Why Kurt Wolff matters for a practice-based perspective of sensible knowledge in ethnography

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to illustrate the contribution offered by Wolff's sociology of knowledge to organizational ethnography and to enrich the lexicon of practice-based studies with the concept of surrender-and-catch.

Design/methodology/approach – Drawing on Wolff's writing, the surrender-and-catch perspective is introduced and how to be inspired by it is illustrated in relation to three working practices.

Findings – The centrality of the body and of sensible knowledge for doing ethnographies of working practices is affirmed and the surrender-and-catch perspective is interpreted as an art of seeing connections.

Practical implications – Surrender-to may be included in the methodology for studying knowing-in-practice and it may help students to get prepared to conduct an organizational ethnography.

Originality/value – A contribution to frame the legacy of a sociologist of knowledge little known in organization studies. Its contribution stresses the importance of a plurality of forms of knowing alongside the rational-analytic one. Therefore Kurt Wolff's work becomes relevant within the practice-based studies.

Keywords Practice-based studies, Aesthetic knowledge, Organizational ethnography, Sensible knowing, Surrender-and-catch, Wolff

Paper type Conceptual paper

Introduction

The tenth anniversary of the death of Kurt Wolff was in 2013. This is therefore an occasion to consider the contribution offered by Wolff's sociology of knowledge at a distance of many years and in a context in many respects distinct from the cultural and historical environment in which his thought developed.

Wolff is known as a translator into English of Simmel and as a major contributor to the sociology of knowledge. Nevertheless, his contributions to qualitative and phenomenological sociology developed from his perspective, known as "surrender-and-catch," which originated from his ethnographic fieldwork in a small village in New Mexico. Even if he may be considered one of the "founding fathers" of ethnography, in the field of organizational ethnography Wolff's contribution is not widely known; nor is it acknowledged.

Therefore the aim of this paper is to present Wolff' work to the readers of *Organizational Ethnography* and show how his insights are still topical. My motives

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for rendering homage to this little-known sociologist are to show the currency of Wolff's thought within organizational studies in relation to discussion centered on the teaching of organizational ethnography. For these reasons, I would like students preparing to conduct an organizational ethnography to reflect on what the surrender-and-catch approach can offer them. At the same time, I would like the lexicon of practice theories to enrich itself with this expression.

In what follows, I shall first describe the surrender-and-catch perspective by drawing on Wolff's writings. Then I shall use three fieldwork vignettes, taken from ethnographies on working practices, to illustrate how research practices can benefit from Wolff's epistemological position.

Kurt Wolff's intellectual biography

When Wolff died in 2003, the journal *Human Studies* devoted a special issue (26/2003) to his memory, and it is there that we find a brief biography written by George Psathas, to which I refer here.

Wolff was born in Darmstadt, Germany in 1912 and attended the University of Frankfurt, where he studied with Karl Mannheim. As the Nazis expelled all Jews from academic positions, he was forced to leave. He went to Italy where he graduated at the University of Florence in 1935 with a thesis titled "La Sociologia del Sapere" (The sociology of knowledge). After teaching in Florence until 1939, he was again forced to emigrate when the fascists prohibited Jews from studying or teaching in Italy. After arriving in the USA, he became a research assistant in sociology at Southern Methodist University from 1939 to 1943 and taught a course on introductory statistics in his last year. In 1943-1944 he was at the University of Chicago and did fieldwork in the spring and summer in New Mexico as part of his fellowship. He "fell in love" with Loma (the name he gave to the small village in New Mexico) that summer of 1944 while producing some 400 pages of field notes which he sent to Robert Redfield and Sol Tax at Chicago on a regular basis. He also wrote a paper on culture patterns, which he presented in Chicago. Later he moved to Ohio State University, as an assistant professor in 1945, working with John Bennett. In 1955 he accepted a position as Professor at Brandeis University, where he served as Chair from 1959-1962 and contributed to one of the most outstanding departments in American sociology in which qualitative perspectives were a major focus. He became Emeritus in 1982, teaching until 1992, and continued to write and publish extensively.

He worked for more than 25 years on the perspective known as "surrender-and-catch," and in 1976 he published his late reflections on surrender, together with his experiences of teaching the idea, in *Surrender and Catch: Experience and Inquiry Today*. The second part of the book, entitled *Trying with Others*, is of great interest because it enables the reader to understand his method indirectly by describing how it is appropriated by students under the careful guidance of the teacher. In other words, this is the principle of artisanal teaching and learning in which the "tricks of the trade" (Becker, 1998) are learned through demonstrating and watching, through sensible knowledge, and through development of an attachment to research practices.

