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The Role of Emotions in Ethnographic Research: Comparing Subjectivities

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Abstract: This article considers the role of the researcher's emotions in ethnographic research. The topic originates from the epistemological turn that since the 1960s has dealt with the researcher–subject studied relationship. The first part of this article analyzes the pivotal elements of the epistemological debate on the researcher–studied subject relationship. It is defined through a dialogical relationship in which the researcher puts into practice their reflexivity while being aware of the elements that characterize it, including emotions. The second part of this article uses two research experiences to show how emotions in ethnographic research are a valid tool for entering into dialogue with the subjects studied. They provide a better understanding of the social cutaways and enrich the reflexivity that characterizes social research, without affecting methodological rigor. The possible risk when considering emotions is to fall into excessive relativism and enter a sort of spiral of reflexivity due to the plurality of possible interpretations. It is a risk that is mitigated by the procedures the researcher uses to explain the personal observer–author equation. Writing is one of the tools that allows the researcher to account for the construction of a meaning of the results. It gives a 'probative' narrative that must contain all the methodological choices that guided the research.

Keywords: emotions; ethnographic research; methodology

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1. Introduction

This article addresses a sensitive issue that is seldomly discussed in the methodological field: the role of the researcher's emotions when ethnographic research is carried out, with a particular reference to situations of social vulnerability.

Ethnographic research focuses on the communicative and cognitive potential of the observer's 'presence'. Its validity is based on the need for dialogue and confrontation between the researcher and the observed reality. It gives a new centrality to the relationship between researcher and social actor as well as to the emotional distance between the sociologist and the human context with which they come into contact while carrying out their research.

The researcher should be seen as a 'two-faced' subject, to quote Manghi's definition (Manghi 1996), because if on the one hand, the researcher puts the observed reality into action while remaining other than it; on the other hand, the researcher is the observed reality and can therefore only put it into action, as other than himself or herself, provided he or she puts himself or herself in his or her shoes in an empathic manner. In a kind of schizophrenic condition, functional to the discovery of the possible worlds in which social reality takes shape, the researcher finds himself or herself having to manage the relationship with another who is different from himself or herself, but a participant like him or her in the same social cross-section. The clothes the researcher wears become 'creative filters' through which the researcher reverberates the external social reality (Manghi 1996).

The starting point in ethnographic research is the presence of a distance between the social actor and the researcher. This distance can be bridged through specific strategies to reduce differences and create a wealth of experience that belongs to both the social actor and the researcher (Cataldi 2012a). It is resized by the possibility of becoming immersed,

while plunging into the folds of interaction and making the more evanescent aspects of social reality visible (Schwartz and Jacobs 1979).

It is an approach that is not limited to discussing the theoretical premises and axioms of sociological knowledge (an element that belongs to quantitative research), but rather explores, from the inside, the mechanisms through which social reality is constructed. Using the words of Peter Berger (Berger 1963), we could say that this type of approach allows one to look beyond the facades of social structures and penetrate the smokescreen of the official version of reality, to focus attention on the micro elements or micro incidents that contribute to the construction of social reality.

The paradigm of the relationship with the social actor as a source of danger for the realization of the research gives way to the paradigm that sees the relationship as a source of resource for the research work. The quality of research depends on the researcher's ability to understand the subject and to draw useful information from it (Ranci 1998).

Ethnographic research, therefore, is not exclusively a way of exploring reality but must also be seen as a relational game. It generates a system of relationships in which the subjects involved give rise to a process of mutual agreement/differentiation by strategically using their own identity references.

For any kind of game to be played, rules need to be established and respected by all the players. This also makes it possible to clarify the tasks and roles of everyone. In the case of social research, the relational game poses a kind of dilemma for the researcher. On the one hand, they are involved in the field of investigation, while on the other, they must have the ability to observe the situation being experienced and its implications from the outside.

The solution can be found in developing reflexivity, which comprises an awareness of the defining elements of the relational game, including emotions, which are integral to it.

The examples and research experiences discussed in this article will help to highlight how the researcher's emotions are not only inevitably present in fieldwork but must also be considered within the dialogical relationship created between researcher and social actor.

When studying social phenomena related to social vulnerability and distress, any emotions that are inevitably aroused in the researcher represent a significant challenge when carrying out ethnographic work. If they are not managed correctly, these emotions risk altering the nature of the dialogue with the social actors involved.

Starting with some ideas about how the relationship between researcher and observed subject has become a focus of attention, the following paragraphs will present some examples of ethnographic research carried out by the writer. This will show how emotions play a key role in social research.

2. The Centrality of the Relationship between Subjects in Ethnographic Research: The Epistemological Turn

The relationship between researcher and subject studied is a fundamental element of the epistemological turn that has taken place since the 1960s. This has been a process of change that has contributed to unhinging the cornerstones of traditional sociological thinking. It has resulted in a conception of social science in which both the researcher and studied subject are seen as constitutive of each other, not simply in relation to each other (Gouldner 1970).

This conceptual framework led to a process of epistemological redefinition that involved the entire field of social research. The centrality of language, situated and culturally defined, was a primary focus. The observer/researcher relationship was redefined in terms of connection rather than dichotomy (Giddens 1976). All this is in the awareness that research does not produce absolute knowledge but, if anything, a plausible interpretation. The aim is to make sense of the different ways in which social actors in turn try to make sense of their actions (Melucci 1998).

The possible interpretations defined by Melucci (Melucci 1998) produce accounts. They are narratives that adopt the rhetorical strategies of scientific language but do not claim to explain reality independently of the subject that observes and studies it.

They move away from the linear relationship between hypothesis and verification of hypotheses, which characterized the classical model of scientific research. They tend to share the paradigm of the emergent and recursive explanation that characterizes those processes in which knowledge is produced through an exchange that can be defined as dialogic between the observer and observed.

This calls into question the assumption that objectivity is the sole criterion for the value and quality of social research. It suggests that the narrative can be a valuable tool for interpreting social phenomena, provided that it is not presented as an independent explanation of reality.

This highlights a particularly relevant issue for social research. It animates any possible debates on the validity of this type of research and its ability to produce reliable and useful results for the development of scientific research.

This is closely linked to the risk that the subjectivity of the researcher and their involvement in the activities of the subject or group being observed are considered potential sources of errors. From this point of view, the presence of the researcher is understood as 'perturbing', with it generating possible distortions. They could be capable of modifying the context, the situations, and the relations between all the social actors involved. The problem affects how 'science' is observed, researched, and produced. It also affects the credibility and validity of the narratives produced.

