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From Pragmatism to Today's Work Dramas: The Ethicized and Public Dimensions of Work.

Abstract: Is there any reason to advocate for a new momentum in the "practice turn"? This article argues that the practice turn, already much inspired by pragmatist philosophers, namely Dewey and Mead, could be enhanced by drawing even more upon pragmatism. We begin with the view that focal cooperation activities have been an overriding concern among interactionist scholars. We contend this framework can be broadened by following Dewey's proposal to shift in vision from interaction to transaction. It helps indeed taking into consideration a wide range of neglected but common situations, joint actions, and temporal processes. In particular, we show how the transactional view can foster the understanding both of the *most intimate* at work – its ethicizing, its moral network and personal styles –, and of the *most public* at work – its public images and public perspectives. We end up considering the significance of these moves to explore today's work dramas and to meet the need to renew our images of work.

1. Introduction

Is there any reason to advocate for a new momentum in the "practice turn"? In this paper, it is argued that the practice turn, already much inspired, directly and indirectly, by pragmatist philosophers, namely Dewey and Mead, could be enhanced by drawing even more upon pragmatism. Such a practice turn is underway in social sciences (Schatzki, Knorr Cetina 2001; Joseph 2004), including sections of economics (Khalil 2003a, b), and anthropology (Brereton 2009). It is also widespread within the trans-disciplinary fields of Workplace Studies (Heath, Luff 2000; Quéré, Terzi 2011; Emirbayer, Maynard 2011), Organization Studies (Simpson 2009), Practice-based Studies (Gherardi 2006; Nicolini et al. 2003), Science and Technology Studies, Ergonomy and Activity Theory (Norros 2004; Barbier 2012), Communication Studies (Bergman 2007; Craig 2007; Perry 2001; Russill 2008), and Games Studies (Deen 2011; Nardi 2010; Boutet 2012), to name but a few.

Our purpose will not be to take a global stand on these multiple strands of research, or to determine the extent to which each draw upon a pragmatist perspective, beyond the mere fact that pragmatism: "is derived from the same Greek word, pragma, meaning action, from which our words practical and practice come" (James 1907). We will either concentrate on the claim that drawing more on Dewey's transactional view might foster our current understandings and approaches to work and its social dramas, especially in our so-called "knowledge-based", "digital", "experimental" and "cosmopolitan" society. It is worth noting that Dewey already had an early impact upon initial bodies of research on work, through scholars like Hughes, Roy, Goffman, Garfinkel, Strauss, Schön, Becker, and, more recently, Vygotsky. However, until today, the pragmatists' proper contribution has not been properly delineated in this area, but more or less mingled with that of symbolic interactionism, if not merged into a broadly

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constructivist approach. In addition, when a more specific current is outlined, it is more likely to be termed "situated action" or "methodological situationism" (Knorr-Cetina 1988; Quéré 1997). We depart from this tendency by suggesting that Dewey's transactional perspective furnishes a distinct and significant move in the direction of studies of work. Its distinctive value needs to be illuminated. It enlightens both the ethicized and the public nature of work.

We begin with the view that focal cooperation activities have been an overriding concern among interactionist scholars. We contend this framework can be broadened by following Dewey's proposal to shift in vision from interaction to transaction. This helps to take into consideration a wide range of neglected but common situations, joint actions, and temporal processes. In particular, we show how the transactional view can foster the understanding both of the *most intimate* at work – its ethicizing, its moral network and personal styles – and of the *most public* at work – its public images and public perspectives. We will end up considering the significance of these moves to explore today's work dramas and to meet the need to renew our images of work.

2. Cooperation, or the need for mutual intelligibility

The intelligence of the situation is neither individual nor collective, it doesn't always imply mutual acknowledgement: the intelligence of work situations, for those who participate, thus grows, not because they converge toward a contract, but as networks, more or less connected and thick and as 'chains of cooperation' building work's space-and-time consistency. (Joseph 1994: 578)

First, we shall recall that the very notion of interaction is at the core of major sociological approaches, to work for instance, that focus upon symbolic and linguistic constructions. Accordingly, scholars have accounted for cooperative interaction and shared perspectives in the making, be it through conversations, inquiries concerning each other's intentions, accountability, or gestures and co-presence. The basic line is derived from, or echoes, the Meadian assertion that communication and mutually coordinated action arise from projecting ourselves imaginatively into the perspectives of others – beginning with the famous "conversation of gestures".

