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## **Empowerment as skill: the role of affect in building new subjectivities**

**Anna Krzywoszynska**

<FIGURE 1 HERE>

Caption: Winter vines as aesthetic objects. Photo by the author, January 2009.

### **1. Introduction**

When I arrived at my fieldwork location at Colli Verdi in winter 2008, I undertook the task of vine apprenticeship; I was to learn how to work with and to care for vines.<sup>i</sup> This effort was part of my doctoral research: a more-than-human ethnography of organic wine making in Northern Italy (Krzywoszynska 2012). The immense awkwardness and alterity of facing a vine for the first time in this context and asking: “who are you, and so who are we? Here we are, and so what are we to become?” (Haraway 2008, p. 221) was one of the pivotal moments of my research, and led me to engage with feminist and materialist writers as I sought to understand both this event, and the developing relationship between the vines and myself. In this chapter, I suggest that the process of becoming skilled in vine work can be thought as an emergence of a new self, understood after Haraway (2008) as an open network of meaningful relations. Haraway’s perspective on the ‘self’ moves away from the idea of an inherent and fixed identity, and towards relational and mutable subjectivities that emerge from, and are constituted by, relations with human and non-human others. In this reading, skill can be seen as a reworking of a self through the development of new, meaningful relations with animate and inanimate non-human ‘others’.

This understanding of ‘self’ as emergent from relations, practices and discourses has been taking root in debates and practice within participatory research (PR), particularly in relation to empowerment, understood as the capacity of individuals and groups to act according to their will. There has been a shift towards more-than-human relationality in PR debates, with explorations of the role of space, embodiment, materiality and affect. For example, social scientists Caitlin Cahill (2007), Amanda Cahill (2008), and Morales and Harris (2014) have called for an understanding of empowerment as an effect of situated relations as much as an individual capacity to act on these relations. In a similar vein, participant action scholars Kesby, Kindon and Pain (2007) call for a reconceptualization of empowerment as a spatial practice, and as an effect of the deployment of certain resources. In this chapter I contribute to this debate by exploring the fruitful resonances between debates around empowerment and enskillment (Ingold 2011), and I propose that empowerment can be usefully seen as a skill in and of itself.<sup>ii</sup> Both empowerment and enskillment require cultivating new forms of subjectivity

through active work on the relations which constitute a ‘self’. I suggest the work of building new relations requires cultivating unfamiliar affects. I use an auto-ethnographic account of acquiring vine work skills to explore the affective states cultivated in my vine apprenticeship, and to highlight the potential resonances between the roles of affects in developing vine-working skill in developing empowerment. The practice of auto-ethnography requires a critical awareness of the effects of research on the self, and is thus well suited to an exploration of the work of building new relations through practicing unfamiliar embodiments and affects, and to reflecting on the socio-material conditions which make these processes possible (O’Connor 2007). In the discussion, I explore some ways in which the affective states that enable a reconfiguring of the relational self may be used in PR practice for cultivating empowerment.

## 2. Relational subjectivities in developing skills and empowerment

The concept of skill as a transformative dialogue between the doer and the world arguably goes back as far as Aristotle’s Nicomachean Ethics (ca. 350 BCE), and has seen a recent revival in social sciences through an interest in craft championed by the sociologist Sennett (2009), and in relationality in action and perception of the anthropologist Ingold (2000,2011). These works have stressed the centrality of sensing and sensation for the interaction between mind-body and its environment in the process of learning (Crossley 2007, Gieser 2008, Lea 2009). Being skilled means being aware of the ways in which the world of action unfolds, and understanding one’s capacity to participate in this unfolding. My understanding of the character of this adjustment between the doer and the world also draws on relational materialism (Anderson and Harrison 2010), which sees bodies and worlds co-creating one another. Human bodies are transformed from a self-contained vessel of, and tool for, the intellect into ‘a dynamic trajectory by which we learn to register and become sensitive to what the world is made of’ (Latour 2004, p. 206). Similarly, the material world is no longer a Euclidean plane populated with separate, passive ‘things’, but instead a dynamic, relational unfolding of materials and forms (Ingold 2000). The notion of affect is central to this perspective. After geographer Jamie Lorimer (2007), I understand affects as a collection of shared and interconnecting forces operating between bodies. The relationship between affect and affordance is also important to stress. Affordance is a relational quality, arising from the meeting of ‘the inherent, ecological characteristics of a nonhuman in relation to the phenomenological apparatus of the body (human or nonhuman) that encounters and perceives them’ (Lorimer 2007, p. 914). Different bodies present different affordances, and so the recognition and responsiveness which structure affective states do not depend exclusively on the efforts of a (perceiving, interacting) actor, but are influenced both by the perceptual apparatus of the actor, and by what the other who is interacted with presents.

