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Abstract

This paper explores the post-qualitative notion of “ethics of becoming” through a critique of common understandings of ethical approaches to research. By applying Deleuze’s reading of Spinoza, the ethics of becoming are discussed using empirical examples from field studies. Attention is given to how ethically challenging moments arise in the imminent space beyond humanism, in which commonly acknowledged handbooks insufficiently prepare the researcher for what is to (be)come. The analysis demonstrates that an ethic of becoming does not direct attention toward moments of stability, as universal ethics usually do, but toward the situation of becomings, and of new relations which are created in the moments of research.

Key words: Deleuze, ethics of becoming, ethnography, research ethics

Introduction

In most qualitative research, a prospected research project begins with a formal, ethical review process through an institutional review board (IRB) or another country-specific equivalent. The review process aims to secure what the Belmont Report (1979) has established as three basic ethical principles, namely, respect for persons, beneficence, and justice. In practice, this implies that human research subjects must attain significant

information and comprehension of the research and that participation must be fully voluntary. Additionally, the risks and benefits must be assessed systematically, and they must be fair in relation to the selection of participants.

Rhodes (2015) and Robley (1995) note that ethical review boards were developed in the aftermath of World War II through what has been called the Nuremberg Code (1946). The lack of respect for human beings, which was part and parcel of the atrocities committed during World War II, had produced science that was harmful to the human subjects included in studies, often legitimized as beneficial to mankind. Human rights were considered inferior to science as well as the inherent possibilities within science. With great clarity, World War II illustrated the importance of capturing and fostering human rights politically as well as in science. The Nuremberg Code (1946) was followed by a series of other declarations that aimed to protect the human subject (see, e.g., Robley, 1995). Although this process and the embedded values are predominantly associated with medicine and adjoining fields of research, the ideal to protect the human research subject is also operative in social and behavioral sciences (Guillemin & Gillam, 2004). Undeniably, these shifts were as groundbreaking as they were important for the rights of human subjects as well as for the reputation of research as such. However, different voices from a wide spectrum of perspectives and disciplines have, in recent decades, directed critique toward diverse aspects of the mere fundamentals at play in ethical review boards (see, e.g., Rhodes, 2005). At the same time, as stressed by Christians (2017), there was a “[...] need for an entirely new model of research ethics in which human action and conceptions of the good are interactive” (p. 79).

In line with that assumption, this paper scrutinizes the fundamentals of research ethics from a post-humanist point of view, thus highlighting the need for a research ethic beyond the stable, autonomous, and rational subject and the dualisms and linearities produced and maintained as a consequence. Using two empirical examples from a larger, ethnographic

study (Hall, 2016), ethics are elaborated as something in becoming, thus liberating the notion from universalism and abstractly standardized ideals. This is done with inspiration from the philosophy of Gilles Deleuze, primarily his reading of Spinoza (Deleuze, 1988). Thus, the guiding research questions of this paper are twofold:

How can research ethics beyond humanism be understood in social science? How can an ethics of becoming confront research ethic differently and what might that produce?

Following this short introduction of the birth of research ethics, the philosophical fundamentals of ethics are, in general, briefly described with references mainly to the Enlightenment and the structuring principles of research and through IRBs and handbooks on methodology.

Based on one commonly used handbook in social science (Bryman, 2012), one portrayal of research ethics is described. The need for other principles of research ethics is addressed by turning to the critique and productions associated with post-qualitative research. As a post-qualitative response to the need for alternative ethical principles, beyond anthropocentrism and transcendence, an ethic of becoming, inspired by Deleuze, is introduced. In order to put this ethic of becoming into play, two empirical examples from an ethnographic study, including observations and interviews, are introduced and discussed. Lastly, concluding remarks are made regarding how these ethics of becoming might contribute to qualitative research in social science in general as well as to the further development of post-qualitative approaches to methodology.

Background

Although research ethics as an institutional procedure can be regarded as a rather new phenomenon, originating in the post-World-War II era, the underlying principles can be regarded as originating from the Enlightenment. In this section, three different notions associated with the Enlightenment will be presented regarding the conduct of social research,

namely, value neutrality (Christians, 2017; Weber, 2011), utilitarianism (Christians, 2017; Mill, 1861), and the categorical imperative (Christians, 2017; Johnson & Cureton, 2017). As argued in this paper, these three entangled notions all play significant roles in structuring the research process, in IRBs, and in methods carried out in accordance with handbooks.

