Working within the shadow: what do we do with "not-yet" data?

Abstract

Purpose

The purpose of this paper is to explore the possibilities opened up by those messy, unclear and indeterminate data in research situations that may be described as being in the shadow and may as such remain in a state of vagueness and indeterminacy.

Design/methodology/approach

The paper draws on the extant literature on shadow organizing and post-qualitative methodologies. It focuses attention on not-yet (or shadow data) in order to ponder over what researchers do to data when they are not (yet) black-boxed as such. At the same time, it investigates what it is that not-yet data do to researchers.

Findings

Four types of 'not-yet' data – illegible, wondrous and disorienting, hesitant, and worn out – are presented and discussed. Illegible data is when a researcher is in the position of not knowing how to interpret what is in front of her/him. A second illustration is constructed around wonder, and poses the question of the feelings of surprise and disorientation that arise when facing uncanny realities. In a third situation, not-yet data is narrated as hesitation, when a participant feels conflicting desires and the researchers hesitates in interpreting. The fourth illustration depicts not-yet data as data that have been corrupted, that vanish after time or are worn out.

Practical implications

Not-yet data belong to researchers practice but can also be found in other professional practices which are concerned with the indeterminacy of shadowy situations. It is argued that situations like these constitute opportunities for learning and for the moral and professional development, so long as indeterminacy is kept open and a process of 'slowing down' both action and interpretation is nurtured.

Originality/value

This paper is of value for taking the metaphor of *shadow organizing* further. Moreover, it represents a rare attempt to bring the vast debate on post-qualitative research/methodologies into management studies, which with very few exceptions seems to have been ignored by organization studies.

Key words: data, not-yet data, professional development, post-qualitative research, shadow organizing

Shadow organizing - extending the metaphor

Here, we take the metaphor of *shadow organizing* further (Gheradi, Jensen and Nerland, 2017) in order to explore those messy, unclear, indeterminate situations in research and professional life that may be described as being 'in the shadow' and may as such remain in a state of vagueness.

The metaphor of *shadow organizing* plays on two concepts: on organizing as an ongoing process and on shadow as a symbol of what is 'betwixt and between.' This metaphor therefore enables us to focus on an epistemology of becoming and at the same time, to focus on the relationality of intra-acting elements, as movements of relationships. In fact, shadow is a powerful symbol in itself, and its polysemy is an interesting vehicle because it allows us to think in terms of intra-actions using the images of the intertwining of light and dark, of grey tone as the entanglement of white and black, or in terms of social imaginary, the entanglement of transparency and secrecy. Light and dark talk of moving/fluid connections that also imply disconnections, and both are necessary features of the

relational space between the human agents, the objects and the discourses that surround them. Relationality is an invitation to see the world as the movement of relationships between things rather than the things in themselves.

The term 'relational epistemology', together with similar terms like sociomaterial epistemology, practice epistemology, and post-qualitative research are part of the same vocabulary, and they signal the blurring of the distinction between ontology and epistemology that followed the consolidation of the linguistic turn and the acknowledgement that both ontology and epistemology are discursive effects (Barad, 2007; Fox and Alldred, 2016; Kuhn *et al.* 2017). Concepts such as sociomateriality, diffraction, entanglement, intra-action, *agencement,* and becoming are therefore part of the same vocabulary for questioning the conventional humanistic qualitative research and for exploring a post-qualitative inquiry in which entanglement renders problematic all the categories of humanist qualitative research.

We shall be working within a post-qualitative framework and will be focusing our attention on our own practices as researchers in relation to what we do to data when they are not (yet) black-boxed as such and, at the same time, we shall be wondering what 'data' do to us in our subjectivity as researchers. Nevertheless, this is not only a methodological paper in traditional terms; what we would like to do, instead, is to start from our own experiences as academics engaged in the specific practice of data manufacturing in order to show that in other professions besides our own, professional development has to do with the indeterminacy of shadow situations.

As researchers, we come face-to-face every day with the situated practice of manufacturing 'data' and of somehow managing to overcome that ambiguous, untidy region between not-yet data and usable data. This situation is common to other professionals who, while they may not be engaged in doing research as a professional practice, still regularly face situations in which they need to take decisions and actions on the basis of unclear information, multiple possible meanings of the same piece of information, absence of information, conflicting emotions and so on. The dynamic space of what is 'not-yet' and what stays in the shadow of indeterminacy is what intrigues us when it defies

rationality and easy cognitive solutions. In professional development, the traditional educational focus is on fostering the acquisition of skills and development of competences on a scientific and professional basis informed by rationality. However, when professionals and/or managers are engaged in situated decision-making and problem-solving, they often have to resolve a state of indeterminacy, ambiguity or ambivalence without having the time or the energy to devote to experimenting with the shadowy aspects of their deliberations and actions. We argue that the development of a professional subjectivity would benefit from learning to dwell in shadow organizing and that the ability to inquire into the twilight of those indeterminate situations encountered in professional life can be learnt without resorting to a resolving attitude in order to black-box or discard what disturbs. Qualitative researchers and professionals can learn to cope with the not-yet of situations without discarding what is not fully understood or what is not comprehensible at that particular moment, or what has vanished even before being. We are suggesting 'slowing down' the quick jump to evaluation and critique 'to find ways of approaching the complex and uncertain objects that fascinate because they literally hit us or exert a pull on us' (Stewart, 2007, p. 4). For this reason, we shall be presenting four not-yet-data; they are fascinating research situations that, on one hand, can be found in other professional practices and, on the other hand, require that the researcher lives within this shadow data, moving away from the model of humanist/rational subject and conceiving their subjectivity as emergent. This subjectivity is in a constant flux of connections and entangled with human and non-human materiality (Fairchild, 2016; 2017). We argue that this different view of subjectivity, 'one who is in constant flux as connections are made, dropped and remade' (Fairchild, 2017, p. 296), should be embraced not only by qualitative researchers but also by professionals and managers.