This is a crucial issue that regards, and in some ways undermines from the ground up, the epistemological principle on which modern science was founded, specifically, the separation between observer and observed as a condition for objective knowledge of the world. The introduction of the ideas of connection and dependence between the person looking at something and the thing being looked at, as well as the contribution of phenomenology and hermeneutics and the great deal of attention paid to language, has made the process of this connection the focus of the debate. Social actors (both the person looking at something and the thing being looked at) interact continuously and constantly in a context that is always changing (Martire et al. 2013). In this framework, ethnographic research and observation are never a simple mirroring of reality, but always intervene by pointing out boundaries and modifying the field of action (Melucci 1998).

Ethnographic activity is possible at the price of a certain opacity on the part of the observer in a balance, always precarious, between involvement and detachment (Biorcio and Pagani 1998), between familiarity and extraneousness (Gadamer 2000), in an attempt not to privilege one at the expense of the other.

The drastic, binary distinction between being an integral and active part of the context under observation and being outside of it, to guarantee objectivity and fidelity and to give precision and scientific rigor to the result of our observation, risks trivializing the epistemological question. The identification of the observer's degree of participation does not exhaust the reflection on ethnography as a method. Furthermore, the distinction between being inside or outside the field of investigation does not imply the existence of two distinct aspects. It is possible to hypothesize intermediate degrees between the two opposite extremes, which can be positioned on a continuum that connects them (Cataldi 2012a).

The perspective formulated through the use of separator terms between the protagonists of the interaction has, to some extent, conditioned our reasoning by dichotomies. This approach involves the use of separator terms to address the fundamental themes that have shaped the discipline of sociology. Themes that have emerged in the present day in a boxing match context include those of quantity vs. quantity, micro vs. macro, monism vs. pluralism, objectivism vs. subjectivism, causal paradigm vs. interpretative paradigm, and so on.

This never-ending contest to conquer the terrain of investigation has generated an endemic state of uncertainty. It is based on approaches that consider the relationship between the researcher and social actor in an antithetical position, characterized by swinging tenden-

cies always poised between detachment and involvement, abstraction and categorization, exchange and recognition.

It is also worth considering how theoretical divergences and methodological oppositions have made the search for a connection rather difficult. They have also prevented the circulation of synergies useful for opening a dialogue on the complementarity of methods, on the valorization of diversities, which have emerged from dissimilar conceptual elaborations, as well as on the promotion of research results, which are the outcome of different orientations.

One example is the debate between monism and methodological pluralism. This has also been discussed in relation to the social sciences and the different methods used in these sciences compared to the physical and natural sciences as well as in the sociological dispute between quantitative and qualitative methods. The solution capable of mediating and stemming this interpretative conflict has to do with a basic assumption: to recognize in essence, as Giddens (Giddens 1976) has pointed out, that we are dealing with distinct situations. In contrast to the natural sciences, where the focus is on the subject-to-object relationship, for the social sciences, the focus is on the subject-to-subject relationship. The diversity of the field of study means that different methods of investigation are needed. It also means understanding the methods used, as Cardano stated (Cardano 2001) when qualifying the governing elements of scientific practice, «not as rules but as principles whose application imposes consideration of the specificities of the context, thus, imposes an interpretation» (Cardano 2001, p. 183).

In his reflections on qualitative research, Melucci (Melucci 1998) argued that this opposition is futile. He also linked changes in complex societies to the growing demand for qualitative research. The concrete activity of research, for the author, lies «between the myth of a distant objectivity and that of a total self-reflexivity that could only wrap around itself [...]. It is made possible by different degrees of opacity and reflexivity, which also depend on the conscious choices of researchers, the values that guide research activity, and the institutional policies that govern the production of social knowledge» (Melucci 1998, pp. 309–10).

This is a process in which individuals conceive and act as autonomous subjects of action. Everyday life takes on a new centrality by directing the researcher's attention towards the particularity of details and the uniqueness of events in a process that emphasizes cultural, territorial, and individual differences.

This awareness places ethnographic research at the center of methodological reflection as a cognitive mode that relates action to everyday life. This makes social research a practice oriented towards understanding society, with it using language as a fundamental tool for understanding.

In his interesting analysis of the complexity of the ethnographic method, Colombo (Colombo 2001) tries to highlight its lights and shadows, focusing on its potential. He identifies it as a new approach in the study of contemporary Western societies, whose complexity requires «new ways of being, of knowing and of narrating that flank or replace those that constituted and sustained the modern Western project» (Colombo 2001, p. 205).

The current conception of the world inherited from modernity is undergoing a significant transformation, which in turn gives rise to the need for a radical rethinking of the categories and methods typically used in social research. This way of thinking about ethnographic research resulted in new questions and insights that inevitably led to considering ethnography, and at the declinations of the qualitative method, with a renewed interest.

In this theoretical frame, ethnographic research finds its natural collocation, both in terms of realization as well as of potential. This is because it offers new insights and interpretative stimuli that are the result of ever-changing sensibilities, capable of revealing the implications of the social reality in which it is interwoven, placing itself in a dialectical relationship with it.

In the implementation of the ethnographic method, the instruments used, such as field notes, written reports, and recorded voice memos, allow the material to be articulated

and classified not only according to precise categories, following genuine ethnographic protocols, as Gobo (Gobo 2001) observes, but also to define new ones.

Ethnographic notes include the researcher's thoughts and observations. They also include the methods used to collect and organize the material. Finally, they include an analysis of the material (Cardano 2011).

It is therefore no coincidence that Cardano (Cardano 2011), in his studies on the relationship between ethnography and reflexivity, discussed at length the contribution of reflexive practices to the justification of ethnographic assertions. He gave reflexivity a prominent place among the criteria governing qualitative research. In his analyses, he strongly supported the idea of founding the plausibility of ethnographic knowledge with scientific criteria that are 'other' than those that dominate quantitative research, to the point of demonstrating how «reflexivity constitutes for ethnographic research the most appropriate instrument for qualifying the objectivity and generality of its own assertions, thus completing the restitution (or surrender) of reflexive practices to scientific discourse» (Cardano 2011, p. 174).

