

**ARTICULATING PRACTICE THROUGH THE INTERVIEW TO THE  
DOUBLE<sup>1</sup>**

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## ARTICULATING AND WRITING PRACTICE THROUGH THE INTERVIEW TO THE DOUBLE

### ABSTRACT

The paper aims to realise the critical potential of the practice lens by contributing to the development of a coherent set of methodologies for investigating work and organisational activity. It does so by introducing and critically assessing the “interview to the double” as a method to articulate and represent practice.

After briefly illustrating its history and usage, the paper analyses in depth the setting generated by this unusual interview method. It argues that the nature of the encounter produces narratives that are often morally connoted and idealised in character. As a consequence the method is especially useful to capture the going concerns which orient the conduct of the members and the normative and moral dimension of practice. The paper also shows that because it mimics familiar instruction-giving discursive practices, the method constitutes an effective textual device to convey this moral and normative dimension in a way which remains faithful to its situated and contingent nature of practice.

Keywords:

*Practice-based studies*

*Interview methods*

*Discursive practice analysis*

*Constructivism*

*Qualitative methodology*

*Organizational knowledge*

## INTRODUCTION

Lynch (1993) noted that, in social science, opening a new space of discursivity through innovative images, concepts or figures of speech far from constitutes an intellectual revolution. In most cases, in fact, the new ideas constitute no more than “a ticket that allows entry into [a new] theatre, and are torn up as soon as one crosses the threshold” (Lynch, 1993, p. 18). Next comes the hard work of using such new ideas and conceptual vocabulary to populate the world with different phenomena, questions, concerns and answers (Rorty, 1989). Although Lynch was referring to ethnomethodology, the same applies to practice and the practice lens. While the concept of practice and the practice lens promise to support a performative, social, and situated understanding of the organising process (Gherardi, 2001; Schatzki et al, 2001; Brown and Duguid, 2001; Orlikowski, 2002; Nicolini et al., 2003; Tsoukas, 2004) its innovative and anti-functionalist potential cannot be divorced from the development of an appropriate conceptual, theoretical, and, above all, methodological toolbox. Respecifying the study of knowledge, learning, and sociality in terms of practices and their connections is not enough to serve as an alternative to the prevailing rationalist and cognitivist views of organisation phenomena. In order to realise the critical potential of the practice lens it is necessary to develop new ways of doing research and constituting objects of inquiry in the practice of academic research. Failure to do so, as suggested by the call for papers for this special issue (Gherardi, 2008), risks practice being reinterpreted along old or simply different categories, so that its promised critical power is never realised.

Accordingly, this paper is devoted to the important task of accruing the methodological (instead of theoretical) toolbox of the practice lens. It does do by introducing, illustrating and critically assessing the “interview to the double” (ITTD), a methodology for articulating and re-presenting practice. This is a technique which requires interviewees to imagine they have a double who will have to replace them at their job the next day. The informant is then asked to provide the necessary detailed instructions which will insure that the ploy is not unveiled and the double is not unmasked. As I will discuss in the paper, the ITTD is coherent with the critical aims and assumptions of practice-based studies in that it supports the effort to provide a multifaceted

representation of practice. The methodology brings to the fore critical aspects of the discursive and moral environment within which practice unfolds. When used in combination with other observational and emic approaches it offers an insight on the criteria used by members to judge the appropriateness of the situated activity.

My discussion will be informed by two main considerations. First, I will be guided by the assumption that practice is, by definition, a complex affair. Contrary to various derivatives of reductionism, including subtle forms of interactional reductionism (Levinson, 2005) I will operate on the assumption that practice constitutes a molar phenomena that must be explored along different dimensions and moments (Harvey, 1996). Because of its multifaceted and complex nature, practice can never be captured by a single method or reproduced through one single style of writing. Czarniawska (2007), for example, cautions that there are many different ways of ‘writing practice’ each of them responding to a specific rhetorical strategy on how to give the impression of getting very close to the ‘real thing’. In this sense, the growing popularity of the illocutionary style whereby a description of practice is realistic if it “reproduces a speech act or a discourse genre of real-world communication” (Czarniawska, 2007, p. 116) should be read not only in terms of the increased heuristic capacity of the methods that embrace this type of representation, but also in term of academic fashions and the shift in the accepted contemporary criteria of realist writing in social science (ibid, p118).

Second, I will build on Wittgenstein’s observation that practice is demonstrably capable of speaking for itself. In this sense, practice always needs to be brought to the fore, it needs to be made visible, articulated, and turned into an epistemic object in order to enter discourse. Practice can never be apprehended in an unmediated way and the notion that practice is “just what people do” is a return to a naive form of empiricism (Schatzki et Al, 2001). Articulating practice therefore requires discursive work and material activity: another practice. When we study practice we thus always scrutinise two practices at the same time: our epistemic practice, and what we are concerned with. Untangling the two, and assuming what I will call a coherent and vigilant reflexive stance, is therefore a fundamental trait of any practice-based theory and approach. For studying practice social scientists need to interrogate not only their object of inquiry but also their tools, assumptions and position in the field, taking into account how their

practices and social conditions structure their understanding of the phenomenon at hand (Steier, 1991; Bourdieu, 2004). For this reason, part of this paper will be devoted to interrogating the conduction of the research itself, critically appraising how the interactional process of generating an account of practice through the ITTD affects the results obtained. Thus, my aim in this paper will be twofold: firstly, I will introduce and explain how the method could be used in the practice of research; secondly, I will clarify how the method is particularly apt at foregrounding, and how it should be positioned among other methods within the toolbox of practice-based studies.