As stressed by Christians (2017), the Enlightenment produced a series of dichotomies, among the most significant being between the subject and object. The subject was regarded as having unlimited freedom and was beyond faith, all kinds of authority and, consequently, above natural orders. According to Christians (2017), autonomy was considered as the core of the human being and was thus superior to the moral order. To protect and nurture the autonomy of the subject, and the different perceptions of the good produced by this autonomy, value neutrality was advanced as the only logical alternative. Knowledge derived from science was thus, in accordance with, for example, Max Weber, regarded as existing objectively and morally neutral (Christians, 2017; Weber, 2011). Value-neutral science provided a platform that was well suited for the Enlightenment's autonomous human being. Immanuel Kant, the philosopher perhaps most associated with this era, introduced what he framed as a categorical imperative. The categorical imperative, formulated as a critique of contemporary utilitarianism, is a rationally necessary, objectively existing, and unconditional principle (Johnson & Cureton, 2017), which, normatively speaking, must be followed. According to the principle of the categorical imperative, moral actions are rational, and immoral actions are irrational. Human beings should only act in such a way that the action can become a universal law. According to Kant, this normative ethical theory was a motivation for goodwill (Johnson & Cureton, 2017). Regardless of the context in which actions take place, they are either right or wrong. It is the actions themselves, and the rationale behind the actions by the autonomous subject, that are right or wrong, not their intentions or consequences. This normative ethical theory has been scrutinized, both explicitly and

implicitly, by for example Hume, Nietzsche, and Kierkegaard. Nonetheless, the Enlightenment and Kant's writings have had immense importance in modernist social science and its ethical principles in terms of universal laws that are embodied and maintained by experiences from prior studies.

Additionally, and according to Christians (2017, p. 75), IRBs embody utilitarian agendas with regard to scope, assumptions, and guidelines for how research should be conducted. In contrast to the categorical imperative, utilitarianism strives for actions that satisfy all, or as many as possible, thus focusing on the consequences of actions. As pointed out by King and Churchill, (2000) with reference to John Stuart Mill's volume *Utilitarianism* (1861), the measure of common good is to assess the extent to which "an action promotes the greatest happiness for the greatest number" (King & Churchill, 2000, p. 716). IRBs as a phenomenon could be considered to represent and promote utilitarian, value-neutral agendas, following normative and universal laws, very much in accordance with Enlightenment thought.

Value neutrality is controlled and secured by rationally embedded and independent boards, and their judgements are based on pre-defined laws and standardized procedures. In utilitarian terms, the significance of the research in question is judged based on how beneficial it can be for the population at large, although without compromising respect for the unique human being. The main problems with IRBs are that they, through outsourced tasks, base their judgement on abstract descriptions and their decisions on universal ideals, thus overlooking or escaping the specificities of the concrete and hence also those issues that are ethically intriguing. Such processes become procedural and instrumental rather than explorative and open ended. In line with this, Kuntz (2015) asks if the creation of methodological apparatuses and institutions, such as IRBs, could be regarded as a potential result of the fact that researchers fail to fully meet what he calls "extractive ethical demands".

Christians (2017) however stresses that IRBs protect their institutional home instead of the research population they are set out to protect. Additionally, and maybe also more importantly, as Christians (2017) points out, judgements are made on the basis of epistemological strands, namely, on the nature of the knowledge produced. An epistemologically constrained ethic is nurtured by a dualism between subject and object, between the researcher and the objects of research. This dualism, which implies distance within research, is a guarantee of the treasured value neutrality.

Elizabeth St. Pierre (2011) focuses on another aspect of the rigidity surrounding the research process in relation to the plentitude of handbooks and textbooks on how to do qualitative research. These books structure the research process as if research was constituted by checklists on concepts, perspectives, and even sources of critique that ought to be dwelled upon – often in a particularistic way. Regarding those repetitive structures in handbooks about methods, St. Pierre (2011, p. 613) writes: “[...] we now believe it is true and real. *We’ve forgotten we made it up*”. Kuntz (2015, p. 122) follows up this reasoning, claiming that the methodological tool-box approaches encouraged in social science, fail to address questions concerning social justice, as they only underpin already established understandings about the knowing and being of existence. This could be regarded as an impediment of being what Kuntz denotes a responsible methodologist. Responsibility is a concept Koro-Ljungberg (2016) also highlights in relation of doing research, but detaches it from “duty”. Koro-Ljungberg stresses that researchers have a duty to follow various kinds of guidelines and protocols as a result of an audit culture, making researchers technicians rather than intellectuals. By regarding the researcher as a technician following a predefined checklist, the importance of responsibility is delimited. Rather than understanding responsibility as a stabile duty, it should be considered as an ongoing response, as something relational and elusive.

Thus, responsibility is not limited to what already is, it also embraces coming and unfinished events.