This type of research is based on a mutual understanding between the researcher and the subject of the study. It simply builds on the ideas of sociology as participation, which Ferrarotti (Ferrarotti 1961) first outlined in 1961.

In this biunivocal relationship between subject and object, there is a third element: the context. Defined by the sociologist Ferrarotti as a third term, it is the common ground in which the encounter takes place and is consummated. This approach makes it possible to reason in other terms and overcome the impasse of detachment from the object. However, it remains one of the prerequisites for a plausible perspective of analysis, putting in the right place that missing piece that allows one to adopt a unitary and more harmonious vision, which refines and enriches a reflection on the subject.

Adopting such a perspective means avoiding the cognitive pitfall inherited from the very beginning of the debate on sociological knowledge, a debate marked by anxiety about the recognition of sociology as a science as well as by an intrinsic reflection on the relationship between researcher and social actor, between subject and object of study.

In this evolution, marked by a dynamic process on several levels, the imprint of ethnographic research not only remains that of knowing new worlds, but takes on the function of a self-reflexive matrix, which allows one to fully understand that «the social world must be known, not simply through the 'discovery' of some external fact, not only by looking outwards, but also by opening oneself from within» (Gouldner 1970, p. 710).

Gouldner's eloquent argument allows one to place on another level the fateful question of the relationship between subject and object which has always been at the heart of sociological reflection on method. The self-awareness of the one who knows becomes the tangle in the weave of the interpretative entanglements generated by the research process because «there can be no knowledge of the world that is not a knowledge of our inner experience of it and of our relations when we are confronted with it» (Gouldner 1970, p. 710).

It is therefore possible to recognise in self-awareness that transversal element capable of easing the dialectical tension built around one of the great dilemmas of qualitative sociology. It is always in search of a definition between the subject and object of study, while being constantly poised between methodological, narrative, and the relativity of the sociologist's point of view.

Trying to re-establish a balance between these elements means acknowledging the impossibility of conceptualizing the two roles in terms of a sort of identity dissociation, as suggested by Cataldi (Cataldi 2012b). It implies characterizing them as elements of integration between consciousness, thoughts, identity, memory, representation, and behavior.

In their cognitive action, the social researcher must inevitably become part of an interactive process based on relationships. They must be able to become part of a system of interactions in which the subjects involved interact and dialogue starting from their own identity references.

They participate in a sort of game of parts in which, on the one hand, they are involved in the study context through their relationship with social actors. However, at the same time, they must be able to observe this relationship from the outside and understand its implications.

The way out of this sort of antinomy lies not so much in adopting a detached attitude, but rather in practicing reflexivity. It involves being aware of all the elements that characterize the interaction with the other... emotions included!

The reluctance to pay attention to the emotional dimension of the researcher has its roots in the cultural heritage of traditional sociological research. The scientific nature seemed to be guaranteed solely by a kind of detachment and distance (especially emotional) between the researcher and social actor, often defined as the object of the research.

The next section highlights how much emotions play a very important role in cognitive activity and can be a useful tool for describing and studying the processes of construction of social reality.

3. The Role of the Researcher's Emotions in the Cognitive Process

At the explicative level, the research experiences presented belong to what is defined in the social sciences, borrowing the term from linguists (Pike 1954), as the emic approach (De Sardan 1998). This is an approach that enhances the internal point of view and the world of meaning of social actors, placing the emphasis on the cultural context and the motivations of the research group and the subjects studied. A type of research is used that relates to non-standardized intrusive strategies. The survey mode does not tend to be structured or uniform, but relies on the presence of the researcher and their direct investigative action (Martire et al. 2013).

The technique is a particular type of observation that is known as shadowing (Sclavi 1989; McDonald 2005; Czarniawska 2007; Quarta 2020), which is enacted by living next to a subject, the target of our research, in their everyday life.

Shadowing is a technique that refers to ethnographic research, with the researcher living next to the person who is part of the research sample.

Shadowing presupposes the study of an individual's life context through a holistic approach, according to which behaviors and actions are the result of the influence of the environment. Each action is related to the situation in which it was produced. It is a technique that is called 'itinerant' (McDonald 2005) since it allows the researcher to experience places of interaction as they are crossed by the individual in their everyday life. It is this characteristic that makes a significant difference from other types of observation that involve being present in a place to observe subjects interacting or performing certain functions within it. The researcher moves together with the subject to be observed in all the places of daily life and enters into a continuous dialogue with their social worlds and contexts. Unlike participant observation, the researcher «also assumes himself or herself, his emotions, his habits of thought, and the continuous search for and negotiation of his or her identity as a fundamental part of the interactive dynamic being studied» (Sclavi 1989, p. 3).

Shadowing is a methodological choice dictated by the need to capture the world of everyday life in its temporal location. The technique makes it possible to analyze all the aspects of everyday life from the inside. It allows one to observe the individual in their context and focus on the daily logics and social practices in which they are involved.

Everyday life with its routines is the place where each person's quality of life is measured, where everyone expects to see their dreams come true (Jedlowski 2005). It is the dimension in which a subject ascribes meaning and significance to the social interactions in which they are involved and to the social reality in which they are embedded (Berger and Luckmann 1966).

Shadowing makes it possible to observe all this. It does so not only through the observation of routine, habitual actions that are faithfully recorded and analyzed in detail but

also through the micro incidents that occur in normality as well as through the knowledge of the forms of the solutions identified to overcome them.

Being the shadow of another person allows the researcher to live next to them and share their experiences, observing them as they happen. The 'diversity' of the researcher becomes the tool for dialogue with the symbolic universe of the person observed. It improves the quality of listening and sharpens relational skills. It is a dynamic that facilitates dialogue, brings out meaningful evidence, and ushers in the style of observation that Marianella Sclavi calls humorous «because it calls to mind the mechanism highlighted by Freud, Bergson, Bateson, Koestler, and Mary Douglas in their studies on the cognitive dynamics underlying the understanding of the witticism [...]. That they all have in common a conception of humor as a mechanism that links together mutually exclusive matrices of meaning» (Sclavi 1989).

This situation inevitably involves the researcher's emotions and habits of thought as part of an ongoing search for and negotiation of an identity as a fundamental part of the interactive dynamic being studied. From an empirical perspective, the decision to shadow another individual entails a commitment to sharing the temporal and modal aspects of their life with them, to stepping outside of our own perspective, and to questioning our own frames of reference in order to gain insight into the other's perspective and its inherent diversity.