What persists in the sociological literature from the pragmatists of the beginning of the 20th century revolves mainly around a question: how to cooperate? And an answer: the study of the operations producing mutual intelligence between participants. As regards work and, more widely, purposeful cooperative activities, no other subject has attracted such interest. How do participants manage to coordinate and so overcome the heterogeneity of their respective perspectives (Bechky 2003; Katz 2002)?

In his description of an air traffic control tower, Goodwin (1996: 89) writes that: "what one finds in this Panopticon is not a single master view, but instead a heterogeneous collection of disparate views provided by the different tools for perception that happen to be available". Building upon Goffman's framing perspective, Joseph states that any work context: "must be conceived as a patchwork of different participative frames in which agents engage according to various modalities, in front

of, and for, different audiences" (1994: 573). It is up to the sociologist to study how "cooperation protocols" are built and constantly rebuilt in the course of action. As there is no "pertinence by convention" (Joseph, Quéré 1993), the management of the interaction order looks like an undefined labour without which work could not be accomplished. What prevails is how cooperation can be made possible.

For work teams as for agent-user couples, co-production of goods or services is hence approached as that of more or less common perspectives, "a mutual visibility of situations, gestures and operations in the workplace" (Quéré 2000: 166), "concerted appearances" (Joseph 1998), or "shared context" (Salembier, Zouinar 2004; Grosjean 2005). As Goodwin shows, ground air traffic controllers who are "continuously faced with the task of juxtaposing perspectives on whatever object is being worked on, so as to situate it within a relevant web of meaning" (1996: 89), do manage to align or articulate their views. On the contrary, the users/supervision agents of the regional train (R.E.R. A) studied by Joseph do not. The mere possibility of a direct interaction with users is lacking. Yet it is clear that, if the informant could just see how crowded people on the platform react to announcements, he could address a precise audience and observe how people turn and move. He could consider the event (or incident) as mutually intelligible and evaluate the relevance of his action (Joseph 1994: 583). Social interaction thus appears as a major support for coordination. More precisely, it is a necessary, but not sufficient, condition for the juxtaposition of the different participants' perspectives and for residual elements of culture to be shared (Gumperz 1989).

This sharing may demand inquiry, as when the work of publication and accountability of reciprocal intentions fails. Or it may work simply by using the resources of co-presence or "conversation of gestures" (Mead 1934: 42-43). Studying public scenes of mutual assistance between users of ticketing machines in train stations, Breviglieri describes a gesture "adjusted to a minimal form of mutual understanding", implying production of a shared reading of the events, an incidental proximity between partners (Breviglieri 1997: 144). It requires the interface of the ticketing machines as a field in common and goes through: "sharing of attention, reciprocal understanding of contextual elements, solicitation and raising awareness of a participant, intervention by itself, which furtive and spontaneous nature will show crucial" (Breviglieri 1997: 124, 127). Civilities, in these situations (showing tolerance, supporting action…): "facilitate mutual intelligibility of incidental elements and support correctness in public, if action fails" (Breviglieri 1997: 124, 127). As the use of verbal language is scarce, building proximity there is rather a matter of rhythms. The felicity of the assistance gesture, and even its mere existence, depend upon the professionals' capacity to join the hesitant rhythm following an unsuccessful use of the interface. Besides, moments of inquiry after users' needs and information to detect the origin of the disappointment with the machine, what is crucial for assistance to occur, pertains to a form of tact: "mostly based on the adjustment of the helping participant to the rhythm of the actor leading his purchasing" (Breviglieri 1997: 143). Without this mutual adjustment, where the practical movement of an actor extends that of the other actor, the attempt at assistance may be considered to be a tiresome interference and twice as uncivil, the user being suspected of disability and the helper of pursuing their own interests.

Further into work situations, Breviglieri also studies the professional tact of agents in a Parisian social emergency centre (Samusocial), who daily meet homeless people in public spaces. Here too, minimal mutual intelligibility is associated with an adjustment of the professionals to the user's rhythm. Professionals follow at the homeless person's pace, imperceptibly leading them towards the bus when they: "feel, in his absence of resistance to accompaniment, an inclination to agree to go to an emergency shelter" (2010). The professionals "avoid embracing him to carry him but, rather, provide, as he makes efforts on his own, quiet support like soft pushes to help him keep his balance", as if a rhythmic adjustment was a prerequisite for an interaction that would surpass hand-to-hand assistance to become more verbal (Breviglieri 2010). For Kendon, who follows a Goffmanian tradition that inclines towards behaviourism, shared rhythm is what attests to the success of the interaction. Through their "rhythmic coordination" or their ''interactional synchrony'': "participants show that they share the same perspective on the interaction" (1990: 256). Reading Goffman from a more phenomenological standpoint, Katz accords the body a key role in the way we interact. His study of emotions shows how agreement with the others and with the environment is, in such emotional moments, constantly recreated through body movements, be they as thin as weeping, moaning modulations, or the intonations of laughter (1999).

