

CHAPTER 6

A GIRL LIKE A WILL-O'-THE WISP. LISTENING TO REPORTS OF CULTURAL EXPERIENCES AS A METHODOLOGICAL MEANS OF ACCESSING THE PRECONSCIOUS DYNAMICS OF SENSE MAKING

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Sociocultural research has to develop methods enabling to reveal thinking processes. One of the classical ways of accessing thinking has always been discourse: in effect, because one cannot have access to thinking “in the head,” it concentrates on externalisations, and on what people can say about their thinking. One of the settings mostly often used to generate discourse is that of the research interview. Yet, this raises various issues, the main one being that discourse about the past is reconstructed in the here and now of the situation, and that therefore not much can be inferred about the past.

Cultural Psychology and Psychoanalysis: Pathways to Synthesis, pp. 151–179
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In this chapter, drawing on psychoanalytical theory and method, I will outline a methodological strategy to overcome this limitation. It is based on two ideas: firstly, many externalisations studied by psychologists happen to be about contents to which people have deliberate, conscious access. However, psychoanalysis has made us aware of the fact that there is more to psychic life than this: the largest part of our psychic life is, according to this approach, made up of “preconscious” or “unconscious” processes, which are affective, embodied, and escape our control. The psychoanalytical therapeutic setting creates conditions for the verbal formulation of a stream of thoughts which enable patient and analyst to make hypotheses about such preconscious and unconscious processes. In that sense, psychoanalysis functions in perfect accord with current sociocultural psychology: externalisations are seen as material to work on, inferences are made about unseen processes, and eventually, the interactions in which the person is engaged, through internalisation, might also change the person him/herself, and hence his/her future externalisations. Secondly, the psychoanalytical setting is not the only one in which the person might be in touch with such preconscious thinking processes; cultural experiences also enable him/her to do so. As a sociocultural psychologist, I therefore offer an interview setting in which people are brought to discuss their cultural experiences, as a way of accessing some preconscious thinking processes.

THE THERAPEUTIC SETTING AND CULTURAL EXPERIENCES

How is it that the therapeutic setting enables psychoanalysts to make hypotheses about the unconscious of their patient? Features of the frames, as well as some theoretical tools, are used by them to reveal, make hypotheses about, and accompany the thinking processes of their patients. The reflection undertaken by psychoanalysts about the properties of a setting enabling such thinking processes offers a base to reflect about other frames for thinking.

Accessing Thinking in Therapy

The therapeutic setting creates a space where unconscious processes can be accessed, thanks to the explicit rules guiding communication, the actual frame of the exchange, the nature of the interpersonal relationship, triangulation of thinking, and the creation of a particular thinking space.

Psychoanalysis has been defined by Freud as a theory, a therapeutic setting, and as a research method. The rules of the psychoanalytic process have

been set so as to take these three sides into account. One of the basic rules of the classical psychoanalytical process is for the patient to say whatever comes to his/her mind, that is, to “freely associate” (Freud, 1910/1961).¹ In Freud’s first topological model, the psychic apparatus is a layered structure, where thoughts have to move through unconscious, preconscious and conscious processes, through a process of representational linking, that we can call semiotic elaboration. The move of thinking processes towards consciousness results from their progressive transformation into forms and contents which seem acceptable for the person in a given social situation. This acceptability depends both on values and norms internalised by the person (the superego) and on the person’s capacity to stand the pain of some affects. The psychoanalytical setting creates conditions in which the person can freely associate, while suspending as much as possible the judgement she has on his/her discourse, that is, by lowering the control over what can be externalised. If this works, then the person might come to externalise much more than what he/she usually does; through this uninterrupted flow of externalisation, the psychoanalyst might also make hypotheses about parallel trajectories of thinking—precisely because the person’s discourse is never purely free, but still avoids some themes or semantic fields, insists on others, chooses some words and some images rather than others, etc.

The safety of the frame appears as an important constituent of the therapeutic process, which can only take place in a space which is isolated from the outside world, where the therapeutic alliance guarantees confidentiality, and welcomes the person’s thoughts, whatever they may be and however intolerable they might be in other settings. This is partly possibly thanks to the physical arrangement of the setting, i.e., a space or location in which one enters, at a regular time, and sits in a certain place in a certain position, in a room which creates a certain impression, inviting the person to a state of relative physical relaxation. It is also possible thanks to the institutional framing of the situation that is a guarantee of its quality. The therapist participates in the constitution of the frame: representing an institution, embodying expertise, he becomes a guardian of that frame (Grossen & Perret-Clermont, 1992; Viderman, 1982). A condition of the quality of the frame, Winnicott (1971/2001) mentions the ability of the “good enough” therapist to resist the attacks of the patient, to adjust to his or her needs, but without adhering too closely to them. This enables the patient to be sure that the therapist exists outside his or her own fantasy, as a person escaping his/her control.² Hence, the reiterative process of the session creates a specific frame in which the person might thus progressively reveal zones of his/her experience that otherwise escape his/her attention, and, through the mediation of the therapist, progressively elaborate these contents.