The observer in this situation feels awkward, intruded upon, ridiculed, and is often in situations where nothing is taken for granted. Everything has to be reconstructed and redefined. There are no fixed or standardized roles. The observer becomes observed (McCall 2006). The circularity of relationships sets in motion mechanisms of reflexivity and awareness that redefine and reconstruct shared life contexts (Dewalt and Dewalt 2002; Behar 1996; Atkinson and Hammersley 1995).

Shadowing was used in two important studies.

In the first study, two adolescents were shadowed (Quarta 2006). The aim was to analyze the ways in which young people participate in the construction of their life project, within a social reality connoted by the presence of different and sometimes conflicting worlds. The interest comes from my own educational background and the study of Berger, Berger, and Kellner's text *The Homeless Mind* (Berger et al. 1973) in which the authors, beginning with Alfred Schutz's analyses, reflect on the pluralization of life worlds as a condition of life for modern man. To pursue this project, I needed to use a method that would allow me to look from the inside at life worlds, while simultaneously grasping their temporal dimension. Time represents one of the perspectives that permeates all forms of social reality (Cavalli 1985) and is one of the symbols that humans learn as a means of orientation in their existence (Elias 1986).

The second study involved an analysis of the phenomenon of NEET (Not in Employment Education and Training) youths living in situations of overt distress (Quarta and Nanni 2017).

Studies on NEET youth in Italy have always highlighted the risk of social exclusion to which young people are exposed. The decision to focus the research on NEETs in situations of social distress was driven by the need to identify and address a particularly vulnerable group. This approach allowed us to delve into the nuances of a complex phenomenon that often manifests in ways that are challenging to analyze and intervene in. The individuals in question often navigate circuits of chronic social distress, which can make them difficult to identify and engage with. The social contexts in which young people accumulate negative life experiences were studied, with a particular focus on family histories within which genuine careers of distress had been established. These experiences were most often identified as the result of a cultural and emotional inheritance from the family.

This time shadowing made it possible to gain insight into the lives of this category of young people, to trace their journeys, to identify challenges they face, and to comprehend the processes through which they construct meaning in their social reality. It was possible to know their stories more from their words than from their behavior, reactions, and

feelings. Lives characterized by intricate and nuanced experiences were encountered, with the protagonists often perceiving them as inconsequential and superfluous. However, these lives proved to be of significant interest, as they illuminated realities that were not always discernible and frequently challenging to understand through conventional interview methods.

Emotions, almost in a gestalt dynamic of different but overlapping forms, become the protagonists of the interactions, acting as a filter to the cognitive dynamic. Shadowing shows all its disruptive force. As a researcher, I was immersed for most of the day in a world that was not my own. I felt just like the 'fish out of water' that Schwartz and Jacobs (Schwartz and Jacobs 1979) talked about. The most complex aspect of this technique is that the researcher asks subjects for unconventional, long-term involvement, although the observational activity does not interrupt the normal activities of the people being observed (Luthans et al. 1985). The researcher becomes aware of the importance of confrontation with personalities profoundly different from their own and acquires skills in the mechanisms that govern the development of an empathic relationship.

The emotion that accompanies the researcher from the first moments in which they begin shadowing is the considerable embarrassment caused by being in a context different from their own. They feel constantly foreign and with the feeling of invading the personal space (Hall 1963) of another person. It is a feeling that enters into dialogue with the discomfort of the studied subject who accepts having a 'stranger' next to them and taking that person with them into all their life worlds. It is a way of accessing the observation of everyday life that is awkward for the one who accepts to be 'stalked', uncomfortable for others, and ambiguous for the researcher. Involving uncertainty of identity and mutual self-study, this a situation in which we never know which aspects can be taken for granted. The trick is to take these 'inconveniences' not as handicaps, but as privileged tools of detection (Sclavi 1989, p. 4).

The start of the observation, with the entry into the field, is a very delicate moment. Even before being an observer, we are observed, watched. It is therefore necessary to learn how to manage the feelings and thoughts that follow, including through some adjustment moves, a smile, a phrase, a gesture, which redefine the roles and help manage the feeling of discomfort.

The first day of shadowing is the most awkward. On the one hand, the researcher has to place themself in a context that is naturally strange and awkward. On the other, the subject of the observation is followed closely, all day long, by a person who does not belong to their daily life. They have to "justify" the presence of the observer to all their acquaintances. During the first moments of shadowing, reactivity on the part of the observed persons is very high and decreases when the participant realizes that their actions are not subject to judgment by the observer.

Commenting on the observation as it is happening, especially at times of greatest discomfort, can be helpful in dealing with the initial difficulty. The person being followed will need to know if the 'flanking' is working. Asking questions, exchanging impressions, and dissolving doubts may give the shadower the feeling that they want to intrude, and this is likely to slow down the actions of the person being followed. The shadower will take time to stabilize the situation and make it "normal" to be around another person. This adjustment period is sometimes uncomfortable and frustrating for both parties, but it usually does not last long (McDonald 2005).

After this initial settling-in phase, in which the researcher will have acquired the ability to stand beside the subject and the latter will have become somewhat familiar with the researcher's presence, the observational work gets off to a good start.

In my first shadowing experience, every day, I would enter a life context that was far from my everyday context: school. I would accompany a set of twins, who had agreed to participate in my research work, to school and sit at desks with them. Upon entering the building, every time (at least in the first ten days of shadowing), as I walked up the stairs to go to the classroom together with the boys, a custodian or a professor would ask me

who I was and what I was doing there. It was at that moment that embarrassment risked becoming shame. Every time I explained who I was and why I was there, doubts arose with respect to my work and the risk that my emotions would not make me maintain the right lucidity to tell what was happening.

One element that is worth noting is that in the research work at school, I was carrying out a type of observation that can be called non-participatory. My presence could not be assimilated to that of a teacher or even that of auxiliary staff. This aspect increased both my embarrassment as well as the curiosity of the children or teachers who had to deal with the presence of an adult who did not fit into a formalized school role.

At the beginning of this experience, I thought that the reactivity (Cardano 1997) of the students would be high, but my mute presence meant that they at times did not notice me. Once, in class, they even witnessed me witnessing the exchange of a note in which the solution to the math assignment was given. The fact that I had not then expressed contrariness or acquiescence to the gesture meant that their reactivity was minimized.