Ethics in handbooks: An example

Multiple researchers within traditional approaches to ethics and research (e.g., within qualitative and quantitative methodology) have addressed several moral challenges arising from embarking on research projects (see, e.g., Guillemin & Gilliam, 2004; King & Churchill, 2000; Lapadat, 2017; Rhodes, 2005). Within medical research, some have questioned “the now accepted dogmas that govern research ethics” (Rhodes, 2005, p. 7).² Rather than following traditional humanist approaches to research, this paper aims to produce a post-qualitative understanding of research ethics through a presentation of the “ethics of becoming.” Before moving to describe the post-qualitative methodology, we choose to present one of the common portrayals of research ethics, as outlined in Bryman (2012).

In one of the most frequently used handbooks, Alan Bryman’s (2012) *Social Research Methods*, a distinction is made between ethical universalism, context-based ethics, and research ethics, in which everything is perceived to be allowed. According to ethical universalism, the researcher is not allowed to act against moral rules for any reason, thus, acts and behaviors can be either good, which means that they are located within the limits of a defined morality, or bad. The context-based ethical approach refers to a relativism steered by some principles that differ from predefined and established morality, although acting in

² Generic approaches to research ethics, for example, concerning informed consent, have been critiqued in multiple studies, within the field of medicine, advocating the treatment of humans as individuals. As Rhodes (2005) furthermore states: “Informed consent has been seen as the primary standard for the ethical conduct of research, and protecting groups branded ‘vulnerable’ [...] has been taken as the easy answer to every vexing question about the proper conduct of human subject research” (Rhodes, 2005, p. 25).

accordance with, for example, human rights. The third version of research ethics follows the logic of the conviction that “everything goes.” What is emphasized in this is that many other societal institutions, such as media and corporations, act without morality, which should also make it possible for social sciences to have a certain leeway for maneuvering in relation to ethics.

These understandings of research ethics express two different relations to ethics, one universal and one relative. Both ideas, either being universal or relative, can be regarded as problematic in diverse ways – the first for offering a rigorous, predefined, and stable morality and the other for the total lack of limits, thus allowing everything. Both the rigidity and the lack of structure may be regarded as potentially harmful for research in social science, since they either represent a recipe for how to be “ethical” in stabilizing certain values and norms – and, thus, also the image of the stable, coherent subject – or a dangerous relativism in which no rules apply.

Although the nature of these research handbooks, such as Bryman’s (2012) volume, as well as the structure of IRBs, in certain ways, relate to ethics in the research process, other ways of understanding ethics when doing research are possible. Christians (2017, p. 75) has called for other kinds of ethical principles, thereby introducing an ethic of being. The notion of ethics of being is described as an ontological ethic, counter to the Enlightenment. Ethics of being direct attention toward the specifics regarding the context as well as the social, political, and cultural universes in which research takes place. As noted earlier, Christians’ (2017) main critique of ethics is that ethical approaches are based on and give primacy to epistemology, thus contributing to a dichotomy between the knowing subject and the neutral object. However, according to Christians (2017), the ethics of being are still based on anthropocentric ideals. As a further response to the need addressed by Christians (2017), this paper introduces an ethic of becoming to put further emphasis on the ontological aspects of ethics as well as on

their post-anthropocentric virtuality. It does so by turning to Gilles Deleuze (1988). An ethic of becoming invites various kinds of questions about research ethics in an explorative manner, beyond standardized procedures and universal laws and, more importantly, beyond the dualism between subject and object, between the researcher and the researched. An ethic of becoming denies stable positions and the value neutrality embedded within the distance between the agent and what is studied. It is not an attempt at dismantling research ethics but, rather, the opposite – to vitalize ethics in an era in which the importance and dignity of science are politically disputed. When the subject is understood as the temporal result of lines of becoming rather than the point of departure, as Deleuze proposes, for example, there will be substantial consequences for many dimensions of research, not least for research ethics.

Post-humanist and post-qualitative research

Up until this point, science and social science have in this article been treated as a single phenomenon, but hereafter, focus will be directed toward ethics in relation to methodologies defined as qualitative and post-qualitative. In 2011, St. Pierre introduced the term post-qualitative research, which can be regarded as a post-modern and post-structuralist production of the shortcomings of what St. Pierre described as conventional humanist methodology. According to this reasoning, conventional humanist methodology is founded on perspectives, concepts, and procedures that are unable to address relevant questions in an explorative manner.

