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Bringing affective perspectives into qualitative research

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Practicing Poetic Inquiry: Bringing Affective Perspectives into Qualitative Research

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ABSTRACT

Poetic inquiry is a so-called 'umbrella' for various ways of using poetic and literary tools to produce qualitative analyses of life lived. Papers on this topic often present poetic analyses and discuss various methodological issues such as representation, researcher subjectivity or 'validity'. However, it seems that there is also a need for papers that offer detailed descriptions of how to practise poetic inquiry. Therefore, this paper will aim to answer the question of what is involved in the process of poetic inquiry. I will describe in detail three analytical stages in the process of creating poetic analyses: deleting and moving text, condensing and theoretical interaction. As a means of illustration of the process, I will use an interview with a young woman who struggles to stay in the educational system. To analyse this interview, Ahmed's concept of 'affective economies' will be used as the theoretical framework that interacts with the analytical processes. This is chosen to enhance the potential of including affective perspectives in applied social research without it being the centre of analytical attention.

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Introduction

Questions of why we need poetry, poetic inquiry and poetic voices in social research have a variety of answers. We need poetic inquiry because it broadens understandings of human interaction (Prendergast, Leggo & Sameshima, 2009; Görlich, 2016, 2019), allows us to understand complexity in different ways (Sparkes, Nilges, Swan & Dowling, 2003), offers multisensory insights (Furman, 2006), and might lead to deeper understandings of human motivation and experience (McCulliss, 2013). We need poetic inquiry because it involves affect and emotion. Poetic inquiry conveys strong emotional content (Furman, 2004) and it represents and produces analyses in ways that are emotionally evocative (Görlich, 2016; Prendergast, Leggo & Sameshima, 2009). Because poetic inquiry is still relatively unestablished as an academic research method, papers on poetic inquiry find a need to legitimize the very existence of poetic inquiry in academia and aim at positioning specific ways of using the method in the ‘umbrella’ (Prendergast, Leggo & Sameshima, 2009) of poetic inquiry (eg. Wu, 2020; Smith, 2019). The point of departure for this paper, however, takes a different direction. It starts with philosopher Franco ‘Bifo’ Berardi (2012), who claims that we need poetry for the purpose of freeing language:

Only the poetic revitalization of language will open the way to the emergence of a new form of social autonomy (Berardi, 2012: 8)

In his book, *The Uprising: On Poetry and Finance* (2012), Berardi describes current social behaviour as regular and inescapable patterns of interaction influenced by ‘techno-linguistic governance’. He argues that precarity is jeopardizing social solidarity and the social body is wired by techno-linguistic automatisms. Human activity is a repetition of embedded patterns of behaviour. We act like a swarm, he says, and tend to conform to shared behaviour while ‘freezing’ the affective potencies of language. Therefore, he calls for a need to start a “process of reactivating sensuousness in the sphere of social communication” (Berardi, 2012: 21). He sees poetry as the entry to reactivate the emotional body and hence social solidarity. In my view, this perspective sums up the purpose of working with poetic inquiry. When we are presented with poetic texts, we connect to our senses and thereby our solidarity with the ‘people behind the data’ is evoked.

In this paper, I will demonstrate in detail how to work with poetic inquiry. As an example, I will use an interview with a young woman on the edge of the educational system. The purpose is to make the method more accessible in the attempt to ‘reactivate sensuousness’, as Berardi calls for. Hence, I will describe the construction of the poetic analyses, while I also emphasize specific issues to be aware of in relation to interviews, the construction of the analysis and the actual process of

analysing the texts. The process of analysing falls into three phases that involve: 1) deleting and moving text, 2) condensing text and 3) theoretical interaction with the text. As the theoretical interaction in this paper involves Ahmed's (2004) affect theory, this will also be included in the paper, however not as an account or discussion of affect but rather as an example.

