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ORIGINAL ARTICLE

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Feminism in organization studies? It is a long story: A conversation between Silvia Gherardi and Lynne Baxter

Silvia Gherardi¹ | Lynne F. Baxter² 

¹University of Trento, Trento, Italy

²University of York, York, UK

Correspondence

Lynne F. Baxter, University of York, York, UK.

Email: lynne.baxter@york.ac.uk

Abstract

This paper is an edited version of a conversation between Silvia Gherardi and Lynne Baxter at the Inaugural Distinguished Speaker Event of the Gender, Materialities, and Activism Network. We learn about the development of Professor Gherardi's interest in feminism, how it evolves and informs her wider work on organization studies and methodology, and how she supports community development while advancing her own work. Moreover, there is a perceptive reflection from Professor Gherardi uncovering what the article, as written text, loses compared to the multisensory verbal encounter taking place in virtual space.

KEYWORDS

academia, affective ethnography, feminism, gender, new materialities, practice

1 | INTRODUCTION

The Inaugural Distinguished Speaker Event took place on the April 26, 2023 as an online conversation between Silvia Gherardi and Lynne Baxter in front of an audience from countries spanning the globe. We begin with some forethoughts from both authors on what they were thinking before the event. Lynne Baxter researched a series of questions that Silvia Gherardi did not see in advance. Then, at the heart of the paper is an edited version of the conversation. Verbal dialog is different from written text, and the transcript has been edited to remove repetitions and unnecessary words, something Professor Gherardi comments upon further in the concluding afterthoughts section of the paper.

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2 | FORETHOUGHTS

Lynne Baxter: When a group of us were gathering ideas on what our Gender Materialities and Activism Network could do, Sheena Vacchani suggested a distinguished speaker series. I thought it a great idea, and instantly knew whom I would like to be our inaugural speaker. For me Professor Gherardi has a unique place as an academic, with such breadth and depth to her contributions in four key areas: gender, practice theory, qualitative methods, and recently feminist new materialism. Over 5 decades, she has produced telling papers and books, and richly deserves to be considered one of our most pre-eminent management and organization scholars. It is important to remember that her career began at a time when feminism was in its second wave, and academics were mostly male. Eminent women academics are still comparatively rare—they were rarer still then. I personally began reading her work as a raw PhD student in 1987, and still react with joy when I discover she has something new published, even more notable considering she has been retired from a formal university position for almost 10 years.

When I approached her about being our inaugural distinguished speaker, Professor Gherardi was very generous in her acceptance, and wanted to have a more conversational session. I asked her with whom she wanted to have the conversation and was quite taken aback when the answer was me. Below is an edited version of what transpired at our April 2023 zoom-based Inaugural Distinguished Speaker Event. For the event I prepared by rereading many of her texts and developed questions intended to show the range and subtleties of Professor Gherardi's writing, as well as learn more about her career and how she works. Next, Professor Gherardi will let us know her thoughts before the event.

Silvia Gherardi: I was surprised and pleased with the invitation. Surprised because I have always felt that around me there is a community of scholars—women but also men—with whom I share an ethos of doing research and being in the academy in solidarity, but I never thought I had a particularly prominent place in this community. Pleased because I felt the honor of being called as an expert in that line of studies that I identify as feminist new materialism, on which I have not been working for long. I therefore expected a discussion on feminism and new materialism, certainly not as it transpired on my full intellectual path!

3 | OUR CONVERSATION

Lynne Baxter: I am very honored to have Professor Silvia Gherardi with us as part of the Network and our Inaugural Distinguished Speaker Event. Professor Gherardi is a senior professor and director of the Research Unit on Communication, Organizational learning and Aesthetics at the University of Trento, Italy. Professor Gherardi is famous for her contributions to gender studies, symbolism, gender citizenship, practice studies, knowing, and more recently for her work on theorizing affective ethnography. Professor Gherardi has published over 100 academic journals, and many, many books. In addition to receiving honorary degrees from the universities of Roskilde, East Finland, and St. Andrews, she has been a Visiting Professor at the universities of Aalto, Mälardalen, Macquarie, and Oslo. In 2018, she was the keynote speaker in Sydney at the Gender Work and Organization Conference.