The most prevalent attitude among the boys was curiosity about this strange adult whom they could not place in the role system of the class group. I had declined the English teacher's invitation to sit next to her in a chair similar to hers and had preferred to sit among them.

At school, at the time of entry, at break times, the relationship with the boys went smoothly, directly, and without any mediation. This is the situation generated in the observation phases carried out in a side-by-side mode, when the researcher and social actor experience the same experiences, the same situations, next to each other, albeit from very different positions. When the relationship with the children was intertwined with other relationships (especially those with their peers), the role of the researcher again became fundamental, emerged in its diversity, and needed continuous recognition and situated relocations.

Even when attendance does not entail full involvement in group activities, it frequently happens that some members, individually or in groups, try to involve the observer in their relationship system, calling them to take sides and positions. On the part of one teacher, for example, there was no shortage of attempts to involve me in a kind of arbitrariness, between her and the pupils, on the negative evaluation expressed against some pupils due to behavior that was deemed inappropriate. These were difficult steps to manage since they risked changing the role definitions of the different interlocutors. Had I become involved, I would have completely lost the boys' trust and perhaps questioned my presence in the classroom.

While the school-based research experience caused me to experience feelings that were somewhat related to the formality of the context and my being an out-of-context adult, the experience with the NEETs was particularly meaningful due to the significant degree of empathy that was created with the person who agreed to have me in their everyday life.

Discomfort, sadness, restlessness, or anxiety are those so-called "negative" feelings that can involve the researcher when studying social phenomena such as poverty, marginality, or social distress. These are emotions that constitute an important test for the researcher. If mishandled, they risk changing the terms of the dialogue with social actors but also risk provoking prejudices against them. Seen from this perspective, emotions become a key element in the construction of research findings because they are themselves part of the context in which social research is carried out and become a significant part of defining the research object.

During the shadowing, there were several occasions when emotions were in danger of taking over. One of the girls who agreed to be the shadowing protagonist had a history of family deprivation that had led her to live in a group home with her son, an 8-month-old child. Her partner lived in another group home (for men only).

She had cared for her seriously ill mother and an abusive father from an early age to the point that she and her mother were forced to seek shelter in a group home.

At several times of shadowing with Sonia (this is the fictional name I gave the girl), emotionally charged memories and stories emerged. They were moments when feeling, perceiving the feeling of others, empathizing became a means through which to analyze the construction of meaning of that particular social reality. They were situations in which emotions became the term of dialogue that suggested that I should interact with the girl in a more dynamic way. This also allowed me to evoke memories in her that would open up the narrative of episodes from the past, letting me enter a kind of backstory useful for understanding her current dimension of life. One day while we were on the bus, I noticed how looking out the window at the sea made her feel sad. I asked her why, and she told me that she first swam in the sea when she was 15 years old, even though she lived in a seaside town. In these moments when I perceived a change, my asking "how come?" was the incipit of real flashbacks, during which tales and turning points (Bonica and Cardano 2008) that had characterized Sonia's life changes unfolded. In these moments, narrative parentheses opened up that only the special relationship of trust that had developed between us could bring out.

On another occasion, as we walked through the neighborhood where she lived as a child, Sonia told me that she knew those streets very well because she had lived there with her family. An intense tale followed, of a life lived amidst hardship, denied affectivity and a desire to cope. Sonia told me about her family, her mother who was always ill, her poor relationship with her father, her difficulty in relating to her brother, and her emotional affinity with people in the neighborhood.

I felt I was the creator of that delicate moment when a researcher, emotionally invested in the situation at hand, lets the interviewee's project of meaning emerge from the narrative, intervening in the right measure to facilitate the flow of the story and, at the same time, add cognitive elements to the research objectives (Bichi 2007).

They were episodes in which traits of the past surfaced that were difficult to say but very often also to hear. These were memories that could not be expressed at any time, let alone reported to anyone or upon request. They were linked to a desire to recount her own life, squeezed in discomfort between a daily grind of renunciations and the constant concern to save herself from social isolation. These are pieces of life that once recounted change the relationship between the listener and the listened to (Jedlowski 2009). In this case, I felt a great responsibility to make sure that the narrative voice relied on the silence that alternates with the sound of the voice, that nod of the head that reassures and urges the speaker to continue with the narrative.

The transcription of these narratives was then performed at home. It was very important to add comments related to the nonverbal, to the emotional state (mine and the person next to me), to possible categories of analysis, as well as to all those elements that had led me to provoke that situation myself. When writing, it is important not to leave anything out and not to fall into the mistake of summarizing what is happening with words taken from our own language. There is the risk of missing the linguistic, emotional, and proxemic variability of the actors. Insisting on the accuracy of transcripts ensures a higher quality of information to be submitted later to the analysis that unfolds during the research work.

These situations put to the test the ability of the researcher to identify emotionally with the social actor as well as to react with their own emotions, which, in such cases, also become a source of information. It is a context in which the relationship is based not only on individual commitment but also on emotional input, on the ability of the researcher to perceive the feelings of the social actor and to interpret the subjective experiences of those in front of them through a process of identification (Ranci 1998). It is a process that allows the researcher to get in touch with the mental state of the social actor and perceive their intentions and states of mind.

It is a framework that moves away from the epistemological assumption that the distance between the researcher and social actor can be reduced by cooperation between the two subjects. Cooperation, in this case, must necessarily give way to the researcher's identification: «research in fact does not so much reflect a social reality as socially construct

it; its adherence to the world of everyday life is guaranteed only to the extent that it is based on the direct and immediate experience of the social actor, that is, when the practical and taken for granted mechanisms that make the reality of everyday life what it actually is are made explicit» (Ranci 1998, pp. 46–47).

The risk when emotions come into play is to fall into excessive relativism and enter a kind of endless spiral of reflexivity arising from the plurality of possible interpretations and points of view.

The crux of the matter at this point is to recognize that scientific knowledge, as Melucci states, loses its sacred privilege and becomes a social practice among others while retaining the advantage of having the resources to account for the processes through which knowledge is produced. It is a matter of being able and having to account for that personal observer–author equation (Cardano 2001) that makes it possible to explain the cognitive and epistemological processes that led to certain results. It also allows for the preservation of a methodological rigor that guarantees the quality of the research.

The tool that first and foremost enables the researcher to manage emotional states and make them a fundamental tool for the construction of meaning in research findings is writing. Writing leads to an 'evidential' narrative that must contain several matrices of meaning. It represents the answer to certain questions from which the researcher started: who I am; what I consider important for my research; what the level of legitimacy of my beliefs is.