The marginalisation of affect

Poetic inquiry is an umbrella (Prendergast, Leggo & Sameshima, 2009) for qualitative methods of analysis that utilize empirical and analytical tools from the arts, in this case literary devices. This is a relatively recent methodological approach, which has been applied internationally (see, for example, Gergen & Gergen, 2012; Prendergast, Leggo & Sameshima, 2009; Richardson, 1997; Wulf-Andersen, 2012; Krøjer, 2003, Hølge-Hazelton, 2002). In constructing the empirical analyses, the researcher uses literary devices such as rhythm, repetition, wording, pauses, and so on, so that, in this endeavour, art and science come closer together (Richardson, 1993). Poetic inquiry as a research approach uncovers the emotional context and touches the reader/listener affectively and emotionally. However, to understand the issue of affect in poetic inquiry, one must first understand parts of the thinking around affect that has characterized scientific research in general.

On the one hand, since the 1990s, affect theory has argued how a turn towards affect is needed as a response to poststructuralist and deconstructionist theories (Clough, 2008). A wealth of publications have defined affect (Gregg & Seigworth, 2010; Fotaki, Kenny & Vachhani, 2014, Zembylas, 2014); argued affect versus emotion (Wetherell, 2012; Massumi, 2002); demonstrated how affect is entangled with policies (Ahmed, 2014; Zembylas, 2022) and a long list of other uses of affect theory.

On the other hand, when practicing qualitative research for instance, in my case, within youth sociology characterized by a cross-disciplinary applied research approach, emotion and affect become something else completely. When not being the research inquiry itself, but rather one of many characteristics of human interaction, affect seem to be somewhat invisible, if not marginalized. Reckwitz (2012) demonstrates how, what he calls, the "anti-aesthetic" position in social sciences has led to the marginalization of traditionally affective phenomena in social science research. Focus has dealt with the 'normative' and the 'rational', which has thus hindered researchers from capturing understandings of affective phenomena in social contexts. This is largely due to the dualistic thinking that has characterised social science research. Dualisms such as 'the social versus the individual', 'the social versus the biological', or 'the irrational versus the rational'

have regarded emotions as belonging to the individual, the biological and the irrational. According to Reckwitz (2012), this means that emotions and affect are considered unsuitable for social science generalizations. They are perceived as superfluous, even risky, categories that are pushed, so to speak, out of social science theory and into individual, biological or psychological understandings. In my own experience, when conducting research interviews, I used to diverge from the emotional content of the interview and consider it 'noise' in relation to the information provided by the research participant. And likewise, during the coding process, in a traditional qualitative research process exploring for instance participation in education, I would omit highly affective sequences in which the informant becomes emotional when talking about certain issues. This is regarded as not trustworthy; the informant diverts from being reflective to being affective and affective statements might not be trusted to inform us 'properly' about the subject, in this case participation in education. However, leaving out emotion and affect when conducting and analysing qualitative interviews, one omits important data. As Reckwitz points out, if one pursues 'the affective turn', one must also rethink the ways in which we analyse and conceptualise affect and/or emotions. This is largely pursued within the field of affect and affect theory, but for researchers conducting research meant to be readily applied by for example teachers, counsellors etc., a different approach needs to be taken; in the case of poetic inquiry, an approach in which affect and emotion is involved in the analytical process without becoming the centre of attention.

For the analytical example in this paper, I will use Ahmed's (2004) theory on affect as it considers affect as a collective phenomenon that circulates among individuals. In the literature, emotion is often referred to as individually felt and socially distributed (Wetherell, 2012; Massumi, 2002) while affect is considered a collective phenomenon that arises "in the midst of in-between-ness" (Seigworth & Gregg, 2010: 1). As I generally in my research tend to apply a shift in focus from individual perspectives to collective ones, in this paper, I will mostly use the concept of affect as it offers interesting points that challenge an individualising focus on young people. Ahmed uses the term 'affective economies' and examines how emotions move between bodies and how they create "the very effect of the surfaces or boundaries of bodies and worlds" (Ahmed, 2004: 117). As the purpose is not to provide the reader with a theoretical account of affect nor to explore affect as the research object, I will not go further into an account of the theoretical position of affect. My aim is to explore how affect, in conjunction with poetic inquiry, can contribute to qualitative research that includes rather than excludes affect.

In the following, I elaborate on the process of poetic inquiry by discussing its various parts. In practice, this occurs in a dynamic and creative process, but to describe in more detail what is involved, I will describe some of the considerations involved when producing the empirical material, when constructing the poetic analyses and when theoretical perspectives are applied into the analysis.