Today I have the pleasure of asking Silvia some questions. Silvia—thanks so much for giving me your time, it is so much appreciated. It is special to hear your views on things, I so loved rereading your work. The breadth of coverage of the text, the types of topics that you discuss, and how you talked about them—I had almost too much choice in what questions I could ask. One of the things I was thinking about when I was preparing was to try and divide things up into categories—and then I realized that was a bit of a waste of time because everything has always been entangled for you in a rich texture.

There is a lovely story in your book 'Gender Symbolism and Organization Cultures' (Gherardi, 1995) about when you were a yacht captain, and you were entering a national competition with an all-female crew, and you won first prize. When you went up to receive your prize you were given a man's cologne, and that cologne was the same cologne as your father wore—not something appropriate at all. That showed to me how intertwined the concept of

gender and practice were, how they become institutionalized, and affect all joining into a deep texture. So, it has always been entangled for you has it not?

Silvia Gherardi: Yes. Thank you, Lynne, for telling this short story with which I started that book. But first, let me thank you for organizing this Inaugural Speech, and for the honor that I am receiving in making it. It is a pleasure to be here with you, to see friends [on the zoom] and make new friends. So, thank you for sharing this moment, because I think it is important to stay in contact in Academia, to meet and think together. This is a way of sharing and showing solidarity. And let me add one thing that you have not said in introducing me, thank you for introducing me, that I am actually retired. I retired in 2014, the same year as I married. Since then, I have had the pleasure of more time to continue reading, and a lot of new things I have written have come out in the last year. It is a privilege, after retirement, to be part of the network, to continue thinking about ideas and develop them together.

I started the book *Gender, Symbolism, and Organizational Cultures* (1995) by telling this story of racing at a sailing regatta. I was part of a female team of only two people. It was not a yacht, but just a small boat for young people. I was at High School, aged less than 20, and it was my first encounter with a sense that gender was there and was operating. It took place before 1968, before the feminist movement was well-known, so I had no words to say why I was upset. Instead of receiving a trophy like the first-, second-, and third-men's teams, there was this special prize for the female crew—a male cologne. I had a feeling of injustice, but I could not express it, because feminism was not there yet, and I had no words for expressing my uneasiness.

My getting into feminist thinking happened a few years later, after the political movements of 1968 and 69. I found the words to start thinking with other people on women's studies, then gender studies, and later posing the question whether we needed the concept of gender at all. It has taken many years, when I started there was very little in the way of thinking or books, so that was something to be constructed. Also, when I joined student movements, I sensed that was something wrong. Why should the women have to do all the 'domestic work' in the movement, and not talk in public assemblies? That was the beginning of thinking that maybe we needed to do things differently, to have self-awareness, and the impetus to find the big feminist philosophers. The impact of the French feminists—Luce Irigaray, Julia Kristeva, Hélène Cixous—was so important for us. Tomorrow morning, I will go and listen to Hélène Cixous at her seminar. When I am in Paris, I always do that. Italy also had its feminist movements. And if you think about it, we have come such a long way in thinking, elaborating, and communicating a feminist point of view. Recently philosophers, some of them my age, are thinking about materiality. With feminist new materialism we have another wave of a number of scholars with whom I feel really connected, in person not just thought, people who have become important in my life, in my intellectual career, and I feel part of a community.

Lynne Baxter: Feminism gave you the vocabulary of expressing the dissonance that you felt at that time, and it has developed over the decades since then, and there are new and different ways of expressing it through different materialities?

Silvia Gherardi: yes, of course!

Lynne Baxter: I was intrigued by your idea of gender citizenship, and I wondered what you felt about that concept now.

Silvia Gherardi: I have not thought about the concept of gender citizenship recently – to be honest I had forgotten about it. I think that comes from the time when I was working more with organizational culture. It was a way of expressing the idea that there could be a different culture for women and men in the workplace, a richer way of expressing things that should be known widely. It came from my extensive empirical work– it was my passion as a gender scholar to go to many different workplaces in different industries or the public sector. I researched a co-operative trade union for a long time, so I could touch places where feminist thought was more respected. Women could have a feeling of being at home in an organizational culture, or a group or a world. Not only maleness but also femaleness was at home, it was respected, so there were possibilities for doing gender differently. This is what I wanted to express with the idea of gender citizenship. I do not know if I will use it again.