The paper is organised as follows. I begin by briefly introducing the historical roots and evolution of the ITTD. I will then illustrate how the method can be used in practice as a device for interrogating and studying practice, discussing which aspects of practice it makes us see and not see. In the final part of the paper I will suggest that the methodology can also be used as a literary device for ‘writing practice’ especially in view of communicating the ‘going concerns’ (Hughes, 1971) and the strong moral connotation that members experience when involved in any form of practice.

## **THE ROOTS OF THE INTERVIEW TO THE DOUBLE**

The ITTD requires interviewees to imagine that they have a double who will take their place in their workplace on the following day. The interviewee-instructor is then asked to provide the necessary detailed instructions which will insure that the interviewer-double is not unmasked.

Unlike most projective techniques which are originally underpinned by a psychoanalytic insight (Branthwaite and Lunn, 1985) the ITTD is rooted in the Marxist tradition. The method was, in fact, originally developed with an explicit emancipatory intent by Italian occupational psychologists in the 1970s. It was used to recover and legitimise the local knowledge that workers learned on the job and passed on to novices (Oddone, Re, Briante, 1977). The ITTD was used to raise the awareness that workers as a “homogenous group” were bearers of valid and precious ‘know how’. The interviews were carried out during training workshops with the researcher acting as the double and the worker as the instructor. The workers were never interrupted and their long monologues, often lasting a couple of hours, were tape-recorded and transcribed using

four main categories: relationship toward the task, the comrades, the factory hierarchy, and the trade union or other workers' organisations (Oddone, Re, Briante, 1977). An extract from one of the interviews is reproduced in table 1.

Insert box 1 about here
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According to the authors, participants often reported that the interviews offered them the opportunity to become aware of – while also reorganising in their own mind - what they already knew. If, for the researcher, the method was especially helpful for capturing the “model of use” (Oddone, Re, Briante 1977, p. 127), for the workers it was an opportunity to reflect on and progressively enrich the image of their own work. The process of interview thus constituted “an opportunity for [the workers] to expand their possibility of acting in the world” (Oddone, Re, Briante 1977, p. 128). The tool was revealed to be useful both to capture and formalise experience and to enrich it through reflection.

The idea and practice of the ITTD was developed in distinct ways by two different academic traditions in France and Italy. The two traditions built on two strengths of the technique.

In France, the ITTD was adopted and reconfigured by a group of Vygotskian ergonomists, who were mainly attracted by its potential use as a training and change methodology. Working within a clinical framework, Clot and his colleagues developed the methodology as a way of describing practice for the purpose of changing it (Clot, 1999; Clot and Fäita, 2000; Clot, 2003; Scheller, 2001, Bournel Bosson, 2006).

In Italy, it was especially its heuristic potential that attracted the attention of sociologists of work (Gherardi, 1990). Following the so-called paradigm crisis in organisation theory during the 1980s, these authors were interested in finding new ways of capturing the processual and linguistic nature of the process of organising. Coherent with the original intent of the technique, they developed the ITTD as a method of data collection and as a way of understanding and re-presenting practice (Gherardi, 1995; Bruni and Gherardi, 2001; Nicolini 2006; 2007). It is this line of work that I discuss in the next sections.

## **USING THE INTERVIEW TO THE DOUBLE FOR STUDYING PRACTICE**

The main argument of this paper is that although the ITTD can, arguably, help realise the potential of the practice turn, the methodology must be addressed in a reflexive and critical way. While the idea of the ITTD is easy to communicate, the reality of the interview is quite different. In the next sections I will examine in depth the different issues which emerge from its practical usage, starting with how to conduct the interview itself.