It is important to write using concrete sensory details in abundance. Goffman (Goffman 1989) recommends copious description, which he called lush, of visual, aural, and sensory details. He suggests that to ensure the scientificity of our work, we must trust ourselves, what we see, the sensations we have in the field of inquiry, and report them in a timely manner.

It is work that must lead to the construction of a reflexive account (Altheide and Johnson 1993) of the conditions that led the researcher to produce the research results and of the dialogical observer–context process that accompanied the fieldwork. The act of writing, along with the entire research process, goes to the heart of producing research results (Altheide and Johnson 1994; Marcus and Clifford 1986).

In taking note of what is happening around us, we need to account for those aspects of the observer–observed–context relationship that are critical to giving plausibility to the findings reported in the reflective account: the negotiation of the research, the enlistment of the ethnographer, and the fieldwork. These are all fundamentally important elements that need to be reported in the writing since they allow the researcher to observe themself as they work, to feel more comfortable, both as an observer and observed, and to give scientific recognition to the method used. It is a matter of accounting for that personal observer–author equation (Cardano 2001) that allows for the cognitive and epistemological processes that led to certain results to be made clear.

In writing, it is always necessary to do so with an abundance of detail both when describing places or people, when reporting on interactions and related emotional states, as well as when reporting on methodological choices.

In the margins of describing access, it was very useful to note, with an abundance of nuance, all the details of both negative experiences (such as when I was denied access to a field of inquiry) and moments when I felt awkward and observed by my interlocutors. Thanks to the richness of this textual material, in the rewriting phase, the one that takes place away from the field of observation, I was able to reflect on the next moves to be made to overcome my awkwardness at the moment when I felt particularly observed or 'pulled into the scenes' by my interlocutors (such as when during shadowing I was asked for my opinion on diriment issues). This aspect made me a conscious interlocutor within that processual reality to which Melucci (Melucci 1998) refers when he emphasizes the importance of the interactive relationship—between observer and observed—that is created during research work, the result of which is the fruit of this very interaction.

Writing is the common thread that accompanies all the stages of research, albeit with different timings. There is a moment of writing that takes place while events are occurring. Then there is writing that takes place away from the field of investigation, in the researcher's study, when they begin to rewrite their notes, reorder them, and assess their interpretative potential.

The most challenging part is not only the management of the vast amount of information that can be generated even by a few hours of observation, but it is that of having to put it in order in a different time from that in which one is in the research field next to the person to be followed.

The writing work must be steeped in accounts of the dynamics of interaction, as well as the description of events, places, or people. It must also include a whole series of elements referable to the cognitive process that guides the researcher's work, such as the modulation of the research timeframe, the tools that are used, the solutions deployed to resolve any problems or snags, the errors that occur, and, finally, the backtalk moments that allow the researcher to thematize the research with their interlocutors, all of which belong to the methodological choices that govern the research process (Cardano 2011).

Observation and writing are part of an osmotic process through which research is constructed. What is observed is entrusted to field notes. The writing of these field notes allows the researcher to reflect on and intensify the interpretative and analytical processes of the events observed. By rewriting and adding details and impressions to the account, we contribute to the attribution of meaning to the interactions witnessed during the observation and facilitate the connection with other events.

For this reason, the writing of the notes, both during and after the observation, must take place with a rigorous and punctual method. It is a moment in which the researcher inscribes the social discourse, annotates it, and, in doing so, transforms it from a fleeting event, which only exists in the moment in which it occurs, into an account that exists in their writings and that can be consulted later (Geertz 1973).

The rigor of ethnographic work is based on all of this. The work of writing is, however, much deeper and more complex than mere transcription. It constitutes an epistemological trial by fire (Van Maanen 1988) that calls into question both the objective and subjective conditions that lead to the production of research results (Cardano 2011).

For the rewriting of the field notes, it was very useful to perform rigorous work that also included emotional states. In my research work, I shared the subdivision that Gobo (Gobo 2001) makes into four types of ethnographic notes, namely observational, methodological, theoretical, and emotional, in a sort of container in communication with each other, to which the researcher 'entrusts' the collected material, and which gives the possibility to organize all the observational work by marking the direction to follow to continue the research work. The original subdivision stemmed from the reflections of Schatzman and Strauss (Schatzman and Strauss 1973) who spoke of observational, methodological, and theoretical notes, with the addition of what Corsaro (Corsaro 1985), during his observation work on children, called emotional notes.

I want to focus on the emotional notes because, in my opinion, they represent a novelty in the style of writing ethnographic notes. However, they contribute to keeping faith with the methodological rigor that we must have in conducting research.

In the emotional notes, the researcher reports the emotions they felt at a particular time of day and through the writing revises themself in that situation and takes note of how much an emotion can play a fundamental role. To deny this aspect, or simply neglect it, would risk interrupting the communication that characterizes the dialogical process of research.

There are many scholars (Corsaro 1985; Lofland et al. 2006; Becker 1998; Burges 1984; Gobo 1999) who agree in valuing and giving importance to the personal and emotional aspects that emerge during fieldwork. They help the researcher to confront themself and reflect on their emotional reactions towards the subject observed.

Emotional and personal aspects, including problems, impressions, feelings, and intuitions, often have to be assimilated into the methodological notes together with certain processes and procedures associated with field research. This is to facilitate reflection and to put under the lens all the methods that can be adopted and developed at particular developmental junctures of research (Becker 1998). For Corsaro (Corsaro 1985), personal notes are intended to capture the observer's feelings and personal reactions to specific features of the observed events. They are personal reactions that may involve responses to the feelings or behavior of specific participants in the observed events.

With emotional notes, it is as if the researcher comes into contact with their feelings and sensations, towards the subjects and situations that characterize the interaction, which inevitably condition the reaction to the object of investigation. Feeling anxiety or disquiet when coming into contact with a person during the observation work can modify the terms of the dialogue. The researcher must keep track of them and become aware of any prejudices towards a subject with whom they enter into a relationship (Lofland et al. 2006).

Writing notes of this kind offers renewed vigor to that osmotic mechanism between the researcher's intuitions and sensations and the object of his research. It is a type of writing that does not simply let ideas out of the mind but helps to fix them and externalize their implicit parts. The researcher can demonstrate that however absurd their intuitions or sensations may be, they constitute a productive part of the research (Mills 1959).