The article is organized as follows: firstly, we introduce the debate on post-qualitative research and then illustrate the concept of not-yet data. Then we present four not yet data variations. The first illustrates illegible data and namely, a situation of not knowing how to interpret what is in front of us. A second illustration of not-yet data is constructed around wonder, and poses the question of the

feelings of surprise and disorientation that arise when facing uncanny realities. In a third situation, not-yet data is narrated as hesitation, when a research participant feels conflicting desires and the researchers hesitate in interpreting the participant's words. The fourth illustration depicts not-yet data as data that has been corrupted, that vanish after time or are worn out. This situation involves the instability of data not only as data that have yet to come into existence, but also as data that are illegible because they have faded away. In the conclusion, we argue how situations like these constitute opportunities for learning and for the moral development of a professional self when indeterminacy is kept open and a process of 'slowing down' both action and interpretation is nurtured.

Post-qualitative research and shadow-data or/as not-yet data

In recent years, a movement labelled *post-qualitative research/inquiry/methodology* has appeared in the field of qualitative inquiry, seeking to deconstruct *conventional humanistic qualitative research* and go beyond a representational anthropocentric worldview (St. Pierre, 2011). Qualitative inquiry is greatly indebted to humanism but, once classical humanist structures were/are disturbed by poststructural theories and when poststructuralism enters the arena of qualitative research (Prasad, 2012), the task for researchers became/becomes how to 'work the ruins' of qualitative research: 'Once those philosophical categories have shifted, methodology will shift as well. If humanism's inscription of reality, knowledge, truth, rationality, and the subject are dangerous fictions, then its 'science' also becomes problematic.' (St. Pierre and Pillow, 2000, p. 10).

Post qualitative research interrogates the kind of qualitative research that has become too predictable in conference after conference, abstract after abstract, article after article, book after book, classroom after classroom, seminar after seminar: it is a secure, stable and regulatory structure. According to post-qualitative researchers conventional humanistic qualitative research has become so disciplined and standardized that it has risked losing the critical mass that characterized its origins. *Post* in the term *post-qualitative research* 'refers not only to what comes after neopositivism, interpretivism and the linguistic turn, rather it refers to the ongoing process of deconstruction of many

of the key concepts of the neopositivist and interpretative frameworks: what counts as "data", "the field", "the interview", "observation" and so on' (Gherardi, 2019, p. 45). Post-qualitative inquiry and methodology refuse to be fixed in precise terms, and much of the methodological rules and devices used in conventional qualitative research may seem inadequate in the post-qualitative field. For example, terms such as research design, methodology and validity and so on are labels 'with no stable identity for post-qualitative scholars and are therefore always, at least in part, becoming. Research and the work of the researcher thus becomes something "not-yet-thought", something different' (Benozzo, 2018, p. 97-98). Moreover, some unexpected words (such as rhizoanalysis, entanglement, movement, apparatus, line of flight, intra-action, diffraction, nomadic, affect, event, onto-epistemology, space-time-matter, agential cut…) connected to philosophical approaches like new materialism and posthumanism (Barad, 2007; Braidotti, 2013; Koro-Ljungberg, 2016; Lather, 2013; Massumi, 2002; MacLure, 2013) have made available to research a new set of words which resist attempts to construct yet another consensual disciplined alternative to humanism.

This paper is framed within post-qualitative methodologies of difference and in "an ontology of immanence, [where] one becomes less interested in what is and more interested in what might be and what is coming into being" (St. Pierre, 2019, p. 4). A post-qualitative endeavour (Author, 10; MacLure, 2011; Koro-Ljungberg, 2016; St. Pierre, 2016; Taylor, 2016) prompts different modes of empirical explorations. These new ways of practising inquiry aim to disturb/interrogate research methods conceiving of knowledge as a commodity which 'produces something' within organization and society. Post-qualitative methodologies can start anywhere and stay at least temporarily lost and uncertain and promote change in onto-episte-methodo-logical practice. Post-qualitative research is interested in continuous variations and movements; not in what 'something' *is* but instead in that which *something is not yet but is to come.*

In this backdrop, a classic notion of research, namely 'data', has recently been radically re-conceptualized. The notion of 'data' as something that represents what is out there as fixed and static reality has by now been fiercely criticised. Within these approaches, data are 'encountered' as having

no boundaries, or as having boundaries which are continuously being shaped and (re)shaped (Benozzo, Bell and Koro-Ljungber, 2013). Data are never fixed, but instead inhabit an indeterminate world and/or produce an indeterminate reality that bites us back.

In doing fieldwork as qualitative researchers, we make observations, talk to people, collect documents, resonate with other people's feelings, and have impressions and fears, and at a certain moment, all the messiness that we gather together becomes 'our data' and undergoes a process of transformation and analysis. Until that moment, this messiness is a space of indeterminacy where the shadow represents the dynamics of what is undetermined. The image of a space where light and dark intra-act and become an ever-changing zone of indeterminacy may help us see the research process differently, to have a different idea of what takes place in the zone of indeterminacy before 'data' get formed, i.e. in that area of 'not-yet-data'.

This idea resonates with the attempt to reconceptualise existing ways of practising research which not only undoes 'binaries but confuse[s], scramble[s] and even frighten[s] our binary-seeking minds' (Andersen, Rantala and Rautio, 2017, p. 6). The not-yet makes the researcher bewildered and distances them from the stubborn need to view through their eyes – the oculocentric view – which has separated the knowing subject from the known. It is the '"not yet" … which is everywhere but indeterminate, not yet created, not yet individuated and organized into the definite—immanent… It is the not yet, the yet to come—the immanent—that marks post qualitative inquiry.' (St. Pierre, 2019, p. 3).

In the following pages we consider how data might be endowed with a dual nature:

> data are both decided and undecided. By this connection we refer to the "presence" of data. Data are here, with us, in some ways knowable and expressing, simulating, possible, repeating diverse forms of knowledge. However, at the same time data's absence haunts scholars, and absent-presence (e.g., Derrida, 1997) reproduces data again and again in their different forms, at different sense times (Koro-Ljungberg *et al.*, 2017, p. 4).

