

## ETHICS AS A MINOR FORM OF POLITICS AND THEORY IN ACTIVIST RESEARCH

– Anne Beate Reinertsen, Anne Ryen –

**Abstract:** To do minor activist research is to create and make use of critical neologistic vocabularies hopefully balancing the ascetic impoverishment of direction and syntax in majority vocabularies when conceptualized as universals. To do minor activist research is therefore to unsettle received discourses, narratives, and material social practices of power to develop means of resistance in new and different registers. To do minor activist research is to train the imagination for a collaboratively accomplished re/presentation of data through creating points of encounters, thus engendering an affirmative perspectivist’s ethos. Re/presenting data as a space in which one’s own thinking is challenged, hence providing a perspective of the storying practices across participants and across different disciplinary, ideological, or personal boundaries within the researcher’s and the researched specific positioning. This requires getting everyone to participate in the “analysis” of data, and then getting everyone “inside” the text: situating data-inquiries in immanence. It therefore demands a liberation from old scripts, and challenges how everyone is transformed into text, with perspectivism being simultaneously means and objective for avoiding the reproduction of both old scripts and ethics. Our goal is to enhance (self)reflexivity regarding knowledge production and research methodologies, to influence actual research practices through fostering a more inclusive, open, and collaborative approach to research that transcends traditional boundaries and embraces the fluid and hybrid nature of knowledge production. Ultimately, turning the concept of ethics through minoring into a thinking hub and pedagogy for change.

The first and theoretical section is on how to ethically represent data in a new-empiricist and post qualitative environment. We call it data-philosophy. Our ontological approach brings its own concepts, which reflect the perspectives from which we argue. In the three next sections, we follow up by looking more closely into these ideas in re/presenting empirical qualitative research to invite hybrid and fluid configurations. Here, activist research refers to bringing actors into our thinking about the data, to accentuate the collaborative, open to thinking differently through staying close to the data. We then bring it all together in a section on the rebirth of language, to open for what we refer to as a storying personifying, thereby storying data together as a process of becoming, of mutuality and affect as a source of agency. We argue that this creates a theory of science and ethics in data analysis, and in re/presenting data, which are closely entangled.

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### **Keeping company *with* the data instead of discerning sufficiency or insufficiency**

In this article, both authors (AB and AR) insist on data being analyzed as processes of keeping company *with* the data. The presence of the “other” being sensed, and stories that are told, are given importance. The data are therefore not simply presented as raw and somewhat naively argued to capture what is and what to do accordingly. Rather, data are presented as “data” only, thus as storied real/virtual experiences and interpretations that meet other storied real/virtual experiences and interpretations. Our approaches to the question of how to ethically represent data into a new-empiricist and post qualitative research environment are thus affectively founded and situated.<sup>2</sup> Given our interest in concepts and concept creation, we call our approach a research and data philosophy. Pointing to every concept being simultaneously performative and methodological, we insist on the need to free ourselves from uncritical imitation of simplistic ways of representing data. We too often see empirical research replacing the creativity of analysis with a mechanical routine. This takes many forms, such as the writer telling us what people said, rather than presenting extracts showing actual talk. Excluding the researcher’s presence in, e.g., interview and ethnographic studies, sometimes therefore sadly jumping to poorly empirically anchored conclusions. This makes the critical of critical research lapse into rhetoric, neither acknowledging the uniqueness of the data, nor the critical potential of research and science. In this theoretical and analytical section, we introduce our ontological position on thinking about research, activism, and language. And you might have noticed that even our style of writing is intentionally meant to create some hesitations and ruptures.

Our goal is to highlight the paradoxical and paramount importance of the subject position in knowledge production and research methodologies, movements between subject/object, inside/outside (self)reflexivity. The subject position as a form of situational performativity might provide new opportunities and potentialities of orientations beyond habitual thought, every situation always consisting of known and unknown, conscious and unconscious factors. Subjectivity and subjectivity theory embrace experience, intuition, wisdom, and warmth, as well as the fact that the most important thing in life is to be human. We therefore highlight the subject position to influence actual research practices through fostering a more inclusive, open, and collaborative approach to research that transcends traditional boundaries, and embraces the fluid, hybrid, always uncertain nature of knowledge production: allowing situational performances to ultimately turn the concept of ethics through minoring into a philosophical hub and pedagogy – also

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<sup>2</sup> St. Pierre (2011).