The therapeutic setting creates safe conditions enabling the person to enter in a state of relative relaxation, and therefore tend to lower the

control over his/her discourse. In technical terms, the setting creates the conditions for a unique alliance of *primary* and *secondary* thinking processes (Green, 1973/1999). Primary processes are those that organise unconscious processes, while secondary processes characterise conscious thinking. In primary processes, thinking can be freely and independently linked following the principle of pleasure, and hence produces mechanisms of displacement, inversion and condensation, such as that seen in the dream-world or in slips of the tongue. In secondary processes, the train of thought is temporal, causal and logical—it obeys the principle of reality. In the therapeutic setting, primary processes are likely to be activated or to emerge thanks to the free association process; at the same time, the rules of the game require the person to intentionally address his/her discourse to another person. This discourse has to be organised into words and ordered into sentences, and hence, acquire characters of secondarity. The therapeutic setting hence creates a triangulation of thinking, where the person pursues two streams of thinking which mutually enable each other and generate a new type of discourse. Green proposes giving the name “tertiary” to the processes characterising this discourse, whereby primary and secondary processes can be articulated (Green, 1995, p. 152). Green’s hypothesis is that such linking processes occur at the preconscious level (Green, 1992, p. 146). For example, reports of dreams made to an analyst are seen as a secondarisation of dreams, themselves occurring as primary processes (Freud, 1900/1953). Yet, in narrating a dream, a person can insist on certain points, repeat him/herself, or be self-contradictory, etc. Freud thus listened to the discourse of the dream, a secondary reconstitution of the dream experience in language, and through it, to the latent discourse—the “cloud” of experiences and perceptions that can be revealed by free associations and that are organised by primary processes. In that case, these two layers of discourse reveal something about the real dream, and about the thinking processes of the person which filtered that experience so as to let only some of its constituent coming to the fore.

Finally, this double anchorage of discourse in the therapeutic setting—a closed, delimited, containing space—is also what enables Winnicott (1971/2001) to see the therapeutic process as occurring in a *transitional* space, that is, in a space where the question of whether what is being said is real or invented, belonging to the patient or to the shared situation, becomes irrelevant.

This setting thus creates conditions for unconscious processes to emerge, or be accessible through people’s externalisations, to be reflected upon, and to be played with, in the interaction with another person. The setting therefore has the power to transform the person. Part of the transformative process occurs thanks to the semiotic elaboration of thoughts, the progressive distancing, unlinking and relinking of experience.

Such reading of the setting does not involve naïvely believing that some “truth” about the past life of the patient and hidden forces will emerge (see in this volume, Van der Veer, 2011; Cabell & Valsiner, 2011); rather, it supposes that in that very specific context, the person will attempt to produce a discourse, which might be impeded, or modified, by the person’s apprehension of the nature of the setting itself. Movements of thinking might show through the discourse; these might be coloured and linked to traces of past events and situations; but of course all this is construed in the here and now.

Thinking in Cultural Experiences

In what other settings does our culture offer people an opportunity to have emotionally laden thinking processes made visible through a semiotic form, so as to give them a chance to reflect them?

Cultural experiences, such as watching a film, listening to tales, praying, contemplating an image, offer some of the features of the therapeutic setting. A cultural experience requires a jump into an *as-if* experience (Josephs, 1998), a form of imaginary thinking. Engaging in a cultural experience requires from the person a form of “surrender” to the flow of the experience (Benson, 2001; Dewey, 1934), which is only possible if the person feels safe enough (Winnicott, 1971/2001). Consequently, cultural experiences always require a framing of experience which separates them from the flow of daily life. This framing can be formal, such as the ritual introduction of a tale, or the habitual red velvet of the cinema lobby. It can also be informal, such as when a person simply changes his/her state of attention before “getting lost” in a book or in a painting (Nell, 1988).