I have been struck by the uncommon quality of Wolff's writing. I find this circumstance to be uncommon, due to the fact that "as a sociologist he remains poetic; a sociologist whose prose is poetry, whose philosophical ideas are emotion laden, whose analyses are filled with reflexive, introspective self-analytic insights, and whose sociology is all of these, committed, political, personal, and poetic" (Psathas, 2003, p. 289). For these reasons, I would like students preparing to conduct an organizational

ethnography to reflect on what the surrender-and-catch approach can offer them, and how ethnographic writing can be done "differently."

The surrender-and-catch perspective

In my experience, the success of ethnographic methods in the workplace studies of the 1990s has had the effect of increasing the demand to learn how to conduct ethnography from a rule-book, or to have a prescriptive approach so that it can be learned quickly and effectively. Another reason for this demand relates to anxiety and to the fear of prolonged intimacy with the field.

To students who express a desire to reduce the risks of ethnographic research, I would reply with Wolff's following words: (the ethnographer must not be) "a dispassionate scientist but rather a political, engaged, human being who 'surrenders' to the world and does not remain a detached, outside observer." In fact, the "surrender" perspective defines the researcher's epistemological position in "its opposition to the official Western, and now potentially worldwide, consciousness, in which the relation to the world, both natural and human, is not surrender but mastery, control, efficiency, handling, manipulation" (Wolff, 1976, p. 21). In fact, "to surrender means to take as fully, to meet as immediately as possible whatever the occasion may be. It means not to select, not to believe that one can know quickly what one's experience means, hence what is understood and acted on" (Wolff, 1976, p. 20).

To understand the experience that engendered the surrender perspective, it is opportune to recapitulate its history as recounted by Wolff. Between 1940 and 1960, Wolff, financed by the Social Science Research Council, was conducting fieldwork at Loma in order "to develop a method by which 'cultural patterns' could be established so as to allow another student to go back and to check point by point" (Wolff, 1976, p. 72). One realizes from these words that the canon of research in the field was established in accordance with the assumptions dominant in that historical period. Nevertheless, in 1944 Wolff said that he was unable to accept that contract any longer, and he declared himself dissatisfied with the three versions of his study that he had published (Wolff, 1974). Moreover, he said that it was only years later that he understood what had happened. He recounted his experience as follows:

> I had fallen through the web of "culture patterns" and assorted conceptual meshes into the chaos of *love*; I was looking everywhere, famished, with a "ruthless glance". Despite admonitions to be selective and form hypotheses that would tell me what to select, I was not and did not. Another thing I sensed was that I was not content with the probable but wanted to *know*; and I thought I might *know* if, instead of looking for culture patterns, for instance, I look directly – not through the lens of *any* received notion but through the adequate lens that would be fashioned by my being in Loma (Wolff, 1976, p. 72).

He recalls that what had struck him during his first encounter with the "field" was "a landscape such as I had not known before. It was high, calm, yet exciting, with sagebrush rolling wide, rolling up the hills, mesas razed flat, shaking their green brown hues into nothingness buzzing with flowers: purple, blue, lemon tufts in the gray circled by rocky tables (Wolff, 1976, p. 71). Wolff's reflections in this regard concern the fact that his field notes contained no trace of what had begun to fascinate him, of how his questions had developed, of how his aesthetic experience had been omitted, and therefore of how his sensible knowledge – though this he conveys very well in his reflections – had not been documented by his research practice.

It was therefore only *a posteriori* and many years after the experience of research in the field that Wolff developed the surrender-and-catch perspective, and started to teach it.

Surrender is cognitive love, in the twofold sense of apprehending and embracing. It means not to select, not to believe that one can know quickly what one's experience means. And by "catch" "I mean the cognitive or existential result, yield, harvest, *Fang* (catch), *Begriff* (concept, from *con-cipio*) of surrender, the beginning (*Anfang)*, new conceiving or new conceptualizing which it is. What is caught (comprehended, conceived), what 'catching' ('conceiving') means cannot be anticipated – otherwise surrender would not be as unconditional as it is, and the catch would not be beginning" (Wolff, 1976, p. 20).