read as methodology for change. Minorizing – and with reference to Deleuze and Guattari’s<sup>3</sup> “minor literature,” in which major and minor perspectives influence each other and change together – refers to doing minor activist research through moving beyond the subject, beyond knowledge and beyond intentions. The ethical ultimately turns into an *ethology*<sup>4</sup> as a study of affective movements attributing value to both conscious and unconscious factors forming our experiences and flattening knowledge hierarchies, eventually debunking causality and linear thinking. Ethics as a minor form of politics and theory method operates in (and with) ruptures, obliged to contribute critical (self) reflexivity and reflection in relation to what goes on in our research practices and what consequences it has, i.e., consequences for research in general and activist research in particular. This is what Deleuze and Guattari<sup>5</sup> write in relation to the major/minor concept creation and interdependent change – the pedagogy of the concept as a philosophy and methodology to mark and produce new subjectivities, spatialities and temporalities:

And this is really what the creation of concepts means: to connect internal inseparable components to the point of closure or saturation, so that we can no longer add or withdraw a component without changing the nature of the concept, to connect the concept with another in such a way that the nature of other connections will change. The plurivocity of the concept depends solely upon neighborhood (one concept can have several neighborhoods). Concepts are flat surfaces without levels, orderings without hierarchy, hence the importance in philosophy to the questions “What to put in a concept?” and “What to put with it?”. What concept should be put alongside a former concept, and what components should be put in each? These are the questions of the creation of concepts.<sup>6</sup>

We put ethics, data, philosophy, research, pedagogy, methodology and ourselves in several neighborhoods. Our respective positions in the theory of science both converge and diverge. AR as an ethno-informed researcher and AB positioned in posthumanism both insist on re/presenting all members or stakeholders as active participants, making whatever we accomplish a result of a collaborative effort. We subsequently insist on data being analyzed or rather philosophized, as opposed to the naïve illusion that raw data captures authentic voices, with every voice containing many. Despite a keen interest in the micro, we do not abandon structure. Despite our respective anchors in the theory of science, we insist that if and how structural properties enter the micro is an empirical question subject to analysis. We argue that ethics is intricately woven into the entanglements of research and politics, yet we find some dominant discourses problematic as moralizing tales.<sup>7</sup> Instead, we see ethics as that of being open to – and worthy of – what awaits us and what we cannot control. We therefore side with Hammersley’s criticism of research ethics as moral principles.

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<sup>3</sup> Deleuze, Guattari (1986).

<sup>4</sup> Deleuze (1988).

<sup>5</sup> Deleuze, Guattari (1994).

<sup>6</sup> *Ibidem*: 90.

<sup>7</sup> Reinertsen (2021).

However, it is after a section on the crucial question of analytic issues that we return to the point of re/presenting data in accordance with ethical thinking in qualitative research.

### **Immanent perspectivation and oxymoronic storying**

Perspectivism refers to the philosophical position that one's access to the world through perception, experience and reason is possible, though only through one's own perspective and interpretation. It rejects the idea both of a perspective-free, and of an interpretation-free objective reality.<sup>8</sup> Perspectivism is not relativism: rather, it is taking a normatively self-critical affirmative posthuman stance. Recognizing that subjectivities, spatialities and temporalities are embodied, situated and fluid: research and knowledge production in research being integrated in life itself, with data-inquiries situated in immanence, the latter meant as the territory of existence.<sup>9</sup> Criticism is ultimately seen as a perspectivating third position that is different from both normativity and neutrality, creating however opportunities to go beyond built-in ideas of improvement and development, as they are assailable because they often lead to more exclusion and inequality, and thus create a kind of internal normative relationship between science and research practices. The scope of this article does not allow a full presentation, but the third position, or fourth or fifth for that matter, theoretically refers to Deleuze and Guattari's<sup>10</sup> works on "lines of flights" and the concept of "becoming" in "smooth spaces," highlighting the importance of thinking differently about the possibilities of research ethics and inspire creative and practical ways of doing so.

Such perspectivating lines of flights, becoming in smooth spaces, are affective and affirmative forms of criticism that analytically relate to the norms that research implements, and the meanings that are created, as well as to the constitutive structures of human practice that are the epistemological driving force of the expressions and consequences of norms. In other words, the critique also includes attention to the scientific forms of research and the regimes of governance and truth in which they are included, and in which they are instrumental in creating the institutionalized forms of practice, relations of superiority and subordination, and legitimate ways of talking about and to the people with whom research deals. Re/presenting data is subsequently seen as a space in which one's own thinking is challenged, hence providing a perspective of the storying practices across participants and across various disciplinary, technological, ideological, or personal boundaries within the researchers and the researched specific positioning. Storying is an ontological endeavor, and means creating nonlinear material arrangements of concepts as well as alliances between the environment, technology and the social, asking if we can talk about what to become? Or in more regular research language, it asks how we ethically represent data, and where is the boundary between ethics and "moralizing"? Taking it even further: asking how can we think adequately about the relation between ontology and language in research and societies governed by algorithmic (digital) systems and objects endowed with agency?