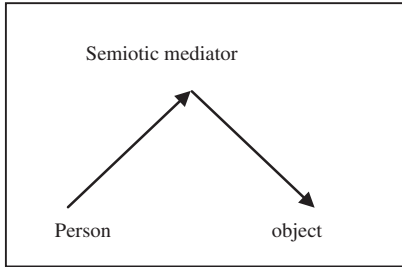
Cultural experiences require two lines of thinking processes: an active, expert construction of the experience, partly drawing on the person’s cultural literacy—such as that regarding the rules of the cinematographic game, knowledge of the basic genres of narration; and a less formal, perceptual, embodied emotional experience, by which the film, painting, or music resonates with one’s sensibility, memories, and desires. This second line of processes consists in the creation of links between the form and content of the cultural experience and the person’s traces of past experiences, thanks to perceptual resemblances, emotional similarities, and semantic proximities and so on, in other words, through the logic of primary processes.

Hence, as in the clinical setting, the frame offered by the cultural experience creates conditions for a certain state of relaxation, through which primary processes might take place relatively freely. The properties of cultural experiences have always interested psychoanalysts. Freud’s interest for the arts is well known (see in this volume, Zittoun, 2011). Winnicott (1971/2001)

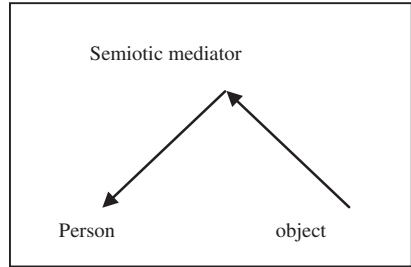
suggested that any cultural experience requiring some form of suspension from reality—art, science, religion—take place in the area of transitional phenomena, in which the therapeutic process is also located. For Green, mythology offers an experience of strongly binding primary and secondary processes, thus promoting tertiary elaboration: in effect, their themes touch upon basic feelings and unconscious experience—the desire to kill or to love a parent, jealousy or despair (primary process-like experiences)—yet they organise them along some culturally set narrative canons (secondarity). Green (1992) suggests the possibility of seeing myths as collective transitional objects.

These authors, together with Vygotsky (1971), also came to consider the transformational power of myth and narratives. Because the person deploys some part of his/her internal life in the semiotic organisation of the cultural experience, the latter can guide a transformation of that experience (Valsiner, 2007; Vygotsky, 1971; Zittoun, 2006). Tisseron (2002, 2003) shows how much people's favourite book or song often precisely represents, or resonates, with part of their yet-unelaborated experience. Their fondness for a story might precisely be due to the fact that they recognise in it, under a semiotic form, some contents that reflect their inner, not yet accessible experience. People's strong connexion to a book which is then reread and reread might be seen a slow attempt to elaborate that experience more and more. It is a way of gnawing a bone, a slow process of digestion mediated by an external means (Zittoun, 2006). In other words, if the therapeutic setting enables semiotic elaboration through the words of the patient and the therapist, the cultural experience supports semiotic elaboration through its semiotic forms.

Hence, both the therapeutic setting and the cultural experience offer a safe space in which a transitional experience is possible. In the therapeutic setting, the transitional space first takes place in the intersubjective relationship before becoming an intrapsychological experience, while in the cultural experience, the transitional experience is mainly intrapsychological, even though it is created by the interaction between the person and a cultural element. In both cases, the flow of semiotic processes might change the linking of secondary processes and primary processes and their recombination. Both experiences might thus have a transformative effect for the person accepting the experience. Of course, one main component of the therapeutic setting seems missing in cultural experiences: the presence of the therapist. Actually, social relationships do occur through people's cultural experiences. On the one hand, it is very often another, emotionally significant person that has mediated a person's relationship to a type of cultural experience: a grandmother that read folktales, a best friend that introduced a rock band (Zittoun, 2006). On the other hand, people also very often either develop imaginary relationship to authors (composers, actors, artists, writers), or to characters (Zittoun, 2007)—processes often called identification (Bollas, 2003).



1.1 Sociocultural study of people's uses of a semiotic mediator



1.2 Proposed inferential study of uses of semiotic mediator

Figure 6.1. Approaches to Semiotic Mediation

A person's preferred cultural element is doubly interesting for the socio-cultural psychologist: on the one hand, it is in itself a potentially transformative mean; on the other hand, the cultural element chosen by a person precisely reveals something about the person's inner world, or at least, about current issues absorbing part of his/her preconscious attention.

Drawing on this, the present chapter is based on an inversion of the traditional sociocultural approach to cultural elements (see Fig. 6.1). Traditionally, sociocultural theory examines how people use cultural elements as tools to achieve some purpose (Zittoun, Gillespie, Cornish, & Psaltis, 2007). What interests the researcher is how the person learns to use the tool or the semiotic mediator, or how the tool or semiotic mediator expands the person's capacity to act on a mind or on an object. Here, I will examine how the person has acted with the use of the semiotic mediator, in order to make inferences about his/her thinking.

