something when he/she see or read it (Gherardi, 2018).

We want to draw organizational scholars' attention that perception and affect are not only objects of study but a means of supporting the researchers' interpretations. This issue is important for two reasons. First, because we aim to overcome the idea that good qualitative research relies only on rational reasoning and analytical perspectives. Second, because assuming perception and affect as action and a process of becoming-with-data, qualitative researchers can develop alternatives forms of interpreting data and offer new insights to organizational theorizing.

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Considering the nature of this article, we will adopt the term “data producing” instead of “data collection”, and “data interpretation” instead of “data analysis”. This option aims at highlighting our “carnal” (Wacquant, 2015) and “affective” perspectives wherein data is a verb (on the move) (Amatucci, 2013) as well as a state of becoming-with (Banerjee & Blaise, 2013). Our goal is to offer an alternative understanding of organizational qualitative research drawing attention to the fact that the researcher as a “mindful, rational, speech-act performing, free-will having, social and political beings” is a limiting perspective when does not consider his/her possibility to perform the phenomenon [becoming-with] as a methodological competency (Wacquant, 2015, p. 2).

After this introduction, we present what we mean by interpretation, judgment, and affect showing the body relevance in performing these activities. We also illustrate the carnal perspective (Wacquant, 2015) and how it understands embodied knowing in research practices. Next, we present how the researcher may be conceived as an embodied, embedded, and affective practitioner resorting on the notions of carnal know how (Wacquant, 2015), affect (Gherardi, 2019), and perception (Noë, 2006). We advocate that embodied practice-based research is a methodological posture to generate and interpret qualitative data instead of a set of methodological rigid procedures, and we offer an example of how an embodied practice-based research has been carried out in a research experience of the second author. Finally, we present our final remarks pointing out some insights from our proposal.

### **Interpretations, judgments, affects and carnal sociology**

Different from the mainstream organizational qualitative research wherein the researcher perception and affective conditions are usually not considered as a relevant resource for data interpretation, we advocate that reasoning is not a state of affairs separated from the senses, feelings, perceptions, and affects. Reasoning is an embodied condition. To reason on any social phenomena is to make sense about them. There is no rational reasoning that is disembodied and not mediated by perception and affect. The qualitative researcher should have the “capacity to combine knowledge, judgement, understanding, emotion, and intuition to act appropriately” (Macklin & Whiteford, 2012, p. 93).

Although many types of research have the body and the senses as objects of study, it remains to know about the role that the body plays in the researcher’s judgments, data interpretation, and the affective aspects that the research process involves.

We mean by interpretation an individual or collective condition of perception and translation of social phenomena in meaningful and understandable accounts drawing on a situated context of knowing-in-practice. We mean by performative judgment (Shotter & Tsoukas, 2014) “the ability to make good decisions within a research practice field” (Bispo, 2017, p. 162), it is an embodied reflection (Kinsella, 2012) that supports the researcher’s capacity of knowing-in-action in decision making. We mean by affect the “capacity to affect and be affected” (Massumi, 2002, p. 5). “A precarious consensus on the meaning of ‘affect’ is constructed around the idea that it is processual, relational, and situated” (Gherardi, 2018, p. 3).

Interpretation, judgment, and affect are highly dependent on the researcher body and its capability to perceive. To be a perceiver is “to understand, implicitly, the effects of movement on sensory stimulation” (Noë, 2006, p. 1). The body works through sensory impression that invokes emotional and physical responses (Pink, 2009), shapes perception, and it is the venue of knowing social relations in practice. From this perspective, the body and the mind are intertwined and just work when they are performing together (Cerulo, 2015). Any social researcher – especially doing qualitative research – relies on the habitual

knowledge of the world lodged in the body properly to make sense of social phenomena or to do science (Merleau-Ponty, 1962, 2004).

Wacquant (2015) proposed the notion of “carnal sociology” that aims to unveil and report the deployment of the practical schemata that involves cognition and affect into the habitus construction. The author holds that we need to regain our “spirit of acuteness” (2015, p. 2) that were abandoned by the traditional social scientific accounts. Wacquant (2015, p. 2) argues that the “disincarnated vision of agent”, a “flattened and negative notion of structure”, and a “mentalist understanding of knowledge” opened room for a problematic “grasp of the social as fluid”. For him, it is necessary to avoid the dualism between the *homo economicus* and *homo culturalis* that highlights their disembodied perspective and overlooks from the social interpretation aspects such as the flesh, desire, and passion. The social researcher needs to take into account the practical knowing manifested in concrete actions. “Carnal sociology applies to any object and can use a variety of methods as long as these treat the social agent as embodied and embedded (Wacquant, 2015, p. 5)”.