Consistently with this literature, in this chapter I suggest that developing skills can be understood as a process of developing new subjectivities, drawing on Haraway's (2008) understandings of subjects as relational, mutable, and changing. Haraway further stresses the self is always already a 'multispecies crowd' (2008, p. 165), with other species being both the condition of existence, and the co-creators of meaning. This perspective rejects the notion an original 'I' to which experience is 'added', but rather sees the self as arising from the entanglement in relations with the human, non-human and elemental others (see also Latour 2004). The self is then understood as a product of mundane and everyday relationality and, being open to this dance of relating (Haraway 2008, p. 25), is understood as how we are in the world – not a bolt-on, not an extra. This multi-species relational perspective rings particularly true in the case of grape-producing vines and wine-drinking humans, as their co-dependence and co-entanglement runs deep. The phylloxera outbreak in late 17<sup>th</sup> century forever bound European grape-vines (*vitis vinifera*) to humans, as to survive they began to be grafted onto the pest-resistant American vine (*vitis lambrusca*) rootstocks. Since then, a complex system of control and certification has developed which governs the circulation of vines as bio-technologies, grown at certified nurseries out of clones developed and owned under intellectual property rights (see Krzywoszynska 2012, chapter 4).

Such relational understandings of the self as a tangle of relations have been gaining prominence in debates on empowerment in participatory research. 'Sovereign' perspectives on empowerment which saw people as 'possessing' empowerment and therefore 'holding' a capacity to act in particular ways have been critiqued by a number of authors (Cahill 2007, Cahill 2008, Kesby 2005, Morales and Harris 2014, Wijnendaele 2014,). In turn, the relational, spatial, and temporal natures of subjectivity have been highlighted, stressing the self as a constant work in progress (Kesby 2005). They have resulted in empowerment being re-cast as a change in the composition of one's self, enabling one to re-engage with the world in a new, and hopefully more positive or productive way. These perspectives highlight that empowerment is not something one acquires, but is something one becomes; it cannot be 'given', but has to be developed by each individual and group as a new way of being in the world. As a result, some participatory research processes have experimented with creating spaces and times for the exploration of one's multiple-situated positionalities, and for the development of new subjectivities – an 'iterative long-term shifting process of learning, making sense of one's subjectivity, and reworking it through collective dialogue, ongoing reflection, and analysis' (Cahill 2007, p. 276).

In the following sections, I draw on these relational perspectives on the self and on experience to reflect on the role affective states played in my process of acquiring vine-work skills. I explore the three key affective states which marked the change in my self from an 'aesthetic observer' to a 'pruner' of vines: enchantment; becoming; and focus. Enchantment allowed me to see the possibility of relating to vines otherwise; becoming (working) vine allowed me to bring temporally and spatially distant events and bodies (of significant humans and non-

humans) to bear on my learning experience; and focus indicated the coupling of action and perception that is characteristic of skill. I explore how PR methodologies may draw on the role of affects in skill acquisition to aid participants' reconfiguring of their subjectivities towards empowerment.