### ***Can the “interview to the double” be used as a stand alone technique?***

A first major decision to be made by the researcher is whether to use the methodology as a stand alone technique or as part of a larger ethnographic study. In other words, the issue is whether to use the methodology as a substitute or an integration of participant observation. As I indicated above, the methodology was originally conceived as a scientific way of capturing and documenting practical knowledge for the purpose of those unfamiliar with it. The technique thus promised to constitute a way of verbally eliciting and articulating practice without having to submit to the rigour and difficulty of direct observation and/or ethnography. I want to suggest that such a standalone use of the ITTD is misplaced and fraught with problems. The ITTD should be conceived as an addition to the toolbox of ethnographic participant observation and not a shortcut for doing away with it (Marcus, 1985). This is for several reasons. First, by being used as a standalone technique the ITTD would position itself outside the naturalistic paradigm. In this case, the methodology would encounter all the well-known issues and contradictions deriving from the attempt to study cultural phenomena through etic (vs. emic) approaches (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000; Silverman, 2001; Seale et al., 2004, Silverman, 2007). Second, projective interviews are often intimidating for the respondent and hence require a safe setting and an existing relationship of trust that most research can only build up through spending time in the study environment (Branthwaite and Lunn, 1985). Third, only when used in conjunction with observation does the technique achieve the necessary ecological validity (Cicourel, 1982). When ecological validity is low, as in survey-based research and other forms of inquiry “from the outside”, there is always the possibility that the wording and content of the questions are comprehended differently by members and the researcher. Finally, the

comprehension of the results of the ITTD, for example the meaning of terms such as “132” or “corteco” or “battoir” (reproduced in box 1<sup>2</sup> from the interview by Oddone et al. 1977) depend on a familiarity with the local practices which can be obtained only by assuming an ethnographical mindset, and “immersing oneself and being there” as Goffman put it.

### Prompting the instructions

A second relevant issue is how to formulate the prompt. The idea of the double, for example, is in many ways a clever prompt that orients the respondent towards a specific discursive performance.

Oddone and colleagues (1977) noted, for example, that by asking the respondent to formulate a set of instructions to a generic worker (instead of their double) they tended to obtain highly-stylised descriptions of ideal behaviours, what they call “the manual of the perfect shop steward” (p. 125). The additional indication of talking to a fictional double not only triggered, in effect, an internal dialogue, it also helped instructors to remain focused on the minute details of the daily practice. To this end, Gherardi (1995, p. 14) suggested to integrate the prompt with a short example (e.g.; “...tomorrow you’ll go into the university, but not before 9.30 because everyone will be surprised to see you since I am not a morning person...”).

A further important aspect of the prompt is to ask the instructor to formulate instructions in the second person. According to Scheller (2001) a formulation in second person significantly enhances the distancing effect and makes the interview less threatening and so more revealing. The formulation is also largely responsible for structuring the exchange in terms of expansive self-dialogue (Clot, 1999).

Finally, the researcher needs to decide whether to prime the description using structuring categories or whether to leave the conversation unstructured. For example, Oddone and his colleagues (1977, p. 58), offered to the worker four main categories for organising their instructions (the task, the comrades, the factory hierarchy and the trade union or other workers’ organisations). While they predicted that asking the workers to

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<sup>2</sup> If you are reading this, you are supporting my argument. The “132” was a car model produced by FIAT in the 1970s. A “corteco” is the brand name for the model’s engine gasket. A “battoir” is a non-metallic tool for in hammering metal pieces without damaging them.



elaborate on these four specific dimensions would help them focus on describing the details of work, they also surreptitiously reintroduced a strong theoretical structuring principle to the interview. In my view, the spirit of the technique is better served by providing as little structure as possible, so that the unfolding of the description itself can be interpreted as a form of prioritisation by the respondent/instructor.

### ***Conducting the interview***

A further relevant question is whether the interviewer should intervene in the process, and how. Different purposes here point in opposite directions. When used in the context of interpretive research, the established practice is that of letting the interview flow, so that the narrative structure of the account may itself become the object of later analysis. Not unlike other types of ethnographic interviews (Spradley, 1979), the double only interjects to ask essential questions of clarification aimed at eliciting further description (“how would you do it”, “what do you mean”, “when”, “in which case” and never “why” and “how come”). The situation is different in a developmental context, where the established practice is for the double to probe the instructor to elicit further detail.

In all cases, it is fundamental that the interview is tape recorded and transcribed verbatim. Preserving the instructors’ linguistic repertoire and folk expression opens a window on a variety of aspects of the local practice.

### **ANALYSING THE DATA: WHAT DOES THE INTERVIEW TO THE DOUBLE REALLY TELL US ABOUT?**

The ITTD, like all other qualitative research methods, generates data, not results. Although this assertion may seem obvious, it is worth emphasising. There is, in fact, a risk that because of its projective nature, the technique ends up fuelling one of the increasingly common misconceptions of the study of work practices. Forsythe (1999) identified this as being that if you want to know what people do, just ask them -- possibly in a cunning way! The ITTD is, in this sense, misleadingly similar. But actually it is markedly different from “thinking aloud” and a “cognitive walk” - two techniques of cognitivist researchers to (allegedly) tap into the knowledge of experts. “Thinking aloud” and “cognitive walk” are methodologies whereby subjects are asked

to verbalise the deliberations they supposedly make while carrying out a task. The verbalisation generates a protocol in the form of a recording of the deliberation. This can then be transcribed to reveal the categories and decision-making process used in the course of action (see Hoffman et al, 1995 for a discussion). These approaches are based upon the naïve belief that verbal representations, if elicited in the right conditions, are predictive of what happens on the ground. Unlike them, ITTD starts from the premise that all research, interviews or other, necessarily generate ‘data’ whose nature cannot be separated from their process of interpretation.