Wacquant (2015) proposes a conception of agent to catch what he calls as “embodied practical knowledge” drawing on five properties jointly structured – sentient, suffering, skilled, sedimented, and situated what he calls as “Six S”. Table I summarizes these properties.

Structure in Wacquant’s Six S proposition has a different meaning from Durkheim’s original idea of a deterministic condition. For Wacquant (2015, p. 3) structures are:

[...] dynamic webs of forces inscribed upon and infolded deep within the body as perceptual grids, sensorimotor capacities, emotional proclivities, and indeed as desire itself. Structures are internal springs or propellers as much as they are external containers, beams, or lattices. They are limber and alive, not inert and immobile.

Properties	Description
<i>Structure</i>	
Sentient	The agent is not only endowed with senses, exteroceptive, proprioceptive, and interoceptive; she also makes sense of what her sensorium captures. She is both capable of feeling and conscious of those feelings; and the body is the synthesizing medium of this feeling awareness (Wacquant, 2015, p. 3)
Suffering	The agent is exposed to the threats and blows of the natural and social worlds; she has needs, yearnings, and desires that do not get fulfilled; she is constantly subjected to the judgment of others and faces the inescapable coming of death. As such, she lives in anguish, distress and pain, and yet she endures (Wacquant, 2015, p. 3)
Skilled	The social agent can “make a difference” because, through experience and training, she acquires capacities to act and the dexterity to do things competently (Wacquant, 2015, p. 3)
Sedimented	All of these elements, our senses, suffering, and skills are not given at birth, generic, or constituted in a solipsistic relation to self. Rather, they are implanted, cultivated, and deployed over time through our engagement in the world, and they are gradually deposited in our body as the layered product of our varied individual and collective histories (Wacquant, 2015, pp. 3-4)
Situated	This sedimentation is shaped by our unique location and peregrinations in physical and social space, precisely because we are both protected by and locked in the fragile physical envelope of our mortal organism, which cannot be at two places at a given time but integrates the traces of the many places we have occupied over time (Wacquant, 2015, p. 4)

**Table I.**  
Wacquant’s six S  
propositions to catch  
embodied practical  
knowledge

**Source:** Authors based on Wacquant (2015)

The notion of individual in Wacquant's proposition assumes a dynamic and performative condition, wherein body, mind, perception, emotion, and structure are enmeshed. Embodied practical knowledge is the upshot of a continuous process wherein what we know comes always from our capacity to learn with our interactions, socializations, feelings, experiences in a certain time and space. "Carnal sociology is a sociology not of the body as sociocultural object but from the body as fount of social intelligence and sociological acumen" (Wacquant, 2015, p. 5).

Inspired by Wacquant's carnal sociology and Gherardi's (2017a, 2017b) affect approach, we propose the term "Embodied Practice-based Research" to represent qualitative research interpretations, judgments, and affects. Even though we are focusing on the researcher individual condition to make judgments and interpretations, we reinforce that the individual is sedimented and situated as well as part of a structure. This condition offers the researcher the possibility of perceiving social realities and account for them not only using personal but societal or collective understandings learned in practice as well. It means the capacity to affect and be affected by the research field.

However, to take affect into account the researcher needs to be familiar with the context wherein the social phenomena happens. One possibility to engage with people and perform the phenomenon is to resort to the ethnomethodology sensibility (Garfinkel, 1967). Ethno methodologists have tackled the need to grasp the logic of a social group to make sense of the phenomena under investigation produced by them (Bispo & Cavalcante, 2019; Bispo & Godoy, 2012; Mondada, 2017; Rawls, 2008).

The embodied practice-based research is always upshot of the experience and affect that the researcher has with the field of study. The idea to link interpretation with judgment relies on the need to enact a reflexive position wherein feelings, emotions, and affects should not be expressions without scientific rigor. Rigor herein has the same understanding as proposed by Czarniawska (2016) as "self-reflection" that requires critical thinking about the senses and feelings involved in the research process.