DESIGNING A RESEARCH PROCESS

Knowing of these two processes, I consider the research interview as a hybrid setting. Some of the features of the therapeutic setting are present: a safe space, institutionally located, and regulated by an expert, inviting some form of externalisation. However, the unique, short-term quality of the research setting, explicitly organised around a specific topic, is not likely to let much of the unconscious primary processes emerge. Therefore, in order to catalyze such emergence, I invited people to give some space to cultural experiences meaningful to them. Reporting upon these experiences, people were then invited to remobilise or invoke the resonances that cultural experiences had for them. With the mediation of these cultural elements, the interviewee is in a situation of having to call upon inner, sometimes

preconscious experiences, and to organise them so as to address them to the interviewer. A form of tertiary process is hence created.

To summarise, what is sought, is part of a person's thinking processes. Yet, these processes are unattainable as such. Within a sociocultural framework, it is usually admitted that people internalise certain cultural elements, and that in doing so, they confer a personal sense to them, at times divergent from the shared social significance it might have (Vygotsky, 1934/1963). People then externalise various messages, which might be related to these elements, in different contexts, and for different purposes. In doing so, they both express (or conceal) something of the personal sense it has from them, and they might attempt to join or position themselves towards the shared meaning it has for others. The personal work of sense making, while invisible to the observer, can be induced somewhere "between" what is internalised and what is externalised—which are both observable.

This is highly consistent from what can be learned from the clinical literature. Indeed, we have seen that people are likely to engage in thinking about cultural elements which, for some reason, resonate, that is, easily create primary links with personal matters, preoccupations, affects and experiences. Hence, having people talk about these cultural elements is a way of gaining access to issues that people have in mind in a preconscious way.

Cues: Making Hypotheses About the Elaboration of Affective Processes

If discourse might be seen as revealing some aspects of the flow of inner experience, how can we go below the content of the discourse, so as to learn about the thinking processes? Given the parallel identified above, it might be useful to use some of the theoretical tools developed by psychoanalysts. Indeed, their theories enabled variations in the discourse to be captured, giving information about the degree to which the person has elaborated his/her experience. I propose to import these insights as methodological tools for sociocultural psychological work.

Thinking is largely the semiotic elaboration of affects (Freud, 1900/1953; Valsiner, 2007; see also in this volume Salvatore & Zittoun, 2011). Consequently, one important methodological need is to identify cues enabling us to infer how much the affective experience has been elaborated. In his study on affects, Green (1973/1999) identifies different typical types of discourse that can be heard in the clinical setting. The first type is characterised by the heaviness of its climate; silence is heavy, discourse is focused on the here and now; the tone of discourse is uniform, lacks melody; the analyst has the impression of being exposed to a compact substance. The second type is characterised by extremely quick and abundant representations; the patient has a lot to say, and creates links and associations. Green sees these two

types as exemplifying, first, a discourse dominated by affect—where the affect is a defence against representations, while the second is exemplifying a discourse dominated by representations—where representations are a defence against affects. A third type of discourse is characterised by the centrality of the process of signifying—that is, the active process of linking separate experiences and affects to representation, and back. Hence, in the course of the session, an idea that comes to the mind of the person calls a dream back to memory, and as she re-experiences it, she embodies it—her hands and feet move, posture changes etc, and thus, affects are experienced; these, in turn, call for more representations, put into a narration, and so forth. Hence, in the third type of discourse identified by Green, language has a function of linking processes, and representations and affects exist in an equilibrated manner. Green distinguishes the modality of linking of affects from that of linking representations. If representations are linked by *concatenation*, that is, in terms of causes and effects, affects are linked by *diffusion*: like oil, they can expand and invade the whole psychic apparatus (Green, 2002, p. 178).

This distinction is not equivalent to that between primary and secondary processes. The dimension that connects primary to secondary processes is somehow orthogonal to the dimension that runs from embodied affect to representations. Hence, primary processes will engage affects and representations linked to some degree, and likewise for secondary processes. It is only in primary processes that the power of affects—their oil-like extension—is dominant, whereas they are limited and constrained in secondary processes. One might therefore say that processes of thirdness occur at two levels, or require a double branching: between affects and representations on the one hand, and between primary and secondary processes, on the other hand.