These decided and undecided data, or in other words, these 'not-yet data' (or shadow data) can begin anywhere, anytime and by doing so, can create a sense of loss, uncertainty and indeterminacy with regard to those stable, fixed, repetitive, traditional structures of neo-positivist qualitative research. These types of 'becoming' and emerging data bring about methodological challenges and examples that can push back the boundaries of current qualitative research and question rigid methodological traditions.

We would argue that it is only in these more emergent not-yet data that it is possible to problematize and undo the 'fixed' relationship between the known (object) and knower (subject) established by the 'Man' of the humanist project (Weedom, 1997). These affective not-yet data can produce different conditions in which subjectivity can be revealed and knowledge produced (Manning, 2016). Throughout this article, our not-yet-data will be inviting readers to enter the time, space and matter of some research where we might encounter data, or data might encounter us. We will be sharing a series of encounters and four (un)connected variations on the idea of not-yet data:

- Not-yet data 1: illegible data

- Not-yet data 2: wondrous and disorienting data

- Not-yet data 3: hesitant data

- Not-yet data 4: worn-out data.

Not-yet-data 1: Illegible data

In their study entitled 'Becoming a problem' – related to the way 5-year-old children acquire the reputation of being a problem MacLure *et al.* (2010) describe a classroom situation in which Hannah stays silent during the ritual of the morning name-call. She does not answer the teacher's call. All the other classmates, on the other hand, as their names are called out in alphabetical order, answer: 'Good morning Mrs. Edison'. Whereas Hannah keeps silent, and this is a problem: for the teacher, for Hanna's parents, for her classmates and for the researchers.

There is a leap, a gap, a hole - that is, Hannah's insistent, obstinate and repeated silence - in the answers to the order of the register. And the teacher cannot bear this hole, so that Hannah's transgressive behaviour becomes a potential area of conflict: the little girl continues to resist Mrs. Edison's requests/calls. Then the parents are involved. However, Hannah's mother cannot persuade her to say those four words - 'Good morning, Mrs. Edison' - and not even her dad, who starts sitting next to her in the morning, manages to convince her. Although Hannah is quite talkative in other situations, during the roll-call she stays silent and her parents start to worry. She seems 'different' from other children.

In a sort of escalation of involvement, MacLure and colleagues continue, her classmates are called on 'to join in the game'. Their teacher now asks them to answer the roll-call in a creative, amusing way. And if this is a lot of fun for the class, it is torture for Hannah. They are also asked to encourage Hannah when it's her turn. The teacher even tries out an experiment and calls out the children's names in the reverse order, from Z to A, but Hannah's silence continues. Naturally, the situation is discussed with the other teachers too, and it is decided that the best thing for Mrs Edison to do - even if she does not completely agree – is to stop pressing Hannah. But above all, it is Hannah's mother who continues to be worried and asks the teacher to let her know when Hannah answers, so that she can reward her positive behaviour.

MacLure and colleagues comment that:

> There is something excessive about Hannah's silence (if indeed it is her silence) and the reactions it provokes. Yet it amounts to such a little hole in the fabric of the daily routine — a mere four words. And their absence hardly leaves Mrs. Edison in any doubt as to whether Hannah is actually "there," which is the ostensible purpose of registration. Hannah is emphatically "there" in her mute presence; she "registers" on everyone's horizon as soon as the routine begins. (2010, p. 493)

In our view, Hannah's silence seems to make all concerned – the teacher and her colleagues, Hannah and her schoolmates, the parents and the researchers – enter an unsettling not-yet area in

which everyone (except for Hannah) seems stubbornly determined either to make Hannah speak or to provide an explanation for her silence. These not-yet data are illegible, and then incomprehensible and unintelligible, unrecognizable and inexplicable. What is illegible produces emotions: fears and anxiety, bewilderment and a feeling of guilt, but also - continues MacLure - a diagnostic effort because 'there must be something wrong with Hannah: she must be timid, or recalcitrant, or attention-seeking, or abnormal' (MacLure, et al. 2010, p. 493).

What is illegible also produces actions, for example in the inversion of the order of the morning call, in the parents' involvement (the father takes part in the morning roll-call), and in the staff meetings. What is illegible also produces the analysis from the researchers who are questioning the silence. Why is Hannah silent? What is the 'meaning' of that silence? Is this silence intentional? Did she decide not to? Was Hannah able or unable to respond? Perhaps the silence was the sign of the beginnings of a paralysis?

And in this analysis, perhaps we cannot rule out the fact that there is also something going on in the relationship between Hannah and Mrs. Edison, the latter may feel defeated and challenged by the little girl, and perhaps this experience has left a deep mark on Hannah too. In this story, the illegible silence seems to be hiding some ungraspable meaning which leaves MacLure and colleagues (and also us) perplexed and nonplussed. These illegible data are at one and the same time a moment of production (of thought, of language, of actions, of feelings, of interpretations) and a moment of resistance (to meaning, to communication and to classroom order). That jump/that hole in the answers to Mrs. Edison's morning roll-call is an illegible knot that catches fire:

> glimpses of a disciplinary violence regulating adults' interactions with children, perhaps, or something intolerable in the vulnerability of children, or the fragility of the compact on which classroom order, and perhaps even social order, rests (MacLure *et al.*, 2010, p. 493).

The productive force of this illegible silence lies in the impossibility of giving a meaning to it, and therefore of putting an end to that silence, as if we had finally grasped, understood and explained it!

But like a shadowy place, for those involved and for the scholars observing it, that silence means that the comfort of certainties is lost; whenever what is not-yet legible bursts onto the scene, we want desperately and stubbornly to give some meaning to it, but what is illegible resists analysis and produces at the same time a never-ending analysis.

Not-yet data 2: wondrous or disorienting data

In the second variation, our not-yet data consist of two painting by De Chirico: *The Great Metaphysician*[1] and *The Disquieting Muses*[2].

Let's allow ourselves to be carried away by what they depict.