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<sup>8</sup> New World Encyclopaedia.

<sup>9</sup> Deleuze, Guattari (2004); Haraway (1988).

<sup>10</sup> Deleuze, Guattari (2004).

These are immanent perspectivations, in which the researcher and the researched are seen as molding and collectively futuring forces in a globalized (digital) world, not creating universalized, major, or idealistic politics of research and ethics, but seeking and learning from immanent stories and storying. Storying is through this a celebration of the alterations of the constitution and construction of major perspectives. This is not done through escaping the fuzziness and incompleteness, neither one nor the other between, but instead through enhancing the importance of storying a learning perspectivist betweenness for both the researcher and the researched. Stories and storying through this used as “data” for foresight and enabling for the many variations of life that encompass (digital, environmental, and social) existence and becomings: storying as an absolute immanent-transcendent situativity, keeping not knowing and knowing in play.

It is a view of stories that goes beyond giving someone a “voice,” and an examination of how stories can be reconfigured as a simultaneous method and means for transforming the status quo into something “other,” stories that bring life and research together. Storying as data demands that we “analyze” terms and images down to the affective minor level to help understand their impact and intentionality, what storying might do, with the minor enhancing the potential of affective and contextual becoming and changing. The notion of affect bears connotations of bodily intensity: affect as a passion, as pathos, sympathy and empathy, a threshold experience where a transition becomes possible in everyday life that is necessarily embodied. The affective minor and minoring perspectives therefore exceed the major ideas and perspectives of, e.g., ethics and research without leaving them behind; however, they reveal the limits of the major as it is transformed along with the minor. They affect theory and the *affective nature of language exchanges and political involvement*,<sup>11</sup> re-ontologizing the real potentializing “other”: activism and activist research as reflections on the politics of language, *an electric spark and “materialist” revelation and moment when the word becomes flesh through oxymoron’s virtues*.<sup>12</sup> (More on this below.) This rhymes well with Hammersley’s argument on the problematic relationship between ethics as general principles and their inability to guide practical fieldwork, in which his critical arguments on the limits of the dominant major indeed have nurtured thinking differently on encounters in the field.

An oxymoron is a self-contradicting or incongruous word or group of words, a rhetorical and epigrammatic device for effect often revealing paradox. Nevertheless, while a paradox might seem to be contradictory to common sense but still be true, an oxymoron is only considered as a “condensed” paradox that includes just a couple of contradictory words paired together, rather than a full statement of ideas. Oxymoronic phrases can be figuratively but not literally true, such as in true fiction, unbiased opinion, guest host, historical present, impossible solution, joyful sadness, minor miracle, and virtual reality, and hence keep things going. Storying through the virtues of oxymorons functioning as an immediate edging of knowledge into experience, and thus a way to access a proto subjective level of affective powers, the prefix proto indicating the first, original or earliest. It is a *constitution of subjectivities through taking part in polysemantic ambiguity*<sup>13</sup> for perspectivist ethos.

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<sup>11</sup> Virno (2015).

<sup>12</sup> Ibidem: 173.

<sup>13</sup> Reinertsen (2021).

Oxymoronic storying is therefore important for developing deeper insights, moments of intensity and occasional whims, and becomes essential to our perception of knowledge production and/with/in research: storying ourselves into being and becoming; storying thus principled in its activism and advocacy; storying as an act of sensing inwards and working with inner prerequisites for movement and innovation. Working in this minor activist mode, working differently, working inside out of fugitive moves and emergent practices, ethics is tuned into a minor form of politics and doing research. This makes possible an expanded scientific language to capture more dimensions and nuances. When we get thoughts for something, we also get words for it. Like in this very instant – thoughts and words about research ethics and data-situativity in inquiry. Furthermore, as we should always remember, the indeterminate and not yet finished must be given as much space in consciousness as the defined, definite, and finished.