These examples show in different ways how mutual intelligibility can be central to cooperative activity studies. This approach finds so many supports in the pragmatist tradition that one could merge it with symbolic interactionism, the field which has most developed those aspects, and with approaches that takes inspiration from it or extend it. More specifically, in James', Mead's, and Schutz's work, mutual intelligibility is crucial. At first sight, cooperative activity studies could then rely entirely on the notion of interaction to address their practical problems of coordination. As Russill puts it: " how can two minds know one thing? For James, to say that any two thoughts or things are strictly identical is nonsense (in the sense of silly) and to say that anyone's thought or thing is identical to itself is nonsensical (in the sense of saying nothing at all). The question only arises as a significant philosophical concern if the functional distinction between subject-object is mistaken for an ontological dualism that must be definitively bridged. But such concerns, when they arise, are practical problems of coordinating our activities in the world rather than apprehending a rational foundation upon which our activities take place" (2008: 289-290).

For Mead, language, and more precisely, symbol, are the most common responses to these practical issues: "We always assume that the symbol we use is one which will call out in the other person the same response, provided it is a part of his mechanism of conduct" (Mead 1934: 147). Hence Mead builds the foundations of the programme of symbolic interactionism. It links communication and thought, claiming that "the language process is essential for the development of the self" (Mead 1934: 135). Nevertheless, as he puts: "another set of background factors in the genesis of the self is represented in the activities of play and the game" (149), so that positions answer positions, without any symbolic mediation, and without excluding a certain form of mutual understanding. This open field of an interactionism that is not symbolic — which is limited, in Mead's work, to the genesis of the self — is actually not restricted

to childhood, but to a "pre-individual" order, according to Simondon's expression (Bidet, Macé 2011), which is also available to adults in order to build cooperation, when sharing perspectives would be too costly.

But it is Schütz who associated most clearly interactional dynamics with the idea of bridging heterogeneous perspectives and actors building a common space together. Trying to understand how emerges a shared frame of interaction — thus a stable, objectively recurrent, and inter-subjectively shared reality — he considers reciprocity to be the fundamental form of any social relations. Reciprocity of perspectives is here a postulate and a presumption. Participants assume that their lived experiences would more or less be the same were they to exchange their respective positions. As Cefaï reminds us: "reciprocity of perspectives and simultaneity of durations are (for Schütz) but a never accomplished and never accomplishable idealization, and the space between standpoints or the gap between the structures of relevance imposes a series of interpretation exercises, in the relationship between Ego and Alter Ego" (Cefaï 1998: 82). What animates interaction, here more than ever considered as an inter-individual, if not inter-subjective, relationship, is the ability to take the Other's standpoint. As Simpson (2009) shows, using Mead, the notion of transaction appears as a deepening of the notion of interaction. Unlike symbolic interactionism, the notion of transaction, according to Simpson, does not stress the sharing of meanings between individuals, but emphasizes the in-the-making-creation of new meanings between individuals. What makes sense, then, is their transformation and their new links to their environment. Dewey, after having used both terms interchangeably until the 1940s, states that: "the word 'interaction' is dangerous because we may easily induce the pre-established existence of two or more beings" (Dewey, Bentley 1964: 115). On the contrary, the continuous transactions between an organism and its environment transform them all. Experience refers to this establishment of a: "felt relationship between doing and undergoing as the organism and environment interact" (Dewey 2005a). New meanings here are not just made of shared symbols: as "what is done and what is undergone are thus reciprocally, cumulatively, and continuously instrumental to each other", writes Dewey (2005a: 52), "the scope and content of the relations measure the significant content of an experience" (Dewey, 2005a: 46). So that the "development of active lines of interest" implies a correlative and continuous transformation of both parts.

The transactional view extends the pragmatist tradition's fecundity beyond the production of mutual intelligibility in order to examine also work as experience. It has gained a large audience among scholars in various fields.