The Great Metaphysician – On an inclined plane of a square, a kind of scaffolding construction seems to reach towards the onlooker. The Great Metaphysician: it is an immobile mannequin, divided up into an infinite variety of geometric objects. On the top of it is the bust of a mannequin with his back turned on us. It is a pile of things that rises vertically at the centre of the painting, a sort of pyramidal sculpture made up of rulers, squares, draped material, picture-frames, pieces of iron, boxes apparently made of wood and other objects impossible to make out. On both sides, there are two buildings with arcades and in the background, two factory chimneys.

The Disquieting Muses – In the background, up a slope, lies the red castle of Ferrara while a factory with two chimneys lies to the left. On the slope and in the foreground there are two mannequins. One is sitting on a bench, with the head removed and placed on the ground next to it, while the other is standing. There are some indecipherable objects nearby: perhaps one is a box of children's toys. To the right and behind the two mannequins stands a Greek statue.

These two paintings that now stand before our eyes are similar to the 'reality' we experience as researchers and which asks to be translated into 'data': these paintings are not-yet data. We decided

---

[1] The painting The Great Metaphysician can be found here: https://www.wikiart.org/en/giorgio-de-chirico/the-great-metaphysician-1917

[2] The painting The Disquieting Muses can be seen found here: https://www.analisidellopera.it/giorgio-de-chirico-le-muse-inquietanti/

to choose these paintings (and not examples from our research), but we could have chosen many others from De Chirico's metaphysical period (1912-1917), since they exalt the fact/idea that they are the result of unexpected juxtapositions. Adalgisa Lugli (2006) has argued that De Chirico's works from his metaphysical period are all painted *assemblages*, that is, constructions obtained by juxtaposing pieces which are very different from each other. She continues: 'the most singular aspect that has emerged from the experiences of these years is the sense of uniqueness, of the union between objects, shapes, figures and backgrounds, the possibility of making compenetrations between them and also the idea that it is possible to extract unified compositions from the most disparate fragments. This is where the *assemblage* comes from, this is the *assemblage*" (Lugli, 2006, p.146).

By *assemblage,* together with Lugli we mean an object made up of other objects: putting something together with something else in a way that is surprising and thought-provoking so as to form (and perform) other objects. Combination follows on from combination, and each one resonates differently. Different materials are juxtaposed, and these juxtapositions fire the imagination and populate our dreams. Although assemblages are dynamic and not static, we are often unaware of just how objects can speak to each other.

This idea of bringing objects together and collecting them is related to the action of gathering and making collections, and inspired Lugli (2006) to make the connection between the *assemblage* and Wunderkammern. This pastime of gathering very different objects and materials together and trying to classify them started in the sixteenth century, and this marked the beginning of the phenomenon of *Wunderkammern* or *cabinets of curiosities* which brought together various pieces from the world around us, a world deemed wonderful and full of amazing surprises. In the Wunderkammer, very different objects and materials - *naturalia* et *artificialia* – were juxtaposed, being placed alongside each other in daring combinations. Wunderkammern are/were places filled with natural (*naturalia*) and artificial (*artificialia* et *mirabilia*) things: optical instruments and games, mechanical toys, natural history specimens, maps, precious gems, anatomical limbs or anomalies, lenses, mirrors, strange objects, and… and … and. They were/are places where things were/are accumulated and pile up

without any clear order and where connections came into being without there having to be a logical reason for them. These connections obey their own laws, and belong to the realm of dreams and wonderment. Unfortunately, the phenomenon of Wunderkammern disappeared with the advent of the modern idea of museum in the nineteenth century, based on Enlightenment/Rationalist ideas. According to Lugli, however, Wunderkammern did survive in the *assemblages* of Cubism, Surrealism and Dadaism, in De Chirico's metaphysical paintings and in contemporary artistic installations, and even (we would like to think) in our own post-qualitative research experimentation (Benozzo, Koro-Ljungberg, Adamo, 2019).

Data-*assemblage* (or data as *assemblage*) is of particular interest to us because it produces two effects simultaneously: wonder and disorientation. As Lugli has pointed out 'the wondrous is a meta-historical category that has been defined all along the eighteenth century, didactically first and foremost, as a form of knowledge, that is, a very special half-way stage, a kind of mental suspension that lies between ignorance and knowledge, which marks the end of ignorance and the beginning of knowledge' (Lugli, 2006, p. 126). Also Maggie MacLure (2013, p. 228) writes about wonder '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'. It was wonder that brought our attention to how we engage with 'data' and in particular, to the *assemblage* of data-and-researchers.

The other effect, the disorientation, or uprooting, or even defamiliarization, is that almost dreamlike, suspended, metaphysical atmosphere that accompanies us when we let ourselves be carried away by De Chirico's paintings. In the images we have chosen, a painting with a title acts as a container, together with another container, which is a frame. Title and frame together lead us to seek out links between objects, figures and backgrounds, all in an atmosphere of desolation, melancholy and abandonment. The painting is enlivened by strange objects/figures that result from equally strange combinations, so that at a certain point, as we look at the painting and try to give it a 'meaning', we no longer know where we are: we are in a world where meanings are short-circuited.

What we observe becomes mysterious and impossible to grasp: it may frighten us, but at the same time it attracts us, because it appeals more to the laws of seduction and wonder, than to the laws of reason.