When words become flesh, language is action, patterns slip in and out of phase with each other. Things shift; without there being a definable moment of change, the pattern is nevertheless no longer the same one. Simultaneously, something extra is gradually recruited, while something else is dropped until the pattern becomes what one could sense what it was leaning over to become: *It resolves. But it does not resolve some unitary problem.*<sup>14</sup> The shifts never happen, and they are never not happening. Not one of them is more or less important than another. Through this, storying can be perceived as an environment, an environment in which listening to, and reading the stories, are less about recording narrowly topical comments on what has been said, and more like records of the feelings the words (stories as data) have created, and what thoughts have been generated.

Summing up and expanding: to do minor activist research is to make use of prompts and displacements to mark and produce new subjectivities, spatialities and temporalities. To do minor activist research is to unsettle received discourses, narratives, and material social practices of power to develop means of resistance in new and different registers, training the imagination for a collaboratively accomplished re/presentation of data through creating points of encounters, thereby engendering an affirmative perspectivist's ethos. Re/presenting data through this is seen as a space in which one's own thinking is challenged, thus providing a perspective of the storying practices across participants, and across different disciplinary, ideological, or personal boundaries within the researcher's and the researched specific positioning. It requires getting everyone to participate in the "analysis" of data, and then getting everyone "inside" the text: situating data-inquiries in immanence. It is a tall order, and demands a liberation from old scripts, and challenges how everyone is transformed into text. Therefore, pause before you try to discern either the sufficiency or the insufficiency of data. Keep company with the data as I/we/you keep converting our flesh and our hearts into words. Bring yourself and us with you in the text; a perspectivist ethos being simultaneously means and objective for avoiding the reproduction of both old scripts and ethics. Again, it is a tall order and even the grammar is changed and changes in these conceptual neighborhoods.

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<sup>14</sup> Ogden (2022): 52.

We will now proceed to working with data and the translation process from the field to text, in which we argue that the minor enriches the potential of affective and contextual becoming, and changes to ontologize the potentializing “other.” Simply, always be open to capture what data may offer to keep (not)knowing in play, as opposed to becoming reductionist and interpretational, be open to ethics as a minor form of politics and doing research.

### **Looking *through*, not *behind*, the interfering glosses: On re-presenting in qualitative research**

Geertz<sup>15</sup> cites Danish L. V. Helms, who wrote up this passage in the 1880s:

While I was at Bali, one of these shocking sacrifices took place. The Rajah of the neighbouring State died on the 20<sup>th</sup> of December 1847; his body was burned with great pomp, three of his concubines sacrificing themselves in the flames. It was a great day for the Balinese... The supreme moment had arrived. With firm and measured steps the victims trod the fatal plank; three times they brought their hands together over their heads, on each of which a small dove was placed, and then, with body erect, they leaped into the flaming sea below... Two of the women showed, even at the very last, no sign of fear; they looked at each other, to see whether both were prepared, and then, without stopping, took the plunge. The third appeared to hesitate, and to take the leap with less resolution; she faltered for a moment, and then followed, all three disappearing without uttering a sound.

Geertz argues that Helm made his observations into an outcry against the oppression of women and into an argument for imperialism, whereas Geertz wants to unpack this re-presentation of the ritual captured by the telling title of the chapter “Found in translation: On the Social History of the Moral Imagination.”<sup>16</sup> He argues that “we can never apprehend another people’s or another period’s imagination neatly, as though it were our own... We can apprehend it well enough...; but we do so not by looking *behind* the interfering glosses that connect us to it, but *through* them ...life is translation, and we are all lost in it.”<sup>17</sup> Helm introduces us to the “the raw materials” of the story, but Geertz insists that for an ethnographer to write on or to teach it is less straight forward. It is “to try to ... locate the instabilities of thought and sentiment it generates into a social frame. Such an effort hardly dissolves the tangle or removes the instabilities. ...rather, it brings them more disturbingly to notice...”<sup>18</sup>

The relevance to us is that Geertz takes this further to discuss the nature of anthropological understanding, as captured in the title of his book “Local Knowledge.”<sup>19</sup> This reflects the ethical aspects of representing and writing up research, which comes

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<sup>15</sup> Geertz (1983): 37–39.

<sup>16</sup> Ibidem: 36.

<sup>17</sup> Ibidem: 44.

<sup>18</sup> Ibidem: 45.