### 3. Enchantment

To create meaningful relations one needs some basis for connection. While this connection is easier to establish with some nonhumans more than others, enchantment has the power to create connections across even radical difference (Bennett 2001, Lorimer 2007). My previous engagements with plants as living beings in the landscape have been predominantly aesthetic, and during my winter fieldwork at the vineyard I continued to focus on vines as aesthetic objects, as illustrated by photographs I took at that time, such as Fig. 1. At that time, I was unavailable to the affects of vines as objects of work. Forging new relations is not easy. We often try to reproduce familiar patterns, and during my first engagements with vines in the winter season I struggled to move beyond the position of an external observer as, following and talking with other workers, I bore witness to pruning work. I struggled to understand how pruning choices were made as the workers cut deep into the tissues of the plants. My quest for what I then saw as a hidden meaning behind the actions deployed the 'engineer' model of understanding skill, critiqued eloquently by Ingold (2000), which presumes a set of rules pre-existing material engagement, and directly imposed onto the world. As I have explored in more detail elsewhere (Krzywoszynska 2015), my early meetings with vines were thus dominated by the idea of a repository of meaning separate from practice, which the workers 'translated' into the body of the vine. This idea was reinforced by diagrams such as Fig. 2, which I took to be proof of a 'universal truth' of vine pruning. For me, winter was a time of frustration, where I started to understand in abstraction why certain things were done, but struggled to connect the intellectual understanding with a practical one.

<FIGURE 2 HERE>

Caption: Schematic of a Guyot trained vine with pruning cuts indicated (Giancarlo Dessim, 2008, [http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Guyot\\_1.svg](http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Guyot_1.svg)).

To become skilled at vine work I needed a way to open myself to the world of action, and to the vines and vineyards in which I laboured, and to stop struggling to connect the intellectual understanding with a practical one. I had to let go of the idea of pre-existent meaning; instead, I had to discover the meaning *in situ*, forge my own way of going forward. When the spring came, I was drawn to the changing bodies of the vines, exploding with sensual greenery; it seemed I could practically see the branches grow. I wrote in my diary that:

Shoots are lovely to touch... Sensually, it is a completely different experience to winter pruning. Before, I was struggling. Now, on the contrary, I have to pay special attention and be extra delicate to make sure I don't do damage (*Peter told me I ought to 'caress the vine' at this stage*). (...). There is more to see now, the vine seems more alive, and it is easier for me to start to think about the force it will need to create grapes, about how many grapes it can support, which branches it can develop, see it as a totality, a living thing. The shoots are a beautiful light green, and they are extremely vulnerable and brittle, they pop off the branch at the most delicate touch. You hardly need tools, we work with our hands. Soon they get covered in fragrant vine juice, it smells lovely, a fresh, green smell (based on field diary 05/05/2009).

The affordances of the spring vines indicated to me a different way of relating to the vines than I felt was possible when faced with the inert 'sticks and knots' of their winter form. The sensual enjoyment opened up something in me; the vines touched me in a new way and demanded my attention. Enchantment is memorably discussed by Bennett (2001) as a state of wonder, a temporarily immobilising encounter characterised by heightened sensibility and exhilaration. Enchantment brings into awareness something which had not been noted before, and so opens up the possibility of relating. Plants' enchanting qualities called upon me to respond, and so enrolled me into new relations (Hitchings 2003). Sensual enjoyment offered a way in, which was further shaped by practice with my vine-working colleagues.

#### 4. Becoming (working) vine

My attention was directed toward the spring vines not only for sensual enjoyment, but towards the goal of 'green pruning' (also known as canopy management), in which superfluous branches, leaves and grape buds are pruned to further aid the development of high quality grapes. This learning was aided by the materiality of the spring vines, which in some respects are more forgiving of mistakes than winter ones, as they continue to vigorously produce shoots. Avoiding mistakes, however, required a reconfiguring of the way I habitually attended to plants. I had to shift my perception of vines from mute and stable objects in front of me, to seeing them as temporally unfolding and spatially connected entities: as living others, always already entangled in relations with human and non-human others.