German has a word to describe this phenomenon - *unheimlich.* It is not easy to translate into English, but it describes something 'disturbing, disquieting, and disorienting: something foreign which has entered the *Heim*, the 'home' of familiarity, thus depriving it of the reassuring character that commonly belongs to it' (Berto, 2002, p.1). In its Freudian meaning, the term *unheimlich* may be translated with 'disturbing familiarity' or with 'something uncanny', as if in a starry sky two moons suddenly appeared in the night. In the case of De Chirico's paintings, the disturbing familiarity is represented by things like the shadow that appears on the canvas whose origin cannot be traced, or two chimneys stuck onto an ancient castle; a train that seems to be moving quite fast without us being able to see the rails that are supposed to support it; the flags waving in a scene where everything is still, without a breath of wind. De Chirico's unsettling paintings - our not-yet data - provide us with the inspiration to think that the data analysed in qualitative research, rather than being subjected to the usual procedure of being broken up and separated into simple parts, might follow a very different path: might be combined and juxtaposed, might be placed alongside each other and made to overlap, in other words, might be made into an *assemblage*. These data might be made into a wonderful, daring courageous disorder. Just like in a cabinet of curiosities, then, 'analysis' becomes an explosion of combinations and connection and might generate amazement and wonder, that feeling of being seduced by the not-yet and suspended between ignorance and knowledge, between indeterminacy and indecision that brings us to the third variation of not-yet, which is hesitant data.

Not-yet data 3: hesitant data

Thomas, an interviewee in a research project on coming out in the workplace (Benozzo, *et al*., 2015)*,* is 51 and works in a university library near Manchester, in England. Before that, he had worked in a

big IT company with 400 staff, developing computer systems for banks. He had got divorced from his wife because she discovered his double life - she found out he was gay. Two years later, he changed job and went to work at the university.

In the IT company where he had worked before, his colleagues knew him as the 'husband' and the "dad": "[T]hey knew I was married, they knew I had children. They knew that whole story." Through the repetition of 'to know' Thomas evokes the epistemology of the closet (Sedgwick, 1990). What kind of story is he referring to? Perhaps to the story of when he and his wife got engaged and then married, of when their children were born and grew up. Who knows what kind of story they experienced? And his colleagues - what story did they know, or imagine, or suppose, or even did not allow themselves to know. These are the kind of questions we ask ourselves, and we can only imagine that these are the same questions Thomas asked himself at work, saying hello to his colleagues every morning, meeting them in the corridors, in the bathrooms and in management meetings. What kind of story do they know about me? Do they know or not? What do they imagine? How do they see me? Is there ignorance or awareness in their gaze?

The interview with Thomas is particularly intriguing because it is characterized by the expression 'I am gay', which Thomas is not able to say in public. A few numbers: this expression is repeated 15 times in different ways during the first 20 minutes of the interview. The fact that Thomas is neither able nor willing to pronounce the word 'gay', so that the word becomes a torment, a nagging worry, tells its own story. The statements 'I was gay', 'I am gay', 'being gay' are part of the identity discourse. There is a *refrain* that returns again and again in the interview: '*I was unable to say it*', where *it* is the word 'gay'. To be interpelled (Althusser, 1971; Butler, 1997), to receive a name, is one of the conditions through which the subject is constituted, comes into the world or becomes alive. But the word – 'gay' – can also be an insult, and it would seem that here, we see all the hesitation and problems connected to defining oneself as gay: for Thomas, *gay* glows and gushes negativity. Since 'gay' is an insult, when Thomas defines himself as gay he is devaluing himself – paradoxically, however, it gives him the added opportunity of a social life. What is really interesting is that it's as if

the word 'gay' is physically expelled and acquires a materiality all of its own, a life independent from the subject:

> Thomas: I remember not being able to just say the words and just sort of I want to say the word…I can't say the word. I'm going through that sort of whole stomach-churning thing of I've got to get those words out and on to the table…

The subject throws *it* (that word) on the table, as it were: 'I've got to get those words out and on to the table'; in these sentences there is an attempt to expel or eliminate, almost to retch, to keep a distance from it. But at the same time, Thomas cannot eliminate it completely because it is what enables him to exist, to define and constitute himself. The word 'gay' explodes in the room; it rolls across the table; it bounces off the walls and breaks the silence. The effect is all the more powerful and noisy because the room is crowded with the voices of silence. And the interview continues with Thomas telling us about his new job at the university library. He describes his hesitant coming-out with a colleague (a coming-out, however, that did not happen) and we see how painful coming-out can be when someone is afraid of how the other might react.

> Thomas: There's this colleague that… I was nearly there to tell her and something happened and something like that. I was just like [Thomas] why can't you just tell her that you're gay? But again - there's that would she be shocked? Probably not. If she is that's her problem…
>
> Researcher: Do you think she could have a problem?
>
> Thomas: Probably not (laughs) I think the problem is with me and that's a hurdle you know even though I've come out to lots and lots of people. I'm on the counselling course, I've come out to all of my tutors, I've come out to every single student on that course. Everybody knows I'm gay on that course. It's still hard to do that. So this person... How is that person going to react? Because they might react differently…but I have been… I've put myself out there…

Thomas points out that he still has difficulties, even though he has come out to all of his tutors on the counselling course, to every single student on the course and to some of his colleagues. In these excerpts, one of the most interesting statements is: 'I've put myself out there'. This expression is interesting/surprising/unexpected because it has at least three overlapping meanings: i) I made a very strong effort; ii) I exposed myself to the world; iii) I came out. Of course, we do not know which of these three meanings and nuances Thomas is referring to, but what is striking is the extent to which such a strong (though ambiguous) sentence emphasizes the dramatic tone of the story.

All these excerpts are *hesitant data* because, on the one hand, they tell us about the hesitation that Thomas feels in the course of accomplishing his coming-out and on the other (and more importantly), in sentences like 'I put myself out there', the meaning is unclear, not fixed and not definitive. We could try to re-configure this sentence as follows 'I made myself vulnerable and I made some effort and now I have come out of the closet'. The point is, however, that we do not know exactly what Thomas meant – and indeed, perhaps Thomas himself does not know exactly what he meant. Words and concepts are made indeterminate (and undeterminable) and seem to give rise to non-sense and vagueness/imprecision. Faced with these hesitant forms of language, research fails to find a kind of correspondence between reality and concept, between reality and language. It is this kind of hesitant data, which are inexact but require us to be 'rigorous', that can open up surprisingly fruitful research spaces/possibilities.