The meaning of surrender flows from its meaning as cognitive love, and it implies (Wolff, 1976, pp. 22-23):

- Total involvement in surrender as in love itself […]. In surrender as in love, differentiation between subject, act, and object disappears.
- Suspension of received notions: matters that I feel have anything whatever to do with what I want to learn or know, with my exploration, are suspended, that is, not affirmed, not denied, but put in question.
- Pertinence of everything: "everything" is everything within the surrenderer's awareness – as for the lover it is everything about the beloved and the love. In the extreme concentration on the moment of surrender, "everything" is important, but "everything else" vanishes.
- Identification: in surrender the individual identifies with it, its occasion, moment, object, self. But identification is the aim of surrender, not the aim of the catch. […] since the surrenderer wants to know, there is the love of the catch, of understanding, conceiving, considering so that others can be told what has occurred, which would be impossible if identification itself were the catch.
- Risk of being hurt: this meaning characterizes not only surrender but also acting on the catch and, obviously, many other activities and situations.

Cognitive love should be understood as openness to knowledge and a mode of knowing that is similar to love, a love for knowledge, since surrender results in an existential knowing – the catch that transcends the already constituted meanings. In fact Wolff used numerous metaphors to convey the amorous experience, and it is important to emphasize that his use of "cognitive" does not relate to the cognitive sciences, which would develop only subsequently. In fact, the reason for recontextualizing Wolff's theory of knowledge in the current debate on ethnographic practices is to give voice to a form of non-rational knowledge, be it experiential, poetic, emotional, or aesthetic.

However, also "surrender is unforeseeable, unpredictable, it happens, it befalls" (Wolff, 1976, p. 25) and catch is the object (a concept, a decision, a poem, a painting, the clarification or urging of an existential question). It cannot exhaust the experience of surrender. Hence, for it to become a method or an epistemology, a further step is necessary. This is represented by the concept of "surrender *to* something or somebody." In fact, "while it [surrender] cannot be brought about by an effort of the will, such an effort can be made: I can try to surrender *to* something or somebody. To surrender-*to* is to concentrate, to dedicate or devote oneself, to pay utmost attention" (Wolff, 1976, p. 26). Both "surrender" and "surrender-*to*" are love for knowing; the difference, again, being between unexpected love and willed love. The practice of

"surrendering-to" involves a conscious effort to promote a relation with a specific phenomenon; therefore in "surrendering-to," the object of love is an object of exhaustive concern. As a method it is characterized by openness toward its origin, that is, toward questioning, doubting, suspending, and abandoning its self in favor of such other cognitive modes as may emerge in its practice; hence it is self-correcting and is in the spirit of the essence of knowledge.

In "surrendering-to" (a community or any other social phenomenon) as a method, therefore, Wolff says that he seeks to avoid two risks (Wolff, 1976, p. 78):

(1) reducing the community to a case in point, an item subsumable under a generalization, an element in a theory; and

(2) forgetting that as a scholar one wants to find out and to report as objectively as one can.

Wolff uses a metaphor that I believe clearly expresses his conception of the relation between comprehension and explanation, and which therefore aids understanding of his formulation of the risks to avoid when using the surrender-and-catch perspective as a method. He writes (Wolff, 1976, p. 184): "I claim that 'surrender and catch' represents knowledge at two stages of explication, most clearly in, first, the poem, then its exegesis." Surrender is the poem, which is unforeseeable and "amethodical" in its essence, while "surrender-*to*" is its exegesis, i.e. it is the method that explains the catch (his meaning of objectification).

It should be borne in mind, in fact, that Wolff's epistemological position is phenomenological, and that it is a critique of positivist and modernist science. It also contains an emancipatory ideal, since "diagnosis of our contemporary situation calls for the emergence of the existential human and social scientist whose practice of surrender-and-catch is capable of providing meaningful insights for *societal transformation*" (Backhouse, 2003, p. 311, italics in original).

The currency of Wolff's thought thus becomes clear when we focus on how ethnography has been appropriated by practice-based research, whose aim is to understand how practitioners work and organize, and to represent their knowing-in-practice in order to facilitate reflection on practices and their transformation (Nicolini, 2012; Gherardi, 2012).

Kurt Wolff's legacy in organizational ethnography

The ethnographic method has burgeoned in organizational studies since the theme of organizational culture disrupted the rationalist paradigm dominant until the 1980s (Hatch, 2013). Organization theory as an interpretive science (Hatch and Yanow, 2003) focuses on meaning and meaning-making in specific situational contexts, since it is concerned with understanding the lifeworld of the actor in the situation studied. Whence derives the search for qualitative methods able to support that interpretative work.