The problems concerning conventional approaches are manifold and comprise both fundamental assumptions and concepts as well as the processes of research. First, as pointed out by St. Pierre (2014), the conventional humanist methodologies presented in the wide range of existing handbooks on methods suppress and restrict the potentially innovative force that is possibly arguably inherent to inquiry. Standardized procedures and the image, or

illusion, of the linear research process dictate a certain order in which questions of research ought to be addressed. Often, this starts with a literature review, followed by the formulation of a research question, and this question decides which methods are going to be used, what kinds of data are going to be collected, and which theory will be applied to shed light on the topic of interest. As critically described by Koro-Ljungberg (2016, p. 82), values such as cleanness, linearity, predictability, and onto-epistemological consistency, are often considered hallmarks of correctly conducted research. In the conventional research process, the method often assumes a superordinate position in research (see, e.g., Lather & St. Pierre, 2013). Undoubtedly, this linearity guided by method is maintained and nurtured through IRBs, which demand clarity early in the process in order to gain acceptance. Institutions such as IRBs aim to reinforce the image of research as something following a linear development, without disruptions and surprises, thus hindering the possibility of capturing the unexpected. The problem is, according to St. Pierre (2016), that researchers within the field of social science are encouraged to jump into practice, by choosing method and collecting data, without taking the important questions regarding the philosophy and consequences of various empiricisms into concern. This creates an undesirable and unproductive distinction between philosophy and science.

Another problem with qualitative methods is that they are pervaded by concepts that are assigned with qualitative ideals and ambitions, such as validity, generalization, and collection of data. The terminology limits the possibilities for qualitative research to advance its strengths and differentness in relation to quantitative research, at the same time as it employs an improper terminology with regard to ambitions, and is presented with an uneven playing field in terms of acquiring credibility (Lather & St. Pierre, 2013; Johansson, 2016). The lack of concepts to capture small-scaled and unique phenomena, beyond what is

expected, enables the emergence of reasons, in an era influenced by positivist tendencies, for dismantling and dismissing the questions addressed in qualitative research.

Moreover, another challenge regarding conventional qualitative research, very much related to the kinship with natural sciences, is the centering of the human being, or the Cartesian subject (Lather & St. Pierre, 2013; St. Pierre, 2013). As described earlier, the subject presented by Immanuel Kant has become influential in the perception of the human being, not only during the Enlightenment, but also during the modern era, which could be regarded as the birth of social science. Guided by reason, the Cartesian subject is a unique, autonomous, and coherent being. The problems assigned to this image of the subject are fully discussed elsewhere (see, e.g., St. Pierre, 2013). In this context, the consequences of the Cartesian subject are the most troublesome aspect. Thus, the image of the stable and autonomous subject is founded on a dualism between subject and object, and thus also between knowing and being, epistemology and ontology. The subject, with its ability to act according to reason, its unique capacity to gather information, to learn and to develop, is regarded as having a superior position compared to objects, animals, nature, and the like. This anthropocentrism legitimizes great injustice in the world at the same time as it delimits research possibilities. It creates tools to study psychological phenomena such as human beings' experiences and understandings, but the anthropocentrism inherent in conventional humanist research makes it difficult to study the ontological events, the being, and the mutual relations and entanglements between humans and surrounding forces.

In light of this, St. Pierre (2011) encourages us to do something different and to let go of the structuring concepts in conventional humanist inquiry: "I believe inquiry should be provocative, risky, stunning, astounding. It should take our breath away with its daring. It should challenge our fundamental assumptions and transform the world" (p. 623). This encouragement can be regarded as a plea to emancipate inquiry from its humanist shackles,

thus releasing the exciting, surprising, and challenging possibilities inherent in inquiry. Since 2011, many researchers have followed this encouragement by questioning existing concepts and procedures in qualitative research and creating new ones. Recently, Jackson (2017) argues for a fragmented strategy to “think without method”; and to explore possibilities to begin research outside of method. Koro-Ljungberg (2016) introduces fluid methodological spaces, highlighting a form of research design which is regarded as temporal and spatial methodological extensions of forces and events. Moreover, data (St. Pierre, 2013; Jackson & Mazzei, 2011; Nordstrom, 2015), representation (MacLure, 2013), interviews (Mazzei, 2013; Nordstrom, 2013), focus group interviews (Johansson, 2016), and research linearity (Guttorm, 2012) are some examples of conventional research that have been challenged. In turn, concepts like the voice-without-organs, data assemblage, thinking with theory, confabulative conversations, etc., have been introduced with the ambition to create new concepts and alternative understandings of what research is and, more importantly, what research can be. The aim of this paper is to rhizomatically continue with this post-qualitative ambition to challenge, discuss, and create new understandings of concepts associated with conventional humanist methodologies.