### **The researcher as an embodied, embedded and affective practitioner**

The embodied practice-based research style opens room to advance in certain aspects of the organizational life that are hard to identify or understand them relying only on classic research methods such as traditional ethnography, hermeneutic, interviewing, historiography, case study, archival research, or statistical techniques. These methods employed parochially are not able to apprehend organizational aspects related to the tacit texture of social action that involves "doxic categories, phronetic abilities, and ordinary ways of being, feeling, and acting" (Wacquant, 2015, p. 4).

The researcher carnal condition (sented, suffering, skilled, sedimented and situated) (Wacquant, 2015) and his/her affective attitude (capacity to affect and be affected) (Gherardi, 2017b) are key to an embodied practice-based research and achieve subjective and dynamic aspects of organizational phenomena. The idea is to engage the researcher in ongoing actions as a co-actor and not as a spectator to apprehend the practical schemata that involves organizational phenomena in its cognitive, conative, and affective aspects (Wacquant, 2015). Practical schemata may be perceived (Noë, 2006) by elements such as texts, actors, materialities, language and agencies entangled in complex ways wherein data is in motion (Gherardi, 2017a). The embodied practice-based research aims at diving:

[. . .] into the stream of action to the greatest possible depth, rather than watch it from the bank; but to dive and swim along with method and purpose, and not with reckless abandon that would cause us to drown in the bottomless whirlpool of subjectivism. (Wacquant, 2015, p. 5)

What makes the researcher interpretations valid and reliable is the affective condition during the investigation immersion. To affect and be affected is what offers to the researcher “acts out (elements of) the phenomenon in order to peel away the layers of its invisible properties and to test its operative mechanisms” (Wacquant, 2015, p. 5). The researcher affective condition is dependent of his/her capacity to perceive – to have a body that acts. Perception is a process wherein the investigator enacts his/her perceptual experience, i.e. “act it out” (Noë, 2006, p. 1). This perspective shapes the way to understand the notion of “cognition” and its role in the research process.

Once we acknowledge that cognition is a situated activity growing out of a tangled dance of body, mind, activity, and world, we can begin to retrieve the tacit knowledge enfolded in cultural and social practices, and thereby enrich our descriptions and deepen our explanations of them. Put these three revamped ingredients together, an incarnate being engaging practical know-how as she navigates active and mobile configurations of affect, action, and powers, and you have the building blocks for a flesh-and-blood sociology, capable of producing multidimensional, polychrome accounts of social life that seize life as it actually unfolds, instead of the torpid reports in black and white that we now read in academic journals (Wacquant, 2015, p. 4).

Cognition herein is embodied and not a mere brain activity (Cerulo, 2015). Cognition from a carnal and affective approach is grounded in our capacity to perceive. Noë (2006) holds that our perception is determined by what we do. Thus, to enact our perceptual experience, we need to develop a sensorimotor knowledge. Considering that the researcher body needs to develop the sensorimotor knowledge oriented to scientific investigation (be skilled in Wacquant’s sense), the researcher embodied, embedded, and affective condition requires a body educated for research. As Mauss (2003) points out, our body is not only biologically developed but it is also socially trained. The way that we use our body is highly influenced by our social context. From this perspective, we advocate that embodied practice-based research style demands the researcher a body trained to take advantage of its carnal and affective capacity in doing fieldwork and later in interpreting data.

Embodied practice-based research is not a technique to be applied as a single and isolated research tool. Rather, it is a researcher condition to be developed that involves body knowledge as well as how to use it. Wacquant (2015) advocates what he calls as “enactive ethnography” as a way to achieve an embodied research condition. For him, the researcher should grasp the action-in-the-making. Gherardi (2018) claims the “affective ethnography” suitable to resonate with, becoming-with, and the capacity for affective attunement. However, embodied knowing is a posture to judge and interpret data. It is not a set of procedures; it is a research style.

### **A story from the field**

In this paragraph we wish to reflect on the embodied experience as a group of researchers engaged in working on the interpretation of research data, the problems encountered, how they were solved and how, in solving what was puzzling in that moment, they arrived to theorizing what was named “affective ethnography”.

