Writing differently by experiencing 'aesthetic episodes' as a researcher – vulnerable insights from the field

Abstract

This paper aims at reflecting upon the value of aesthetic experiences of the researcher in academic writing. More specifically, this paper explores the ways we can write differently about organizational phenomena by experiencing 'aesthetic episodes' in the field. In this paper, I share examples of the 'aesthetic episodes' that I as a researcher have experienced during three different research projects. I find these examples as a way to elaborate on ethical and more sensory appreciative approaches to writing, as well as develop questions around voicing marginal research areas in organization studies. The paper identifies three aspects: appreciating 'sensory cues', writing 'in and from the flesh', and allowing vulnerability to flourish, which allow the researcher to experience 'aesthetic episodes' in the field. This paper argues that by experiencing 'aesthetic episodes' as researchers we can challenge the hegemonic and masculine traditions of academic writing, and develop the ways we write in academia into a more delicate and vulnerable directions.

Keywords: aesthetics, ethics, researcher's embodiment, senses, vulnerability, academic writing.

Introduction

> "You see another woman standing there, leaning against the hospital's wall – shaking and crying – and you think 'okay, here we go. I'm prepared for the worst (again), prepared for those destroying news'. But you hold out that *small moment of feel*, filled with absolute gratefulness of this unique companionship between you and your dog, see, and that's what makes you keep going on one hand, and hurts you deeply on the other." (An autoethnographic research note, outside The Veterinary Teaching Hospital of the University of Helsinki, Finland, 20 June 2017)

How do we write from the sensory body in ways that can convey the lived experience of both the researcher and the researched and allow other researchers to make sense of their lived experiences, too? What alternative writings could transform the (masculine) academia through dialogue and relational reflection? In this paper, I question the tendency to appreciate only the intellectual (and hence) disembodied dimensions of academic writing. As such, this paper takes seriously the meaningfulness of the researcher's embodied and sensory-based presence in the field. As the opening quote renders visible, daring to write in and about our vulnerable selves as researchers opens up new possibilities in how and to what extend we actually can write about our own lived experiences we are surrounded by, and how these kinds of writings could enrich the 'taken-for-granted neutrality of the ways in which organization studies is written and theorized' (Phillips et al., 2014: 327).

In this paper, I build on recent literature on organizational aesthetics and aesthetic experiences (for example Koivunen and Wennes, 2011; Ropo and Sauer, 2008; Strati, 2013; Taylor, 2002; Warren, 2008) in order to explore the ways we can write academic texts differently by sharing topics, sentiments and thoughts about something we feel intensely about

and currently experience ourselves – not only as researchers, but as human-beings. Here, I understand aesthetic experiences as deriving from the idea that 'our lives, actions and reflections have a certain subjective feel' (Tomkins and Eatough, 2013: 261-262) to us. It has been argued that the embodied dimensions of academic research practices are entwined with how one writes scientific texts (Essén and Värlander, 2012; Pullen, 2006). However, to date relatively little attention has been paid to *how* exactly academic writing is entwined with the researcher's aesthetic experiences, based on his or her imagination, emotions and other fine-grained perceptions, in (and outside) the field. Moreover, the aesthetic episodes experienced by the researcher may not only make him or her involved with the research phenomenon in fundamentally embodied ways, but they may also trigger novel ways of writing 'differently' in academia and, by so doing, discourage 'pompous and impenetrable writing' (Grey and Sinclair, 2006: 443).

In order to build this argument, I aim at developing the notion of 'aesthetic episodes' experienced by the researcher in the field. In this paper, I use research material from three separate (auto)ethnographic studies, which discuss the (marginal) topics of embodied work in professional dance, academic motherhood and dog-human companionship. All these studies have been profoundly personal and intimate topics for me as a researcher and therefore, in my view, illustrate insightfully the ways academic writing (and thinking too) could be done differently by allowing the sentimental, fragile, vulnerable, and sometimes even desperate thoughts of the researcher to be voiced too.