<sup>19</sup> Geertz (1983).

with an obligation to remind our readers of the instabilities that it brings along in the translation process. It challenges how to explore local knowledge and the analyst's job in it. Locals are often excellent storytellers of local ways, but not uncritically more competent translators, because we argue that this is a matter of the analytical how. Geertz reminds us that people use experience-near concepts spontaneously and that "they do not .... recognize there are any 'concepts' involved at all," which makes it pertinent to search out and analyze the symbolic forms of words, images, etc. "in terms of which, in each place, people actually represented themselves to themselves and to one another."<sup>20</sup> To see from the native's point of view is not about imaging oneself as someone. Our informant and ourselves do not necessarily see the same because the ideas and realities they inform are bound up together as he describes it. This is not about the psychic constitution of anthropologists as a place to see from. The analyst's job is to grasp the experience-near of another people, and to connect this with experience-distant concepts to capture the general feeling of social life. It is not about the "inner correspondence of spirit with your informant," but "[t]he trick is to figure out what the devil they think they are up to."<sup>21</sup> Geertz illustrates this by means of the Western conception of a person which may appear a most unfamiliar idea to other cultures, which is also a criticism of the old debate praising "empathy" in ethnographic fieldwork. Instead, this is about "seeing their experiences within the framework of their own idea of what selfhood is."<sup>22</sup> To help illustrate, AR's informant once told her about when they found a white, clean cloth with a nugget of gold inside a newly slaughtered goat. "You don't believe me?" he said looking at the newcomer's puzzled face, because AR was grappling with the ethnographer's sensemaking of the unfamiliar. It was not about trust or distrust, but about the encounter with (local) knowledge. Such encounters make our respective positions transparent; they rupture thinking and invite an immanent perspectivation with configurations that are never fixed. It makes minor activist research about unsettling the taken for granted, in which the collaborative instigates data-inquiries into immanence. Transforming someone into text is no small matter. Drawing on Deleuze and Guattari on major/minor concept creation, we probe into knowledge production, and argue this is how ethics become entangled with re/presenting data.

This makes representing data into re-presenting anew, storying a story, a complex activity whereby we translate something into a tellable story, though not by seeing "behind the interfering glosses, but through them," which makes the instabilities stay on, hence "lost in translation." The intricacy of language makes it far from transparent, as often assumed in more traditionally oriented analytic work, which fails to inquire into local descriptions by simply repeating the informant's common-sense talk by treating these as explanations, as opposed to examining how and in what contexts they are used. Alternatively, the researcher simply imposes his/her own concepts and jumps to conclusions based on anecdotes. This calls us to ask whose story is it, and what does the story do? This falls within AB's minor activist research. After more than 25 years of research in East-Africa (AR), these issues have been constant reminders to avoid a story

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<sup>20</sup> Ibidem: 58.

<sup>21</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>22</sup> Ibidem: 59.



“imprisoned within [a people’s] mental horizons, an ethnography of witchcraft as written by a witch, nor systematically deaf to the distinctive tonalities of their existence.”<sup>23</sup>

A naturalist story such as Helm’s proposes to reflect what took place or the “raw materials” of the story but is firmly told from the writer’s gaze or here, his Scandinavian position of the time. As such, it illustrates the classic criticism in cross-cultural research, which made Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak<sup>24</sup> ask, “Can the Subaltern speak?”, as well as the controversies around Stoll<sup>25</sup> on Rigoberta Menchú’s storytelling. These two capture much of the heated debate about Western research in the South and indigenous voices, yet as we shall see according to (the non-interpretive) ethnomethodology, the solution to her question is not ordinary storytelling by locals. That would also go against Geertz on interpretive anthropology. On the other hand, Menchú insists her storytelling (about her brother’s death) is not about documenting true experiences or what took place, but argues her story serves a political aim. As such, there is a link to early feminism’s insistence on women’s own voices, raw without being analyzed. The point was to make social change, not high-quality analytic work. This initial phase set off a heated debate which concerned the trustworthiness of storytelling, or rather the very pursuit of research. These positions generate alternative ethical thinking to which we will return later. It reminds us of our above reference to subjectivities, spatialities and temporalities as embodied, situated and fluid with concepts’ potential in creating alliances. The unavoidable risk is to generate new others. On the one hand, global research tends to draw on ontologies and epistemologies dressed up as universally mediated by prominent and capital-intensive publishers, but these activist opponents have succeeded in destabilizing the former knowledge hegemony, though may have replaced one hegemony by another rather than advocating multiple locals with ethics as locally embedded, which opens to a variety in representational practices.