Within qualitative research methodology, ethnography is a distinctive type of research and not a simple method of doing research. Although how to define "organizational ethnography" is still contested (Yanow, 2012), we may concur with Brannan *et al.* (2012, p. 6) by saying "ethnography in all its forms […] has something important to say about the complexities of modern society." Moreover, ethnographers can be conceived as "theorists in the field" (Watson, 2012, p. 19), since theory is both a resource for guiding fieldwork and an outcome of the thinking process. It is against this background that I intend to contextualize Kurt Wolff's legacy in organizational ethnography in general, and within practice-based ethnography in particular.

What is distinctive of practice-based ethnography is its reflexive stance, since in studying situated working practices the ethnographer provides the practitioners with a representation of the practices that s/he is studying. Hence we may say that the ethnographer's research practices are constitutive of the practices represented. Surrendering-to the working practices of a community and catching the community's knowledgeable doing is what an ethnographer must learn to perform.

Providing a brief account of the conceptual boundaries of the field of practice-based studies is as difficult as trying to do so for organizational ethnography. Nevertheless, we can start from the consideration that many of the classics in practice-based studies are ethnographies. We can consider Cook and Yanow's (1993) ethnography of flute-makers or Lave and Wenger's (1991) ethnographies of apprenticeship, in which they postulated a close relationship among knowledge, the technology of practice and the culture of that practice. The latter authors were concerned with the process whereby novices become full practitioners through participation – as a way of belonging – to a community of practices. Their social theory of learning was concerned to extend the notion of learning outside schooling and outside traditional places. Also Brown and Duguid's (1991) understanding of community of practice stresses the "non-canonical" nature of learning while working. Another classic is Orr's (1996) ethnography on photocopier repair technicians, or Suchman's (1993) study of technology in airport practices, and again Suchman *et al.*'s (1999) study of a law office, or Feldman's (1989) study of five organizational routines, or Orlikowski and Yates's (1994) study of organizational communicative practices. More generally, the stream of research known as "workplace studies" (Heath *et al.*, 2000) studies situated technological practices using ethnographic analysis (also video-based) and ethno-methodological tools. Moreover, many "laboratory studies" (Lynch, 1985) are based on the ethnographic study of scientific practices. Numerous other examples could be cited, but I prefer to focus on the theoretical reasons for conducting ethnographic fieldwork in order to understand and represent working practices.

Central to "practice-based studies" is the notion that social life is an ongoing production. Organizing is increasingly understood to be complex, dynamic, distributed, mobile, transient, and unprecedented, so that it emerges through people's recurrent actions (Feldman and Orlikowski, 2011). In other words, we can treat working practices as ongoing accomplishments of situated activities which form an institutionalized pattern. Since practices are interconnected with other practices we can move from a situated working practice to the society at large, and vice versa (the micro/macro divide no longer holds in practice theory).

Nevertheless, if we focus on practices as activities (just doing) we run the risk of losing sight of practice as collective, knowledgeable doing (Gherardi, 2000) and thus undervalue both knowing as a situated activity and the type of knowledge that is produced, kept, and changed in the community of practitioners as a common good. Moreover, when we consider working practices from the point of view of knowability, we have to acknowledge the centrality of the body as a source of knowing (sensible knowledge) and the extent of pre-verbal knowing. In other words, in order to understand working practices "with the eyes" of the practitioners, the researcher needs to catch the invisible and tacit knowledge produced and kept within practicing.

Polanyi (1966) argued that there is a realm of knowability aside from the explicit; there is much that humans know but cannot say. We are bodies rather than having

bodies (Merleau-Ponty, 2002), and we know through the senses, individually, collectively, and organizationally (Strati, 1999). Therefore, aesthetic knowledge is the knowledge that we gain through the senses and sometimes elaborate by using aesthetic categories and formulating aesthetic judgments. But on other occasions this knowledge remains pre-verbal, and it may be communicated or shared through means other than words. Merleau-Ponty makes a crucial point in regard to sensible knowledge. He takes account of the subject's intimate, personal, and corporeal relation with the experience of the world and does not restrict such knowledge to the mere direct, physical, and objectively observable relation. In fact sensible knowledge "is a form of knowing and acting directed towards 'sensible' worlds; it concerns what is perceived through the senses and is judged, produced and reproduced through them. It is profoundly different from the knowledge produced through the ratiocinative faculty directed toward 'intelligible' worlds" (Strati, 2007, p. 62). Emotions, affect, art, sensible knowledge, aesthetics are phenomena that cannot be neglected when we wish to consider practice as a life-form (Sandberg and Dall'Alba, 2009).