A different take on ethics

This section describes an alternative understanding of research ethics through what is called “an ethic of becoming.” An ethic of becoming is especially inspired by Deleuze’s reading of Spinoza, presented in the text *Spinoza: Practical Philosophy* (1988).³ In contrast to the earlier

³ Deleuze’s writings on ethics have been used in various contexts and with different conceptualizations. Daniel W. Smith (2011) describes it as an ethics of immanence, Levi R. Bryant (2011) as an ethic of the event, while

mentioned Immanuel Kant, for example, Gilles Deleuze alone or Gilles Deleuze in collaboration with Félix Guattari have not contributed extensively to the topic of ethics. However, as framed so eloquently by Bryant (2011), “some sort of ethics winds its way through his [Deleuze’s] thought like a thin red line” (p. 30). Throughout Deleuze’s philosophical work, critique is directed at all kinds of stable, transcendent, and universal forces. Ethics, or morality as Deleuze would have called it, could be regarded as one production of such stabilizing forces. Moral law, which Deleuze (1988) described in his comment on Spinoza’s practical philosophy, is an imperative for obedience. It has no other goals, means, or effects. He writes:

Law, whether moral or social, does not provide us with any knowledge; it makes nothing known. At worst, it prevents the formation of knowledge. At best, it prepares for knowledge and makes it possible. Between these extremes, it takes the place of knowledge in those who, because of their mode of existence, are incapable of knowledge. (Deleuze, 1988, p. 24)

According to Deleuze, the problem with transcendent laws and moralities is that they deny the formation of knowledge. Thus, obedience could be regarded as a restraint on knowledge. Law is transcendent and defines oppositions in definite terms (Good-Evil), which insist on judgement, blame, and obligation. In contrast, knowledge is the “immanent power that determines the qualitative difference of modes of existence (good-bad) (Deleuze, 1988, pp. 24-5). Transcendence is, according to Deleuze’s reading of Spinoza, and moreover in his following philosophical work, a threat towards knowledge and thinking, and ultimately, it separates us from life. It fosters obedience and denies the power of action (Smith, 2011).

Rosi Braidotti (2006), mainly inspired by Deleuze and Guattari’s *Thousand Plateaus*, introduced an ethics of becoming-imperceptible.

In contrast to transcendental morality, Deleuze speaks about ethics or ethology, which deals with the body's capacity to be affected (applicable to both humans and animals). According to Deleuze and Spinoza, affection is a movement of the body, not the mind or the consciousness; thus, consciousness "is only a dream with one's eyes open" (Deleuze, 1988, p. 20). In relation to the mind and body, Spinoza introduces a parallelism that both denies the question of causality and rejects the image of the mind's primacy over the body (or vice versa). Deleuze (1988, 18ff) writes: "It is a matter of showing that the body surpasses the knowledge that we have of it; *and that thought likewise surpasses the consciousness that we have of it*". For Deleuze, the imperative here is not one of obedience, but of capturing the power of body and mind beyond given conditions of knowledge and consciousness. The point here about parallelism made by Spinoza, and Deleuze's reading of Spinoza's texts, is especially fertile for theories associated with post-humanism, new materialism, and the like. Assigning body and mind the same importance, thus highlighting the body's abilities to be affected as sources of knowledge (thus deriving neither from the mind nor the consciousness), challenges the image of human primacy over other creatures. Consciousness and the ability to act rational are, as expressed by Kant and others in favor for the ideas associated with the Enlightenment and modernity, perceived to be uniquely human. Spinoza's parallelism, with its focus on the body, challenges the basis for this claim and, implicitly, the basis for human primacy. However, this does not mean that consciousness is unimportant, rather that consciousness is not the given point of departure for action. While immersing in Spinoza's texts, it appears that Deleuze received inspiration for his early understanding of desire as something productive (see, e.g., Deleuze & Guattari, 2004). With reference to Spinoza, Deleuze (1988, pp. 20-21) notes that we do not desire things because we judge them to be good, but rather the opposite: we judge things to be good because we desire them. Thus, desire is productive, and desire calls for actions, not the contrary. Transcendence, demanding

universalism, and obedience are perverting desire, thus fooling us into desiring repression, which in turn denies possibilities for action (Smith, 2011). Transcendence is, according to Smith's (2011, p. 126) reading of Deleuze, actually what prevents ethics from taking place.