3. From interaction to transaction: the pragmatist stance applied to work

The pragmatist stance is key to ecological approaches in social sciences, those which do not focus upon individuals or constituted environment but on the connection between them, that is, the continuous flux of interactions that ties them together and through which they constitute and transform constantly. As Simpson puts it, these approaches renew the question of agency and of temporality: on the one hand, action

cannot be associated with individual, environment, context, or subject. On the other hand, a situation in the making cannot be cut into several moments. The broad assumption that no organism can exist but for active and creative connections with its environment, that we do not only live in an environment but *by* it (Joas 1993), has already drawn attention to this constitutive relationship. "Agency is not an attribute but the ongoing reconfiguring of the world" (Barad 2003: 818); "it resides neither in us nor in our artifacts but in our intra-actions" (Suchman 2007: 285). Within the *Practice Turn,* Suchman suggests replacing the expression "human-machine interface" with "human-machine interchange" in order to rethink how we relate to our machines (Suchman 2007: 285). Part of the school of research "Embodied Interaction", Dourish also views our interactions with "the things themselves" as the most deserving subject matter for research into: "the creation, manipulation and sharing of meanings through the commitment to interact with artifacts" (Dourish 2001).

Here the pragmatist perspective intersects with French technical anthropology (Leroi-Gourhan 1943; Leroi-Gourhan 1964; Goody 1979). By granting a sociological dignity equal to that of cooperation between people to our relationships with the environment, by integrating the realm of technical objects into the culture, it questions the ontological primacy accorded to the constituted individual, and discards a substantial conception of the individual *"homo clausus",* as Elias terms it, who sees action only through the "tragedy of choice", that is, the simple communication of pre-existing substances. Prioritizing the individuation process over the constituted individual allows us: "to look for a sense of values elsewhere than in the limited inwardness of the individual being, and to pay attention to the desires, tendencies or instincts which invite him to speak or to act outside his limits" (Simondon 1989b).

Depicting interests emerging from work activities, this "creative curiosity", undermines the claim to satisfy a pre-existing personality, expressing and contemplating itself in the mastery of an object. Dewey's transactional view recasts the very concept of interest by prioritizing the point of view of the "development of the individual", that is individuation over the individual. He seeks to dismantle a "false notion of the relation of interest and the self" which considers the latter as "fixed antecedent to action", as "a fixed and hence isolated quantity". The development of "active lines of interest" involves, on the contrary, a correlative transformation of people and the world, associating a process of organization of attention to a: "course of events in which one is engaged and by whose outcome one is affected" (Dewey 2012: 126). He recalls the etymology of the notion: "The word interest suggests, etymologically, what is between, – that which connects two things otherwise distant". The idea designates less a state than a "career", i.e. an effort at transformation in which we relate things to "a situation in continuous development", "to be interested is to be absorbed in, wrapped up in, carried away by, some object. To take an interest is to be on the alert, to care about, to be attentive. We say of an interested person both that he has lost himself in some affair and that he has found himself in it. Both terms express the engrossment of the self in an object". Through this creation of habits, we inhabit the world.

The pragmatist stance helps to meet the limitations of existing approaches that fail to account for this genesis of interests and forms of life. In actor-network theory,

for instance, the questioning of the "subject with inwardness" as the origin of action has brought individuals back into the "mutiplicity that makes them act", but at the risk of losing them. In activity theories, the reintegration of the creative and affective dimension of action fails to discard the traditional notion of subject, and remains dependent upon the classic semantic of action and its dichotomies – subject/object, ends/means, etc. This literature (Beguin, Clot 2004; Kaptelini, Nardi 2006: 226) is still infatuated with the opposition between subject-driven and context-driven action, which echoes the opposition between the interactional view (rationality theory) and the self-actional view (normative) among economists, early criticized by Dewey (see Khalil 2003a). Fundamental preconceptions are involved here. It seems that exploring "the variety of experiences that people engage in", and: "making the person – and particularly the emotional-volitional character of the person that we recognize in desire, longing and joy – central, would radically challenge the rationalist assumptions of studies of people and technology in ways that Human-Computer Interaction (HCI) and Computer-Supported Cooperative Work (CSCW) may not be ready to do" (McCarthy, Wright 2004).

This pragmatist stance has made ecological perspectives flourish (Joseph 2007a; Joseph 2007b; *Tracés* 2008; *Tracés* 2012). As regards work, it has allowed for the study of vigilance (Chateauraynaud 1997), orientation (Boutet 2006; Boutet 2008; Bidet 2008; Bidet 2011a; Denis, Pontille 2010) and complex information ecologies (Nardi, O'Day 1999; Lahlou 2000), for a "core-task analysis" in ergonomy (Norros 2004), to mention just a few. The ecology of perception (Gibson 1979) was in fact already "implicitely pragmatist", as an affordance is: "a property that cannot be attributed to the environment, nor to the agent, but to their relationship" (Joseph, as quoted from Breviglieri, Stavo-Debauge 2007). Human agency is thus inseparable from a "reticulation" of space and time at: "selected key points". As the French philosopher Simondon puts it: "The human being finds himself connected to a world experienced as an environment […] A reticulation of space and time develops, that highlights privileged places and moments, as if all man's power to act and all the world's ability to influence him were concentrated in these places and these moments. […] These points and these moments localize and focus the attitude of the living being *vis-à-vis* his environment" (1989a: 164).