Producing empirical material for poetic inquiry

My research focuses on young people on the margins of the educational system and explores structural, relational, and individual conditions that weave into their movements to and from ordinary education. The research field is youth sociology, also called youth research. Giving young people a voice is crucial in youth research. If we want to understand the phenomena and problems connected to young people's lives, we must give them the opportunity to be heard. However, I also want to draw attention to the fact that the notion of 'giving people a voice' raises several issues that are important to bear in mind. Specifically, these are related to how the research participants are represented, positioned, and reduced in the researchers' interpretations and readings of the participants' voices (Nielsen, 2018). As I discuss in more detail below, in poetic inquiry, the researcher is open about her role in constructing the knowledge that emerges through the analyses. Poetic analyses do not pretend to "represent" the research participants but are instead considered as analytical polyvocal constructs (Gergen & Gergen, 2012; Görlich, 2016, 2019). Thus, it must be emphasised that research participants' perspectives are not 1:1 representations of the participants' voices. The researcher cannot take someone else's perspective and believe it to be represented in the research. Instead, the researcher co-constructs the knowledge produced, which means that she researches, writes and analyses based on her own subjective perspective and constructs analyses that are composed of a multitude of different perspectives. The researcher writes her story about their history (Richardson, 1993).

Furthermore, giving a voice to research participants also means giving voice to what I as a researcher allow to become the foreground. I am interested in what research participants say, what they experience, and what emotions they connect to their experiences. Therefore, when the research participants start talking about emotional reactions, instead of directing the conversation in another direction, I probe deeper. I ask them to unfold this emotional and affective landscape and consider this as just as important parts of their experiences as actions, reflections or conversations. The researcher probes and the research participant answers. This is an inherent part of the research

construction. Hence, the researcher co-constructs the voice of the research participant. This also means that, during the interviews, it matters what questioning techniques is used. In the following section, I will elaborate on this.

Interview and questioning technique

Inspired by Bronwyn Davies (2010) and Kenneth Gergen (2015), I use what I call a “relational research optic”, which means that relational perspectives weave into the production of knowledge at all levels. At the core of the analyses is the idea of mutual processing:

The concept of processing here emphasises the phenomenon of human embeddedness in culture; it is only through their use of culture, through their assimilation into the culture and vice versa that they are at all able to become human and that the culture is developed, lived, reproduced, moved and changed in a continuous process (Søndergaard, 1996: 31 [my translation]).

Humans shape and are shaped by culture and society and are, therefore, also dependent on cultural and social integration. Thus, when I examine mutual processing, I examine the young people’s “subjective processing of the conditions that they are dealt and through which they have to become human”, as Søndergaard (1996: 31 [my translation]) puts it. The analytical processes can be conducted in a variety of ways, and just like other analytical methods for processing qualitative data, the use of theoretical concepts to construct the analyses is crucial. Later in this paper, I will show how the analyses differ according to the theoretical perspectives.

On the foundation of a ‘relational research optics’, at a more practical level, I prepare interview guides that contain questions that have a relational content and purpose. Instead of asking solely about the research participants’ individual motivations, behaviour, experiences, etc., I also ask about their relationships with teachers, social workers, family, and friends as well as their experiences with politically determined conditions involved in their education processes. For example, in the case of young people on the margins of the educational system, this would be education injunctions, entrance requirements, limited education attempts, etc., which are, therefore, objects that produce affects in the lives of the young people. However, I do not usually ask about this directly. Instead, when they mention it themselves, I ask them to explain and elaborate on their experiences. Similarly, I probe the situations they themselves mention which involve other people, and which involve feelings. They unfold the situation and in doing so, the relational and affective landscape becomes more and more detailed.

As in many other qualitative interviews, I apply an interview structure that is open, exploratory, unfolding, searching, and engaging, and my role as a researcher is to establish a forum in which the interviewee can unfold understandings and descriptions (Søndergaard, 2005). In individual as well as group interviews I use an interview technique, which is based on my experiences with therapeutic work. As a psychotherapist, I am trained to conduct therapeutic conversations. Even though therapeutic narratives are very different to narratives in research interviews, it is unavoidable that the way I communicate and connect with research participants is influenced by my past work experiences. This means, more specifically, that I use techniques that establish room for reflection during the interview in which the research participants feel that they are being listened to.