There are organizational scholars who have expressed a growing interest in the embodied aspects of organizational life (for example Atkinson, 2013b; Ladkin, 2013; Ropo and Sauer, 2008; Strati, 2016; Taylor and Hansen, 2005; Warren, 2008). In my view, however, these scholars have not paid enough closely attention to how the 'aesthetic episodes' experienced by the researcher in the field might develop the ways she or he is able to write about the topic she

or he is studying. On the other hand, although organizational researchers have widely discussed the dynamics related to the issue of subjectivity (e.g. Hayes et al. 2016), researcher's positions (e.g. Berger, 2015; Bucerius, 2013; Crowley, 2007; Enguix, 2012; Haynes, 2011; Orrico, 2015) and the dilemma of 'othering' (e.g., Krumer-Nevo and Sidi, 2012; see also Marcos and Denyer, 2012), the aesthetic side of the researcher's subjectivity has yet received only marginally attention. Therefore, through giving examples of the three separate research projects mentioned above, I wish to extend the existing literatures of the aesthetic side of thinking about and doing research, and by so doing – also to writing differently in academia.

The sensing researcher in the field

According to DeLuca and Batts Maddox (2016: 286) the knowledge gained through the research process is 'always mediated through the self'. The discussion on the different positions and the switches between these positions that a researcher may take in relation to the research phenomenon has often done around the concepts of insider and outsider research. While some have considered these positions to be generally context specific (Cui, 2015: 358), others have emphasized the possibility for a researcher to take on the 'dual role' of an insider in one setting and an outsider in another (Leigh, 2014). In line with this idea of a 'dual role', Enguix (2012: 79) argues that the researcher's position in the field is constantly negotiated within a complex process of 'anthropological difference construction', and affected by various emotional loadings between the researcher and the researched (see Whiteman, 2010).

However, despite of a few examples (Essén and Värlander, 2012; Grey and Sinclair, 2006; Pullen, 2006; Whiteman, 2010) there is not much research done in the field of organization studies addressing how the researcher's aesthetic involvement, derived from her intimate and vulnerable experiences related to the research topic. Therefore, within organization studies, there is a need for works that recognize the researcher as a feeling and embodied agent, too. I view aesthetics, involving senses, bodily memory and emotion, as a suitable

epistemological perspective for this purpose and in line with Page et al. (2014) I argue that doing aesthetic research entails the sensory, affective dimensions of lived experience. Therefore, accepting us, the researchers as, vulnerable agents in the field and writing openly about our embodied experiences may open up totally new kinds of possibilities to understand both the research phenomena under study and to write differently research accounts in ways in which the feminine will not be suppressed, but rather openly expressed (see Pullen, 2006).

I argue that attention to this aspect would also allow for a more holistic understanding of the meaning of the aesthetic involvement of the researcher with the phenomenon in focus. This would reveal the potential of the researcher's 'aesthetic episodes' during the research process in general, as well as the ways in which the aesthetic episodes experienced by the researcher in the field affect the ways of 'how we see and understand' the research phenomenon as an 'aesthetic counter' (cf. Freeman, 2014: 827) and the researcher as an embodied, vulnerable agent in the field.

Embodied experience at the heart of an aesthetic episode

Our bodies are fundamental to us; they are changing, temporal sites and biological forces where agency, body fluids, experiences and social meanings are constantly co-created, negotiated and processed (for example Borgerson, 2005). Therefore, when we perceive others, we always perceive them as fundamentally corporeal (Strati, 2007). I approach embodiment as the sensation of inhabiting a body that moves and feels (Noland, 2009), and agree with Adamson and Johansson (2016: 4) who write that embodiment serves as a 'key to understanding the lived experiences of professional work', and experience as a way of understanding organizations (Rippin, 2013).

Also, I approach aesthetic experiences as closely attached to the notion of embodied agency. Here, we view agency as a sense of self-assertion and reaching beyond the (bodily)

limits produced by the cultural norms and expectations we are surrounded by (Satama, 2017). In other words, I stress the dynamics of subjectivity; to us, the individual can act and gain a sense of agency despite being constrained by surrounding norms, structures and societal expectations. Embodied agency is thus viewed as the source of aesthetic experiences, based on aesthetic sensitivity to which the researcher immerses him- or herself during the fieldwork.