According to Spinoza, the body is not defined by its form nor by its function (Deleuze, 1988). Instead, it is defined by relations of motion and rest, of slowness and speed between particles. Second, the body is defined by its capacity to affect and to be affected. The first of these propositions is kinetic, and the other is dynamic; it is about motion and changes. Deleuze (1988, p. 124) declares that there are greater differences between a plow horse or a draft horse and a racehorse than between an ox and a plow horse. This is because the racehorse and the plow horse do not have the same affects nor the same capacity for being affected; rather, the plow horse has affects in common with the ox. In Deleuze's ethology, three propositions are described, the first of which is a question of the characteristics of the relation that each thing has to its surroundings on the plane of immanence – what it is moved by or what it moves (or its capabilities of affecting and being affected). According to this reasoning, a thing is inseparable from its relations with the world (Deleuze, 1988, p. 125); it is these relations, and the relation between speed and slowness within these relations and what they produce with regards to actions, perceptions, etc., that “constitute a particular individual in the world” (Deleuze, 1988, p. 125). The second is a question of realization and how the capacity of being affected really comes into play – whether it strengthens, poisons, or influences the thing in any other way. Regardless of the manner, the thing is always moved and changed, in some sense, when it is affected. The third is a question on how these affections influence the compositions of relations between things, namely, how the movement of the thing has changed its relation in and to the systems of which it is part. Thus, it is the capacity of being affected and of affecting and what these movements, and becomings, produce in relation to the surrounding relations that define the thing. The important, or

interesting aspect is thus, according to Deleuze's reasoning, not what a thing *is*, but what it *could be* (Deleuze & Guattari, 2012). Ethics thus refer to a body's ability to be affected and to become on a plane of immanence. How this might be composed is impossible to predict, as the following states: you do not know beforehand what good or bad you are capable of; you do not know beforehand what a body or mind can do, in a given encounter, a given arrangement, a given combination (Deleuze, 1988, p. 125). Thus, there are no such things as pre-defined values and norms that can be used to judge whether an act is Good or Evil (just good or bad). Rather, it is a question of what becomes realized in the changing relations between things (see, e.g., Kuntz, 2015 p. 140ff), or as Deleuze and Guattari (2012) described it later in their work, as encounters between heterogeneous assemblages. In the following sections, Deleuze's understanding of ethics and ethology will be transposed to a research context and will be experimented with as a research ethic of becoming.

Empirical movements – Between the immanent and transcendent

The following situations or movements are two empirical glimpses from a rather traditionally conducted study in which observations, interviews, and document analyses were carried out (Hall, 2016). In short, the study focused on how state school inspection in Norway, both in terms of policy and practice, has undergone significant change since the mid-2000s. Today, there are 17 county governor offices (CGOs), each responsible for regular inspections and self-initiated inspections of kindergartens and public compulsory schools at the municipal level (Years 1–10), as well as public upper-secondary schools at the county level (Years 11–13). In addition, CGOs process individual complaint cases concerning, for example, final examination scores. Finally, the Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training (UDIR), which is superior to the CGOs, carries out inspections of the free school sector. This paper

draws on observation data from shadowing school inspectors in the field (Czarniawska-Joerges, 2007).

In the first situation (Movement 1), the role of the researcher was to observe and to make verbatim field notes from a conversation taking place between three school inspectors from a CGO and one school principal. As part of the inspection process, the school principal was interviewed by the school inspectors about the school's legal practice and formative assessment routines ("Assessment for Learning"), and the following example is an account of what transpired once the actual interview with the school principal had been completed:

Movement 1

After the principal had left the meeting room, the three school inspectors, one of them a trained lawyer and the other two previous educators, started discussing what had just taken place. At the same time, the lawyer was finalizing the minutes from the meeting, a protocol to be included as part of a forthcoming preliminary inspection report. I sat listening to their conversation, and at the same time trying to finalize my observation notes. One of the key issues emerging during their talk was whether the school's routines and practices were within the law or whether there were certain deviations from the requirements of the Education Act (1998). A sort of "judicial give and take" process then took place, since the inspectors did not fully agree on how to interpret their immediate impression of the interview.

Suddenly, one of the inspectors (previous educator) turned to me and asked: "What do you think?" I was astonished that they sought my impression of the interview with the school's principal.