The phenomenological thinker pays close attention to these feelings, not because they are the object of one's attention but because they are the instruments of that attention. The conclusion is that, in general, people do not have focal awareness of the instruments over which they have achieved mastery, and this also applies to the ethnographer's research practices. The implication for studying a practice is that what matters is not how to make tacit knowledge explicit but how to deal with what is unsayable and kept within the usable environment and the docile instruments in it. And this is where Kurt Wolff comes in with his theorizing on the attitudes of total involvement, suspension of received notions, pertinence of everything, identification, risk of being hurt. He thus gives names to the research practices of ethnographers and how they share their experiences with students, rather than prescribing them.

Surrender-and-catch for practice-based ethnography

To understand a practice requires more than explicit knowing, both for the practitioner whose aim is practicing and being a competent practitioner and the researcher whose aim is "to understand a practice from within" and "to represent it for those outside it." Surrender and "surrender-to" is Wolff's recommendation for accessing what goes on without (or before) sayings. I shall now give examples of what is meant by the surrender-and-catch perspective, since they will enable the reader to understand Wolff's method indirectly through how it is appropriated by researchers doing fieldwork or by students under the careful guidance of the teacher.

I offer three vignettes with which to illustrate: how surrender-and catch may come about in everyday life and be relevant to non-professional and professional practices of care; how surrender-and-catch works for practitioners; and how surrender-and-catch happens for a researcher during fieldwork. The three vignettes have been chosen because they highlight different levels of practice. The first concerns a social practice, the second a working practice, and the third an ethnographer's research practice. Nevertheless, I suggest that they should be read as intertwined practices not separated by heuristic boundaries, since, in fieldwork, the epistemic practices of the researchers, practitioners, and society are simultaneously present.

The first story has to do with food, how food matters, and how ethnographies of everyday care can show surrender-and-catch at work. It is an episode reported by

Harbers *et al.* (2002, p. 208), and it relates to a story that they heard during their fieldwork when Paul told them how he found a way to get his sick mother to eat:

> When he heard we were interested in questions to do with food in nursing homes, Paul told us about his mother. In the last stage of her life she had suffered from Alzheimer's disease. She was cared for in a nursing home and gradually ate less and less. Then for a while it was only possible to get her to eat or drink anything at all if it tasted like chocolate. And in the end she refused all food except for the small chocolates out of the box that Paul brought her. This was not enough to keep her going – so finally she died.

I interpret Paul's intuition concerning the taste of chocolate as a case of surrender-and-catch. We can presume that the knowledge of his mother as somebody who loved chocolate was already in the family saga. We can call it a case of retrieved information, or we can find other, more rationalistic definitions. But this is not the whole story. We can interpret his surrender-to care for his beloved mother as an act of total involvement and identification with the other, and the taste of chocolate as the catch. It became the objectification of surrender that intersubjectively yielded his insight on how to change nutrition practices in the nursing home. In fact surrender-and-catch was what happened to a layman, formally outside the organization, but his catch became relevant for ethnographers' research practices when it was used as a key to challenging nutrition practices in the elderly care home and to pose the ethical dilemma of what care means in contemporary society and in techno-scientific practices.

Food is charged with meaning, and the sociomaterialities of chocolate may have importance for the single patient. But they are also significant for organizational practices (food and nutrition are different concepts calling for different routines) and for ethics in society. The authors, after recounting this episode, comment that "dying from a lack of proper nutrition is a quite common way to go. It has been so for ages, not only in places and times of food shortage, but also in the middle of abundance" (Harbers *et al.*, 2002, p. 208). The difference is that nutrition may be linked to specific technologies of artificial feeding and to ethical questions about the decision-making process and the situated meaning of care. Chocolate is the symbol of a relational object, of organizational practices where the object of care emerges from the interactions with non-professional care givers. At the same time, it substantiates the tension in the ethical relation between technology and society around what counts as "the good."