Discovering significant relationalities of the vines was challenging as they presented an ethology very different to my own, inhabiting time and space differently to the way I do (Jones and Cloke 2002). Rooted in place, vines exist through their mutually impactful relations with others, elemental, human, and non-human, enrolling them to further their growth and reproduction (Atchison and Head 2013); they are also highly adaptable and sensitive to their environments. Vines are indeed so entangled in their environments as to challenge simple

distinctions between individuals and collectives, landscapes and their constituents. Their seasonal temporality can be both off-putting and overbearing. Mute, seemingly dead in winter, in spring and summer vines' capacity for unassisted and vigorous growth can challenge attempts at control and containment (Barker 2008, Ginn 2008, Hitchings 2003). The longevity of vines further confused my attempts at relating. Vines can be affected by embodied memories of events long past, or events so momentary as to be inaccessible to an untrained, uninformed workers' perception.

Other, more experienced workers helped me to tune by body and my feeling to what was significant to the vine as a relational, but also productive, organism – to what was significant, not only to secure the vine's health, but also to secure a desirable crop. The affect that was being cultivated in me was therefore what, drawing on the philosophy of Deleuze and Guattari (1988), authors in geography have described as the work of 'becoming animal' (Lorimer 2008, Bear and Eden 2011), or in my case 'becoming (working) plant': a different way of resonating and reacting to the world around me. I was seeking to become not just any plant, however, and Bear and Eden (*ibid.*) are right in drawing attention to the important specificity of the non-humans we seek to get close to. The work of situating myself in relation to the being of the vine had as much to do with understanding how my body and my actions interacted with the bodies and activities of vines (growing, reproduction, decay), as with the bodies and activities of other workers (pruning, spraying, harvesting). This meant developing new ways of feeling and being with the plants, in the group, and in the landscape, cultivating in my body the capacity to react to signals and configurations which hitherto passed unnoticed.

Reconfiguring my habitual ways of looking and inhabiting place were central to this work. On one occasion Damian, the team leader, brought me back to a row that I had just worked, to correct my performance. It was early summer, and mildew was starting to develop. In this organic vineyard sulphur sprays were used to protect the plants (instead of more conventional fungicides). Damian asked me to kneel beside him, and to look along his extended arm, into the vine and across, up the row. Leaves were blocking my view in all directions; this meant there was no air circulating, and the sprays couldn't penetrate either. 'You have to really get in there', Damian told me, as he cleared the surplus creating a new, airy feel. 'That's better. Now you try'.

'You have to be able to see through the vine' was just one of the myriad rules of thumb I was taught during my vine apprenticeship, and there were always more to learn. Rules of thumb were not instructions: this is what must be done, but didactic tools: attend to this, and use your own judgement (Krzywoszynska 2016). They encouraged me to embody the space differently, as part of a network of past,

present, and future relations in which my activities played only one part. Are there too many leaves here, and if so, which ones should I remove? Leaving young and pruning old to prevent mildew, leaving midday leaf ‘umbrellas’ to shade the developing grape bunches, pruning the shoots growing too close together to make harvesting easier for the future workers, required me to develop a sensitivity to the vines and to other workers. Rules directing my attention were ‘like the map of an unfamiliar territory (...) the map can be a help in beginning to know the country, but the aim is to learn the country, not the map’ (Ingold 2000, p. 415). The aim, for the human workers there, was to make wine. This involved acquiring an embodied experience of the unfolding of vines in the processes of vine work, which required ongoing, and long-term, cultivation of attention to the temporally unfolding materiality of vines and vine work.

In addition to rules of thumb, the education of attention in vineyards frequently incorporated the telling of (hi)stories. Like rules of thumb, they helped communicate a change in practice amongst experienced workers, and to direct the attention of the less experienced ones so that the knowledge expressed could be rediscovered by the novices as they engaged with the vines (see Ingold 2011, p. 159). They made it possible to situate green vine pruning in the longer lifecycle of a vine and of a vineyard: the moment of encounter in the dance of relating. In the context of this historical knowledge, in each vineyard, pruning was re-evaluated, as seen in Damian’s description of Vigna Nuova, where vines were being trained to produce high quality grapes:

Damian: *Last year, for example, there weren’t that many grapes, but all the same we went through the vineyard and plucked bunches off to make the vineyard used to making fewer. And, in fact, it is already making fewer. (...) This vineyard always has to produce little, and of high quality. It is different with Barbera in Vigna di Carla – the terrain is more flat, and there is less clay, so we know the grapes will always be less good, so we leave more on, for the demijohns, or less expensive bottles* (field diary 07/05/2009).