Lynne Baxter: When I was reading the text, I was thinking that we might have different ways of expressing our affective dissonance about being othered, treated as second class citizens but we are still experiencing it, and I

thought that it was quite a useful concept in trying to think through how a different workplace might look like. It really intrigued me that way. What would a productive texture of feminist organizing look like for you?

Silvia Gherardi: I should say that I never felt at home with the idea of feminist organizing or feminist organization. In organization studies, I do not think that there is something like female leadership—that is a word that I really hate or that feminist organizing should be different. I would think in terms of degrees—there are degrees of organizing differently. I would prefer to talk about the organizing with care. Care is not only a feminist concept; it can also be used in a more ordinary way. Caring is something that organizations can do to try to organize differently, in a more democratic way. I feel uneasy saying that something is a feminist way of organizing and people should organize this way.

Lynne Baxter: Yes, it was a bit of a cheeky question, because I understand you see the multiplicities of gender, that things are constructed socially, materially, and relationally. In your early writing you seemed very keen to explore male sensibilities and different perspectives. And that is something that I have always taken from your work on methodology too, is to look at as many different perspectives as you can gather on a specific topic or entanglement.

Silvia Gherardi: Yes.

Lynne Baxter: Did your interest in how gender was done and undone foster your work on practice?

Silvia Gherardi: Yes, it is a bit like the story of the chicken and the egg. What came first—gender or practice and for me of course first was gender and feminism. But when I started theorizing practice theory, especially from a post-humanist approach the two things went together in a better way—can I say that? Meaning the reason for proposing a return to practice, for pushing this around 2000—so it is already 23 years ago and it was not new then—was a way of thinking with new wave practice theories that left behind Giddens, Bourdieu, Schatzki and a human-centered perspective. I was joining an interesting conversation that was going around on ethics, on epistemology, and ontology, with people like Karen Barad and Rosi Braidotti, but also a wider movement in philosophy, especially in empirical research to decentre the human subject. And for us, of course, the human subject is not a neutral subject—it is Man, masculinities, human exceptionalism—I will not repeat all of this because we all know it very well.

The possibility of looking at practice as a way of changing the border between ontology and epistemology was important. The awareness that your epistemic practices, that your ways of knowing, produce the object of knowledge was something that spread in different fields, in different conversations—feminist new materialism, posthumanism, but also post qualitative inquiry and many other conversations. It was easy to move towards 'the how question' and instead of asking 'what is friendship?' to asking—'how is friendship done?' so that you do not start from the human, the voluntary and so on. For me, it was taken for granted, coming from gender studies, saying from an ethnomethodological perspective that gender is something that you do. Organizational and working practices are something people do together as a collective, knowledgeable in the making. There was nothing new for me moving from what I had experienced in doing gender, to doing that with any other working practice, as a collective knowledgeable doing. Putting boundaries around a practice is a heuristic move, practices are not things out there that we study from outside in a dis-embodied way. To look at the implications for how we produce knowledge, so that we look at knowledge as something that people do together—our knowing practices in our empirical work—means considering what we do with our knowing practices and their effects and affects. I use the term *agencement* to stress how humans, more-than-humans, and discourses are entangled and the researcher as embodied knower is inside the research *agencement*. A posthumanist practice theory changes the concept of agency while de-centering the human subject.

And this is the big question that I think we have, and we have not yet tackled thoroughly, is how do we do empirical research when all the elements are entangled? The humans, the more-than-human, and discourse are emergent, and everything is always in motion. So how can you stop something in order to say 'This is this'—and this is related to that. We have a feeling that all these flows of agency are something that is going to change our epistemic practices. How do we do empirical research? The point about methodologies, how to do it step by step, how we approach reality, how we know what we know, and how we construct knowledge that matter in a way that recognizes this materiality and this epistemology. I think also we are still at the beginning of thinking about materiality as vibrant and agentic. We give voice to the materials but for me this is not the right way of doing it, we should not talk for the material. The

material has a voice that is different from the voice from the written word, is different from heard voices, so there is a semiosis that is different from talk and image.