However, once we accept this basic constructivist tenet, we face a further issue: what are the data generated by the ITTD about?

Several authors have convincingly argued that interviews, self-reports, and other forms of account-giving constitute specific forms of highly conventionalised and socially-sanctioned practices. In these socially-sanctioned encounters, the nature of the interaction is just as important as the object of discussion. When we scrutinise the results of an interview we necessarily contemplate only glimmers of what was asked by the researchers and conveyed by the respondent. This content is inextricably mixed and con-fused with the traces of the process of meaning making and the interactional dynamic that took place during the interview as a situated event (Holstein and Gubrium, 1997; Atkinson and Coffey, 2002; Potter and Hepburn, 2005, Silverman, 2007). The result is that we cannot simply approach these data in terms of “truth” and “distortion” (Silverman, 2007). On the contrary, “we need to treat interviews as generating accounts and performances that have their own properties and ought to be analysed in accordance to such characteristics” (Atkinson and Coffey, 2002, p.422). The question is, therefore, what kind of discursive interaction does the methodology set up between the interviewer and the presumed double? What aspect is it particularly good at articulating? What kind of narrative is enacted as a consequence? Only by responding analytically to these questions can we avoid using the ITTD in naive terms and fully exploit its potential.

In the next two sections I will try to respond to these issues in turn. I will start by analysing the nature of the interaction established by the ITTD. I will then proceed to pass comment on the type and content of the accounts that such an interactional setting

is likely to generate. By connecting on the how and what of the ITTD I will try to shed light on what the methods make us see and not see.

### *A closer look at the “interview” process*

An appropriate place to start is to observe the nature of the ‘artificial’ encounter generated by the ITTD methodology and compare it with the naturally occurring activity of direction-giving.

The discursive activity of direction and instruction-giving has been extensively studied by Psathas (1986; 1991). The author claims that giving directions is accomplished by a coherent conversational unit marked by a recurrent and identifiable organisation of multi-turn extended sequences of talk. Directions are shown to be “collaboratively produced as the recipient is actively involved in listening, showing understanding, giving acknowledgements to the other, and so on (Psathas, 1991, p.196). To this end, “opportunities are continually provided by the direction giver to produce indications of understanding or non understanding, request for clarification and so on” (ibid). Within the sequence of talk in interaction, this usually takes the form of insertion sequences, short discursive detours used to ensure that sufficient common ground exists to proceed to the next step (Schegloff, 1972). Consider the following example:

Q1: ... How do I get to the main square?

Q2: Do you know where the café XY is?

A2: Well yes...

A1: OK, you get there and then you...

The short sequence Q2-A2 is an insertion sequence in that the speaker, in our instance the direction-giver, suspends the on-going main discursive activity, ascertains the state of common knowledge, repairs possible misunderstanding or provides further details, and then returns to the main line of conversation.

In sum, the naturally occurring discursive activity of direction giving is inherently collaborative, occasioned, and highly context dependent. Insertions sequences are a critical feature of direction-giving as prior to A2 there was no possibility of an

understood route. If we compare these features with those of the ITTD (see, for example, boxes 1 and 2) a number of significant differences emerge.

Firstly, the ITTD is oriented to generating soliloquy rather than an authentic interactional encounter. In the version developed by Oddone et al. (1977), for example, the “interview” is a long uninterrupted monologue so that most of the work is carried out by the interviewee. This feature remained constant in later uses (Gherardi, 1995; Bruni and Gherardi, 2001; Nicolini, 2006).

Secondly, insertion sequences are rare, particularly when this monologue form prevails. This profoundly subverts the principle of economy implicit in the naturally occurring practice of direction-giving. While the aim of any direction giver is providing as little as explanation as necessary (psathas’ principle of minimum effort), the double in the context of the interview is oriented towards providing a much more extensive description.

Thirdly, and closely related, the naturally occurring activity of instruction-giving and the ITTD are oriented towards different pragmatic outcomes and so respond to different logics. Direction and instruction-giving are instances of language in action where the aim is clearly identified and occasioned by a person asking how to carry out a task or how to get from a to b. While the encounter is usually sequentially organised, the language is likely to be vague, informal, and occasionally incomprehensible when translated to writing. The ITTD, on the contrary, is oriented towards providing a description that, at least in principle, could be understood on the basis of a minimal common ground. While, in both cases, the aim is to impart information and the encounter is characterised by one speaker constantly holding the floor and directing the flow of conversation, the ITTD belongs to the narrative communicative genre and is thus substantially different from its naturally occurring counterpart.

A closer look at the ITTD as a situated interaction thus leads us to consider whether the prompt is, in fact, heard by the interviewee as an invitation to produce a specific type of story within the constraints of what appears as a restricted narrative canon. In the next section I will examine such a possibility, as there are two critical consequences. First, to the extent that the interview produces stories its outputs belong to a quite different universe from participant observation. As all stories are necessarily partly idealised, it

makes little sense to ask whether the account is inaccurate, distorted, or biased (Atkinson and Coffey, 2002). Second, the ITTD can, and should be, interrogated using methods that are sensitive to its narrative and performative nature. This, however, requires a further examination of what sort of narratives the methodology generate.