To introduce the context of our argument it is good to start with an image and we like to recall Merleau-Ponty’s (2002, pp. 26-27) example of “being a body” encountering honey and feeling the sensation of the “honeyed” (*mielleux*). The hand touching the “honeyed” and being touched by it has been portrayed as prototypical of sensible knowledge:

Honey is fluid but has some consistency and is viscous. Whenever it is touched, it “touches” in its turn. The non-human element – in our terms – shows an ability to be active and a certain



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autonomy in its relationship with the human being, since it takes the initiative of spattering his or her fingers with mud, or colouring and perfuming them, or dirtying them (Strati, 2007, p. 63).

Can we think of “data” as “honeyed”? This was a question that a group of five researchers, engaged in the analysis of the notes and interviews from their fieldwork, posed to themselves and that now the second author of the present article wishes to exemplify in order to theorize embodiment knowing. From now on the plural “we” refer to story of those five researchers (Gherardi *et al.*, 2018). Our story is located in this intercorporeal involvement with data. During fieldwork and later in interpreting the data and writing reports or articles, bodies encounter other bodies and other materialities sensed via touch, hearing, smell, sight, taste, which reveal their active intercorporeal involvement in the process of producing sensible knowledge. And we started to look for an answer to the question that Benozzo *et al.* (2013) formulated in terms of: what do we do to data and what data do to us?

We – as five different authors – experienced the stickiness of “data”, and began a collective reflection on the intensity of affect – as our being affected by the interviews we had conducted, and our power to affect the participants we met and who accepted to narrate their experience of vulnerability in being women, immigrant, working in industrial sectors of tourism and personal care service with low legal protections (temporary work contracts) and having suffered an accident at work.

In that research project[1] the researchers engaged in the fieldwork had 40 encounters with immigrant women, in precarious working positions whose bodies had suffered a work-related accident. The immigrant women narratives were always highly emotional since the traumatism of a work-related accident was still fresh in their memory. The immigrant women vulnerability in the society and not only in the labor market was “a presence” in the words of that women and the project researchers. According to Walkerdine (2010) in the communication of trauma takes place an embodied encounter in which separation-in-jointness and distance-in-proximity create matrixial effects which hold, transmit and metamorphose trauma. Sometimes we met them in a public space like a bar, sometimes we were invited to their houses, in both cases a sense of intimacy was spontaneously reached since these places have not the sign of the institutions as the university could have had.

Affect was not a topic anticipated in the original research design, and we did not set out to collect manifestations of it, rather, it announced itself gradually as the research team gathered for the research project during the two years of fieldwork and began to notice recurrent comments on a gut feeling, difficult to name, that was present during or after an interview. It could have been easy to discard that feeling, as it is often done in elaborating qualitative data where all those things that do not fit in are just discarded. Since all the researchers were professionally trained in interviewing on sensitive topics and in getting in contact with vulnerable persons; that bodily feeling of uneasiness came as a “wonder” and the researchers’ affective condition imposed its presence – a sort of carnal know-how.

Maggie MacLure (2013a, p. 228) writes about wonder as “as an untapped potential in qualitative research”. She advocates “more wonder in qualitative research, and especially in our engagements with data, as a counterpart to the exercise of reason through interpretation, classification, and representation”. Wonder directed our attention to our engagement with “data” and to the entanglement of data-and-researchers. The question of what counts as “data” after the critique of conventional humanist qualitative research (St. Pierre, 2011; Somerville, 2016), the de-centering of the subject, and the dissolution of the distinction subject/object is an open-ended question calling for experimentation with posthumanist methodologies[2]. Our engagement with embodiment theory and affective methodologies was prompted by the desire to account for the presence of a strong bodily

affect and the challenges we faced in keeping it seriously as a relevant phenomenon in conducting an empirical interpretation of the materials we had produced. This is where experimenting with embodied interpretation began!

We took seriously the challenges for an empirical study of our own embodied experience with data formulating three questions:

Q1. Asking to ourselves questions about how to look at affect in our data.

Q2. Generating “embodied data”.

Q3. Identifying affective traces of embodied processes in empirical material.