Methodological Implications

From these considerations, two methodological pointers emerge. Firstly, in terms of the identification of significant tasks or research objects, one might be willing to consider tasks that demand a substantial affective involvement, while offering people space in which representation or discourse is facilitated. The emotionally significant event considered here is the transition to parenthood,³ which is likely to have emotional resonances, and requires some working through. Transition processes can be analysed following three lines of changes: processes of identity changes (e.g., from being an independent student to becoming a responsible father); processes of learning (e.g., how to deal with sleeping hours); and issues of sense making (e.g., what does it mean to have a child in my life?). Additionally, we have seen that tertiary processes as well as linking between affects and representations occur in specific situations of dialogue, or in specific interactions

that people have with myths and other culturally generated transitional spaces. Here, we question people about the cultural elements that they considered and thought about while they were expecting a child.

Secondly, the psychoanalytical reflection of affects in discourse leads us to define significant cues when listening to interviewees. In order to access what is significant to them, what they can elaborate, or what they resist, attention can be paid to two types of elements:

1. The semantic contents of the discourse, not only in their discursive construction, but also, in the overall fabric of the discourse, in its repetition, contradictions, recurrences, silences, etc. In that sense, the discourse “under” the discourse can be listened to, that is, the traces of primary processes, or the effect of unbound affects at the representational or semantic level which can be propagated through the discourse.
2. The emotional quality of the discourse: rhythm, melody, or accents of the discourse are always revealing something of the balance between affects and representations. Green’s typology gives us tools to identify these changing balances. In particular, beyond the general tone of a person’s discourse in a given discursive context, the binding of affects and representations varies according to what is being talked about.

CAPTURING NAME CHOICE PROCEDURE TO REVEAL SENSE-MAKING IN TRANSITIONS

The clinical literature suggests that the transition to parenthood is an important moment of reelaboration of past experience and raises various questions which have deep unconscious prolongation. Authors note the importance of the changing relationship that the new mother might have to her parents, the closer contact she might have to her body, and her experiences of questions linked to sexuality and gender, but also to life and death (Bydlowski, 1997; Stern, Brunschweiler-Stern, & Freeland, 1998). Many of the feelings, memories, and echoes of these questions remain unconscious and preconscious; yet, authors also often mention the mother’s particular receptivity to these contents, which seem to manifest themselves through dreams and daydreaming.⁴

In order to have access to people’s process of making sense of their transition to parenthood, I questioned them about the procedures by which they had chosen first names for their children (Zittoun, 2004, 2005). The theoretical reasoning was the following: narrative and symbolic systems in traditional societies provided people not only with birth rituals, but also with naming principles. Names, which are public, always reveal something of the

symbolic system to which they belong. Hence, in a modern society, first names might also indicate narratives and stories belonging to the parents' personal culture, which are mobilised in relationship to the birth of a child.

Forty semistructured reconstructive interviews were carried out with parents, alone or in couples, three or four months after the birth of a child, about the procedure of choosing a name (Zittoun, 2004, 2005). The parents, out of a group contacted in a French speaking Swiss town by way of their birth-announcements in the newspaper, came from different social classes and cultural backgrounds. Interviews included questions related to their choice procedure (names evoked but rejected, naming practices in use by their families), representations of the child, and the cultural elements mobilised through the name-choice procedure. Notes were taken during the interviews. The taped interviews have been fully transcribed and the corpus of transcriptions was submitted to four types of analysis. The first one was a content analysis documenting procedures of choices and negotiations of names ("what's in a name"). Case-analysis of each family constituted the second analysis; they enabled the trajectories of decision through couple negotiations and identity dynamics to be reconstructed. The third, quantitative analysis, was based on a systematic codification of the interviews on two dimensions. The first one, based on the clinical work of Ammaniti Ammaniti, Candelori, Pola, and Tambelli (1999)⁵—which can be seen as an operationalisation of Green's three types of discourses—classified the transcripts according to the balance between affective and cognitive dimensions of the discourse (by three independent coders); the second one identified the transgenerational transmission present in the interviews. Based on the idea that tradition offers resources to elaborate the newness offered by the transition to parenthood, the hypothesis tested was that discourses reflecting a transgenerational awareness were also more likely to have a cognitive-affective balance. Interviews without this transgenerational dimension, yet equivalently elaborated, appeared especially interesting, as they enabled us to explore which other symbolic resources were used by parents to elaborate such events. Consequently, the fourth analysis was a qualitative exploration of interviews corresponding to the hypothesis, or on the other hand, not predicted by the theory. It was an interpretative attempt to trace back processes of sense making in which the person had been engaged, and that might have been mediated by various cultural elements⁶ (for an exhaustive presentation see Zittoun, 2005).

In the rest of this chapter, I will give an example of a case-study, which I have chosen because it mentions a wide variety of cultural elements and their uses. I will draw on the first, second, and fourth analyses mentioned above, and propose an analysis in four steps. First, I will examine explicit contents, showing how the interview starts, summarising the name choice procedure, and suggesting how it is linked to the process of becoming a

parent. Secondly, I will identify significant cultural elements for the parents. Thirdly, I will make hypothesis about thinking processes through a closer look at “conflicting knots” of the discourse. Fourthly, I will consider the cultural elements as mediators, or as diffracting mirrors, to access to some of the person’s preconscious thinking process.