### ***What kind of story?***

Like all other types of interview, the ITTD is a form of provoked communication that yields useful results only as long as we are prepared to 'listen' to what the informants are doing with words, instead of limiting us to a registration of what they say. The interview to the double generates a particular form of discursive production, and understanding the nature of such production is critical if we are to apply reflexively the methodology to the representation of practice. Additional insights on this issue can be obtained if we pause to observe two further features of the setting created by the methodology.

We can start by considering that while the ITTD turns practitioners into observers of their own activity, work tends to disappear with distance. Members are rarely good reporters of their own activity as they disregard the type of work they do not see or that they take for granted. Practitioners understand and apply the term 'work' in a selective manner; tapping into their expertise through their accounts means contemplating a specific practice of selection and deletion (Suchman, 1987). This is particularly true of the rhetorical genre of instructions which is, effectively, a tool for making others see and not see. As a form of conversation in practice, instructions are meant to be selective. This means that what is not mentioned is just as important as what is.

Secondly, the above problem is compounded by the projective nature of the ITTD. Puchta and Potter (2003) note that projective interviews can be evaluative. They require people to invest psychological or social significance into descriptions and, as such, they include an element of impression management. One of the principle practical concerns of the interviewee thus becomes producing a publicly receivable description that is acceptable according to the local rules of the game (Godeaux and Stroumza, 2004, p. 498). How the work is done, and how it should be done, becomes intimately enmeshed.

When taken together, these observations help us see that the result of the ITTD are, in fact, manufactured occurrences of a specific type of narrative; moralising and largely idealised stories.

Insert box 2 about here

Consider, for example, the interview extract in box 2, transcribed verbatim from an ITTD conducted by the author (Mengis, Nicolini, and Swan, 2009). In this extract, like in the others reported above, the narration is quite linear; the tone is quite “heroic” (an effect of the fact that all action necessarily stems from one character only); all the contradictions and ambiguities of daily activities are hidden or showed to be demonstrably solvable (deciding whether cells grow healthily or not is extremely complicated); finally, there is an assumption of consensus about the content of the interview and an expectation that the hearers will learn from these descriptions and, if required, model their conducts accordingly. The text has all the hallmarks of a moralizing communicative act, the sort of discursive device that in all social settings is used to communicate and impose what Luckmann (2002) calls the local “morality-in-use”.

### ***A moral and legitimising story***

From the above we can see that the particular setting generated by the prompt therefore induces the interviewees to produce a highly idealised narrative description of the practice from a particular moral and normative angle. In effect, the prompt “imagine that you needed to be substituted by a double in the plant etc.” is heard by the interviewee as an invitation to produce a persuasive monologue that thematises both what is it correct and appropriate. The setting thus stresses a typical feature of all the efforts at visibilising practice. As Suchman insightfully observed, the well known distinction between explicit and tacit in relation to the description of practical knowledge is not only a difference between “what we can see, talk, or even think but also between what our social milieu sanctions as legitimate to be seen, spoken or thought” (Suchman, 1995, p.61). With regards to practices, all descriptions are also necessarily value-laden. The setting induced by the ITTD has the characteristic of artificially stressing this aspect which is inherently part of any effort to make work visible through accounts.

My tenet is that this bias towards producing an idealised moral account can be turned to the advantage of the researcher. To the extent that the technique provides us with a specific but also identifiable type story, we can use it to get (partial) access to the normative and moral texture of the local practice. In particular, the technique brings to the fore three important aspects of practice: the conventionalised moral pillars of the local practice – the local good, so to speak; the repertoire and grammar of accountability that sustains such good; and the main practical concerns through which this good manifests itself in the daily activity.

In the first place, the interview with the double articulates and documents aspects of the local conventional idea of the “good” (MacIntyre, 1981; Jayyusi, 1991). Although such an idea never reaches a stable state, as it is continuously negotiated, tested, and put at stake during the concerted action, it must be held in practice. By virtue of its particular format, the ITTD allows expert members to communicate this critical dimension of the practice without attempting to verbalise the sense of the good according to the legal genre of abstract norms and formal rules. Through the moralising monologue we thus learn aspects of what is right, what is wrong, what to expect and what is to be expected in the local practicing. The downside is, of course, that we are only (or mostly) presented with the less contentious aspects of the local good, those which can be safely assumed as consensually held and to which all the members are assumed to be visibly committed (and very likely those which are deemed to be receivable by the researcher). It is in this sense that I have described the outcome of the interview as idealised. The interview elicits the minimum common denominator among local practitioners, the aspects of the object of work which are less controversial and less likely to be contested. Alternative versions remain in the shadow and need to be uncovered by comparing different interviews or by using other methodologies. It is for this reason that the instructions need to be taken at face value, and become especially useful when interpreted against a broader canvass of data.