Another illustration of surrender-and-catch as a form of knowing relates to practices of creativity in craftwork. The fieldwork consisted in observation of craftswomen as they designed fashion or jewelry products. The main interpretive category for understanding their disciplined creative process was formativeness (Gherardi and Perrotta, 2013). This is a key concept with which to interpret practical creativity as a process which gives form to material, and which in doing so relies on a dynamic which in aesthetic theory is called "formativeness": that is, doing by inventing "the way of doing." In Pareyson's (1960) aesthetic theory, formativeness is the art of knowing/doing.

For instance, Emma, a fashion designer, recounted her relationship with cloth as follows:

> In my head it works in different ways […] I can be inspired by the fabric, right? I'm there, I sniff the fabrics, I touch them, I have visceral relationships with the things, so that I can be inspired by the cloth, I go and look at it, and I say "Gosh, this fabric is just right for a coat I'm working on, with the neck like this […].

The relationship with the fabric is described through sensory perceptions: "sniffing," "touching," and "looking" are the verbs used to convey this physical and bodily relationship with an active matter. At the same time, however, sensoriality and the relationship with materiality are identified as the real sources of inspiration: not only does the fabric arouse corporeal and sensorial reactions but it is so indissolubly embedded in the formative process that it is at once an active stimulus and a passive material to be shaped. The craftswoman associates the material (the fabric) with the accomplished form ("a coat that I'm working on, with the neck like this"), discursively representing its indistinguishability.

The activity/passivity dichotomy is blurred in favor of the entanglement of matter and intention. This is a surrender-and-catch experience that is narrated by another fashion creator, who describes how a garment comes into being thus:

> Nobody invents anything. I always insist on saying "I may be very original in how I make things, yes, but nobody invents anything, even less in fashion […]" So I may see a photo, the cut of a bodice, of a bra that I like, it inspires me and I decide that I'll make the bodice for the skirt in this way […] How things are born is very particular, at times even from pictures, even from comic strips that I like […] I feel like making a jacket with the shoulders like this, very like in a comic strip or a costume […] The other day I saw this sort of super-hero with sleeves like a bat, so I tried to recreate it. Ideas almost never come to me here [in the atelier], but they come to me on the bus, they come to me when I wake up in the morning, they come to me when I'm in the shower […].

Although Elsa's story depicts the idea that induces her to create a new garment as a kind of external illumination inspired by a multiplicity of factors and everyday situations, the linearity of the process that leads from the idea to realization is only a reconstruction *a posteriori*, while the development of the creation is complex and links with the uniqueness of the formative process. Once Elsa has been inspired by a certain image, she adapts her creation to the fabric, to the form of the body, to the way in which the jacket falls, inserting new elements which change the final effect and thus align the formative process with the resistance of the material and the purposes of the operation (the jacket). In other words, the formative process comprises the invention of "the way of doing" in the reciprocal co-formation of idea and material. In "surrendering-to" the material world, the craftswomen catch the form of their products while they invent their way of doing. In the practitioners' narratives we find the words for what Wolff expressed with the concepts of suspension of received notions and pertinence of everything. Knowing and doing are entangled in practitioners' experiences, and the expert practitioner is also the one who knows when "something" is right or wrong, well done or ugly, if it sounds good, smells right, and so on. In looking at the object of their practices, expert practitioners have a "felt sense" (Gendlin, 1995) of their knowability.

A felt sense is partly emotional; it is a combination of emotion, awareness, intuitiveness, and embodiment. Gendlin (1995, p. 450) provides a good example of how this way of knowing works, and of how it has been used while doing research on practical knowledge:

> For example, recently some people greatly improved chess-playing computers. How did they do it? Let us say they asked chess masters why they chose a given strategy at that point. The masters dipped into their felt sense of so choosing, and found many reasons implicitly functioning together as one felt sense of knowing what move to make. They could explicate some of these many pre-separated factors, and one of them was that they chose certain strategies because it was early in the game, other strategies late in a game. That could then be built into the program.

A felt sense comes from the body's interaction with the situation. Our bodies imply every next bit of our further living. An action can explicate this implicit further living, and can carry it forward. Explications in words and in logic are special cases of such further living that I shall now illustrate in relation to the researcher's surrender-and-catch during her fieldwork (Perrotta, 2008, p. 250):