Not yet data 4 – Worn out data

Recently, one of us has conceptualized 'data' in two different, but interconnected ways (Benozzo, Bell and Koro-Ljungberg, 2013; Benozzo and Koro-Ljungberg, 2017): the first is the idea of data movement/data waves and the second is the idea of data bag. To develop these ideas of data, it is useful to start with Brian Massumi when he writes:

> When I think of my body and ask what it does to earn that name, two things stand out. It
>
> *moves*. It *feels*. In fact, it does both at the same time. It moves as it feels, and it feels itself

moving. Can we think a body without this: an intrinsic connection between movement and sensation whereby each immediately summons the other? (2002, p. 1).

Massumi is talking about the body, but we could talk about data in a similar way, as they shift between their diverse variations (becoming things such as nuisances, splinters, and secrets). At this point, in the context of their research, Benozzo Bell and Koro-Ljungberg, started to think about data as something that passes them by, as something that moves, that is a flow of connected (or disconnected) thoughts, relationships, interactions, and events arising in the research setting and in their (our) lives. In a research context, there are always *unobtrusive traces* wandering around (see also Guba and Lincoln, 1985; St. Pierre, 1997). Some of these unobtrusive traces were created with participants, others with friends and others occurred by chance.

If we begin to conceptualize data as movement, an image that describes this becoming of data – these not-yet data – is the fluctuating movement of waves. 'The waves extend themselves and potentially return to formations similar to the past, and then again are reduced in a constant but irregular movement of construction and deconstruction of new shapes. Similarly, data expand and contract, constantly changing shape and being carried by some invisible force' (Benozzo, Bell and Koro-Ljungberg, 2013, p. 311).

And sometimes, together with this movement, we find some traces belonging to us, to our interviewees, to friends and colleagues, to books and newspapers, to TV programmes, to ghosts and vampires, to witches and wizards…to … who knows? But does it matter who these traces belong to or where they come from? Data become and happen and sometimes they disappear: 'data are here and there, and in this space they catch fire, they light up, they become inflamed with desire' (Benozzo, Bell and Koro-Ljungberg, 2013, p. 311). In an attempt to extend this conversation about data-movement and waves, Benozzo and Koro-Ljungberg have played with the materiality of bags and the notion of diffraction. As Barad (2007) explains, diffraction happens when waves pass through an opening or obstruction and spread differently than they would do otherwise: 'whereas the metaphor of reflection reflects the themes of mirroring and sameness, diffraction is marked by patterns of

difference' (pp. 71–72). Diffraction is a process that continuously produces new and differentiating data bags. More specifically, the diffracted data-bags take its point of departure from an IKEA bag (see Benozzo, Carey, and Koro-Ljungberg, 2016) (in-data-bag), which appeared in an Italian ad for that company. This bag continued to produce variations/differentiations including: the in-data-bags which queered the IKEA bag; *Emily Muller* a short film including data-bag improvisation; a piece of art by Sophie Calles questioning voyeurism and ethics; and the ongoing data-bag conversations still produced by the authors (Benozzo, Carey, and Koro-Ljungberg, 2016; Benozzo and Koro-Ljungberg, 2017; Taylor, *et al.,* 2019).

Barad's idea of diffraction invites us to continue to produce movement in our research and this suggestion has led us to think about the decomposition/corruption of those unobtrusive traces. Indeed, these data-traces both attract and repel us (and other researchers). However, sometimes after a few years in which we have produced data, or when the research is finished or even during the same research process, we say something like 'these data are old; too old', referring to the fact that time passes and flies by; signifying that data ages beyond usefulness, into decrepitude, beyond meaning. But this way of glancing at data fixes on their role in mimetically representing reality. In what ways the materiality – of bags, of newspaper pages, of objects, of interview transcriptions and so on – matters, or might come to matter?! What is at stake in giving life to data and then taking it away after an indeterminate but fixed period of time? Let's bring matter together with space and time and then we have *worn-out data* (or data which are worn out). We noticed that an IKEA bag is wearing out, starting from the bottom, and is also very beaten up. Very small pieces of plastic are perishing. Again, the page of the daily newspaper which inspired one of us (Benozzo, 2013) to do a discourse analysis, despite his attempt to protect it, storing it in a transparent bag, is losing its consistency, becoming more fragile and liable to tear, and is changing colour.

In our study at home, we still have some transcriptions of interviews and personal narratives (Benozzo, *et al.*, 2015; Pizzorno *et al.,* 2014*)* some worn out data, stored in a big box: these sheets of paper are behaving just like the newspaper: the ink is changing, it is already becoming something

else: some of it is still as vibrant as when it was produced, some has faded taking on a pale grey hue, and some has disappeared altogether. These sheets become mixed up with the dust of their own degradation and take on that of their surroundings: dried skin-cells, threads of fabric, and the particles that wander in from the polluted and polluting outside. These dust motes give these interviews a different sort of life. The kind of life that could make them king in the archive.

In these processes of decomposition, it would seem that worn out data are fading away. Where are they going, what are they doing? Data waves, data-bag, and data waves and bags have worn out, but do they also wear us out? Can they be anything more than an ongoing reminder and remainder, a cast, a fading mould of the fact that we are living in this world. Are these destined as some time capsule for an un-imagined future. Is this the only life we can afford ageing data? Is it possible that worn out data might become (anew and once again) not-yet data? Are worn out data like not-yet data 1, that is illegible data?

Learning to dwell in the not-yet: provisional conclusion

This paper is based on the idea that shadow organizing might open up a number of new opportunities, not only from the theoretical and methodological point of view but from the professional one. The image of a common space where the light and the dark intra-act and form an ever-changing zone of indeterminacy has helped us to think of what takes place in our relationship with not-yet data in that zone of indeterminacy before 'data' get formed. However, as we said at the beginning, this is not *only/just* a methodological paper; what we wanted to do was ponder over our own experiences as researchers and professionals engaged in a specific professional practice (data manufacturing), in an attempt to find an inspiration for thinking differently about professional development and to show how professional training and the professionals in their everyday organizational experience have to do with similar shadow and/or not-yet situations. Throughout the course of the paper, we used the concept of not-yet data and discussed examples of certain types of not-yet data – illegible, wondrous and disorienting, hesitant, worn out – in order to present situations in which post-qualitative research

is carried out in the face of bewildering/undetermined experiences that need to be kept 'open. Can professionals and managers start to learn from post-qualitative research methodologies and begin to open up to multiplicities and differences?'