Such (hi)stories, like rules of thumb, allowed the more experienced workers to communicate a shared history of embodied experience of these vines. They brought together what was in front of us now, what came before, and what may come after. Vines grow slowly, which can result in epistemic distance for the working human (Carolan 2006): not all that is relevant can be perceived at one time. Similarly, many relations are hidden to the casual observer: although the character of the soil and the (hi)story of the weather and the vines were not perceptible for me, through the telling of the vineyard’s stories these materialities were made visible and their significance more clear. In addition to the thinking-backwards and thinking-forwards, to where the vine had been and where it was going, we were also encouraged to think ‘sideways’, considering the relations of which the vine was part, such as those with soils or the weather. These relations were always materialising in the bodies of vines. By being attentive to their

material presences, and appreciating their power, I could become more sensitive to how my relationship with the vines (through pruning) fitted in the wider mesh of relations. Enrolling the vines into this mesh of relations which made my ‘self’ brought with them soils, water tables, and other workers. I was not making relations with ‘any’ vines, with abstract entities, but with the very real plants rooted in the space and history of a particular place.

## 5. Focus and its rhythms

Enchantment provided a way in to the network of relations around a working vine, and attempts at becoming-working-vine made the relations available through the training of attention. Exercising the skill, in turn, required focus, a state of being ‘in the zone’ described in studies of skill as maximum grip (Merleau-Ponty and Smith 1996), flow (Csikszentmihalyi and Csikszentmihalyi 1992), or being in harmony in the world of action (O’Connor 2007). In the context of leisure skills such as parkour (Saville 2008) or rock climbing (Thrift 2008), this affect is often described as a seamless coupling of action and perception where the ‘I’ disappears and there is no sense of effort. In the context of labour skill, however, this state, I found, is not effortless. In contrast, staying focused is tiring and requires work, as I recall in my research diary:

When working the rows, we become fully submerged in the plants. Hardly anyone talks, and we all concentrate hard on not making mistakes. Every few rows, every hour or so, we take a break, sit on the grass for a quarter of an hour and smoke and drink water. Some stretch out on the ground to give the back and the arms a rest, *after all we are spending the day bent in two. (...)* [the wine-maker] walks past and jokingly tells us off for loafing about. Damian waves him on, but gets quite defensive after a while. It is hard work, he says, lying in the shade of the leaves. *The winery workers don’t get it, but it requires so much concentration, it* is intellectual as well as physical. If you let tiredness take over, and you start going on auto-pilot, and you can do a lot of damage (09/05/2009).

In my developing of vine-working skill, affordances and affects did not come effortlessly together. Playing my part of the relational network well required work. Mistakes happened, not only to me, but to other workers, as tiredness made us numb to the world around us, and caused us to switch off. These experiences problematized for me the notion of an effortless connection between doer and deed in the exercise of skill. While attentiveness to the rhythm of the world of action has been noted as an element of skilled practice (, Bear and Eden 2011, Ingold 2011, Sennett 2009), the rhythm of the focus itself is less commented on. Every skilled practice, however, carries an inherent risk of practice breakdown (Harrison 2009). I saw that the work of even the most experienced practitioner has a wavelike temporal quality in which peaks of attunement change into lows of disconnection. This rhythm of skill was written into the very unfolding of vine work practice, the intensity of which we could not sustain for long periods of

time, or in the difficult conditions of mid-day heat. Relating well meant also knowing when to let go and recover, appreciating the inherent effort.