> During the observation periods in the assisted reproduction centres, biologists and other people spoke about eggs in terms of beauty. This happened mainly during egg extractions. In these situations the gynecologist is usually seated in front of the patient and does the physical work of extracting follicle liquids from her body. The gynecologist has to coordinate his/her work in performing the operation by focusing on the patient's body, the images of her follicles on the screen of the ultrasound, and the images of the screen connected with the laboratory on which s/he can see if the oocyte has been found. All these activities are connected with accomplishment of what is called "flushing". Flushing is one of the activities that require most coordination work with the biologist. Generally, every follicle has an oocyte. If it is not found with the first extraction, a physiological fluid is injected into the follicle and then sucked out again. This process is repeated until the oocyte has been found, and it is very difficult to understand whether or not what one sees is an oocyte. Nevertheless, after a brief period of observation, I saw an oocyte on the screen, and I thought it was very beautiful! I was very surprised at myself because I was thinking that an oocyte was beautiful. At the same time I had recognized it as an oocyte. I was quite sure it was an oocyte. While I was reflecting on my learning process, the assistant gynecologist looking at the screen said: "what a beautiful oocyte!" Thus I had learned how to recognize a beautiful oocyte!

In research practices, surrender may happen and the researcher may be aware of it, as in the episode described. Vice versa the researcher may miss this opportunity for self-reflexion and not note or feel that "something" which remains outside the reach of his or her awareness and outside language. In this episode, what is narrated is not only the personal experience and how an embodied knowing came about but also the acquisition of an aesthetic vocabulary developed by the community of practitioners. The researcher tells us how she became able to see working practices with the eyes of the practitioners and how she learned to share a common idiom. While the narrative is focused on an experience of surrender which is unforeseeable and amethodical, the self-reflection that followed this episode concerned "surrender-to" as a method for ethnographies of working practices.

The three vignettes have been extracted from different organizational ethnographies; nevertheless, they illustrate how surrender-and-catch is an epistemic practice that happens to the researcher, to the practitioner, and to a layperson.

I realize how difficult it is to recommend surrender-and-catch as a "trick of our trade" to students desperately looking for "instructions" on how to conduct a practice-based ethnography. Nevertheless, on reading and sharing experiences on "becoming an ethnographer" (Kunda, 2013; Fox, 1990; Warden, 2013) they may find, expressed in different words, an invitation to forgo "discipline," to trust their personal sources of imagination, and also to release emotions, curiosity and playfulness. Zaner (1981, p. 372) calls this the discipline of pluralism: "Wolff seem to respond that surrender involves a most cunning discipline, one which, while remaining profoundly rational, in no way requires or even invites the move to a 'one' principle."

Discussion and conclusion

In this paper I have conducted discussion on the one hand directed to students preparing to undertake ethnographic research, and on the other, intended to contextualize the

contribution that the concept of "surrender-and-catch" offers to practice-based ethnography. In both cases, and for both audiences, the core of the message is the same: that besides analytical and rational knowledge, there is another form of knowing centered on the body, the senses and emotionality and that also this form of knowing is collective, shared, contested, and contained in practices and in the practical knowledge that sustains them.

The epistemological position that Kurt Wolff describes with the term "surrender-and-catch" is defined in the researcher's relation with the world, both natural and human. While the rhetoric of modernist, rational and western thought is grounded on the ideas of mastery, control, manipulation, and so on, the position that Wolff describes is that of abandonment, expectation, and suspension of the will to control. Opposed to the desire to be in control (of the object, of the situation) and to obtain such control through research techniques, is the urgency of the desire to know. Cognitive love – in Wolff's terms – is an emotional force, and it is the relation of attachment to the object or the situation. The epistemological position described as "cognitive love" indicates both the attitude of abandonment to love and love for knowledge as a driver of research, as we saw in the three vignettes.

To teach this form of knowing as a research practice, we must bear in mind that experience is mainly an active-passive affair. Polany (1957, pp. 127-128) defines a heuristic process as a combination of active and passive stages: "the admonition to look at the unknown really means that we should look at the known data, but not in themselves, rather as clues to the unknown, as pointers to it and parts of it" Learning in a passive mode (and teaching how to learn) – according to Polanyi – is like teaching a person to surrender himself/herself to works of art: "this is neither to observe nor to handle them, but to live in them. Thus the satisfaction of gaining intellectual control over the external world is linked to a satisfaction of gaining control over ourselves" (Polany, 1957, p. 196).

This form of knowing was named "tacit knowledge" by Polanyi, "narrative knowledge" by Bruner (1990), or it may be named "aesthetic or sensible knowing" when we give more centrality to the body, sensible knowing and felt senses. Wolff's legacy for practice-based ethnography consists in the centrality of researchers' personal and sensorial experiences. And the measure of value of an experience lies in the perception of relationships or continuities to which it leads up.