Methodically speaking, the intention is to unfold affective perspectives through various questioning techniques, where the research participants and I, in collaboration, examine their situation. These techniques are first and foremost based on acknowledgement, whereby I deliberately create an atmosphere which makes the research participants want to enter this reflection space with me. This acknowledging contact emerges partly through the general approach I adopt, in which I listen to what the research participants say, ask questions about it and do my best to understand the meaning they ascribe to what they say, no matter how 'strange' or 'unlikely' it may sound. Often statements that at first sound 'strange' or 'unlikely' turn out to be meaningful once they have been unfolded. In addition, I verbally acknowledge what the research participants say. Small expressions such as 'yes', 'ok' or 'ah, now I understand' make the research participants want to keep talking and they often continue their narrative themselves.

The second questioning technique, which is related to the first, is called paraphrasing in the field of therapy. This involves repeating the last thing the research participant has said. If, for example, research participants say "... but it did not go so well", I follow this up by saying, "It didn't go so well?" Or if he says "... it was just a crap school", I will follow up with, "ok, so it was a crap school?" In this way, I acknowledge what the research has said while, at the same time, signalling with my question that I would like to hear more. The difference between a therapeutic conversation and a research interview is that the research interview often is more controlled by the researcher, who decides when to change the focus of the interview in accordance with the research questions. Thirdly, I use affective subjectivity in the interview. This means that I relate to what the research participant says and react if they say something that I respond to emotionally. One can say that I let their affects 'stick' (Ahmed, 2004) to me, which creates a mutual space that centres on feelings. Therefore, I might say something like "I really understand why you were angry ", if the research

participant's feeling of anger 'sticks' to me. Instead of being 'objective' and trying to keep my reactions in check, I express myself emotionally partly to acknowledge the research participants' experience and partly to facilitate an analysis of the affective landscape. This means that the interview instead of evading the feelings, unfolds them, which is part of my aim of applying poetic inquiry to construct evocative and affective analyses.

Finally, I use visual material in individual interviews, but especially in focus group interviews. The young research participants can find it very challenging sitting at a table just talking for one-and-a-half to two hours. Therefore, I use exercises where, instead of only reflecting verbally, they use a variety of senses to reflect. To this end, I use photos that are chosen by the research participants to describe their experiences, attitudes, thoughts, and feelings. In addition to introducing an element of variation in the interview, it also gives the research participants an opportunity to talk about some of the things they might otherwise have found difficult to put into words. I use photos taken from a research project (Wildemeersch & Leuven, 2000), which I have used in several research projects since. The most important feature of this technique is that it allows affective content to emerge during the interview. I ask the research participants to choose a photo that describes how they 'feel' about education and, thus, it becomes appropriate for them to describe their affective experiences with education. For example, the research participants may choose a photo of a premature baby to illustrate their vulnerability in connection with education, or a photo of a sign that is pointing different directions to express a high degree of confusion over the many potential choices they face, or a photo of a large pile of bicycles to express the inner turmoil connected to their chaotic experiences with education. Therefore, I include affective aspects of the research participants' experiences with education in various ways.

When collecting the empirical material, it is essential to use techniques that give the young people time to express themselves emotionally about their experiences with education. In the actual empirical research, however, there are often several issues in the question guide, which means that the researcher must find a balance between making room for the feelings while, at the same time, controlling the interview. The key is that the researcher uses the affective approach to collect material to construct poetic analyses. In the following section, I discuss in detail how this is played out in my use of the technique.

Poetic inquiry: The analytical process

In order to explore the analytical process in this paper, I use empirical material from a research project titled "The path towards education and work" (Pless & Görlich, 2018). The research project follows an activation project, the aim of which is to test new methods of helping young people under the age of 30 to re-enter education or pursue a job. It is in a provincial part of Denmark in an area with a high number of young people who have not completed ordinary education. The aim is to qualify the young people for them to be able to complete upper secondary education. Six focus group interviews and 20 individual interviews were conducted. For this article, however, I use a single interview, to examine and unfold what is involved in the analytical process; the decisions I make and why; an examination of the process that constitutes poetic inquiry. More specifically, I have conducted a poetic analysis during which I have carefully noted how I work with the text. This has resulted in a detailed description of three phases of the analytical process. Before introducing the three phases, I will present the poetic analysis:

I am 22
 always been shy
 just sat there
 afraid
 haven't said much
 never completed anything
 been all over the place
 all over
 my papers said
 ready for education
 I don't know if I am ready
 don't know what I want
 need more time
 a little more certain
 of what I want

I am pleased to be here
 a place to be me
 a breathing space
 don't have to do this or that
 not forced into anything
 they look after you
 have a break
 I am sad to leave this place
 sad
 I have to grow up
 no more quitting
 just do it
 cross the bridge

into the big building
that is what I have to do

(Sally)

Phase one: Deleting and moving text

In the first phase, I go through the entire interview transcript and delete and move text. I work through the document and start by deleting my questions, the interviewee's name, and short words such as 'yes', 'exactly' and 'actually'. If the interviewee frequently uses filler words, I decide whether I should keep the words to make it part of their particular 'sound'. This is one way of making the analysis poetic. After deleting questions, names, and filler words, I examine the content of individual sentences. During this process, I often delete sequences that deal with factual aspects such as teaching, exams, etc. For example: "When is your exam?", "The 12th". I also delete sequences that rationalise such as: "It is better now" and generalisations such as: "There is a lot of pressure on young people today". While the word "pressure" does have affective content, it is my view that the generalisation blurs the affective experience. Instead, I am interested in describing this pressure in a way that produces an affective feeling. During this stage, I also look at repetitions. Often a phenomenon is explained two or more times in an interview, and I choose that which has emotional content and delete anything that does not include affective language.

As well as deleting text, I also move text. In general, I move text to construct different sections with different analytical content. In an interview, there will be several sequences in which the interviewee talks about various topics that are connected to different spaces or specific episodes that have a time frame. In such cases, I break up the text and move one part further down the document. For example, when a sequence is about the past, I move it next to other sequences about the past, thereby constructing a verse. Thus, the construction of the poetic analysis may be based on several time verses that are also institutionally connected, for example, elementary school or upper-secondary education. Within each of these verses, the affective experience in the specific context is condensed. I also move text when the same phenomenon is mentioned in different ways. By moving it, I make repetitions to create a rhythmic mood, for example, "all over the place".

haven't said much
never completed anything
been all over the place
all over

Some repetitions are evocative, either because they highlight emotional experience, in this case having tried many different educational programmes, or because they emphasise the importance of something. Therefore, I emphasise expressions the research participant repeats many times during the interview such as, “they look after you”. The purpose of this is for the reader to notice the importance affectively.

they look after you
 have a break
 I am sad to leave this place
 sad

At the same time as focusing on the material that is emotional and evocative, I also ensure that I keep sequences concerning emotions that involve objects such as education injunctions, assessments about readiness for education, buildings, and classrooms. This is to maintain the analytical focus on the mutual processing between the individual and structural conditions.

Overall, the first phase of the poetic inquiry entails deleting text that is factual, post-rationalising, generalising, and that does not have any affective content. It also involves breaking up the text in relation to past, present, future, or specific contexts, and moving text to apply literary tools such as repetition and rhythm. The first phase is complete once I have reached the end of the interview transcript. By this time, the text has been condensed down to a fourth or fifth of the length of the original transcript.

Phase two: Condensing

In the second phase, the content is further condensed (Krøjer, 2003). I review the entire transcription once again and delete filler words as well as sentences with factual content or sentences that describe emotions but without any affective content. For example, formulations such as: “I mean, I feel a bit like it was the same”. Even though the interviewee talks about feelings, the sensation of the talk is not affective and, therefore, I will delete it. Furthermore, I often delete the pronoun ‘I’, but the decision depends on the rhythm I want to create. Sometimes I choose to retain “I” if it is repetitive and can be used rhythmically.

At this stage, it is crucial to condense by deleting text. This is achieved by evaluating the content of sequences with a common topic. I delete sequences with rationally explained content and retain sequences with affective content. This makes the affective content stand out. For example, I will

delete factual descriptions of the teachers or comments such as, “I think it’s good” but I will not delete affective words and phrases such as “breathing space”, “take care of you”, “consider you”.

I am pleased to be here
a place to be me
a breathing space

Often, several sequences express the same content, in which case I select the ones where the poetic and affective content is greatest, i.e., that contain evocative words and phrases that work affectively. I may also decide to delete descriptive affective words such as “nervous” if the nervousness can instead be described poetically by, for example, use of the phrase “the big building”.