As argued above, minor activism situates immanence in data-inquiries and lines of flight to rupture rather than to stabilize re-presentations. This requires getting all participants into the text to capture the collaborative of data. This is not unique to post-qualitative research, but also mandatory in ethnomethodology, and in much ethnographic work as we will discuss in the next two more practically oriented sections on analytic implications of keeping company *with* data.

### **Capturing the collaborative**

From an ethno-informed position, the traditional though indirect appeal to culture by indicating cultural contrasts is most disturbing in classic ethnographic texts. Elsewhere, Ryen and Silverman<sup>26</sup> argue that:

By contrast, drawing on what Harvey Sacks (1998) calls the ‘structural properties’ of commonsense knowledge, we demonstrate the limits of an analyst’s appeal to the use of ‘culture’ as an explanation... our second take on the issue of cross-cultural

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<sup>23</sup> Ibidem: 57.

<sup>24</sup> Spivak (1988).

<sup>25</sup> Beverley (2005): 550.

<sup>26</sup> Ryen, Silverman (2000): 108–109.

communication raises neglected issues about how both ethnographers and laypersons categorize and, in so doing, bring to the fore Garfinkel's (1967) and Sacks' (1992) neglected reminders of the deeply commensal character of ethnography and of sociology in general

by citing Sacks' statement that "all the sociology we read is unanalytic in the sense that they simply put some category in. They may make sense to us in doing that, but they're doing it simply as another member."<sup>27</sup> Sacks' interest is with the machinery by which members appeal to categories and descriptions, hence our arguments above on concepts and language. Moreover, the ethnographer who provokes stories to describe a culture substitutes a researcher-incited "telling" for an observation of a member's "doing." Such a telling does not supplement or test an analyst's other observations; it is just another activity.<sup>28</sup>

As ethnographers, we often experience informants using culture as an explanation, but this does not justify the ethnographer's own appeals to culture. Sacks insists that the analyst's job is not to clarify or criticize members' descriptions, but to describe them or explore how the informants do whatever they do, which marks the contrast between culture as topic and as resource. This differs from Geertz, though they meet in Sacks' argument that the analyst's job is not simply to put in another category or description. This would simply be to reiterate old rhetoric just as another ordinary member, and not as an analyst. This is what makes language into action not yet transparent, but rather as a naïve attempt to fix something which is unfixable.

Storytelling follows local and cultural ways, and as we argued above, is collaboratively accomplished. As a social activity talk is never fully repeated, but tailored to the context at hand, where the involved tell the story for a particular audience in that very context. This makes storytelling social, which allows for seeming disorder if compared and expected to be the replica of a former story. We may recognize certain kernels, despite its newness, whenever a story appears again in another context to another audience. This is the hallmark of a good storyteller different from lyrics as we know them from songs and poems, where the lyrics stay on, and where the content is highlighted through the very performance itself; as AR knows it from her research on Indian business with performances firmly embedded in local modes of expressions. Her elderly informants recited ghazals, an old oral tradition developed into a literary form, to express love, and especially longing for a perspectivist ethos.<sup>29</sup> Every performance is a meeting between performer and audience as collaborating partners. The question remains how to tell the story about the ghazal performances in her fieldwork and how to make sense of these events as an analyst, and not just as another lay member. This takes us to yet another epistemological position to reflect on our analytical and ethical obligations in representing data.

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<sup>27</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>28</sup> Ibidem: 118-119.

<sup>29</sup> Wikipedia.

## Performance ethnography

The cultural turn implied more creative performative research activities under the umbrella of *performance ethnography* with texts, as well as alternative re-presentational genres anchored in a worldview of its own, and as argued by Mirón,<sup>30</sup> establishes a social space for subject formation, subjectivity, and identity. These performances re-create the practices of daily life and cultural forms, but where the researchers or performers reinstate such performances or praxis in dialogue with the audiences by overcoming the text-bound descriptions of everyday lives.<sup>31</sup> It is described as cultural exchange, cross-cultural communication, as part of critical pedagogy and with emancipatory potential. This also has a political goal aiming for social change. It is also described as a standpoint epistemology that engages the performers and audiences, where the performance becomes a standpoint from which to view culture,<sup>32</sup> since the performances invite us to explore the everyday representation and understanding of phenomena such as racial subjectivities and identities. It may inform the politics of knowledge and build coalitions across racial groups by allowing for the construction of new racial selves. Artistic performances build on Jean Baudrillard on visual images, which lock reality in space and time isolated from the people involved. Rather than seeing a literary creation as a fixed, material object, Mirón is concerned with the work as performance that opens the text or visual images, such as video or a film, to a collaborative reader or audience. This is a vision of social action and social change located in politics and praxis.