Their re-reading, finally, can help to understand the distance between involvement and detachment. It can also shed light on any stereotypes, beliefs, or fears of the researcher. These are passages to be taken into account since they also help to explain how the researcher carried out their fieldwork, how they observed, and how they arrived at the research results (Cigliuti 2014).

In shadowing, these types of notes acquire a particular value given the proximity and the continuous questioning of ourselves in the dialogical relationship with the subject we are shadowing. The emotional notes in this type of observation serve even more to bring out the moods and emotions that characterize the interactions.

Every time I wrote them down, I saw myself in that scene and tried to understand whether embarrassment, anger, or prejudice had made me handle the situation appropriately.

In light of this dynamic process through which social reality can be studied, emotions take on a fundamental role in gaining insight into social cutaways and contribute to the reflexivity that characterizes social research.

The reflections that emerge from the fieldwork make it possible to overcome all those oppositions that have historically conditioned the path of the discipline and prevented the understanding that observation, ethnography, and qualitative sociology are part of the same discourse. Their development is so intertwined that it is possible to create overlaps between the three elements.

One of the central nodes of this path is represented by the legitimate acquisition of the context of action between the protagonists of the interaction, stripping it of the garb of the obvious, of being there as the background of an action, to the point of considering it as an integral part of that process of situated interpretation of the reality under examination (Giddens 1976).

Observing, perceiving our own emotions, letting them enter into the flow of the cognitive process and the analysis of texts means in some way constructing the social reality in which we have participated in order to carry out our research work (Atkinson 1990; Burgess 1927; Becker 1998; Dewalt and Dewalt 2002; Van Maanen 1988). It is a work in which the researcher brings themself into play through their subjectivity, emotional side, and professionalism. To do this in the best possible way, borrowing Mills' words, they must learn to put their life experience at the service of their intellectual work, studying and interpreting it continuously. The researcher's craft becomes the center of their personality, and the self is involved in every intellectual product they can work on. In this dynamic, the past operates in the present, influencing it and determining the capacity for future experience. It is important to develop the ability to be able to control this complex game, to

be able to fix and choose what is part of our experience. Only in this way can the researcher hope to make use of it, to guide and control their own reflections, and to shape themself, during this process, as an intellectual worker (Mills 1959).

4. Conclusions

Starting out from emotions allows us to draw on a new cognitive map, useful for redefining the terms of the encounter between these 'apparent' diversities (observer and observed). It also allows us to give substance to that cognitive process necessary to translate, in terms of evaluations and choices, and synthesize into arguments that are useful and plausible in the sight of a referential public, all the steps leading to the results of our research activities.

The dynamics of interpretation refer to a much more articulated and extended process, also anchored, according to authoritative opinions (Cardano 2001; Gobo 2001), to other spheres of confrontation. We are thinking of the sphere of reciprocity and exchangeability. It is inherent in the encounter between the texts produced by the researcher and their readers. There is the institutional and academic sphere, constituted by the commissioners of the research or the scholars themselves, and finally, the delicate moment of confrontation with the actors themselves, the 'housemates' of the research field. In this swarming of relationships, the interpretative nexus ends up blurring the distinction between observer and observed, between reader and text, between researcher and social actor, assigning no subject a condition of privilege over the other (Neresini 1997).

In this communicative flow, narration represents the link between training and learning, taking the form of a long sequence, during which one of the interlocutors takes possession of the word and the other mainly assumes the part of listening. It also becomes the practice thanks to which a narrator and a receiver share their identities, their emotions on which they construct a story, around which certain representations of reality are produced and reproduced (Turnaturi 2003; Jedlowski 2009).

We can, therefore, look at narration as a conjunction between different knowledge, notions, and experiences, as a vehicle of affinities between privileged witnesses, as a channel of ancient interlocutions and knowledge practices, as a great dwelling, as Jedlowski puts it (Jedlowski 2009), within which awareness, reflexivity and subjectivity coexist and coexist without conflicting.

In this game of roles, the power of narration, as a practice of social construction of reality, cannot disregard the sociologist's point of view, their emotional states, and their role, understood as a fundamental category of sociological analysis. It represents, as Ferrarotti (Ferrarotti 1961) would say, the middle term linking the individual and the social moment, and indicates the part entrusted to, or rather played by, the individual in society.

When we speak of ethnographic research, a series of elements arise linked to the level of involvement, participation, and the role that the researcher must have in the field of research. This is a role that probably cannot be separated from the adoption of a professional point of view but, at the same time, cannot be separated from all those subjective, emotional, and personal aspects that are proper to them.

In this context, Cardano's (Cardano 1997) observation acquires particular relevance, when he emphasizes how ethnographic research produces knowledge that has in the ethnographer's subjectivity, in their interpretive work, its basis but also its limit. The subjective element, then, becomes the needle of the scales, leveraging that process of role domestication of which Ferrarotti (Ferrarotti 1961) speaks, which, in addition to producing balance, generates a compromise and conceives a synthesis between the sociologist's point of view and the person adopting this point of view. To use Gouldner's words, «the nature and quality of such knowledge depend not only on man's technical ability and not only on his intelligence, but also on all that he is and all that he desires, on his courage no less than on his talent, on his passion no less than on his objectivity. They depend on everything a man does and lives. Ultimately, if a man wants to change what he knows, he must change his life, he must change his praxis in the world» (Gouldner 1970, p. 712).

The use of our own personality, of dialogical frames of reference, of our own emotions in social research becomes the real turning point not only for the research objectives. It somehow allows us to find the real key to access and read the reality we want to study and to understand fully that it is not always profitable to think as usual (Schütz 1979). It seems more convenient to adopt an attitude that allows us to go beyond appearances, to look critically at what we are taking for granted, and to accept the approach of problem awareness, as Ferrarotti (Ferrarotti 1961) suggests, as an essential precondition, the only real precondition of sociology as participation.

This perspective emphasizes the dynamism of the interpretative action, highlighting the positive, almost adrenalinic tension that induces the scholar almost to sniff out the problem and place himself or herself on the same wavelength with it, to be awake, open, and ready to welcome it without any fear. Ferrarotti (Ferrarotti 1961), in his well-known dissertation on the subject, skillfully distinguishes the casuistry of problems that, in his opinion, constitute the object of sociology, grouping them into two macro categories. The first category includes all those aspects that are substantially specific, quibbling, but which, all things considered, can be codified and therefore tackled and resolved. The second category includes all those aspects characterized by a permanent tension, constituted by a technically difficult problematic nature, probably, not comprehensible and not easy to solve. The latter undoubtedly represent the focal points of the analysis. These are the fundamental junctures through which the research process can take a different turn, and which find a solution in the tout court awareness of the difficulty, with which we must come to terms.