## 6. Working on affects for cultivating empowerment

Reconfiguring my self to develop meaningful relations with working vines was aided by affective states which made the connection possible (enchantment), which stretched my awareness (becoming (working) vine), and which indicated things were going well (focus). These affects, I suggest, can be usefully reflected on and utilised in PR methodologies which aim to support the development of empowerment understood, like skill, as a reconfiguring of one's relational engagement with the world.

Becoming otherwise through the cultivation of attention has emerged as an important theme in recent PR scholarship on cultivating empowerment. Scholars working from the perspective of relational subjectivity propose that PR projects should offer spaces for critical analyses of one's situatedness within broader social, spatial and political processes (Cahill 2007). This includes exploration of the ways in which one has embodied and internalised potentially oppressive power relations (Kesby et al. 2007). Drawing conscious attention to the norms governing one's life and subjecting them to scrutiny can make one aware of how one's everyday choices reproduce power-laden relations, and it can be an important step toward changing the subjectivities prompted by the norm (Morales and Harris 2014). This explicit exploration of one's lived entanglements – of one's subjectivity – is facilitated by PR practitioners, who seek to support the generation of new narratives for social relationships (Morales and Harris 2014), and to construct the space of participation as a field within which 'opportunities open up for people, first, to disentangle the complex web of everyday life (...) second, to deconstruct norms and conventions; third, to reflect on the performativity of everyday life; and finally, to rehearse performances for alternative realities' (Kesby 2005, p. 2055). For example Catilin Cahill, in her work with young working-class women of colour, used PR processes to encourage her participants to reflect critically upon their everyday lives as part of a collective process which emphasised dialogue, and in so doing reworked and redefined their subjectivities (2007, p. 273).

While cognition has therefore been stressed as a source of action in developing new relations empowerment, the role of materiality, embodiment, and affect in building empowered subjectivities has also been noted, as discussed above, and can be built on further. It is in this context that keeping in mind the potent role enchantment, focus, and becoming play in creating and sustaining new relations may lead to other useful ways for engaging with the world differently. Authors have stressed that cultivating new ways of being in the world involves developing a whole new affective and bodily praxis (Wijnendaele 2014); playing on these

new embodiments through affects may offer powerful ways of exploring how different relations feel. Some PR practitioners have sought to create opportunities for such ‘rescripting of interactions’ (Morales and Harris 2014, Boal 2000) through theatre (Boal 2000), role-playing (Kesby 2005), participatory art (Askins and Pain 2011), participatory video (Hume-Cook et al. 2007), and photovoice (Krieg and Roberts 2007). Through such work, participants have a chance ‘to “do” and “feel” things differently; by offering them a direct embodied experience/experiment of how things can be/feel different’ (Wijendale 2014, p. 277). Using these methods and others, moments of enchantment, in which the habitual way of being is suddenly and exhilaratingly shifted, of becoming, where new ways of resonating with the world are experimented with, and of focus, where perception and action become coupled, can surely be created. Thus these established methods can be pushed further to support the cultivation of new subjectivities not only through rational discourse but also by developing new affective registers.

## 7. Conclusions

Pregnant with her second child, a friend of mine commented once: ‘when you’re expecting, the whole world is pregnant!’ Suddenly, she could see pregnant women everywhere she looked. This sensation is familiar to all of us (although not necessarily through the experience of pregnancy!); the experiences we go through change our engagement with the world, stretching us out, making more – or less – of the world available to us. If you’ve just started gardening, the whole world is made up of gardens; if you’ve just read Marx, class struggle is everywhere. Instead of understanding this as a change in perspective, as if our ‘self’ were putting on a new pair of glasses, we can follow Haraway (2008) and re-ground selfhood in material practice. If we reject the idea of an independent, pre-existent mind, and look at the mind-body as a dynamic trajectory (Latour 2004), and made through the relations of which it forms part, acquiring skill becomes not so much the adding of a capacity as the becoming something new (perhaps we know this intuitively when we say ‘I am an academic’ or ‘I am a driver’). The skill does not simply ‘appear’; by experimenting with and being worked by affordances, we develop new capacities for relating which may result in skill.