We can illustrate this vision by storying from when AR was strolling around at the Morogoro market in Tanzania when the rain started to pour down, and she and her student along with the others sought shelter under the tarpaulins above the vegetables, even though the time for the departure of their bus was approaching. However, the rain had filled the holes in the gravel, and soon we had fallen flat in the mud to great cheers from the spectators. We stood up, bowed, and accepted the applause with a smile before running on encouraged by the cheers.<sup>33</sup> Unknowingly, we had become part of an impromptu or improvised theatre performance, spontaneously, with no script and no rehearsal. An impromptu is known as an artistic theatre genre concerned with narratives to make an excellent story. Comedy on the spot transforms the audience into improving participants as part of the very moment where the magic happens. The event managed to organize the thoughts into a coherent story despite no practice – or stories. The performance is collaborative, affective and embodied with storying as the environment for training our imaginations and generating thoughts and alliances. Nothing could be like a story about two white women in the mud in a former colonial part of the world – or not, but the event may also have reminded our audience about their childhood memories, or of foreigners' inability to maneuver in new landscapes, or simply enjoying the sheer fun of it. We need to get the involved into the text, and to open for yet unknown possibilities, to reflect on how language and concepts may restrict our creative imaginations and access to “yet-unknown territories of thought” different from a reductionist notion

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<sup>30</sup> Mirón (2008): 555.

<sup>31</sup> Ryen (2019).

<sup>32</sup> Alexander (2008): 411.

<sup>33</sup> Ryen (2023).

of re/presentational ethics. Aware of the potential narratives, we found the story both cheerful and telling, and with enthusiasm took on our part of the show as we saw it. Performance ethnography draws on the collaborative, no longer with the audience as passive observers, but as active co-actors. There is an analytic kinship with both ethno-methodology's insistence on all involved as members, and with Deleuze and Guattari on activism pinpointing people's agency in storying their own life and becomings. Auto-ethnography comes even closer to the latter philosophical strand, yet very distant to Sacks. This reminds us of the link between analytic strategy and ethics, by acknowledging all participants as crucial members of our data; it refers to the quality of the representation of our data, and it highlights the entanglement of ontology/epistemology and ethics. With data often represented in words, this calls for a section on language at the frontiers of understanding, as we soon knot our arguments together.

### **Storying personas storying data together**

While Virno<sup>34</sup> speaks of electric sparks through the virtues of oxymorons, Deleuze<sup>35</sup> speaks of the *rebirth of language* at the frontiers of understanding and connectivity through *intensive difference* and affective force through Aion, and through this, the actualization of affect. The concept of difference is conceptualized as an *internal difference* that lies at the heart of *difference in itself*.<sup>36</sup> It is a difference that is iterative, and all there is always. Furthermore, affect is that which expresses our innermost intense and as yet a-conceptual feelings. This can also be seen – and elaborated more on below, as a Guattarian<sup>37</sup> image of *dancing intensities and crystallizing glossolalia, ungluing the intensities of desire from their ancient territories, [hence receiving] their polarity of subject and object through the exhaustion of such designs*. Contrary to making positivism-induced retrograde movements, concepts are seen through this as inherently experimental and open to yet-unknown territories of thought. It implies a move beyond the known overcoming paradox and movement in flows of information. The concepts of “subject,” “object” and “data” – or any concept, are thus opened. This is also what Deleuze and Guattari<sup>38</sup> call the *pedagogy of the concept*, possibilizing the becoming of a *conceptual persona through philosophy*,<sup>39</sup> and what here we might call a storying persona, or rather, storying personas storying data together. Through storying, concepts become prospective ahead, retrospective backwards, constant playing and guessings of the now, hence as indicated above, simultaneously performative and methodological. All knowing through affect therefore becomes a process of connecting, experimentation, and speculative thought. We might envision this as storying, as an interpretation of “data,” as processes of eternal immediation, the access to- and of language through experience. Virno<sup>40</sup> writes: *The access to language is not an inaugural, transient event, but a constant way of experiencing language.*

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<sup>34</sup> Virno (2015).

<sup>35</sup> Deleuze (2004): 190.

<sup>36</sup> Ibidem: 94.

<sup>37</sup> Guattari (2011): 39.

<sup>38</sup> Deleuze, Guattari (1994): 16.

<sup>39</sup> Ibidem: 76.