This first example is by no means exceptional; it is something that often happens in research that takes place out in the field. What was originally set up to be, and sketched up in, research plans might suddenly change, though not always drastically; the situation is, in reality, different from the prospected. The researcher had, much earlier in the research process, already made up his mind about conducting observations. As described in research assigned with this specific method, observations do not include any form for interaction. This is a methodological decision; but because the research process is expected to be linear and strict, any deviation from this path might not only be faulty, but also in some sense unethical. The excerpt sheds light on various aspects of relevance to the issues addressed in this paper. First, it highlights the difficulties with universal, transcendent research ideals regarding what it means to do research. As a researcher, you are subscribed to act in accordance with certain principles. This does not have to be problematic as such, but it becomes problematic when the guiding principle is the method and not, for example, the theory (as suggested by St. Pierre & Jackson, 2014), and the judgement is made on transcendent values (Good-Evil), with the inherent risk of making movements like the above unethical. In order not to jeopardize the ideal of the independent observer, as described in handbooks, the researcher made the following notes:

I had to think quickly, briefly responding: “I’m just an observer and don’t have any opinion.” They smiled and continued their conversation, leaving me puzzled that they could have wanted to hear what I thought of the interview situation, of which we had all just been part. I wanted to respond, since I did have an opinion. At the same time, they seemed to want me to confirm that their interpretation was valid.

Second, the excerpt highlights that the transcendent universal ideals also deny the possibilities created by the sudden change in the room. During the time in which the situation was

developing as expected, it was rather easy for the researcher to establish the role of an independent observer. The relations in the room, or on the immanent plane, were defined and rather stable. The principle acted as he was expected to, the inspectors as they were expected to, and so did the researcher. However, when the principle left the room, the basis for the earlier stable positions was suddenly questioned. The capacities for being affected and to affect changed, and thus, so did the relations on this plane of immanence – in that room. The affections and desires refurbishing the room made the observing researcher an active agent, thus crushing the stable positions, the transcendence, as well as the guidelines on how to act accordingly. However, with the eager ambition to act in line with the method and the ethics it draws upon, the researcher missed out on the opportunity possibility that emerged in the movement. According to a Deleuzian understanding, the transcendence inherent in this research situation, and many alike it, denies the possibility for becomings to take place and, thus, for possibilities to create knowledge and new understandings – and therefore to construct an ethic of becoming. Hypothetically, this could be done by reflecting on the question to the inspectors, or by becoming-other, taking the position of the absent principle and what he might have thought.

The onsite inspection visit described above included multiple situations whereby the inspection team acquired information and data, which were used to compile preliminary and final reports. These reports would eventually be presented to the targeted schools, and finally published on the CGO website. The following situation (Movement 2) stems from the same school toward the end of the first day of the inspection visit:

Movement 2

Following the situation described above, the inspection team approached the school principal and requested access to the student files, especially those held for special needs

education (SNE). Approximately seven percent of the student body received SNE, and the inspection team wanted to acquire a sample of these student files to get a wider picture of the school's SNE routines. One of the inspectors asked me whether I wanted to take part in the activity.

Again, I was quite perplexed, since I had seen my observer role as passive and not one in which I would become part of the process I had set out to experience. I briefly contemplated my response, however, I declined and continued to work on my field notes. The inspection team left the conference room, and I was left to my notebook for the better part of an hour.

Once again, this is an example of a situation that differed from what the researcher had advocated, thus putting the researcher in a somewhat problematic position. As outlined in the initial research description, the plan was to conduct observations that were meant to be passive. However, as both these excerpts show, albeit in diverse ways, it is a rather difficult act to be passive. The ideal for a passive observant is to take an objective position, to be there as a thing or device to record and collect information on the situation, as if he were not there (“to be a fly on the wall”). First, this shows the problems assigned with the ambition of being objective, neutral, and passive.

As in the first movement, the second movement initially followed the sketched research path, at least regarding what can be seen. However, by regarding the conference room as a plane of immanence, constituted by flows of affections, desires, and becomings, other movements become apparent. At first, the positions are stable, and the present participants act accordingly. When the student files encountered the situation, the flows in the room changed, thus redirecting affections and, consequently, becomings. Until then, the ideally objective researcher was suddenly, through the files and inspectors, assigned affections, desires, and thus, possibilities

for action and change. The files, and their potentially sensitive content refurbished the room. The files became agents, and so did the intended objective researcher, thus highlighting how objects and subjects become entangled with flows of desires and affections in the room, changing the positions and creating new relations. The objective position of the researcher can only be maintained when the flows are broken into predetermined roles, thus making a transcendent ethic possible. However, as shown, in research situations, as in life, things seldom turn out as planned. Chaos and flows of desires and affections are ontological and thus exist in all situations as an inherent possibility of change.

As shown in this excerpt, it is impossible to hold onto a transcendent ethic as situations change, as participation forces change, and relations become different. As described earlier, research ethics are a type of ethic for stable positions, for dichotomies between subjects and objects, for linear and predictable research, which are less suitable for dealing with change, encounters between different research components, and research about the unknown. It is not suited for life. Thus, as described by Bryman (2012), for example, research ethics that are neither universal nor relative are needed to help to productively deal with movements and what is produced when different components encounter each other; this encounter goes on to reform the basis of the relations while still capturing the potential richness in the unexpected. Only then can research be as St. Pierre (2011) described it: provocative, risky, stunning, astounding, daring, while challenging our fundamental assumptions of the world (p. 623).