I have to grow up
no more quitting
just do it
cross the bridge
into the big building

When I compare two sequences, I delete the one that has the least affective content, but also text that is least capable of revealing the mutual processing between the individual and the surroundings. If both are present, that will be the sequence I keep. In the construction of the analysis, “the big building” provides a poetic and evocative image of Sally’s affective experience of the educational demands, just as it is an object to which certain emotions are connected. At this point, I start to read the poetry aloud. This highlights how the text functions rhythmically and whether there are any words that are out of place or superfluous. I use my affective subjectivity in this process – when I am personally affected, I will keep it, if not, I will delete it.

As can be seen, it is central to the second phase that the poetic sequences are further condensed based on the specific analytical perspectives. In general, when conducting the analysis, I strive to ensure that the interaction between the meanings and, amongst others, categories, discussions, and subject positions is highlighted as a point of entry to the study of what the complexity of structural, institutional and discursive conditions does to the young people, and how feelings bind the young people to objects that are connected to this complex field. This is apparent in the example of words/phrases such as ‘forced’, ‘pressurised’ and ‘education ready’. I condense the text from the beginning many times until the poetic sequences seem “concentrated” (Krøjer, 2003), evocative and rhythmically stringent. I can control this in different ways, for example, by having a certain number

of verses, or by ensuring that each verse has a certain number of stanzas. What is key, however, is the affective, poetic and analytical content.

Phase three: Theoretical interaction

The third phase of the analytical process involves interaction between the theoretical perspectives, analytical concepts, and the empirical material (Krøjer, 2003; Hølge-Hazelton, 2002). In this paper, I have used theoretical perspectives on affect:

Rather than seeing emotions as psychological dispositions, we need to consider how they work, in concrete and particular ways, to mediate the relationship between the psychic and the social, and between the individual and the collective. (...) My economic model of emotions suggests that while emotions do not positively reside in a subject or figure, they still work to bind subjects together (Ahmed, 2004: 119).

Ahmed (2004) is interested in how emotions involve both subjects and objects without residing in them. Instead, she sees emotions as something that move sideways via associations between signs, figures and objects, and backwards through the experiences of emotions. With Ahmed, it is possible to investigate how emotions both help to draw borders between bodies while, at the same time, acting as what brings bodies together. Instead of viewing emotions as psychological dispositions, Ahmed examines how they function, what they do, and how they mediate the relationship between the psychic and the social and between the individual and the collective. With Ahmed, emotional states become a form of glue that binds subjects and objects together in communities.

When preparing the analyses, I make a distinction between poetic texts and poetic inquiry. The latter consists of the individual poetic sub-analyses, which I call poetic texts, and the analytical reflections through which I read the poetic texts. Therefore, I conduct an analytical-theoretical reading of the poetic texts. A theoretical reading of the above poetic text of Sally with a focus on subject positioning (Davies & Harré, 1990) might be:

Sally is positioned as “ready for education” and she negotiates this position by, on the one hand, questioning how “ready” she actually is. She talks about education as being something she has to jump into, despite the fact that she “has no idea” what education she should choose. On the other hand, the position is thus also negotiated by the fact that she “jumps” into education because it is something she “has to do”. Through these negotiations, she tries to assume the subject position of “adult”.

An alternative theoretical reading with a focus on affective economy (Ahmed, 2004) might, for example, sound like this:

The feeling of being “scared” sticks to Sally’s earlier experience with education and, thus, binds her together with both previous schools and with other young people, to whom the feeling of being “scared” also sticks. Thus, there is a collective circulation of “scared” as something that is connected to previous educational experiences. The same circulation is apparent with “happy”, which sticks Sally sideways together with the project she is taking part in, those whose teachers “take care of her” and other young people. At the same time as “happy”, the feeling of being “frustrated” stands out in the poetic texts. “Frustrated” sticks to the project, the “big building” and Sally, but also to the political decisions that demand Sally go to ‘the big building’, even though she thinks she needs more time.