Paying attention to problems means trying to give a name to an unknown, to bring out from the empirical data that human side, problematic by definition, which appears rather difficult to decipher. Therefore, the real turning point consists precisely in understanding that «the acquisition of a problematic awareness, capable of orienting research and giving meaning to empirical data, implies the detection of the limits of the naturalistic-scientific conception of the researcher-object relationship and their overcoming» (Ferrarotti 1961, p. 24).

In this perspective, emotions also teach the researcher to make a virtue of necessity and to proceed to a constant reinterpretation of situations, eventually modifying their definition, to the point of opening up a glimpse of the unpredictable, not as a paralyzing event, but as a stimulating one, which needs to be analyzed through other categories of thought. This concept is well explained by Marinella Sclavi (Sclavi 1989) when she refers to the systematization of ethnographic notes and to the possibility of treating the moments of rupture, the unexpected and the emergency situations, encountered during shadowing, as 'lateral events' and of giving them a space, weight, and specific meaning in the research report.

It is precisely in the possibility of introducing new elements that we can understand the power of the reflexivity process, which is activated almost unconsciously in the experimentation of the use of the method. The researcher «also assumes himself, his own emotions, his own habits of thought, the continuous research and negotiation on his own identity as a fundamental part of the interactive dynamic being studied» (Sclavi 1989, p. 3).

In the wake of these reflections, we cannot but agree with Colombo (Colombo 2001) when he speaks of shadowing as a technique that somehow feeds on the researcher's capacity for improvisation, on their aptitude for problem-solving, on the cognitive speed that is proper to them and that allows them not only to manage the unexpected, but to retrieve it, manipulate it, and use it in terms of a resource, as a possibility or as a real stratagem, which will become the keystone in the interpretation process of which it is an integral part.

The development of these skills is undoubtedly stimulated by continually putting ourselves to the test, by interaction with the context, and by the use of a cognitive tool that thrives on continual openings, possibilities and opportunities that must be taken by the researcher in their attempt to be the shadow of another person.

Since it is a form of extreme participant observation, as Cardano (Cardano 2011) defines it, shadowing invites us to thematize the participation of social actors in the process of constructing social reality as a singular occasion of knowledge produced within an inseparable relationship between the protagonists of the interaction. This is not a new issue, given that the debate on the subject has historically oriented reflection on methods in the social sciences. However, we must take note of the fact that, today, this issue takes on new meanings and has new contents, thus raising new questions, the results of which can be partially assimilated and traced back to traditional sociological thought.

One of the missing pieces in the classical reflection on the particularity of the relationship between researcher and social actor, as Cataldi (Cataldi 2012a) suggests, lies in the inability to decline the relationship between the two subjects in concrete terms, to assess the nature of the human interaction that is established between the subjects in the various stages of the research process.

The time has come, therefore, to give due consideration to this form of 'participation'. More than others, it involves emotions. It is also important to understand that it is the theme from which to start, going beyond its 'repertoire' meaning and conceiving it as the fil rouge that links the researcher, actor, and social context of the research. They are linked along a continuum built from time to time through processes of interaction made up of reciprocity, exchange, and mutuality. The context is, therefore, not only the background of interaction, but becomes the place of a cognitive process, space as an activity of the soul. As Simmel would say (Simmel 1908), it is a sphere on which the final result that observation is able to produce crucially depends, precisely because, in the unfolding of interaction, it becomes and lives as a space endowed with meaning.

This consideration prompts new reflections and opens up numerous possibilities for analyzing the methodological peculiarities of this research technique. It brings out the form/dimension of the observational relationship as a relationship that lives in a synchronic space and is nourished by this form of mutual recognition, even in the overt diversity that exists between the actors.

It is a matter of emphasizing a relationship that is generated among the micro interactions of everyday life and that finds its leitmotif in this specific and elective dimension of manifestation/appearance.

It is from this interweaving that the different profiles and faces/forms of a relationship that is not given once and for all but which is constructed, modified, and refined in the different stages of the research progressively emerge, thus giving the scholar the opportunity to experiment with multiple ways of participating in the research itself.

There is that copious system of relationships that acts, in some ways, as a gradation lens on the scale of observation adopted by the researcher. It makes them vigilant actors, witnesses to the construction of meaning in social reality. In other ways, being a participant themself, they contribute to the construction of the imaginaries that sediment and generate the context itself.

This is how space flourishes again as a constantly constructed and redefined dimension that is not just experienced by us but emerges as a mode of experiencing, insofar as it can only be experienced, to quote Simmel once again, as the product of a reciprocal interaction, at once the condition and symbol of interpersonal relationships.

By shadowing, the researcher ends up observing a reality in small strokes. A reality that constantly crystallizes and shatters in the speed of interactions. They can photograph it in snapshots, as with a Polaroid, preserving meaningful images, of which they will only be able to make sense afterwards, stitching them together and relocating them in their natural flow. It is not just a matter of capturing the fateful moment, but of grasping countless ones, overcoming them, and moving forward as reality continues to unfold in its temporality.

This approach opens the way to several horizons. On the one hand, it allows us to enucleate criteria capable of settling the dispute between interpretations, recognizing in the method the potential of possessing that set of principles that impose on the scientist the responsibility of their interpretation in the context in which they are applied (Cardano

2001). On the other, it allows us to understand the method as a sort of 'collector' in relation to the theory and interpretative paradigms, from time to time used. As Rita Bichi (Bichi 2000, p. 32) states, that «methodological discourse must be closely anchored to research practice, that one can best discuss definitions and concepts, links and connections, theory and interpretation if one experiments and compares thought with the activity of praxis».

This intuition derives from the method's ability to leverage interpretative stimuli that circulate in terms of the participation of a borrowed knowledge between the three elements of interaction, while «integrating them in an essential way, directing them, adapting them, extracting all they can give, preventing them from setting themselves up as an end, rather than an instrument of research, imposing their calibration, recognizing their limits» (Ferrarotti 1961, p. 23).

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