Therefore, in my view, the researcher's aesthetic sensitivity materializes as 'felt-experience of being' (Ladkin, 2013: 321). In the spirit of Warren (2008: 560-561), I define aesthetic sensitivity as universal and embodied ways of experiencing the world in an involuntary, overwhelming and short-lived manner. Here, experiencing especially refers to the 'ways that our lives, actions and reflections have a certain subjective feel' (Tomkins and Eatough, 2013: 261-262) to us. Aesthetic sensitivity has been found critical for researchers to present themselves more authentically as part of their studies (see Whiteman, 2010: 335), which requires both their personal proximity and empathy to the research participants. Recognition of the 'inherently subjective' (Taylor, 2002: 822) nature of aesthetic sensitivity is valuable for understanding the sensory and bodily aspects of fieldwork especially because it demands looking at the research phenomenon either from the researcher's or the research participants' perspective.

The previous studies on aesthetic experience in the social sciences have been conducted in diverse contexts, which include art (Joy and Sherry, 2003; Woodward and Ellison, 2010), education (Mack, 2015; Paul, 2009; Raikou, 2016), music-recording (Siciliano, 2016), walking in the cities (Stevenson, 2015) and urban traffic (Taylor, 2003). The overall message of the studies that have addressed the aesthetic sensitivity of the researcher as a way in which he or she can become closer with the research topic (for example Atkinson, 2013a; Taylor, 2002; Pink, 2009; Warren, 2008) is that it can help the researcher to understand the feelings of the research participants in a way that develops his or her sense of reflexivity and researcher skills

(Gray, 2008). Relatedly, researcher's bodily-based (Ladkin, 2013: 320), sensory (Mason and Davies, 2009; Pink, 2009), and lived experience (e.g., Stanley, 2015) also deserve a role at least in *ethnographic* fieldwork.

Finally, Helin (2013) argues that the researcher especially uses the senses in the 'dialogic listening' of the research participants as means to find out how to continue with the research process. However, these studies have not taken seriously the ways the researcher might benefit from the fine-grained aesthetic episodes continuously experienced in the field in order to write differently about organizational life. In this study, my aim is to provide with illustrative examples of the ways one can accept oneself as a vulnerable and relational researcher in the field by experiencing 'aesthetic episodes' and, by so doing, interrupt the masculine, rational, and 'masterful' forms of academic writing (Pullen and Rhodes, 2015).

Methodological starting points

All the three studies explored in this paper rely on critical sensory methodology (Mason and Davis, 2009; Warren, 2008), which draws not only on the five senses of sight, sound, touch, taste and smell, but also on the less-acknowledged sensory experiences (Pink, 2009), which are culturally and socially (re)produced (Sunderland et al., 2012). More specifically, the method of autoethnography is used in all the three studies analysed here. Autoethnography as a form of ethnography of 'rewriting selves in the social world' (Denshire, 2014: 831), suited the purposes for the bodily-based studies described here. In autoethnography, the research subject explores specific phenomena based upon her own, subjective experiences (Haynes, 2011). The strengths of autoethnography include capturing highly personal, embodied, emotional and in-depth insights of a specific research topic (Spry, 2001; Wall, 2006). In contrast, difficulties of remaining critical about the research and potential role conflicts remain, as the researcher is

both the producer of the research material, and the one who analyzes and reflects upon it (Karra and Phillips, 2008).

The first study explored in this paper is a sensory ethnography of professional dancers' embodied agency. I conducted the fieldwork among professional dancers in 2011–2014, and had practiced dance since I was a child. Therefore, I already had life-long, bodily experiences of dance and many close friends working as professional dancers before starting this study. This forced me to explore unusual things in the context that was usual for me (see Carlsen and Sandelands, 2015: 375), and allowed me to situate myself "as a living body of thought" (Homan Stones, 2016: 228) throughout researching the dancers' work.

The second study introduced in this paper is an auto-ethnographic study written by two mothers(to-be) and early-career researchers, of which I am the other one. Throughout working on this study, I openly discussed with my close colleague the lived and vulnerable maternal experiences – in all their ambiguity, materiality and corporeality. The autoethnographic material used in this study had been gathered in personal diaries during before and after the birth of babies of us two. In this exemplary study, autoethnography as a method worked as a reflexive practice, a method in which two 'critical friends' worked together, experienced and related to academic motherhood together, and produced novel insights in relation with each other (see Gilmore and Kenny, 2015: 73; see also Helin, 2016).