Secondly, the interview articulates some of the main practical concerns which govern the activity and give the practice a projected directionality and sense (in its double meaning of where to go and how to get there). The idea of practical concerns captures the intuition that, as in this paper’s examples, what to do next presents itself to the practitioners in the form of practical concerns to attend to and matters to take care of, or

about. The interview thus makes visible that the ordered production of sayings and doings and the accomplishment of concerted action takes place in the dimension of urgency and care. To practice means aiming towards making something happen (or not happen) in the world and, therefore, caring about, or taking care of, something.

Finally, the interview taps into the local lexicon of accountability which novices have to learn in order to produce activities which are observable-reportable, that is account-able. This emerges clearly, for example, in the instruction of the first lines of the FIAT interview in box 1. In the excerpt we are told that you need to use a “battoir” in order to prevent damaging the engine. Reporting and accounting for this activity in FIAT requires not only use of a battoir, but to also refer to the tool as such. Through the instructions to the double we are therefore introduced to the pillars of the local repertoire (the content) and lexicon (the right way of asserting it) of accountability, the things you need to be concerned about when carrying out the activity and that you’ll need to remember in order to make yourself accountable. In so doing, the method offers a glimpse into the modes of justification and rhetorical resources members have at their disposition to make themselves accountable for different practical purposes. They offer a vista, and the necessary textual materials, to investigate which discursive registers and themes are employed in the workplace, where they come from, what relationship they establish, and in which way they connect the local practice with wider discursive formations and environments. In other words, they tap into the local version of reality and how the local discursive environment relates to wider institutional and societal circuits of discursivity (Holstein and Gubrium, 2007). For example, in my study of the emergence of the practice of telemedicine, I used the ITTD to compare the discursive environments of nurses operating in a traditional ward setting and within the new telemedicine arrangement (Nicolini, 2006; 2007). Following a previous study by Gherardi (1990; 1995), my analysis observed the systematic similarities and differences in the accounts and compared the results with the data from observation. It is in this context that using the technique in conjunction with participant observation becomes critical. By comparing the results of the interview with the observation of the everyday practice and the analysis of other sources I was able to appreciate not only what the instructions contained but also what was left out and deleted. The analysis revealed interesting elements of continuity of discontinuity. The idealised account of the tele-



nurses focussed on taking personal responsibility for the management of the patients, while colleagues emphasised more the collective performance of the ward routines. At the same time, however, the tele-nurses also put particular emphasis on the need to manage carefully the authority positioning vis-à-vis the clinicians. Their instruction to the double often referred to the need of demonstrating that, in spite of the ample autonomy implicit in their new role, “the doctor was still in charge”. The ITTD thus helped bring to the fore the subtle and silent type of work that the tele-nurses were putting in place to repair the breaches in the overall fabric of accountability caused by the new way of doing (tele) medicine. In so doing, it also revealed in which way the emergence of the new practice was implicated in the broader renegotiation of professional identities in healthcare (Nicolini, 2007).

#### **WRITING PRACTICE: THE INTERVIEW TO THE DOUBLE AS A LITERARY GENRE**

In the previous section I argued that, when used reflexively, the ITTD constitutes a valid way of capturing important aspects of practice. My argument has been that the value of the technique is not so much in its capacity to produce a detailed and factually accurate account of real-time activity as much as to make visible important elements of the discursive and moral environment within which the practice unfolds. Although the doing is conveyed in a necessary idealised and stylised way, the ITTD still provides valuable information as it brings to the surface the moral and normative dimension of practice sustained in interaction by the local community of practitioners.

In this conclusive section I argue that, by the same token and *because* of such distinctive features, the ITTD also constitutes a persuasive way of organising and communicating the ‘data’ collected through the interviews. In other words, the methodology also constitutes an interesting literary genre for writing practice. As Czarniawska (2007) reminded us, studying practice is two-pronged and is far from solved once we choose and feel comfortable with a particular way of approaching the field. Both words ‘ethno-graphy’ and ‘ergono-graphy’ (the neologism proposed by the author to describe the study of practice) implicitly refer to the need to translate the finding into a textual form. Re-presenting practice is thus the combined effect of both

observational and textualisation activities, and the choice of the literary genre is as consequential for the way in which practice is translated into discourse as is the way in which we study it. As I suggested at the outset, it is easy to fall within a form of naïve ‘writing realism’ which confuses the contingent capacity of a particular and fashionable textual strategy to increase the realism of a practice account (i.e., achieving the impression of getting very close to re-present practice in its real essence) with its heuristic capacity. The only viable solution is thus to extend a vigilant reflexive stance to the process of writing. Accordingly, in what follows I will briefly examine what register this particular way of writing practice strikes in the attempt to appear convincing, and what aspects of the practice the particular literary style of the ITTD is adept at conveying. My central argument will be that using the ITTD as a literary genre is appealing because it both makes it easy for the reader to accept the account as realistic and it allows to convey in writing aspects of the practice that other methods fail to convey.