BAPTIST AND THE WILL-O’-THE-WISP

Jean has been interviewed after the birth of her second son, Baptist, following Benjamin, 3 years older. According to the criteria defined by Ammaniti and colleagues (1999), this interview can be considered to be characterised by a relative balance between affective components and secondary elaboration. It is also an interview in which one finds a certain attention to trans-generational values and transmission. In that sense, this is an interview which is somehow “canonical,” that is, that corresponds to the general expectations of the research project mentioned above.

First Turn⁷

Like all the interviewees, Jean had been expecting this interview—she had been contacted by means of a letter, and then by a phone call, explaining the purpose of the research and the definition of the situation—a young researcher interested in how people found first names for their children. Once I had arrived in her flat—in the living room, with the baby that would be breast-fed in my presence—the interview started rapidly, and after my reiteration of the question—“so, how did it happen for you, this choice of first name for your children?,” Jean gave a first, long, relatively prepared answer. First turn answers are usually revealing something about what the person think is expected and her understanding of the situation. Yet, it has other informative qualities: firstly, it often repeats what the young mother usually answers to people who ask her about the origin of the first name; the answer is often quite stereotypical, and reveals some form of social representations about what is in a name (Moscovici, 2000). Secondly, this first turn also often informs about the emotional state of the interviewee: comparatively, some mothers’ first turn about the same questions are very short, factual, while others are expanded, rich in emotions, and cover a good part of the interview. Thirdly, it often introduces the thematic threads which will have to be explored during the interview. Here, the first turn is quite interesting for this reason:

E Let’s start with the older one. He’s called Benjamin, he’s three years old, well, we just looked in a book of names, we tried to choose between names,

and then I tried to make a list, and my husband too. And, well, we were unable to find a common name (laugh)—and well, we decided, we found—well, Benjamin was a smooth name, it wasn't heard too often, and I do quite like old first names, that's why we choose Benjamin. It's true that ... it sounds good. We have been looking with the surname, too, it's not so easy, we are called C., and my husband is a plumber, then if we had ... I liked William quite well but William it would have been WC, then WC for the plumber's son (laugh) it was (laugh) not so terrific, then now BC that's all right with the initials, too. Because it's true we have been thinking about all that stuff, because then later at school with the kids you know what happens, they won't do each other any favours. So, for Benjamin that's how it went, we kept the surprise until the end.

The first turn announces some of the traits of the procedure of choosing a name (each parent made a list and they tried to find a common name), and the resources used for it. Books were used to generate names, and various criteria were used as operator to restrain the choice: aesthetic (a smooth name), general harmony (it shall be fitting with the surname), frequency (not too often), identity related (belonging to a certain family), future consideration (what children will say at school). These criteria are among the commonly used. However, the first joke about plumbers is to be noted. It is the most connected here to transmission—what sort of son, what is the heritage in the family; and the theme will come back in the interview. After the first turn, Jean will expand on various aspects of this first turn, and consider various first names that have been considered for the two children.

Naming a Child: Insights into the Transition to Parenthood

A first analysis can remain close to the explicit content of the interview. It explores the name choice procedure, and highlights issues related to the transition to parenthood, especially, issues related to the affirmation of one's identity which comes to the fore as the parents have to decide "what sort of child" they will have.

Naming a child is choosing an explicit sign of belonging. Negotiations about names often turn to be identity negotiation between parents. These negotiation can be more or less conflictual, and parents find different strategies to resolve or repress the conflict—e.g., finding names which fit in two cultures, or out of them, or giving the space of the second name to the other parent's claims. In this case, Jean's husband wanted names that she found too common, too "Americanised"—Kilian, Kevin or Jonathan. The names she was interested in are more Christian, French names, which are related to her origins, that she defines as Breton and Christian. Her maternal grandfather is a "pure" Breton, and many relatives have such first names. However, she considers mainly Breton names for girls.