Such a perspective invites to pay more attention, beyond interactions, situated meanings and practices occurring here and now, to the continuous transactions between organisms and environments, and to what these "intra-actions" (Suchman 2007) continuously produce, besides the making of "social selves" (Simpson 2009; Brassac 2005), of "activity cultures" (Barbier, Durand 2006; Gherardi 2006), of professional capabilities (Zimmermann, 2011), and of innovative process in organizations (Stark 2009; Lorino 2013). We assume that this shift in vision from interaction to transaction can illuminate today's work dramas, both their most intimate and their most public challenges. As regards their most intimate challenges, the ethicizing of work shows the vital need of being a participant and of inhabiting one's work and how it faces new constraints in labile and complex environments (4). As regards their most public challenges, work may prove crucial for cultivating democratic habits (5).

4. The ethicizing of work: workers as form seekers

We introduced the notion of "true work" *(vrai boulot)* to point the ethicizing of work and the correlative involvement in work. This ethicizing happens when we come to value moments or parts of our work, even scarce (Bidet 2011a). Thus "true work" invites to describe how people try to orient themselves, especially within complex, labile and uncertain work environments, so as to inhabit them and to turn working, despite everything and at least temporarily, into a meaningful practice. Memory is particularly attached to these moments, which become sources of emotional attachment, commitment, and nostalgia, and which usually feed criticism and professional claims. Such moments do not mean pure joy. Most of the time, they go hand in hand with long lasting effort and attention. Therefore, studying "true work", as we did in our investigations on technicians working in a traffic control center platform, calls for both a situational and a 'trans-situational' focus, to grasp how valuations are created during the course of careers, when experienced moments of felicity (re)invent a relationship with an activity and its environment. Their valuation can be explicitly stated as such – "here you have a true end", "you truly have something to do", but more frequently it is the valuations of an agency of some kind, not of a frenetic activity, nor of mirroring oneself in an object.

The notion of "true work" lays stress upon the possible making of valued forms of life, that is, what work may produce for the workers themselves. Dewey was already much concerned with experience becoming: "so dispersed, so heterogeneous, that it hardly deserves this appellation any longer" (Bidet 2011b). Evocations of work are numerous in his writings, as has been emphasized (Donohue 1960; Hickman 1992; Garrison 1995). Occupations, associated with both habits and inquiry, are a fundamental issue for Dewey: "occupations determine the fundamental modes of activity, and hence control the formation and use of habit" (1902: 219); "occupations decide the sets of objects and relations that are important, and thereby provide the content or material of attention, and the qualities that are interestingly significant" (1902: 220). Long before Sennett's *The Craftsman* (2008), Burke related Marx's and Veblen's approaches to Dewey's appraisal of the importance of work. In *Permanence and Change,* he built upon Dewey's: "subtle distinction between what is to a man's interest and what he is interested in" (1983: 45) and refers to his notion of "occupational psychosis" as a "pronounced character of the mind" (40). He reminds us that what is at stake with this "occupational psychosis", and "ethicizing of work", is nothing less than the anthropological urge, rooted in our biological conditions, of being a participant: "The men 'socialized' their specific patterns of interest by the manipulation of objective materials in a way whereby the internal and the external were indeterminately fused" (Burke 1983: 215). More precisely, we do so by: "molding the qualities of our experience, as it sometimes induces us to single out those aspects of events which immediately reflect our interests, and at other times it trains our attention upon the selection of such means as will make events reflect our interests" (Burke 1983: 215). Burke, following Veblen, pays a great deal of attention to the way "such ethical structures tend to become self perpetuating" (239): when "occupation and morality are