Just as we have seen how certain research situations that are undetermined can be profoundly revealing, 'difficult' and disorienting professional situations can be similarly rich and fruitful. Professional education, training and competence development programs are mainly focused on transferring knowledge which is codified and legitimized to varying degrees by some formally recognized body of knowledge. In real life, however, like any other practitioners, professionals encounter difficult situations in which the usual 'what to do next' is questioned, interrogated and puzzled over. From the literature on 'difficult' situations and breakdown in the habitual way of doing things (Shotter and Tsoukas, 2011; Yanow and Tsoukas, 2009), we learn that a specific attitude is necessary to 'resolve' difficult situations or put them aside as something that cannot be dealt with in the usual/appropriate way. We would like to push this traditional view a step further: inspired by the 'data-manufacturing process' we have presented, we would suggest that situations given the label of 'shadow organizing' or 'not-yet' can actually enrich professional development and encourage a fresh and useful attitude towards coexisting with the undetermined.

Instead of seeing an indeterminate-illegible-disorienting situation as *problematic*, where the unclear elements have to be turned into a unified whole or 'made clear', or solved using the usual rational/bureaucratic processes, professionals might learn something new from the not-yet research situations we have presented. For instance, they might learn to 'slow the quick jump to representational thinking and evaluative critique' (Stewart, 2007, p. 4). Instead of *thinking about* (Shotter and Tsoukas, 2014) a puzzling situation, analyzing it in abstract terms and intellectualizing what is felt, our not-yet data point to the importance of turning to affect (Author 9) when doing qualitative research and dealing with complex situations. Writing about professional engaged judgment, Shotter and Tsoukas (2014) stress a special way of approaching the context of the practice; they talk about turning from *thinking about to sensing from within*. In our view, each in their different

way, all the not-yet examples we have presented mark a transition from *thinking about to sensing from within*, because in these research situations we made no attempt to impose a model or a framework on that not-yet data and tried instead to inhabit those wondrously illegible places, those hesitant, faded away spaces 'with attention to felt nuances and to felt details that are only too easy to ignore' (Shotter and Tsoukas, 2014, p. 391). It is possible to envisage some similar learning spaces/places in professional life too. In this 'sensing from within' a learning space/place may be constructed in which professionals and managers experiment with difficult and threatening situations instead of denying or not seeing them. Thus, shadow learning consists in learning to dwell in indeterminacy where control and responsibility are distributed and emerging from ongoing movements of relationships. The four situations that we offered to the reader are situations where dwelling in the space of the not-yet data presumes different competences. In the case of illegible data shadow learning implies the cultivation of an attitude towards not-knowing and acting in the presence of an illegible situation. In the case of wonderous data, shadow learning implies to cultivate an open mind ready to be surprised and to collect heterogeneous items outside of instrumental rationality. In the face of hesitant data, shadow learning implies a sensibility towards language, a competence to be skilled in listening but ready to accept that situations may not have a definite meaning. Finally, in worn out data, shadow learning contemplates how temporality may change the personal relationship with data, both because the materiality of data makes them simply disappear, corrupted by the passing of time and also because the personal relationship with them changes as time passes. These elements of professional and managerial education are no longer residual or only connected to the development of a proper subjectivity, rather with the contemporary requirements of a changing work context they are becoming more and more central for the design of a professional figure in which technical and rational competence is less relevant in the face of the so-called 'soft competences'.

References

Althusser, L. (1971), "Ideology and ideological state apparatus (notes toward an investigation)", in

    Brewster, B., (trans.) *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays by Louis Althusser*, New York:

Monthly Review Press, New York, pp. 127–186.

Andersen C. E., Rantala, T. and Rautio, P. (2017), "Editorial – Special Issue: 'Darkness Matters'".

    Reconceptualizing Educational Research Methodology, Vol. 8, No. 2, pp. 4-12.

Barad, K. (2003), "Posthumanist performativity: Toward an understanding of how matter comes to

    matter". *Signs*, Vol. No. 28, pp. 801-831.

Barad, K. (2007), *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter*

    and Meaning, Duke University Press, Durham, NC.

Benozzo, A. (2013), "Coming out of the Credenza: An Italian celebrities unveils his 'new' gay self".

    Sexualities, Vol.16, No 3/4, pp. 336-360.

Benozzo A (2018), "Poststructuralism", in Cassell, C., Cunliffe, A. and Grandy, G. (eds.) *The Sage*

    Handbook of Qualitative Research Methods in Business and Management, Sage, London, pp.

    86-101.

Benozzo A., Bell H., and Koro-Ljungberg M. (2013), "Moving between nuisance, secrets, and

    splinters as data". *Cultural Studies <=> Critical Methodologies*, Vol.13, No. 4, pp. 309-315.

Benozzo A., Pizzorno M. C., Bell H., and M. Koro-Ljungberg (2015), "Coming Out but into What:

    Problematizing Discoursive Variations of Revealing the Gay Self in the Workplace." *Gender,*

    Work and Organization, Vol. 22, No. 3, pp. 292–306.

Benozzo A., Koro-Ljungberg M., and Carey N. (2016), "Five or more IKEA Customers in Search of

    an Author." *Qualitative Inquiry*, Vol. 22, No. 7, pp. 568-580.

Benozzo A., and Koro-Ljungberg M. (2017), "[Data within (data]-bag) diffracted", in M. Koro-

    Ljungberg, T. Löytönen, and M. Tesar (eds.), *Disrupting Data in Qualitative Inquiry:*

    Entanglements with the Post-Critical and Post-Anthropocentric, Peter Lang, New York, NY,

    pp. 117-130.