Finally, the third study, explored the affective companionship between me and my beloved dog. My three-year-old dog was diagnosed with the fatal chronic kidney disease (CKD) at the age of one and a half years, and when writing about my experiences of our female-canine companionship, I was currently living through borderlines between life and death as well as joy and mourning. In this study, the aim was at describing and analysing the touching case of me and my dog, and in this way, develop the sensuous understanding of academic writing practices (see Essén and Sandelands, 2015). Therefore, in line with the other two studies mentioned

above, this study also exemplified the value of the vulnerabilities of the researcher in order to transmit powerful emotional experiences to wider scholarly audiences.

The empirical material of the three exemplary studies described above consists of field notes, autoethnographic diary notes, as well as photographs taken by me and the research participants. However, for the sake of the argument of this paper, I focus here only on the autoethnographic field notes and diary notes, and decided to leave the visual material of these studies out. In overall, this paper's methodological argument highlights the lived, sensuous and overlapping experiences of the researcher and the research participants (Stevenson, 2015: 4). For me, doing research is an embodied practice, and it is always relational and dialogical in nature (compare for example Helin, 2016). In an attempt to writing differently, I emphasize feminine and aesthetic styles of writing, which might help us to challenge the masculine stereotypes of writing academic papers in rational, disembodied, rigorous and rather distant ways (for example Cixous, 1976; Biehl-Missal, 2015). In this sense, the writing of this paper thus resembles a physical exercise (see Biehl-Missal, 2015: 179) in which open-minded wondering and passion for doing research is emphasized (Carlsen and Sandelands, 2015).

I acknowledge the gendered nature of all writing and wish to challenge the 'taken-for-granted neutrality of the ways in which organization studies is written and theorized' (Phillips et al., 2014: 327). Therefore, I must, of course, continuously avoid romanticizing my intimate research topics. Furthermore, studying sensitive organizational topics is sometimes socially undesirable (King et al., 2012: 504), and especially motherhood and dog-human-companionship, explored in this paper, I believe, are illustrative examples of such areas of research.

Opening an aperture for experiencing 'aesthetic episodes' in the field: three viewpoints to writing differently

Appreciating 'sensory cues'

I start by describing how the 'blurred' aesthetic moments in the field were based on my sensitivity for sensory cues when being in the field. To give an example, the following empirical extract illustrates the very delicate 'sensory cues' that were continuously happening between me and my dog:

> "It was Friday morning. Usually when I woke up my two retrievers always followed me upstairs. But this time my dog stayed downstairs on her own bed, and came upstairs a moment later than usually. This seemed somewhat strange for me. I sensed something was wrong but didn't know what and therefore, I thought it was just a silly piece of my imagination. Maybe I had become too sensitive as the sister of my dog had been diagnosed with kidney failure and euthanized just a week ago." (Notes from autoethnographic diary, 6 October 2015)

As the empirical extract above illustrates, paying attention to the smallest nuances in the interaction between me and my dog helped not only to identify the gestural nuances female-canine companionship, but also to practice my embodied agency in the field. The empirical extract above also renders visible the potentials and limitations of alternative research that recognizes our vulnerable, organized relations with animals in the field of organization studies.

In a similar way, when doing field work in the context of professional dance, by using my aesthetic sensitivity and embodied empathy with the dancers' struggles I was able to identify characteristics of the dancers' embodied work that would have otherwise remained hidden in my writing. Concretely, I was able to differentiate between the dancers' moments of joy and

suffering as a consequence of their attempts to attain the ideals of the balletic body, as the following empirical extract illustrates:

> "The executive secretary led me into a huge rehearsal studio in which a morning class was about to start. I sat on the floor on the left side of the studio, next to the entrance. One of the dancers was practicing in the middle of the studio, while the trainer was following her with a strict look on his face. The dancer was practicing fouettée pirouettes, which can be considered one of the technical benchmarks of a professional dancer. Just a moment before another dancer had turned several of them smoothly and looked seemingly satisfied, standing relaxed now in the back corner of the studio and giving judging glances at the other dancer trying to do her best in a similar manner. The atmosphere was tense and I could sense the competitive atmosphere between the two dancers. The trainer encouraged the dancer: 'Everybody hates the left side, it's horrible, it's built that way. So don't get pissed off yet!' I felt distressed for the dancer and the smallest muscles in my legs moving even though I was staying still and quiet on the floor." (Field note extract, the Dutch National Ballet, 16 August 2011)