integrally intermingled", that is: "when occupation reaches the stage of preoccupation. For we are preoccupied with something which we value: a woman, a business, a book. We ethicize something when we act towards it as though it were an intrinsic good" (238). As poets, workers use "weighted words" (liii), that contain "emotional overtones" telling how we should act toward these objects. And this ethicizing "is probably carried into the most casual bit of slang" (238). But through this process, our interests are also tested, revised, and produced partly anew. This point is at the heart of Burke's discussion of Veblen's attention to the way our interests confine our thinking within certain channels. He describes this confinement, as when: "one tends to state the problem in such a way that his particular aptitude becomes the 'solution' for it. Thus, the young pugilist will so ethicize his fists that he tends to simplify a great diversity of human relationships by considering them capable of treatment in terms of an actual or threatened rap on the chin" (243). But when we attempt to embody our attitude into the full complexity of life, we enter into a creative process, as it discloses the different orders of recalcitrance; we then make "discoveries" which are: "nothing other than revisions made necessary by the nature of the world itself". Thereby our common desire to be a participant – "man as communicant" (xxix) – is always challenged: even "the recurrence of 'like' situations is always accompanied by the introduction of new factors". If Dewey praised work, provided it is not reduced to pure *labor*, it is as the set of activities in which we take into consideration the more continuously the direct and indirect consequences of our activities: "industrial arts are the typeforms of experience that bring to light the sequential connections of things with one another". Burke points in this sense the "synthetic" character of our acts: "each being a new way of putting things together, quite as each line of a drama is" (215, 254).

This ordinary effort to give a form to his own experience deserves all the more our attention that, today, forming "an "orientation" by dealing with partial perspectives or various "occupational psychosis", gets at the core of work as we have to put up with increasingly symbolic and relational activities, within networks of artefacts or distant workers. As work becomes basically an interface work between organizations, activities, processes, participants, standard-setters or ever-changing situations, it increasingly appeals to the human capacity of adaptation, to his plasticity more than his motor force. Scores of sociological investigations still rely upon an implicit mechanistic vision of work as an amount of force, an energetic input, a painful and repulsive motor effort. They are more eager to stress work's "intensification" than to explore its growing intrinsic heterogeneity. By contrast, gaining deeper insights onto temporal aspects, taking into account both the dynamics of life courses and the rhythms of activity is necessary to shed light upon how workers try to create forms, styles, rhythms of their own. This led for example to describe two valued forms of lives within the same technical work (Bidet 2011a). These two forms of life, departing widely from one another, are built upon opposite affordances and rhythms, so that we distinguished a 'watchman' style and an 'explorer' style. Interviews show indeed two vocabularies for that same activity. On the one hand, the *material* universe of care of machines; on the other, the *electronic* world of IT interfaces and artefacts. For the 'watchmen' valued activities are termed "true technique", *making* and *repairing, programming* and

troubleshooting. They appear to require a body of knowledge that is likely to guarantee the priority of the technician over the technical object: "That's more technical, whereas here, the person who has no knowledge will be able to work anyway". The "things which are really worth it" stand "behind" the abstractions of the control operation. Meanwhile, they succeed to reconfiguring part of their work into "troubleshooting". Eschewing an indefinite, costly, and futile exploration, they thus display motor valuations related to short responses: "you filter the calls, then *done,* it works like new!". By contrast, the 'explorers' associate "true work" with continuous research, a constant and time-consuming distant circulation within the telecommunications network. To them, the telephone traffic flow should be constantly *researched* to keep in touch and be prepared for any circumstances. Thus the 'explorers' are not familiar with porous temporality, the scarce and temporally limited interventions of the 'watchmen', who in turn look with perplexity at these: "enthusiasts, who are really into it and will find lots of things to do". The accounts of explorers readily delve into the dynamic of traffic flow, the cumulative snowball effects of which are, for them, the very site of "true work". The two groups face in fact the same experimental environment in different ways. Each of the two vocabularies ethicizes a part of this work. For one group, the explicit reference to a "true work" indicates a distanced and readily criticized relationship to the activity, which is discarded as being too distant from "true technique". Nevertheless, they also encounter some "true work" in the present, when they reconfigure their work in "troubleshooting". A part of the activity is valued; it is coloured, although too rarely for their taste, by the delights of nostalgia, which we see in our interviews with mentions of the time when: "we were all in our machine, maybe it's stupid, but we had… When you're in your machine, it's like in your car, you pay more attention because it's yours; we knew the whole history of the machine, the site's particularities". Recurrence of the possessive case indicates the comfort of familiarity acquired with an environment which one has come to "inhabit" over time (Breviglieri 2004).