I am still looking for good answers to know how to do research that relates to the force, to the vitality of all the materialities. All the materialities mean from the corporeal, that we are matter, to the earth, and to the material consequences of the practices that you practice, the Anthropocene. We are part of the world, and the knowledge that we produce is part of this world. You need this link to materialities, it is entangled in our knowing practices, and I think that we should still elaborate this better. This is my passion now.

Lynne Baxter: Yes, there are various ways that you have expressed this problem over the years. You have been interested in the unknowable. Sometimes it is obscure and sometimes it is flesh and blood. We try to engage to know things. It would probably be a waste if we had a direct correspondence, would it not, and it would ignore Barad.

Silvia Gherardi: Well, this is still what I am working around, that it is not only writing on affect about that affect, writing from within affect, but more generally how we account for knowledge in the making. This is why I was interested in not-yet knowledge, not-yet practice, and so on. And the problem is still open, as is to how we produce knowledge about that and how do we write about that? To write about affect is still tricky, and I am experimenting with the feminist concept of diffraction, diffractive reading and diffractive writing. This is why writing stories is like taking a sidestep. You do not talk straight to the arguments, so to speak, but you tell different stories about that argument. For example, I experimented, I picked up again the concept of embodiment—the meaning, what is it about, and feminism has already paid attention to materiality, why new materialism is a different way of relating to reality. Things are affected by the materiality of the body. There is the materiality of the world that is just a matter of something that is moving and is connecting and connected. Telling and using different stories to diffract these stories, one through the other is what I tried to do in writing a chapter on embodiment in the *Handbook of Phenomenologies and Organization Studies* (2023) which is published open access. I am also experimenting with this idea of diffraction because it is a way of breaking linearity. There is not one story in a multiplicity of stories, my co-authors (Jaramillo et al., 2023) and I are thinking how you can read a story one through another. A lot of you have been trying to write differently, that is also one way of doing this, but we read through our bodies, our corporeality. The text we read is already read through our affective relation to the text. When we write, producing another text out of our text, we bring all the affective links that have been created between them. The idea of intertextuality is nothing new, we write always from another text and from our reading of it. And this is why our individual readings are so different sometimes. It is not that the text has a single meaning, but that when we related to this text, we have our own readings of it, and it changes when our body and its moods change.

Lynne Baxter: Yes, in one of your recent chapters with Michela Cozza (Gherardi & Cozza, 2022) you used images which you normally do not do. We have been talking about relationships between the text, and sometimes—it is probably my own inadequacies with writing—the written text is not enough for me, and pictures and other ways of expressing things are helpful. In this chapter you used film to capture the movement of the materialities.

Silvia Gherardi: Writing and also reading are open-ended processes. With Michela Cozza, we have read a video through affect and the ambiguous becoming of a 'happy object'. It was a challenging process since 'writing differently' is not always well accepted in academia. With a colleague I am also experimenting with poetry. Now we have had the first rejection, maybe we have to wait for more rejections before producing a poetic text. But there are wonderful people writing wonderful texts and using other ways of writing, using poetry, using images like in collage. When you look at arts-based methodologies, people working with more freedom of expression or experimenting, I think we have to bring something of this into organization studies.

Lynne Baxter: We are probably just finding a different way to experience the same, but there is a juncture between what is intended and what is taken up by readers. I am quoting Barthes there (1977). What do you make of how other researchers have taken up your work?