What is central to my use of poetic inquiry as a method is that I read the poetic texts through these theoretical concepts because this allows me to read across poetic texts and construct the analyses from these readings. For example, I have conducted focus group interviews with a total of 33 young people, where this transverse reading is central to the selection of the poetic texts around which I construct the overall analysis. In this analytical process, I broke the focus group interviews up and collected all the quotes from each interviewee. This is another way of working with the voices of the young participants and it provided a good opportunity to, once again, “listen to” what the young people had said in the focus group interview. Next, I worked on the transcription according to the method described above.

Overall, poetic inquiry contributes to an affective reading of the mutual processing between the young people and the socially produced conditions through which the young people come into being. Through the poetic condensations of the interviews with the young people, it is possible to construct analyses that have affective perspectives in focus.

Affective perspectives in qualitative research

The aim of this paper has been to describe in detail how poetic inquiry is practised and how a focus on affect in interaction with poetic inquiry can open new perspectives to the researcher. In the paper, I show how it is possible to construct analyses in a relational and affective research process that offer new perspectives on the “mutual processing” between the young people and the socially produced conditions through which the young people become subjects. This consists of the methodological concept of poetic inquiry in conjunction with an affective focus that facilitates an analysis of the young people’s affective voices in the field between feelings, institutional practices, political conditions, and individual actions.

Affective poetic analyses allow the qualitative researcher to take an interest in the feelings that are connected to the experiences, narratives and emotions of the research participant. In the interviews, the emotional and affective landscape is unfolded, which implies some key methodological considerations. Firstly, it is important to acknowledge the research participant during the contact as this is a prerequisite for their entering the affective reflective space. Secondly, it is also important to paraphrase what the research participant says, as a way of creating an affective and reflective space. Thirdly, as a researcher, I use my affective subjectivity in the interview and let feelings 'stick' to me in a mutual study of affect. Finally, I use visual material that encourages conversations with an affective focus during the interviews. Similarly, the focus of the analytical work is on allowing affective perspectives to stand out. As shown, this is achieved by the researcher condensing the content of the interview transcripts based on the analytical questions, so that structural, relational, and affective perspectives stand out. This is achieved by constantly assessing the text in terms of its affective content, the mutual processing and poetic content, i.e., the literary tools applied in the construction of the affective content in the analysis.

It is important to stress that the poetic texts I construct originate from the relational interaction between the respondent's statements and the researcher's interpretations derived from my analytical optic. I am under no illusion that the research participant's voices emerge by themselves and 'reveal' underlying mechanisms that are oppressive. The poetic texts are empirical constructs like other types of qualitative empirical constructs, where several analytical voices are presented simultaneously. In this work, the researcher selects and edits the research participant's voices. My interest centres on the mutual processing between young people and structural conditions and phenomena. Therefore, I choose to listen to whatever elevates this affectively and evocatively. It is important to stress this because otherwise one might think that the poetic texts run the risk of maintaining an individual focus. This is something I distance myself from through my adoption of the relational analytical optic. The latter allows me, in a relational and affective process, to listen to the young people and turn their voices into poetic texts in ways that let affective narratives emerge.

Thus, by combining affective perspectives, poetic inquiry and specific theoretical concepts, it is possible to produce analytical constructions that can contribute to qualitative research by providing new ways of understanding and exploring the lives of research participants. Therefore, poetic inquiry and affective perspectives have the potential to bring new insights and methods to social research. Firstly, the method legitimises the inclusion, investigation, and interpretation of affective and emotional perspectives in the research participant's experiences. Secondly, the method facilitates

the construction of analyses in which the emotional responses to, and experiences with, the society of which the research participants are in the process of becoming a part are in focus and shows how affect can be investigated as something that circulates between people and objects. Thirdly, the method allows professionals, decision-makers, researchers, etc., to sense these emotional responses in their attempts to understand the young.

Against this background, there is a rich potential for developing poetic inquiry as a qualitative method and disseminating its use in qualitative research, so that research participant's experiences are also understood in an affective and relational context. In this paper, I have outlined how poetic and affective perspectives can be constructed and applied and what they can contribute to qualitative research. Including affect and/or emotion in qualitative analysis can be done in multiple ways without affect being the research object. However, it will be highly beneficial to include affect and/or emotion – what is being sensed – into the production of knowledge in a variety of fields. This might, 'reactivate sensuousness' as Berardi (2012) puts it and add important perspectives to already known phenomena.

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