### ***Writing practice as a series of instructions to the double***

Giving instructions is an everyday activity. But organised and ceremonial forms of instruction-giving of the type summoned by the ITTD are an integral part of the process through which novices become socialised into new practice. As such, they constitute a recurring observable occurrence of many, if not all, workplaces (Gherardi and Nicolini, 2002). This discursive practice of ‘on-the-job’ instruction is characterised by the effort to infuse normative valence to the content of the communicative interaction through in situ devices such as timing (pausing can signal importance), wording (the instruction often including generalising and prescriptive expressions such as “we generally”, “always” and “you must”), figures of speech and non-verbal cues (see Gherardi and Nicolini, 2002 and Luckman, 2002 for a discussion). One can see, then, that at its most basic level the ITTD mimics a common feature of the social process of learning with which we are all familiar. The ITTD is recognised because it resonates with the familiar practice of being instructed about something we are not familiar with. This mechanism operates between both the double and the instructor during the interview and the reader and the text once the instructions are put to writing. The result of these special interviews, especially when the original linguistic features are faithfully preserved,

tends to be heard and understood as a set of instructions. Because of these characteristics, the technique makes not only for an interesting tool of data collection but also a way of re-presenting these data.

Insert box 3 about here

In this sense Box 3 represents an example of a literary genre for “writing” practice in the form of the instruction of a presumed expert to a presumed novice. The extract is from the study of telemedicine referred to above. Following Gherardi (1995), the interview in box 3 was obtained after analysing the interviews and saturating the emerging elements with data derived from further conversations and observations. I then assembled an ideal set of ‘instructions to the double’, combining material from several interviews. I tried to retain as much of the original formulation as possible. But I also integrated and modified the emerging set of instructions with the results of the observations and other forms of interviews. In this manner, I used the interviews to the double as a means to not only gather data but also to re-present them after my interpretation.

By re-constituting the textual material in the form of a sequence of instructions, the text puts the reader in the (familiar) position of a novice. This is useful given that most readers will only have limited acquaintance with the domain under discussion. The result is a capacity of the text to convince the reader of its veracity.

### ***Writing up the moral and normative dimension of practice***

The interview to the double is also a valuable device to convey in writing the normative and moral nature of practice. The idea that morality is central to the understanding of practice is common to many, if not all, strands of practice theory (Garfinkel, 1967; MacIntyre, 1981; Thevenot, 2001). While functionalist and cognitivist approaches assume that orderly conduct and social order result from the application of principles rationality, rules and values, practice theorists propose that what is logical, moral and practical all belong to the same circle of intelligibility. Concern, understanding and justification are therefore at the core of practice (Jayyusi, 1991).

The problem, however, is how to re-present and textualise this important dimension of practice. The texture of expectations, conception of the “good”, and the moral

expectations inherent in all activity do not constitute an abstract corpus that, implicitly or explicitly, regulates the conduct of members. On the contrary, the conception of the good and the moral expectations are absorbed by newcomers as part of their socialisation, and these conceptions are sustained through practice, for example through the ways in which disagreements are settled. It is in this sense that the ITTD is a valuable way to communicate the morally binding dimension of practice without resorting to the standard (and largely discredited) rule-based jargon of the legal tradition which is endorsed by the functionalist paradigm. By emulating the master-learner relationship discussed above, the ITTD as a literary device conveys what Hughes (1971) called the “going concerns” that all institutionalised forms of practice bestow onto members. Most importantly, it does so without the need of reifying them into a corpus of maxims and rules, so steering clear of all the problems which such reification generates (Giddens, 1979). Consider, for example, box 3 above. The text articulates practice in terms of (some of) the main practical concerns governing the activity and giving the practice a projected directionality and sense (in its double meaning of where to go and how to get there). For example, in the extract the nurse is telling the novice (and us) that you need to insert carefully all data into the computerised medical record, and that by so doing you make yourself accountable “for all practical purposes”. In this way, the text makes visible that the ordered production of sayings and doings and the accomplishment of concerted action takes place in a dimension of urgency and care. When used as a writing device the ITTD conveys a sense of the common enterprise and communicates an important aspect of how the common object of work is actually perceived and discursively shared among practitioners.

## **CONCLUDING REMARKS**

In this paper I argued a case for the addition of the ITTD to the ideal box of tools for practice theorists. My starting point has been that in order to realise the potential of the practice turn we need to develop a variety of approaches for appreciating and representing practice in all its complexity. This requires identifying methods that capture different aspect of practice while remaining authentic to the critical and constructionist nature of practice-based studies.