Regarding the first question/challenge and being concerned with developing starting points, we formulated the following principle: research questions about affect become increasingly more answerable if they are concretely linked to the researcher’s own body in specific social situations. This orientation enabled us to look at our data in a way that is made it more likely to produce materials allowing for empirically based argumentation. Our strategy was therefore to use our own bodies as living records of both the traces left by affect as experienced during the encounters with the research participants and recorded by our own bodies, the traces kept in our memory, the annotations in the logbook, and the traces materialized during our group discussion. Moreover, for asking questions with a strong situational specificity, we focused on a single situation – interviewing – in which all human participants, artifacts (as the recorder), the physical environment of the interview (the participant’s home or a bar), the communication process, and the events of the past and those prefigured in the future were all affectively entangled. In fact, a situated practice is a site where knowing and doing are not separated and as [Wacquant \(2015\)](#) argues focusing on sentient and situated knowledge provides a way to acknowledge the researchers’ intertwinement with the knowledge produced and the dimensions of the situation that are outside the researchers’ control but that were part of the structure (in Wacquant’s sense).

Our second challenge concerns the production of embodied data and how to interpret them via concepts that may be used to identify the presence and cultural meaning of affective forces. Our strategy was to look systematically for “data that glow”. The expression “data that glow” has been used by [MacLure \(2013b\)](#) to condense the affective dimension in-between the “data” and a team of researchers who get energized in the encounter and in the engagement with data, with the materialities where they glow, with the mutual process of engaging in something not experienced before. The glow evokes the emergence of sense, that “something abstract or intangible that exceeds propositional meaning, but also has a decidedly embodied aspect” ([MacLure, 2013b](#), p. 661). The glow is described as singular, but not (yet) attached to specific instances, and it is reminiscent of [Deleuze’s \(2004\)](#) material-linguistic status of sense, resonating in the body as well as in the brain.

The first glimmer of affect in our team was produced by the comments on the effects of the interviews on the bodies of the interviewers. Not only did we discuss the respective experiences at length, but we returned to the field notes that the researchers wrote once the single encounter was over. It was in this process that we noted how in talking about the most intense experiences of “difficult” interviews the researcher used her or his body’s gestures to mimic the body and gestures of the interviewee or indicate some other thing present in the room where the interview was taking place (like the recorder or a strong light) and which was recreated in the conversation. It was in this process that we focused on the idea of affective resonance in the in-betweenness of the bodies who met for talking about the work-related accident and we started to think in terms of “transmission of affect”. To follow



this first glimmer, we went further into the transcripts of more “difficult” interviews and we identified a series of episodes in which affect was transpiring from the interactions and the narratives. We moved from the written text of the transcript to the registration of the interviews again and again, looking for words and sounds able to lead us further towards what we could feel but not yet name. The feeling that there was much more of what could be expressed in words or gestures, that much is evoked and transmitted beyond the visible, the audible, the olfactory, and what is present and re-created in the conversation is what we thought of in terms of “intensity” through perception.

Our third challenge was – using [Knudsen and Stage’s \(2015, p. 7\)](#) words – how “to approach material in ways that are sensible to the affective processes leading to, traced or motivated by the empirical material”. Our strategy here has been to experiment with writing and textualities, using the material where we pinpointed the traces of affect and elaborating a more-than-representational text around two episodes ([Gherardi et al., 2018](#)).

Non-representational theory or practice ([Ingold, 2011](#); [Thrift, 2003](#)) or better more-than-representational ([Lorimer, 2005](#)) seeks to escape the “reading techniques on which the social sciences are founded” to “inject a note of wonder back into a social science which, too often, assumes that it must explain everything” ([Thrift, 2007, p. 12](#)). A more-than-representational text focuses:

[. . .] 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, p. 84](#)).

Therefore, we were challenged to show “where affect is” and “what it does”, and we faced the need to track the material traces of affect: in communication, through the choice of words, the pitch of the voices, the *crescendo* in the verbal interactions, the mimicking of other (absent) voices, the broken language and the rhetorical figures embedded in the narratives. The material traces of affect in communication were left in the audio-recordings, where the voices (and the silences) could be heard and the rhythm of their alternation could be followed. In the transcript of the interviews the voices disappeared but the words came frontstage. The non-verbal and the gestures left a material trace in the memory of the interviewers and in the discussion in the research group. The energy (and its fall or absence) was a trace embodied in the way that the bodies resonate in reflecting on how to make affect accountable for somebody who was not part of the process. Therefore, in writing for the absent reader we experimented with what [Lury and Wakeford \(2012, p. 17\)](#) defined as inventive methods, i.e. methods that “enable *the happening* of the social world – its ongoingness, relationality, contingency and sensuousness – to be investigated” (emphasis in original).