Valuations of "true work" set up a rich though neglected realm of meanings and potential ties, above and below the classical domain of occupational identities and rhetorics. Because these valuations convey the desire for a consistent and cumulative work experience, "true work" is all the more relevant to depict contemporary work worlds, their tests and their constraints, and how they may underwrite, when tests become "existential" (Boltanski 2009), radical criticisms. Here the ethicizing of work already touches its public dimension. We illustrate now more precisely how the pragmatist stance, as opposed to the somewhat moralistic approach developed by symbolic interactionism, can help to better understand how work can cultivate public perspectives, and even democratic habits of tolerance.

5. *Public perspectives at work: beyond shared perspectives*

> What we share is not as interesting as what we do not share
> (Bender on Mikhail Bakhtin, as quoted from Béguin, Clot 2004)

The shift from interaction to transaction can enlighten the very existence of a public perspective within a work context. To take a step from shared perspectives,

the Deweyian standpoint on transaction benefited from Simmel's insistence upon configurations implying three members, and from Peirce's interest in the thirdness. We begin by assuming that this standpoint is necessary in order to decentre depiction from the traditional image of teamwork and to make visible a mainly collaborative and "knowledge-based" work where workers confront a multiplicity of information, or patients, or clients, or communication devices, and sometimes all together. To make this claim, we draw on a study of paediatric emergency care services (Chave 2010). In drawing this section to a close, we will state how this might pertain to a democratic experience.

In the two paediatric emergency care services where observations and interviews were conducted, the main feature is the coexistence of cooperation and entirely asymmetric perspectives, not as a moment in the course of sharing perspectives, but as a stabilized configuration. What holds people together does not resemble any kind of emergent relationship or understanding. Nevertheless, we depict co-activities. The presence of another person is acknowledged. Activities are related, entangled, and useful one to the other, but without any shared understanding. Taking the point of view of the other is not even an issue. On the contrary, we observed a scarce use of verbal language, rare visual coordination, and no focused attention. One must even ignore the other in order to cooperate. It is not a matter of misunderstanding (as in Grosjean 2005), nor of not having to know each other in order to cooperate. This "practical indifference" is an invisible work, but a practical and positive one in complex information ecologies where practitioners are likely to fight "to fit experiences together in a unified whole" and to create a thread of continuity.

So we studied forms of what we call "practical indifference" between actors oriented toward the same global object in two paediatric emergency care services. Most interactions there are not just between medical workers and patients, but include the parents, or at least one parent. They form two parallel conducts regarding the patient, so that the activity as collective and centred upon a common motive, as articulated by Engeström's, relies at the same time upon the co-activity of parents and professionals as regards the common object patient-file, on the cure for doctors and the care for parents, to state it simply and approximately. The object of such cooperative activities is indeed very polymorphic: being a person, a patient, a child, or relative, or a file, according to whom is considering it. The practitioner can treat at the same time one or four or five files, each one in a different moment of its trajectory in the centre. So files are taken one after another but patients are treated sequentially and wait between sequences.

Their respective perspectives do not fit. For the doctor, what is at stake is the patient's recovery, just as for parents, but it is also making the patient leave the centre, be it to another service or home to make room for new patients. In a sense, the doctor treats files first, as it is the file, and comments on the file made by parents, patient, and nurses, that matters and determines what is to be done. Parents, by contrast, focus upon the child and are involved in a thick biographical and relational historical continuity. They care for the child's sake, but also for the family's activities' continuity, the child's long-term potentialities and short-term comfort and so on. In

a highly distributed context of activities, the parents keep things coherent, maintain continuity of the medical course and stay by the child at all times, and from place to place: they in many ways take care of the child during these sequences, and they transmit (and reconfigure) the story, past episodes, and what has been said to them to the next professional. In doing so, they orient the next decisions, and prevent possible errors or pointless repetition.

Nevertheless, there is no sign of care for mutual awareness or shared perspective. On the contrary, there are sharp contrasts between doctors' and families' experiences, emotions, feelings, practical and affective engagements with the patient. The significance and the framing of the situation also differ: the parents focus on the injured or sick child, the doctors focus on the continuity of the service's activity through the handling of patients. *Far from a team-work,* and far from a classical medical relationship, the interactions and cross-actions in regard to the same patient still articulate two partially joined lines of activity. Rhythmically, this mutual indifference and limited mutual awareness has consequences. When doctors face fresh emergencies, families stay in the examination room for longer and longer periods.