I suggested that the technique is attractive, both as a method to analyse and re-present practice. The ITTD is, in fact, an interesting way to evoke critical aspects of practice. These aspects include its normative dimension; its development in a context of concern and care; the fact that all actions are morally, not only cognitively connoted, and; the routine effect and inevitability which characterised practice from the point of view of proficient members. Used as a rhetorical artifice, the ITTD also allows us to create a representation “from within” while, at the same time, being a representation “from the forefront”, the location where practice is experienced as orientation and irreversibility . This, however, requires that we approach the ITTD with a coherent reflexive attitude and that we refrain from considering it as an alternative to other “thick” ways of analysing and re-presenting practice. My suggestion has been, in particular, that we exploit the peculiar characteristics of the ITTD method. As an investigation tool, the ITTD establishes a particular interactional setting between the interviewer and the interviewee. Practitioners are immediately required to step outside their normal position and to observe themselves *qua* agents. They are asked to produce a narration of their activity by selectively mentioning certain aspects and concealing others. They have to do so in a context that is, at least partially, a potential arena of evaluation. The result is a story which is often idealised and strongly moralising. The accounts produced tend to have a strong normative and moral flavour because the interviewees tend to emphasise the accountability of their conducts. In this way, however, the method provides a rare insight into the modes of justification and rhetorical resources members have at their dispositions to make themselves accountable for different practical purposes. The method offers a view of the discursive resources employed in the workplace, and allows us to establish connections between the local discursive environment and the wider institutional and societal order of discourses.

As a tool for re-presenting practice, the ITTD builds on the familiarity of the reader with the expert-novice discursive practice. Because the expert-novice form of discursivity is so familiar, the accounts are often recognisable and believable. At the same time, the method helps us recover and convey aspects of the normative texture that practitioners ordinarily experience as a situated feature of practice. In so doing, it suggests that while all practices are subject to a specific regime of right and wrong, ‘norms’ and ‘rule’ need not constitute a separate corpus or substance and they cannot, therefore, be invoked to

explain conduct as in the traditional cognitivist “thinking before acting” paradigm (Gherardi, 2001).

In conclusion, the paper corroborates Bourdieu’s observation that any attempt at capturing practice through accounts is necessarily subject to severe constraints; verbal re-presentation necessarily extracts an *opus operatum* from a living *modus operandi*, i.e., real people making things happen in the world (Bourdieu, 1990). The paper argues, however, that these limitations apply to all methods for re-presenting practice. Instead of pondering on whether we can get better “access” to practice, either through direct verbalisation, talking aloud, participant observation or other means of visibilisation, we should learn to ask to what extent different methods are sensitive to the processual and situated nature of practice and what aspects of the practicing they are particularly good at articulating and re-presenting.

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*(The task)* I work on the assembly line, I assemble the gearbox of the 132: it is a hanging line, a large oval ring where there are several pendants hanging. The pieces run on tracks and pass in front of all the workers: the first starts to assemble the first part, the last discharges the finished piece... I start by fitting a corteco which I need to grease first on the inside and smear with airtight on the outside. I fit it on the back with a battoir and a hammer and then I take an air screw driver and tight the nuts and bolt on the back of the gearshift... If a double was to substitute me and he didn't work here before, the procedure would be the following: first...

**Box 1:** Fragment of “interview to the double” from Oddone et al. (1977) p. 214

“You take the tube and you arrive at [name of place] and then walk to the college at around 9.30... hum... then I open the door, turn on the computer, check the emails... normally, and then the first thing I would do, you would do... normally I would go to the lab ...so I put up my lab coat... the coat is behind the door in the microscope room ...so I go in the tissue culture room to check my cells... maybe now I do not have cells but normally I would have cells growing in the incubator, so I go into the room, I put up one a pair of gloves – I use small size (laughter), I spray alcohol on my gloves, I take out the flasks with the cells... hum... I put them under the microscope in the tissue room and see if the cells are growing good... or slow... I write these things down in my notebook... then I go out of the lab and plan what to do today”. [...]

**Box 2:** Extract of verbatim transcription of “interview to the double” with a lab researcher

*Imagine you had to take the place of a nurse in charge of the telemonitoring service G. hospital. This is what you would have to do:*

You are a professional nurse. You work from 8am to 4 pm, every working day.

You report to work at 8am. You go to the cardiology ward and put on your uniform. You wear a white coat and clogs. In your coat pocket you put a ruler to measure the width of the ECG curves, a pen, a pencil, a highlighter, a small notebook or an agenda (or check that they are there). A coat pocket full of instruments and rulers is the hallmark of cardiology practitioners.

You move on to the telemedicine room. But first you stop by the nurses' office. You check to see if there are any messages for you (some of your patients may have called during the night) or any other news. You collect the list of patients to be discharged over the next few days who have been placed on the telemedicine list. You chat briefly with the other ward colleagues, ask who the doctors on duty are, who is doing what that day (exercise tests, echocardiographs) and who did the night shift. In this way you find out who to ask in case of need and which doctors to avoid because they are in a bad mood.

(...)

Use the morning hours for updating the medical records. When the record was on paper all you needed was to slip the results into the plastic envelope. Now it is on a computer every piece of information, both those given over the phone and transmitted via fax, must be inserted into each appropriate form. You must be precise because these files are often used to retrieve scientific data and consulted often, even by those who are in charge...

**Box 3**