Silvia Gherardi: Well, first I am grateful—and then, well it is really rewarding, and this is why I told you that I am retired. I am not writing for my career, because my career is done. I sympathize with people who have to publish or perish, that really is an issue, I do not want to dismiss the problem, but I now have the possibility of having the feeling

that I have contributed. Before [the zoom began] we were talking about affective ethnography, and I learn who refers to it, and in just a few years the label has been taken up so widely that I feel very happy, and proud because I put forward something that was meaningful for other people as well. Now people can say 'I am doing affective ethnography' and then my name, it is a way of legitimating doing embodied research. I have always enjoyed the feeling of doing something with other people, and how that can be presented. I have been writing a lot these last years because I had a contract in Sweden with the University of Mälardalen, so I collaborated with colleagues and friends there and elsewhere, and it is really nice to work with somebody else. Some time it is hard because it is challenging work, but it is also rewarding to see how differences can take a form. The feeling that we connect with each other through our writing has a nice expression in Italian: 'when you put a reference to somebody in writing it is like a greeting done from far away'. I always think about the person who is behind the written article. So, when I see you Lynne—that you quoted my affective ethnography, I think 'Oh, Lynne is greeting me.'

Lynne Baxter: I certainly was. So are my students.

Silvia Gherardi: I think that especially with writing within the gender studies family—whatever you like to call it—there is a way also of creating a community of waving to each other, forming a network of trust, solidarity, and so on. It is also a network of admiration, there are people that I admire. When I see that a new article is coming out by them, I make a point of reading it, because I expect to meet you in another material form, in another material mediation, because also, now [in the zoom] we are half a person, maybe half dressed, connecting only by image, and no smell, no touch, the sensing is limited. But we still have the feeling of being together, or different material mediations connect us though a plurality of materials.

Lynne Baxter: There was one time that we were in the back of a bus going from Naples front up the hills for a conference, and you were receiving lots of phone calls from the organizer because the keynote speaker was unobtainable, and they thought that you could step in that short notice and perform the keynote speech. I was horrified at this, I was worried for you, but you managed to cope with the situation with tremendous elan. So how did you manage to maintain your calmness in such circumstances?

Silvia Gherardi: Let me try to be polite. I had the feeling of being loyal to the organizers, and I also sympathized with the anxieties that they may have had. It was not a problem for me, because I had my pen drive with me so I could have done it. Also, the day before I had a feeling that I had to do it. I am sorry to be a little bit shocking here, but I have to say that if I am a keynote speaker, I get in touch with the organizers the day before, just to let them know that I am ready. I say 'See you tomorrow morning'—because, if you have ever been an organizer, you know the anxieties that are behind organizing—especially with a big conference. So, I would have done it—no question. I think that it is a matter of care. I do not want to make it a gender point, but what I think is that you should not only think about yourself and the task that you have to perform. While you are performing your task, you also think of other people that are performing their task around you. Your task does not take place in isolation, you should take care to recognize that it is entangled with that of others as you are working in a social community. This is also important in practice theory: how to keep a common orientation in practising.

Lynne Baxter: You mentioned care in research earlier, and I think there is a nice parallel here, this is drawing out one of the things I wanted to do in this event, because I am aware that some of the networks are early career researchers, and what is coming across rather beautifully is that reciprocal relations make academia a more tolerable space and a better place to work. This is a lovely theme that is coming out of our discussion.

Were there any formative experiences that you had that you would say were positive in developing you as a scholar?

Silvia Gherardi: Oh, my God I think that there have been so many! But I am unable to think of one especially, because I think I have met so many wonderful people with whom I collaborate, who have been a formative encounter for me, that they cannot all be mentioned. Well, in a sense I can. I can mention the experience that I had in my university with the network of people that I helped to set up. I set up two networks, or maybe more, but with the research unit in communication, organizational learning, and aesthetics (RUCOLA) and the interdisciplinary gender studies (CSG) there were years where I had the feeling of being in a formative context. Formative for people who

came to do research, but also for me, because I mean, it is formative in both ways. I still keep in touch with many of the former doctoral students from the 10 years when we ran a doctoral program in Information Systems and Organization at Trento, because we had a shared affective experience. It was a formative experience for me too because you are not born a supervisor, you become one, and so that is another example of organizing with care. We set up a Ph.D. program based on the idea of developing people's capacity, not teach 'top down' and I have been writing, not with all, but with many of these former Ph.D. students.