But surprisingly, this mutual lack of concern for the other group's activity favours their co-activity for the patient's sake. Through forms of practical indifference, invisible work done parallel to ones' actions can be tackled in a way other than as a burden or prejudicial misrecognition. What is invisible there is the coordination, and what relates and makes coherent the respective activities, what builds co-activity with so small a relationship between actors. What is invisible, otherwise, is what the other actors are doing, not because it is hidden, shameful, or understated, but because it is taken to be unnecessary, and usefully ignored. Through their permanent presence and vigilance, parents enable the doctor to practice cuts in sequences that constitute an efficient solution to treat simultaneously a large number of patients. They enable doctors not to care about or even remember each and every one at every moment. At the heart of this sometimes uncomfortable indifference lies a form of complementarily and public cooperation or co-activity upon the same "runaway object" (Engeström), with a heterogeneous, short-term but stabilized community which acts mostly separately and with minimal accountability.

In a larger research programme on multi-activity at work, conducting fieldwork in various sectors and organizational settings, we found similar economies of attention and mutual practical indifference at the core of co-activities among workers that also deserve to be documented, not simply as a lack of cooperation, but as a new hybrid form of collective organization through multi-activity and high heterogeneous interactions. The transactional view helps to describe forms of coordination that depart from the traditional account of the desirable and necessary alignment of perspectives in groups where doing things together supposedly takes into account each point of view and the overarching goal, facilitating dialogue and criticism among different views derived from various practices, and overcoming, in some degree, the irreducible otherness of experience.

As she studied quite similar working contexts, Grosjean speculated as to whether activity theory models might offer: "a more satisfying framework [than situated

action] to rethink issues of relevance and mutual intelligibility according to the activity systems [of the various actors involved in cooperative work] when they are not-convergent" (2005). Despite the early (Garreta 2013) and continued (Norros 2004) influence of pragmatism on activity theory, we believe that building from the pragmatist stance offers an alternative path in this direction, highlighting: "the part of shadow collective intelligence at work in any cooperative situation" (Joseph 2004: 23). What we term "practical indifference" suggests indeed an alternative way to enter the public dimension of micro-interactions and the mere possibility of a public perspective within a situation. It echoes the Deweyian point of view on a public dimension that does not necessarily end with community or shared perspectives or stated public problems. But it indicates a broader sense of tolerance, a tolerance in co-activity that does not aim at sharing perspectives, and is consonant with the routine meeting of strangers – which is becoming increasingly important in our digital and knowledge-based worlds of work.

6. Conclusion

The pragmatist stance helps to get deeper insights into today's work dramas: their most intimate as their most public challenges. To illuminate how ways of doing and living are created at work, we have to depict workers not primarily as status-seekers, but as seekers after style, rhythm, form. We can then examine how they try to find their way in their everyday context. But it is also a means of progressing from the ethicizing of work to how it can foster public experience. Both dimensions, the ethicized and the public dimensions of work, are required to understand how one confronts work dramas.

First, the challenge of becoming a participant faces new constraints. In an increasingly knowledge-based, experimental and cosmopolitan society, work becomes less apparent since it requires less physical force than adaptability. Work mobilizes increasingly the strictly human capacity to cope with ever-changing situations and contexts, to move and negotiate between different perspectives, and to engage in distant and temporary interactions within shifting production networks. But how are ethicized forms of lives, with a minimum of continuity and homogeneity, created in such labile and complex contexts? What counts on a daily basis for workers? Can we bring out the methods and the artfulness of their ordinary devices?

Second, the growing division of labour means that workplaces and "workspaces" – as work becomes more also porous, mobile, ubiquitous (Borzeix, Cochoy 2008), depart increasingly from the work-team figure and its mutual intelligibility or mutual awareness horizon. Burke expressed early concerns about this trend: "our nomadism, […] our wide diversification of occupational habits". A "world of much occupational diversity", he feared, will turn "the different classes of individuals in 'mysteries' one for another" (1983). Over the past decades, this trend accelerated. But we saw in this article that such a trend may also foster public experience. Working daily with humans or artifacts that remain strangers to us can cultivate habits of tolerance (Bidet 2008; Bidet 2011a; Chave 2010; Boutet 2008; Naville 1963; Knorr-Cetina 1997;

Kaptelini, Nardi 2006). The remaining question is under what conditions and with what consequences.

More generally, much of the sociological literature is underpinned by outdated pictures of work – as an energetic input and as a peer group matter (Vatin 1993; Vatin 2008). They prevent researchers from considering the ethicized and the public dimensions of work. A pressing task may then be to rephrase work within a new set of symbols and images. As long as its most common images remain mechanistic, following Charlot in the film *Modern Times* (Chaplin 1936), a large range of occupations and activities, their abilities and challenges, will remain outside the public scope, and even perhaps not recognized as work.

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