E For a girl, the name we chose was Gwendolyn, because my mother is of Breton origin, I like Gwendolyn very much, kind of fairy-like, it was cute (...) **T** Is there a particular story about Gwendolyn? **E** Let's say it was ... In relation to what I had read in the fairy tales, she was running a bit ... I don't know if you know Brittany, there are some rather abrupt fields, where one can run, there are will-o'-the-wisps ... it's a bit strange at night.... There are all those stories with the standing stones ... then there was a little girl called Gwendolyn who took walks at night ... Well, I like the night very much, I adore going for walks at night (laughs), and I thought that it fitted well.... I had figured out a brown-haired little girl—because my husband has real brown hair—brown-haired, green eyes, who'd been running at night (laughs) sometimes one can have sort of images, when you're pregnant, that's true.... And even earlier.... That has always been the case, seeing such a little girl. I was sure that I would only have boys, anyway (laughs) I don't know how, but I just felt it.... I dreamed more about girls, but I've been feeling that I was going to have boys ...

We thus have a configuration in which two family lines merge, and the two parents' positions are slightly divergent. The young woman defines herself as French and Christian. The names chosen for boys refer to the Bible, the feminine one instead to Brittany. Actually, Jean has not been socialised to this Breton identity, it is more a root that she is actively reconstructing. This identity dimension is quasi-mythical, and the family seems to go back to the origins of history:

E On my grandfather side there is a genealogical tree. They went far back, they went back to the times of the Mongols. The Mongols invaded Brittany ...

At some point the couple used a book on names to help their procedure, but it turned out to be too confusing:

E We read [the book] "3000 thousand first names for boys and girls," but I *strongly advise* everybody *not* to look at these names. Because what happens for us, we were looking at the meaning of these names—and this is a pity.... Because so many names, it troubles the mind, it's frightening.

So they stopped consulting it. They then found Benjamin—and Jean explains that she listened to her body, asked the baby whether he liked it, and felt that he moved, which she interpreted as him liking it. We do not know exactly where the name come from, although Jean knows the biblical anchorage and the fact that it generally means the younger son, meaning that she reappropriates saying that Benjamin is the younger son of the family branch.

Jean and her husband do not follow any established naming rules; they also agree not to give second names, although they both have one. Jean explains that the reason for rejecting this tradition is that each of them had

painful memories associated to their godfather (although the children do have godfathers).

Some identity and position differences between the partners have appeared during the first decision procedure. These are partly grounded in the more general trajectory of the young mother, and the previous transition she had experienced—that of being a migrant in Switzerland. Jean defines herself through her connection to France, but also through her status of “migrant” in Switzerland, which she experienced as difficult, while her husband is from a local Swiss family. She also places more importance on the real or imaginary memory of her family (she was typing the genealogical research undertaken by her grandfather), while her husband has more concrete links to his family, through large gatherings; and she attributes a high status to studies and literary culture, while her husband, a craftsman, does not. Hence, finding the name for Benjamin is also a task of conciliating these two stories, sets of values, and life experiences.

This conciliating task seems to have been difficult. Jean says that the couple had difficulties to find a name for their first son; in effect, “Benjamin” was defined rather late, at 8 months (first names are often thought about during the 4–5th months, or 8–9th). Jean also refused the help of the family in finding the name, and kept the decision secret until the end. Note that Jean also explains that, unlike her husband, she did not want to know the sex of the child—so she actually did not know it while the husband knew it.

For the second child, the couple seems more relaxed. No naming principles were chosen and the repertoires of possible names are relatively stable. Jean however refuses to use the name envisaged for a girl the first time for this second child:

E For me it was like.... Not like a dead child, but another phase, it was another pregnancy ... Because in our bodies we have.... I don't know what you know about that, but we all have a masculine and a feminine side. So I thought, if I took this name from Benjamin, I would take away his feminine side ...

Jean appears attentive to the imaginary child—the child growing and developing in her fantasy, that eventually meets the real child at birth (Ben Soussan, 1999). She observes her daydreams and fantasizing. She reacts intuitively and chooses names that “flash” her. Hence the name Angeline:

T Did Angeline come from somewhere? **E** No it came like this, I didn't find any meaning to it, I didn't look for it either as we discovered we would have a boy. I found that it was smooth, like an angel ... One evening I was thinking about names, I don't know, all at once I say, Oh, there is Angeline, I don't know, it's cute, it's smooth ... Well it must exist somewhere⁸ ...