As visible in the episode above, I lived along with the struggle that the dancers were going through and so shared their aims of reaching the ideal body. Concurrently, by sensing the sweaty efforts of the dancers throughout my body, I also became 'aesthetically involved' in the episodes in the field and thus, practiced embodied agency as well. The following auto-ethnographic note also illustrates my attempts of empathizing with the 'sensory cues' of the dancers' mundane, sweaty work in the field:

> "How come it was so hard to perform these kinds of routine-based movements perfectly, even if they [the dancers] were all top-level professionals? It seemed that the dancers were aiming at 'never-achieved' perfection, which, therefore,

> created a feeling of frustration in me. I felt a flow of adrenaline going through my body as the dancer tried to do as many perfect pirouettes as she could. Moreover, it felt cruel as the dancers had to be under the constant gaze of others. After the 90-minute morning class the dancers divided into small groups to practise different works in the rehearsal studios. I already felt very exhausted both mentally and physically, but decided to go along with the female soloist who familiarised me with different parts of the building." (Notes from auto-ethnographic diary, the Dutch National Ballet, 16 August 2011)

The note above illustrates how I also experienced pain and emotional exhaustion in the field as I lived along with the dancers' endless repetition of movements. The 'aesthetic episode' I lived through in the described scene above was only a short moment, but it involved powerful sensations that told a lot about the research phenomenon, about me as the researcher, and triggered sensuous ideas of how I could write about all these. Therefore, these kinds of quickly passing moments of aesthetic involvement that I experienced became an essential part of this study.

Writing 'in and from the flesh'

'Texts are written by bodies', Pullen and Rhodes (2015: 92) argue, and I totally agree. Therefore, fleshy closeness is another aspect that I identified as a central element in experiencing 'aesthetic episodes' as a researcher in the field. Flesh is ontologically slippery and definitionally elusive. For Merleau-Ponty (1964), flesh reconnects the viewing and the visible, the touching and the touched, the body and the world. It is therefore an important concept in developing the relational understanding between the (researcher) self, the others and the world around us (see for example Bathurst and Cain, 2013; Cunliffe, 2009).

Therefore, I continue by illustrating how aesthetic episodes materialized in a fleshy, material relation when working on a study about young academic motherhood between me and

my close colleague. Working on this research topic was a relational endeavour, and a truly emotional and embodied process (Essén and Winterstorm Värlander, 2012; see also Valtonen et al., 2017), enabling questioning the existing traditions of what and how we should write in academia. By applying memory-work as a method, we realized how we were far from alone with our experiences and hence, experienced 'spontaneous growth' when experiencing aesthetic episodes *together*. For example, the following note, illustrating the various insecurities and vulnerabilities related to one's academic and maternal identity, exemplifies the ways we talked about our doubts openly together when analysing and writing about our fleshy, maternal experiences:

> "I was afraid that 'everything would be different' after having a baby, as the nurse at the maternity clinic told me and which I didn't want to happen. Would I want to stay at home for years, dedicating all of myself and all my time to my child? I was happy with my life as it was and therefore, I navigated between the thoughts of joy and anxiety when envisioning what my (academic) life would be like with a baby." Notes from autoethnographic diary, 15 February 2015)

I believe that sharing our embodied sensations and experiencing 'aesthetic episodes' during our mutual discussions helped us to identify the most intensive tensions of our discussions. While experiencing anxiety and insecurity about our situation as new mothers, we still strived to find ways to develop as researchers, and openly discussed our mutual, fleshy experiences of working in academia, as the following quote renders visible:

> "All the talk about pregnancy brain, 'weak' female embodiment or absentmindedness has actually began to irritate me. My entire body is still engaged with work, and I mostly feel empowered by my intellectual endeavour. I am as committed to research as always, and although I believe I listen very

> carefully to my body, it is currently not telling me to perform less." Notes from autoethnographic diary, 1 November 2014)

Above, the quote illustrates the fleshy sensations that we shared throughout the research process. I remember that when listening to my colleague talking as described above, I experienced strong, emotional empathy and mutual connection with her ideas. This was thus an 'aesthetic episode' experienced relationally between us, the two researchers. In my view, our discussions were always (bodily) stimulating, and certainly affected the ways we later wrote about our thoughts.