<sup>40</sup> Virno (2015): 194.

This brings us to the *machinic unconscious*: The machine itself being produced by its productions, and the *chaosmic ecosophy* of Felix Guattari<sup>41</sup> when he states:

*Language is everywhere, but it does not have any domain of its own. There is no language in itself. What specifies human language is precisely that it never refers back to itself, that it always remains open to all the other modes of semiotization. (Italics in the original)*

Moreover:

There is no universality of language nor is there a universality of speech acts. Every sequence of linguistic expression is associated with a network of various semiotic links (perceptive, mimetic, gestural, imagistic thought, etc...). Every signifying statement crystallizes a mute dance of intensities that is simultaneously played out on the social body and the individuated body. From language to glossolalia, all the transitions are possible.<sup>42</sup>

The actualizing of affect is what contributes to the actual possibilizing and formation of collaboratively accomplished interpretations of “data.” Access to language – as a state of mind and practice of mutuality and care, helping research participants to integrate agency into his/her own worlds. Affect – as a source of agency and ultimately as a source to self-power. Guattari<sup>43</sup> writes:

Power is not something that simply concerns well defined social ensembles. Power formations do not engage in “human communications”. Consequently, they imply a whole complex of “extra semiotic” machines. [...] The stability of a “state of language” corresponds to a balance between these diverse levels of power. (Quotation marks in the original)

Storying personas, storying “data” together, implies not knowing but still holding it together, as AR’s translations also – lost and not - and strolling show. The it being this something that can be used to rivet stories and their themes, their purposes, and the cognitive work. Stories suturing up our parts against some sort of awareness of being in pieces and what we must. Virno<sup>44</sup> writes:

We need to bring the heterogeneity to its limit, and to try and connect the antipodes *as such*. What really counts is the immediate relation between the distinctive traits of the *Homo sapiens* as species and the most fleeting cultural dispositions, the biological “always already” of biology and the social “right now”, the innate dispositions for language and a political decision dictated by exceptional circumstances. Neither metaphorical, nor allegorical, the expression of “natural history” might share the virtues of the oxymoron, i.e., it postulates an electric spark resulting from the connection of two clearly contrasting elements.

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<sup>41</sup> Guattari (2011): 27.

<sup>42</sup> Ibidem: 32.

<sup>43</sup> Ibidem: 35.

<sup>44</sup> Virno (2015): 173.

Stories and storying personas weave bodies and worlds into shapes we can use, and that can make sense to us, shapes that can break and be prepared in sufficiently predictable ways, out of perceptions of fragments. Stories and storying are making research a/live.

### **The machinery of ethics in research**

Viewing ethics as a duty to openness, performance, collaboration, perspectivation and storying, in/and an uncontrollable machinery, paradoxically strengthens our research analysis in general, with our analysis of data in particular. Avoiding through this some excluding and reductionist notions of ethics on the one side, and gaining increased transparency on the other. No moralizing, only major and minor, researcher and the researched, storying each other together. The paradox and key lays in a sublimation of the real, hence a more realistic and inclusive view of what research shows, can do and what might become.

According to Geertz, Malinowski demolished the myth of the emphatic field-worker, both in person and in writing. He rejected the notion of the moral idealization of the researcher by describing it as sentimentality. Geertz claims the issue is rather about epistemology, or we would argue about the theory of science to include ontology. This makes the new governance of research ethics in market-oriented universities no longer about ethical thinking, but about social control to produce loyal researchers. Qualitative researchers argue this makes it no longer clear what formal research ethics is about. It also produces new risks by ignoring the vital issue of re-presenting our data, which makes the analytic and ethical thinking intricately entangled. As above, we argue that to do minor activist research is to unsettle, to introduce encounters, to train the imagination for the collaborative of re/presenting data. We described our approach as data philosophy. This reminds us of Marek Tesar,<sup>45</sup> who sees philosophy as a method, a driving force to read and think, an ontological, epistemological, and ethical relationship with a thought. This makes philosophy into ethical thought-work. As above, storying thus becomes an environment with listening and reading less about recording narrowly topical comments on what has been said, and more about records of what the words (stories as data) have exited, and what are the thoughts that have been generated.

Our goal has been to enrich (self)reflexivity regarding knowledge production by an ontological more inclusive, open, and collaborative approach to transcend classic boundaries, by turning the concept of ethics through minoring, into a thinking hub and pedagogy for change by situating data-inquiries in immanence.

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<sup>45</sup> Tesar (2021): 545.

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