We suggested to the reader to imagine to stand in front of a mixing console where different channels tracking the traces of affect can be played, either in isolation or in a collective sound and our written text isolated the different channels: Channel 1: traces of affect left on the paper support of a transcript, Channel 2: traces of affect left on researcher’s logbook, Channel 3: the traces of affect left on the audio support, Channel 4: the traces of affect left in the memory and in the team reflection. Our aim was not only to argue about the materiality of affective embodiment but also to reproduce for the reader an embodied experience of “being there”.

Writing is therefore an affect-laden process, dialoguing with the body of the author/reader, the attunement within bodies, and the resonance thus produced when the text finds the particular form adequate to what it describes ([Gibbs, 2015](#); [Stewart, 2007](#)). To write differently in qualitative studies responds to an emerging need to acknowledge proximity with the persons and the events in the fieldwork, and to write the stories in a way that is intended to bring them to life.

This story from the fieldwork gives an idea of the kind of problems that a researcher or a group of researchers face in trying to understand and use their embodied experience in the interpretation and representation of research data. It was an intense experience and it was the inspiration for theorizing affective ethnography sometime later (Gherardi, 2018). In recognizing the centrality of the bodies, the pervasiveness of carnal know-how, and the affective resonance with the persons, the materialities, and the emplacements of the fieldwork situation, affective ethnography is centered on three aspects related to bodily presence in doing fieldwork and the bodies' capacity to affect/be affected. The first is embodiment and embodied knowing. Doing fieldwork implies the ability to resonate with, becoming-with, and the capacity for affective attunement. The second aspect relates to place as flow, and process. The third relates to affect as the power to act and therefore to the presence in the fieldwork of the capacity to "make do", either intentionally or unintentionally.

### Final remarks

Our goal in this article was to offer a perspective to interpret qualitative data drawing on the notion of "embodied practice-based research". Instead of proposing a rigid set of procedures to interpret and report organizational qualitative data, we advocate that the researcher embodied knowing and experience is relevant to apprehend and understand subjective phenomena – especially those overlooked by organizational scholars on the tacit texture of social action and cognition.

Embodied practice-based research is a style of inquiry and not a method itself. Therefore, it is extensive to be adopted in different sorts of qualitative methods. Any organizational researcher concerned with embodied knowing of organizational phenomena and the research process involved may take advantage of our research style proposal. Even though "the body" is not a totally new issue in social sciences and is emergent in organizational studies, scholars pay much attention to the initial moment of "being in the field" and "collecting" data, while the problem of "where is the body" when the researchers interpret the data has been overlooked.

Through the embodied practice-based research, we highlight how the body has been reinterpreted as a social element and a means of research. The "new" perspective of "being a body" as pointed by Merleau-Ponty (1962), Noë (2006), Wacquant (2015), and Gherardi (2017b, 2018) paves the way to the researcher use his/her body experience to interpret data. The embodied practice-based research opens room to the body capacity to affect and being affected wherein not only the researcher is in the field with the senses, but data are embodied with the researcher.

We hold that when embodied knowing tend to be discarded, undervalued, and not taken into consideration once the researchers leave the field and go home with their data under the arm, their data become again disembodied and a relevant part of the organizational phenomena understanding is neglect.

### Notes

1. The project SICURTEMP: Sicurezza e Benessere Lavorativo tra Vecchi e Nuovi Contratti Temporanei [Workplace Safety and Well-being between Old and New Temporary Contracts] was conducted in the province of Trento, in northeastern Italy, from January 2012 to April 2014.
2. Several special issues on post-qualitative methodologies and posthumanist approaches have appeared in recent years, such as Davies (2017); Koro-Ljungberg & MacLure (2013); Koro-Ljungberg & Mazzei (2012); Lather & St. Pierre (2013), Lenz Taguchi & St. Pierre (2017); St. Pierre & Jackson (2014).

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