Something similar is my experience with the interdisciplinary center for gender studies (CSG) that is still going after 20 years and that I was active in setting up from a very simple idea. I knew gender scholars in other disciplines in my own university, and I suggested we work together to create something to give our students in engineering, economics, law, sociology, and in the humanities the opportunity to think with gender. Oh, it was hard, and I still remember that. Once it was set up, then in a sense I retired from the center. In the beginning I used my status as an established scholar to influence those higher up in the university hierarchy, but then, when the center was established, I wanted to pass the ball to the youngsters. I think that there is a need to change, and not only to give support, but to give opportunities to other people to do things differently, to do it in their way and not to be as us, older scholars. Sometimes you are oppressing others willingly or unwillingly. I do not think that you want to oppress, but you can be a disturbing presence. I stepped aside and let other people to get on with it. Because feminist historical thinking and the contemporary way of thinking is becoming different, and there is a need to protect innovation in what we do and how we do it and, at the same time, give other people the possibility of experimenting, maybe with things that I do not fully understand. It is a matter of trusting that something new will happen.

Lynne Baxter: Great, we are trying to do that in the network. I now have a question on writing—you are so prolific. What is your relation to writing?

Silvia Gherardi: Well, first of all, I like to write. I read a lot, and I especially like to write the first draft, because later on it may become painful to make yourself understood. I would never dare to go outside of the academic field, I never had the dream of writing as a novelist, but writing is about creating things with words, and I think that it is just wonderful to be able to do it. I have a good time writing. It is not always straightforward because sometimes I am unable to find the way to start, getting started is very, very difficult. And sometimes, if I have an image of how to start, and then things go smoothly.

But it is also true that I write a lot, I am used to taking notes. I think that I pile notes upon notes that most of the time are not useful at all. When I read something that makes me think then I write notes. I think that this was something useful that I started to do when learning grounded theory. I am still grateful for this experience. I am grateful to Barry Turner who actually trained me to do it -so that was one of the other formative encounters in my life, the idea of taking notes. I would say anytime that you have a thought just write it down and keep writing. Sometimes it is useful, because it helps me to remember a concept that pushed me to think. Writing is a way to see if I have found something interesting. Maybe I find out things that are not what I was looking for, but in this way, writing becomes habitual and creates a bank of work that I have already written. In this way, I can go back and re-discover the line of thought which made me think in that way and I keep the traces of it.

Lynne Baxter: For those that do not know Barry Turner wrote a great book about Man Made Disasters (Turner, 1978) which shows a beautiful use of grounded theorizing and analyzing qualitative materials; and also, a very interesting booklet with Silvia: 'Real Men Do Not Collect Soft Data' (Gherardi & Turner, 1987). Reading it was one of my own early formative experiences, and it is a book I treasure.

Finally, do you mind if I share something of yours with the audience? In our email conversations, you let slip one of your happy activities. Can you see any parallels between your sailing or skiing and your academic career?

Silvia Gherardi: Well, of course yes. Sailing was long ago, skiing is still there for me, that is a connection. First of all, when you do something physical, your thoughts go away. So, it is a happy thing to go to the mountains during the weekends and ski. To be in the nature doing something physical is a way to get rid of all the bad feelings that Academia gives you. At the weekend I can have a free mind, and I am a very physical person. I need to walk, to do something to keep my body happy! If my body is not happy because it has not moved, I will become physically

unhappy. This is a real need that my body reminds me of, and it is a way of refreshing the mind. So, I really need to do something physical all the time as a way of feeling my energies return.

Lynne Baxter: Thank you so much Silvia, for your time and care in answering my questions.

Silvia Gherardi: Thank you, it has been lovely.