Another example from the context of dance illustrates how sometimes those being studied may *assume* and even *expect* me to become 'aesthetically involved' in the rehearsal situation:

> I followed the female dancer to the rehearsal studio in which the male dancer, the trainer and the pianist were already waiting. Even if the atmosphere was relaxed, I felt stressed about being part of the rehearsal situation, as I needed to follow the scene empathetically with concentration. The dancers gave short looks to me, and the trainer gave the pianist a mark to start playing. The scene started with the male dancer walking from the corner across the stage. The trainer interrupted him several times by arguing: "No, no, you're not conveying the emotion deeply enough to the audience now. Let's try it again!"
>
> After several restarts with the walk the trainer sitting beside me asked me: "Did you see the difference?" I felt a bit confused by her question, but replied with an insecure tone in my voice: "Yes, absolutely". Meanwhile, the female dancer smiled at me empathetically as she knew it was a matter of such small nuances that were almost impossible to recognize without being a professional dancer. Still, I felt thrilled with my involvement in those moments of action. (Field note

extracts and notes from auto-ethnographic diary, the Dutch National Ballet, 16 August 2011)

Thus, the moments of 'aesthetic episodes' became visible through a relational, fleshy interplay between me and the research participants and through the trainer's active support to involve me in the rehearsal. Therefore, although I felt like an outsider in the context of the Dutch National Ballet, through the moments of aesthetic involvement I was able to combine my understanding of the culture of ballet with my analytical capabilities and by so doing, make interpretations (and write about them too) that would have been otherwise probably impossible to tease out.

In my study of the dog-human-relationship the fleshy closeness between me and my dog became obvious during the black moments that I experienced with her after talking with the veterinarian experts, as the following autoethnographic note illustrates:

> Six months later, in February 2016, I drove to Helsinki with my dog for further examinations to find out what exactly was wrong with her. The diagnosis was chocking: she had chronic kidney disease, IRIS stage 2. She was given from 1 month to a couple of years of time to live. For the following week, I was struggling with mixed emotions of relief and anxiety; on the one hand, it was relieving to finally talk with a veterinarian who was very professional and seemed to know a lot about this disease. On the other, I felt so sad for my dog and disappointed for our companionship. What if she lived for another month only? For me it felt absolutely impossible to let her go so soon. The responsibility and the power that I have over her life is frightening. How do I know when it's time for her to go and for me to decide to put her on sleep? Will she show me somehow if she is suffering? (Notes from autoethnographic diary, 15 February 2016)

Above, the 'aesthetic moment' of realizing that I was going to lose my dog during the following few years forced me to write down even the most painful, fleshy sensations I was currently living through. I remember of having the feeling for 'there was something special in these experiences, I must write these down', and so did I. Later on, I made continuous moves in-between my original diary notes, more abstract constructions produced during the analysis, and the research literature, which provided conceptual anchorages for my ideas about female-canine companionship visible in the empirical extracts.

Allowing vulnerability to flourish

I close the analysis by describing the meaningfulness of vulnerability in experiencing 'aesthetic episodes' as a researcher in the field, and, by so doing, to write differently. Here, I understand vulnerability as entailing both physical and mental challenges, which I do not consider only as negative consequences for people at work (compare Mullen et al., 2012; Tarr and Thomas, 2011), but instead aspects which empower the people's embodied sense of self. Inspired by Gherardi et al. (2007), I thus view vulnerability as the painful, yet strengthening side of a passionate commitment towards one's work, deriving from our bodily experiences.

Entering the private life of the dancer under study offered me a chance of experiencing the vulnerabilities of the dancer in a powerful manner that later materialized in other situations of close interaction with her. The following empirical extract illustrates this aspect:

> "As the years passed by, the dancer often invited me to her home. Those were the moments that I felt like I was becoming a true friend of her. Once, we left her home as she'd had to rush to the theatre to prepare herself for the forthcoming show. Suddenly she said in the elevator, "Don't tell anybody, but I'm pregnant. It's only in the very beginning and only my closest friends know. Somehow it's easy to tell this to you…" I felt privileged for her openness to

> share such a private issue with me." (Notes from auto-ethnographic diary, 14 April 2013)

The note above enlightens how the dancer was 'constructing' her intimacy in relation to me by sharing a private experience about becoming a mother. This particular note also illustrates how my and the dancer's embodied experiences became entwined through the cultural and gendered backgrounds behind them. Therefore, the researcher's willingness to create an open-minded atmosphere, allowing all the vulnerabilities to be mutually shared, may also contribute to the nature of the knowledge shared and produced mutually throughout the research process and the ways it is written upon.