Benozzo A., Koro-Ljungberg M. and Adamo S. (2019), "'World you Prefer not to?' Resetting/Resistance across Literature, Culture and Organizations." *Culture and Organization*, Vol. 25, No. 2, pp. 131-145.

Berto, G. (2002), *Freud, Heidegger. Lo spaesamento*. Milano: Bompiani.

Braidotti, R. (2013), *The Posthuman*, Polity Press: Cambridge, UK.

Butler, J. (1997), *The Psychic Life of Power*, Stanford University Press, Stanford, CA.

Derrida J (1997), *Of Grammatology*. (G. Spivak, Trans.), The Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, MD.

Fairchild, N. (2016), "Plugging into the umbra: creative experimentation (in)(on) the boundaries of knowledge production in ECEC research. *Reconceptualizing Educational Research Methodology* Vol. 7, No. 1, pp. 16-30.

Fairchild, N. (2017), "Segments and stutters: early years teachers and becoming-professional", *Contemporary Issues in Early Childhood*, Vol.18, No. 3, pp. 294 - 307.

Foucault, M. (1976), *La Volonté de Savoir*. Paris: Gallimard.

Fox, N.J. and Alldred, P. (2016), *Sociology and the New Materialism: Theory, Research, Action*, Sage, London.

Gherardi, S., Jensen, K. and Nerland, M. (2017), "Shadow organizing: A metaphor to explore organizing as intra-relating". *Qualitative Research in Organizations and Management: An International Journal,* Vol. 12, No. 1, pp. 2-17.

Gherardi, S. (2019), "If we practice posthumanist research, do we need gender anymore?". *Gender, Work and Organizations*, Vol. 26, No. 1, pp. 40-53.

Guba, E.G. and Lincoln, Y.S. (1985), *Naturalistic Inquiry*. Sage, London.

Koro-Ljungberg, M. (2016), *Reconceptualizing Qualitative Research. Methodologies without Methodology*. Sage, London.

Koro-Ljungberg, M. and MacLure, M. (2013), "Provocations, re-un-visions, death and other possibilities for 'data'". *Cultural Studies ↔ Critical Methodologies*, Vol. 13, No. 4, pp. 219-222.

Koro-Ljungberg, M., Löytönen, T. and Tesar, M. (2017), *Disrupting data in qualitative inquiry: Entanglements with the post-critical and post-anthropocentric*, Peter Lang, New York, NY.

Kuhn T., Ashcraft, K.L. and Cooren, F. (2017), *The Work of Communication: Relational Perspectives on Working and Organizing in Contemporary Capitalism*. Routledge. London.

Lather, P. (2013), "Methodology-21: What do we do in the afterward?", *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, Vol. 26, No. 6, pp. 634–645.

Lugli, A. (2006), *Arte e Meraviglia. Scritti Sparsi 1974-1995* [Arts and wonder: Collected writings 1974-1996], Umberto Allemandi & C, Torino.

MacLure, M. (2011), "Where are the ruins?", *Qualitative Inquiry*, Vol. 17, No. 10, pp. 899–912.

MacLure, M. (2013), "Researching without representation? Language and materiality in post-qualitative methodology", *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education,* Vol. 26, No. 6, pp. 658-667.

MacLure, M., Rachel, H., Jones, L., and MacRae, L. (2010), "Silence as resistance to analysis: Or, on not opening one's mouth properly", *Qualitative Inquiry*, Vol. 16, No. 6, pp. 492-500.

Manning, E. (2016), *The Minor Gesture*, Duke University Press, Durham and London.

Massumi, B. (2002), *Parables for the virtual*, Duke University Press Durham, SC.

Pizzorno M.C., Benozzo A., Fina A., Sabato S. and Scopesi M. (2014), "Parent–child career construction: A narrative study from a gender perspective." *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, Vol. 84, No. 3, pp. 420-430.

Prasad, A. (2012), "Beyond analytical dichotomies", *Human Relations*, Vol. 65, No. 5, pp. 567–695.

Sedgwick, E. (1990), *Epistemology of the Closet*, University of California Press, Berkeley.

Shotter, J. and Tsoukas, H. (2014), "Performing *phronesis*: On the way to engaged judgment", *Management Learning,* Vol. 45, No. 4, pp. 377-396.

Stewart, K. (2007), *Ordinary Affects,* Duke University Press, Durham.

St. Pierre, E.A. (1997), "Methodology in the fold and the irruption of transgressive data", *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, Vol. 10, No. 2, pp. 175-189.

St. Pierre, E. (2011), "Post qualitative research: The critique and the coming after", in Denzin N.K. and Y.S. Lincoln (Eds), *The Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research 4th edn*. (pp. 611–625). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

St. Pierre, E.A. (2016), "Rethinking the Empirical and the Posthuman", in Taylor, C.A. and Hughes, C. (Eds), *Posthuman Research Practices in Education*. Palgrave Macmillan, London, pp. 25-36.

St. Pierre, E.A. (2019), "Post qualitative inquiry in an ontology of immanence", *Qualitative Inquiry,* Vol. 25, No. 1, pp. 3-16.

St. Pierre, E. and Pillow, W. (2000), *Working the Ruins. Feminist Poststructural Theory and Methods in Education*. New York: Routledge.

Taylor, C.A. (2016), "Rethinking the empirical in higher education: Postqualitative inquiry as a less comfortable social science", *International Journal of Research and Method in Education*, Vol. 40, No. 3, pp. 311-324.

Taylor, C., Fairchild, N., Elmenhorst, C., Koro-Ljungberg, M., Benozzo, A. and Carey. N. (2019), "Bags choreographies: Disturbing normative ways of doing research", *Qualitative Inquiry*, Vol. 25, No. 1, pp. 17-25.

Weedon, C. (1997), *Feminist Practice and Poststructuralist Theory*. Blackwell, Malden, MA.

Yanow, D. and Tsoukas, H. (2009), "What is reflection-in-action? A phenomenological account". *Journal of Management Studies*, Vol. 46, No. 8, pp. 1339–1364.