4 | AFTERTHOUGHTS

Lynne Baxter: For me, the event achieved what I hoped for and more. Professor Gherardi explained the circumstances and motivations behind her conceptual contributions, and we learned much about her personal practices as an academic. What comes across is the vibrancy of her intellectual curiosity, evident in the strength of her theoretical work, and how it flourishes within and beyond the university. Professor Gherardi became interested in feminist thinking through her experiences of unfairness, something that resonates with many contemporary issues in the journal *Gender Work and Organization*. We gained insight into her empirical studies, and how she worked in organizations that demonstrated things could be different, which gave impetus for her research work and citizenship in the academy. I had not thought about academic practice as performed affective ethnography before, but I got a feeling of this in Professor Gherardi's telling of community building activities, designing spaces for gender to be studied, colleagues to blossom, and supporting harassed conference organizers. Too often the subscript of the neoliberal academy is that to be an eminent scholar you need to be instrumental with your time and relationships and not 'waste' effort. Professor Gherardi demonstrates that you can have a sustainable, eminent career by being aware of your community and contributing to its development, together with generating outstanding work. I suspect, as Silvia thinks when people reference her, many of us will continue to wave in gratitude to her throughout our own careers.

5 | SILVIA GHERARDI

The Latins said: 'verba volant, scripta manent', that is, words have a light materiality, once pronounced they go away with the wind, written words however behave differently, they remain because their materiality is inscribed in some medium, more or less durable but different from the outflow of breath.

It is an irreversible process that an author witnesses when she looks at the technological transformation whereby her voice 'dal sen fuggita'¹ have become written words. The words have hardened and have lost that last trace of carnality which bound them to her body. Their colour and scent no longer exist. Without this light carnality, how does the author recognize those words as 'her' words? If then the author uses a 'foreign' language, his words are less than hers or on the contrary they are more than hers because they have been appropriated by the authors in an educational process that is other than the natural one, of the mother tongue. Perhaps the foreign language is a father tongue that has been mediated by other-than-mother codes.

In reading the transcript of the conversation between Lynne and me, it was as if I was looking at a different me than what I think about myself. That me which is reflected in the words spoken and which are now written, does not have my eyes. She looks at me and asks me if I recognize myself in that discursive ego, in that discursive ego co-constructed together with Lynne. My voice is her voice—together with her—our voice is a multi-populated and multi-sited *agencement*. Lynne was presumably alone in her room, but perhaps a cat was walking around behind her, I was alone in my room but we were scattered in many other rooms where we spoke with other presences that were not present with us, presences also made up of no physical presence, they were absent-present. Can I still speak of a discursive me? Whose is this voice that appears in written form and asks me to be recognized: is it as mine or as ours? Or is it yours, the readers? The voice is a fiction. And it is this conclusion that I came to thinking about how difficult it is to read a transcript, but also how grateful I am to Lynne for generating a great epistemological question. Who is the 'I' behind a text? What if there is no 'I' at all?

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

There are no conflicts of interest associated with this paper.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

ORCID

Lynne F. Baxter  <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1202-0204>

ENDNOTE

¹ This is a well-known quotation attributed to Pietro Metastasio (1774):

voce dal sen fuggita voice of the sen fled
non si trattien lo strale then calling back is not valid
poi richiamar non vale do not hold back the arrow
quando dall'arco uscì once it came out of the arch

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AUTHOR BIOGRAPHIES

Silvia Gherardi is a senior professor of Sociology of Organization at the University of Trento in Italy, where she founded the Research Unit on Communication, Organizational Learning, and Aesthetics (www.unitn.it/rucola). She is also a Professor II at the School of Business, Society and Engineering, Mälardalens University in Sweden. She received Honorary Doctoral Degrees from Roskilde University (2005), East Finland University (2010), and St Andrews University (2014). Her research interests include: feminist new materialism, entrepreneurship, epistemology of practice, and post qualitative methodologies in organization studies. Recent publications include 'How to Conduct Practice-Based Studies: Problems and Methods' (Edward Elgar, 2019) in collaboration with Michela

Cozza, *The Posthumanist Epistemology of Practice Theory* (Palgrave, 2023), in collaboration with Francois-Xavier de Vaujany and Polyana Silva, *Organization Studies and posthumanism* (Routledge, 2024).

Lynne F. Baxter is a Senior Lecturer in Management Systems at the University of York. She is currently researching materialities and gender, using post-qualitative methodologies. In addition, she helps organize the Gender Work and Organization network Gender, Materialities, and Activism as well as being an Associate Editor of the Gender Work and Organization journal.

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