On the other hand, by using feminist dog-writing as an embodied and relational activity (see Haraway, 2008; Thoresen and Ahlén, 2015) in my study of the dog-human companionship, I believe that rich, personal and alternative writings in the field of organization studies could be produced. Especially, when allowing myself to be a vulnerable researcher, writing in more delicate and touching ways that the existing academic traditions have not encouraged to do (see for example Pullen and Rhodes, 2015), may trigger totally new perspectives to academic *thinking* practices as well, as the following autoethnographic note illustrates:

> "The thought of realizing that my son won't grow up with my dog for the next ten years, as I had expected, still makes me feel a bittersweet ache in my heart. Even so, it is strange how, during the past few months, my initial sensations of deep grief, despair and frustration have changed into the sensations of great gratitude, happiness and joy. My senses have become more sharpened. I have become prepaid for the death of my dog, and I now view it as an inseparable part of our lives." (Notes from autoethnographic diary, 10 June 2016)

As the note above describes, the vulnerable researcher in the field enables a more human aspect to academic writing to exist, and provokes to think about how, why and to whom we, after all, write (Grey and Sinclair, 2006). Therefore, the embodied and emotional resources of organizational researchers are in many ways still under-used (see for example Essén and Värlander, 2012).

Finally, by giving an example of the study of academic motherhood, I wish to illustrate the elaboration in the mutual writing process, which was largely based on accepting us as vulnerable humans, and now having a daring attitude towards writing our vulnerable selves into academic texts. Our elaboration followed loosely the idea of a 'pair interview method' (Gilmore and Kenny, 2015: 61) and more precisely the method of 'memory-work' (e.g. Fraser and Michell, 2015; Onyx and Small, 2001), in which the idea is to collectively analyze individually written memories of everyday experience (Onyx and Small, 2001: 773; 775). When discussing the research topic together, we emphasized with each other's thoughts, which in turn helped us to create a supportive and appreciative atmosphere, in which even the most fragile experiences could be shared and discussed, as the following note illustrates:

> "Given my appreciation for freedom and flexibility committing to research, family, friends and all the things I enjoyed in life, it was never self-evident for me to desire children. Was 29-year-old me suddenly feeling the biological clock ticking (oh, what a horrible and repressive expression, like all women would ever feel such urge!), or was I suddenly aware of the culturally *learned* desires for children? What would happen to me as an academic if I got pregnant? What would I possibly have to give up? It all felt utterly confusing and still quite new and exciting, given that I had never changed a diaper in my life." (Notes from autoethnographic diary, 6 January 2015)

As close friends and co-workers, we supported each other in negotiating our multiple subjectivities. We found it helpful and empowering to share experiences with each other throughout the research process, and in this way 'nurture' each other analytically. Taken together, the aesthetic episodes described above were meaningful for the analysis of the entire studies especially because they enabled me as a researcher to practice embodied agency. As a result, I was able to make more fine-grained interpretations of the sensory-based aspects of the research phenomena, and most importantly, able to write differently about sensuous aspects of our lives to academia.

Concluding thoughts

Drawing on three aesthetic and highly personal studies, my aim has been to introduce and illustrate how a researcher may experience 'aesthetic episodes' in the field and, by so doing, write differently academic texts. Overall, by viewing aesthetics as an epistemological perspective that highlights emotions, embodied knowledge and memory derived from our senses (Ropo and Sauer, 2008; Strati, 1992, 1999; Taylor and Hansen, 2005) I aimed to shed light on the ambiguous ways in which I experienced aesthetic moments in the field. In the same spirit, I argue that in organization studies, ethnographic approach should be understood to build on embodied, sensory-based moments continuously flowing during the research process.

Based on the three separate studies analysed in this paper, I identified three key aspects of aesthetic episodes which are at the heart of experiencing them. The key aspects partly overlapped as they all involve aesthetic characteristics, and in this way, support one another. First, appreciating 'sensory cues' was materialised in the mundane, fine-grained moments between me and the research participants that I carefully paid attention to and reflected on in my writing processes. Second, writing 'in and from the flesh' reconnects the viewing and the visible, the touching and the touched, the body and the world, and was therefore an important aspect in

developing the relational understanding between the (researcher) self, the others and the world (see for example Bathurst and Cain, 2013; Cunliffe, 2009). Finally, allowing vulnerability to flourish related to my consent of being a vulnerable researcher in the field and, by doing so, develop my writing skills into more delicate and touching directions that the existing academic traditions have not encouraged to do (Pullen and Rhodes, 2015).