To date, in PR debates, one way of understanding the acquisition of skill (of public speaking, of IT literacy etc.) has been in a supportive role to the work of empowerment. However I suggest we can also usefully understand empowerment itself as a skill: that is as a goal-oriented praxis. This gives empowerment a translatability which allows it to go beyond any immediate context of a project or issue, and to be enacted in various contexts. While the stress is different, there are striking similarities with regard to the basic dynamics of skill and empowerment, both in terms of their acquisition, and in terms of how they are lived and enacted. Both skill and empowerment are enacted by individuals, but emerge from a field of social and material relations. Both require a reconfiguration of relations

between one's mind-body and those of others, human and nonhuman. This reconfiguration requires both training attention towards one's existing relations, and developing capacities to act in new ways to cultivate new relationalities. To achieve this, both empowerment and enskillment benefit from 'other spaces' governed by discourses and practices quite unlike those that order everyday space and agency (Kesby 2005). In these spaces, new affective registers can be cultivated which enable and sustain the creation of particular relations.

In the case of vine working skill, the exercise of skill requires a positioning of individual mind-body in relation to others who constitute the realm of action – workers, plants, soils, chemicals, vineyards etc. In the case of empowerment, the object is similar. In both cases, the work involved with 'rescripting of interactions' (Morales and Harris 2014) requires a training of attention. Such attention cannot be only conscious and critical, separate somehow from the material environment of action, but must also be embodied and felt. With interaction between human and nonhuman others in a supportive setting we experiment with new ways of feeling and being, with new affective states. Affects are thus a gateway to new relationalities. Enchantment opens up new affordances in the world around us – new opportunities for meaningful engagement. For me, the training of new affects resulted in vines morphing from aesthetic 'knots and sticks' into sites of conscious engagement and work. My hands knew what to do, as indeed did my entire body; while I can't claim to have become fully competent, I knew I was moving in the right direction. Similarly, for Askins and Pain's (2011) young participants, experience of playing together within the space of the PR project resulted in new friendships across hitherto insurmountable lines of difference.

PR practitioners already use a range of techniques to aid in the reconfiguration of subjectivities and exploration of how life can be felt differently. The importance of affect in developing new relationalities with humans and non-humans reported in this chapter suggests that a further focus on affect in reconfiguring selves for empowerment is a valuable direction of travel. By approaching empowerment as a form of skill, PR practitioners can further reflect on what 'empowerment apprenticeship' may entail, and what conditions may be necessary or desirable for exercising empowerment beyond the spaces of PR encounters. As Keby et al. note, PAR epistemologies and methodologies allow participants and researchers to achieve new forms of agency, however these need to be 'constantly redeployed and normalised if empowered performances are to become sustainable' (2007, p. 24). Understanding empowerment as skill draws attention to its relational character; it does not come into being *ex nihilo*, but its development is aided by particular material and social conditions, as well as repetition. Empowerment is also not carried by an individual as a stable construct, but emerges from a field of relations, and constantly is responsive to the social and material context in which it is utilised. Furthermore, studies of skill can be helpful for PR in thinking beyond the

human-to-human dimension of becoming empowered, and inviting an interrogation of the material and more-than-human relations which come into play. Crucially, understanding empowerment as skill stresses that it is not something that can be given or received; it has to be lived and felt. Like skill, power exists only in its use. To paraphrase Allen, power is no more to be found ‘in’ the apparatus of rule than skill of playing is to be found ‘in’ the wood of a violin (Allen 2003, p. 5). By helping one another cultivate new affective relations within the world, we can explore the skill of playing the violin of power to our own tune.

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<sup>i</sup> On the question of care in working with plants please see Krzywoszynska (2015b). All places and persons in this article have been given pseudonyms.

<sup>ii</sup> Drawing primarily on Ingold (2000, 2011) I choose to speak of ‘skill’ rather than ‘craft’; however I acknowledge these terms are increasingly used synonymously.