I would stress that this type of relation with the world and this form of knowing are not alternatives to rational (or paradigmatic) knowledge, nor to analytical research methods and techniques. Nor is it a mystical method and justification for rejection of every methodology. Rather, I would emphasize that it is a complementary approach based on the recognition of, and trust in, a plurality of knowledge-gathering forms. As a method it is openness to the unforeseen and the unpredictable, so that these can be grasped when and if they arise, rather than excluding them because they do not fit into the researcher's protocols of observation.

When ethnography is conceived and conducted as one method or tool together with others, the risk arises of letting "the data speak for themselves" and believing that the interpretations lie at the bottom of the net cast to capture them. By contrast, the suggestion that the aspiring ethnographer receives from the "surrender-to" method is comprised in its presuppositions: total involvement, pertinence of everything, identification, risk of being hurt. To resume Kurt Wolff's metaphor, the ethnography becomes the poem, and the ethnographer's methods its exegesis. Poetic language in fact is about images/imagining rather than literal meaning, about creating possibilities

rather than describing actualities. Thus, poetic forms of talk (or writing) do not give us information about an already structured situation but help "us form or constitute for the very first time, a way of orienting toward or relating ourselves to our surroundings and the circumstances of our lives" (Shotter and Cunliffe, 2002 in Cunliffe, 2002).

Kurt Wolff has something to teach our students, and I believe that his thought still has currency and is worth studying for more than merely historical reasons. In fact, the epistemological position that he advocates for ethnography is still present – explicitly or implicitly – in contemporary authors. For example, Cunliffe (2002) has elaborated social poetics as a research practice that offers a way to explore how, in the flow of our embodied dialogical activity, we relate to our surroundings and make sense of our experiences. Other researchers, like Pink (2009), call for sensory ethnography, Strati (1999) invites experimentation with imaginative participant observation, and Warren (2012) warns us about the "aesthetic ethnographer" who is still faced with the very real challenge of sensory fieldwork, since we are simply not accustomed to noticing much of the sensory stimuli in which we are immersed. All these later works have a family resemblance with the idea of surrender-and-catch. What they have in common is trust in aesthetic and sensible knowing. This is the kind of knowing central to the interest of practice-based ethnography.

When researchers study situated practices, they may train their focal attention on the activities of the practitioners and their collective meaning-making, while their subsidiary focus may be on the feelings that these activities arouse and on how knowing-in-practice is collectively accomplished. The subsidiary focus (knowledge) is the instrument for focal awareness. In ethnographies of working practices, the researchers' attention is directed both at the gap between prescribed work and its situated working accomplishment in the midst of contingent situations, and at the same time at how knowing-in-practice is realized as a joint activity. Both forms of doing/knowing rest on aesthetic knowledge and often relate to "what goes on without saying" in situated interactions.

In order to illustrate how surrender-and-catch happens in ethnographic research practices, I have provided three examples, on the assumption that teaching it through the students' immersion in other researchers' experiences is more effective than formulating decontextualized recommendations. Through the first example (chocolate taste) I sought to suggest that aesthetic knowledge happens in everyday life at an individual level, and that it is important for the researcher doing fieldwork to catch it in order to transfer it into organizational and societal care practices. Through the second example I illustrated the sociomateriality of creative practices and how practitioners have learned to trust their felt sense of what is appropriate in which situation and according to the material that they are using. Through this example I wanted to illustrate the kind of knowing called formativeness to denote the knowing process that in doing invents the way of doing. Here surrender-and-catch is not only an individual experience; it is also a collective and organizational knowing-in-practice. Finally, with the third example I focused on the researcher immersed in fieldwork and how surrender-and-catch happens within research practices while the researcher tries to attune to the practitioners' working practices and learns how to see through the practitioners' eyes and how to share their vocabulary and aesthetic categories.

I shall conclude with my own understanding of surrender-and-catch as an art of seeing connections, following in the tradition of Wittgenstein (1953, No. 122) and Bakhtin (1986). When doing practice-based ethnography, the researcher's epistemological position is to pay attention (surrender) to the kind of practical

understanding that consists in seeing connections among aspects of our surrounding circumstances, between ourselves and others, and between action and sense. These connections arise as gestural and poetic aspects of our dialogue and create "arresting moments" (Shotter, 1996; Cunliffe, 2002) when we, as researchers, surrender-*to* our object of study.

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