Throughout this paper, my aim has been to illustrate how research is s a relational and not an individual endeavor, as the tendency in academia seems to be (Hardy et al., 2001). In a similar way, writing a scientific research paper together is an emotional and embodied process (Essén and Winterstorm Värlander, 2012; see also Valtonen et al., 2017; Viteritti, 2013). Our positions as researchers in academia are always situated, both socio-culturally and historically (for example Ashcraft, 2006; Pullen, 2006), and relationally 'done, undone and re-done' (Pecis, 2016: 7) in the everyday interactions in the context we are part of. Therefore, in the spirit of Spry (2001), I call on our bodies 'as a site of scholarly awareness'.

In this paper, I have also aimed to discuss how you can move inductively from personal evidence to academic themes. There are several advantages in writing emotionally in academia even if 'grief or heartbreak is rarely captured within our management texts' (Whiteman, 2010: 331). To me, writing about our personal experiences outside academia tell us something valuable about powerful affects such love, joy and anger, shame and suffering, desires for care and closeness, always already present in organizational life.

In overall, this paper makes three contributions. First, in the spirit of Thoresen and Öhlén (2015: 1589), my analysis speaks for a view that regards the personal experiences of the researcher as a sensory-based activity. Therefore, any researcher doing qualitative research should think carefully about potential research topics that stem from their personal affections and experiences, and thus, have a potential to particularly multifaceted and reflexive analytical outcomes (see Whiteman, 2010). Therefore, in this paper, I argue for the value of the attempts

to write about something we feel intensely about and currently experience ourselves. As such, this paper is an attempt to introduce my own personal life into academic writing.

Second, my study also highlights the role of conveying the research participants' 'felt understanding' of their worlds (cf. Gair, 2012: 134) in relation to the researcher's embodiment in the field. More generally, my study extends previous largely instrumental understandings of the researcher's varying positions in academia (for example Cui, 2015; Enguix, 2012; Haynes, 2011; Leigh, 2014) by calling for a more sensory-based and emotionally appreciative (for example Paul, 2009; Woodward and Ellison, 2010) research practice in organization studies. More specifically, this paper illustrates how the craft of doing and writing research is not only a matter of fieldwork, headwork and textwork (e.g., Van Maanen, 2011), but also a matter of bodywork.

Third, this study forwards the current discussion of sensory methodology (for example Mason and Davies, 2009; Pink, 2009; Warren, 2008) that pays attention to the mundane and often (analytically) neglected social micro-practices (Atkinson, 2013b). By conducting sensory (auto)ethnography in the three studies explored in this paper, I feel was not strongly constrained by conventional academic expectations of doing research and writing about my thoughts in a certain manner. In this way, I was at least partly abled to overcome 'aesthetic muteness' (Taylor, 2002), and to develop the practice of writing differently in academia further. Therefore, in the spirit of Mason and Davies (2009) and Warren (2008), my study calls for more research on the sensory-based 'micro-dynamics' between the researchers and the research phenomena to recognize the ways experiencing 'aesthetic episodes' as a researcher truly matters not only in ethnographic studies, but also in qualitative research more broadly.

Naturally, I acknowledge that my study is limited in several senses. Because aesthetic experiences are inherently subjective (Warren, 2008), their relation to the researcher's position in the field remains blurred. In part, this is because 'the relation between the self and the other

can never be fully defined' (Thoresen and Öhlén, 2015: 1596) and that the relationships in the field are far more complex than often described in scholarly debates (Cunliffe and Alcadipani, 2016). Furthermore, I recognize the specificity of the three research topics explored here. Even so, I hope this study will work as an encouraging example for other organizational ethnographers to open up for their senses in the field.

It is about time that lived and fleshy embodied experiences are voiced further within the field of organization studies. We have for too long witnessed a disembodied and discursive dominance in our research community that largely ignores what is felt and experienced *in* and *through* our bodies. Addressing confusing, changing and marginalized experiences of our vulnerable selves as researcher, therefore, allows silenced bodies to speak up and disrupts the dominance of disembodiment, linearity, and order (Grey and Sinclair, 2006; Pullen and Rhodes, 2015) in our scholarly community.

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