Concluding remarks: Ethics of becoming

This paper presented a brief overview of the modern birth of research ethics, highlighting that the ideals of research ethics are, in many ways, to be regarded as favorable. The individual must be protected, including in the name of science and knowledge. Having said that, many challenges remain in relation to the fundamental ideas behind research ethics and their roots in

the Enlightenment and modernity. Based on this overview, several problems were highlighted. First are the universal values and transcendence maintained and supported by and through IRBs, on one hand, and the methodology handbooks, on the other. Both of these different forms of institutions steer the research process into linearity, forcing research to follow certain and often anticipated paths. Ethics are often reduced to judging, in definite terms (Good-Evil), how well the research has been conducted in accordance with the chosen methods and their corresponding checklists. Universal laws, morality, and transcendence are problematic features, according to a Deleuzian philosophy, because they deny the possibility for movements and for change, for flows and becomings – for life. Thus, they also deny the possibility to create knowledge. Research guided and steered in accordance with strict plans, such as subscriptions to boards and the expectations followed by the choice of a certain method, might circumvent the possibility of producing unexpected data. Moreover, it might deny the possibility of asking ethical questions of relevance, which are intriguing and challenging, in general terms and specifically in relation to the actual study. The ethical and procedural transcendence that pervades the research process denies the possibility of addressing ethically important questions – for the researcher, the participants, the context, and society as such. Also, it denies responsibility, as described by Koro-Ljungberg (2016).

Second, and closely related to the problems of transcendence, are the problems assigned to the belief that subjects are stable, coherent, and rational entities. The ethical descriptions in handbooks center the researcher, making him or her the active, ethically superior, and stable subject, studying other humans and things as objects. Thus, the problem regarding transcendence in this case is twofold: it creates a dichotomy between object and subject, and it gives precedence to stability. As shown in both the empirical movements, even though the researcher had an outspoken position as passive, the roles suddenly changed, either when the constellation in the room changed or when a certain type of file was mentioned. In some sense,

the participants, the files, and the newly formed relations in the room overtook the agency of the situation, thus changing the constellation of the researcher as subject. According to Deleuze (1988), we are not defined by what we are, but rather by our bodies' capacities to affect, to be affected, and to become. These processes run through the body, not the mind or the consciousness, and includes humans, things, and animals, etc. Changes are produced by flows and desires on the plane of immanence; the attendant parts (subjects and objects) get entangled in each other's becomings, thus changing the relations between the different components. As shown in the excerpts, this happens in rather ordinary research situations, thus making transcendental and universal values on how to act futile. Regardless of how experienced, ambitious, and well-planned a researcher is, and regardless of how controlled the research situation might be, there will always be situations that will be impossible to foresee. Predetermined ethics, universal laws, and faithfulness to certain methods will be of little help in such situations, as they lean toward transcendence and deny the possibility of capturing change and of creating knowledge.

An ethic of becoming, which has been sketched in this paper, is an ethic of ontology rather than of epistemology. In the latter, the stable, rational subject with a consciousness assumes precedence. The ethic of becoming is ontological in the sense that it creates preconditions to make momentary captures of the constantly ongoing flows of affection and desires, the movements and entanglements between components within the research process that produce becomings and changing relations. It is in these movements, when the positions are challenged, that the need for a research ethic beyond transcendence and relativism becomes actualized. An ethic of becoming does not direct attention towards moments of stability, as universal ethics usually do, but toward situations of change, of becomings, and of new relations in the research situation. Impossible to turn to predefined laws and values, the ethic of becoming is what becomes actualized in these entanglements on the plane of

immanence between different components: the researcher, participants, empty chairs, files, doors, ambitions, etc. This does not lean toward transcendence—nor toward predefined standards and processes defined either by IRBs or methods in handbooks—but toward the entanglements within the specific situation, the chosen theory, as well as in a kind of reflexivity that might appear after the situation has ended but at a time when the movements are still at work in the non-linear research process. It is not a question of judgement, but of production and creativity. Thus, the question to ask is not whether the action, as a consequence of the flows, desires, and becomings, was Good or Evil in accordance with a defined value, but rather, whether it was good or bad in accordance with theory and, more importantly, what the movements produced with regard to understandings, knowledge, and different perspectives. Only then can the fundamentally interesting questions about ethics be addressed, and only then can research be truly responsible, surprising, astonishing, and about life as we know it.

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