The parents this time know the sex of the child, a boy, and decide his name in an intuitive manner:

E So for Baptist, I heard ... it's something else : we haven't looked in the book, I suddenly heard the name on television, well—I don't remember if it was in a movie, that name, Baptist, no actually it was Jean-Baptist that I heard. I said, Oh, Jean-Baptist it's too long, and my father's name is already Jean-Paul, and we found it too long to write down and everything, and my husband didn't like hyphenated names at all [in French: "composed"]. So I said, Ah, Baptist, I think that Baptist alone is possible, so we checked. Then we saw this little card, and the signification on the book I had, we found it nice. And since we are both believers, Baptist, he's the one who baptised Jesus, when one looks at it, and I found it good. Always a bit ... and connected to water, too, always plumbing, water, we like its contact. It rang a bell at once :

The procedure of choosing "Baptist" is presented as contrasting with that of choosing the older son's name; while the latter was rationally decided (list of preferences, identity negotiations) here the procedure is much more intuitive, in the sense that the mother was struck by a name heard while watching television. The first name "Jean-Baptist" (John Baptist, a common composition in French) rings a bell. Watching films or the television often put people in a state of relative relaxation, and preconscious thoughts are more likely to emerge. The criteria and identity claims of the first child are still present, and the name solves the equation by satisfying both Jean's demands (French, rare name) and her husband's (a plumber's son) thanks to its designation of a higher level category to which the two belong, Christianity. Yet, this is solved in a preconscious, or unconscious manner, through a very different logic of reasoning: the name appeared in a "flash," and the decision seems due to a free association based on images which I might reconstitute as following: Baptist, baptising Jesus in the river, the baptismal water, the running water, the pipes, the plumber.... Hence the name here solves the problem thanks to a primary process operation. Note that a large proportion of parents believe in the importance of a name given in a "flash," and such names usually cancel the many contradictions and constraints people are dealing with. In the quotation, the report of this "flash" is followed by a sort of rationalisation, by which the name is linked to other surrounding facts: her father's name, from which she wants to differentiate, the length, and finally, a symbolic resource—a card about first names.

At this stage, we observe consistent semantic networks emerging from these chosen and possible names. Angeline can be connected to the angelic dimension of John the Baptist (see Fig. 6.2). It crosses another sacred, religious line—Benjamin, Baptist—to which another name mentioned also belongs, Blandine, referring to Saint-Blandine, a church in Jean's father's town;

<i>FRENCH, RARE, CANNOT BE DEFORMED</i> <i>Religious</i> Blandine Julien Mathieu <u>Benjamin</u> <u>Baptist</u> Angeline	William <i>REFUSED</i>
Gaétan Gaël Gwendolyne Gwenaëlle <i>Breton</i>	Jonathan Jérémie Kevin

Figure 6.2. First Names Considered

the religious line comes from a spiritual—and perhaps desexualised—side with angels, baptismal purity; finally this sacred field finds a more pagan realisation—the will-o’-the wisp woman running at night, the importance of water and air (two of the basic elements of the old Breton tales). These networks are also characterised by phonological sets—the first names in B-, the endings in -ine; other names considered by Jean and refused for various reasons were Gaétan, Gaël, Gwendolyn, all Bretonic names starting with a G. Aesthetic preferences are the most difficult to analyse, as they directly touch upon embodied impressions and resonances.

Parents also have plans for their children. Jean intends to transmit her French identity, her religious identity, and the Breton origin that she is working at reconstructing. However, Jean did not hand down her maiden name. She wishes success in friendship to her children and at school. She also mentions the little books she is writing for the sons, about how the names were chosen, that is, with a story of their origin. Eventually, her husband will also hand down his business to his son. Finally, she also announces a desire to hand down her passion for reading historical books:

E Oh, I like reading. And by the way for the kids, not for Baptist because he’s a bit young (laughs) but I buy many books for Benjamin, well for his age, but I’ll encourage him to read. I have never been forced to read, but I was encouraged, I was taught reading.

Relevant Cultural Experiences

Jean mentions many of the cultural elements that have been used during her transition to parenthood, or more generally, in her life. Mediating

the name choice procedure were books of first names, books of tales, and the television.

For the first choice, none of these mediations were really relevant. Jean seemed to have felt that as invading and confusing. One might say that the infinity of possibilities revealed by books might just have reflected the couple's lack of direction at that point. It is by taking their distance from these books that the couple was able to find its way.

Another source of cultural experiences is television; although the name of Baptist came from there, Jean actually mentions television as a negative reference. In her view, television is propagating a loss of information which has rather negative influences on society, while more useful information is obviously missing:

E If they showed less [violence] on the telly, there would be less in the streets. When you see those kids on the screen that can kill each other ... if they weren't shown how to do it, than they wouldn't do it ... I'm quite sure about this. The more you show the badness the more there will be badness. They don't show ... they hardly ever show something beautiful ... Some programmes are nice but it's still rare to see, Oh, well, a birth, or no, no, no one speaks about it, they always speak about, how many deaths this time ...

Hence, it seems that television is a potentially relevant medium for Jean, as she seems to believe in its power to influence people's actions, and to miss more important information, such as human birth.

Then, the most significant cultural experience for Jean is given by her reading of French history books:

E And I do read a lot of historical things, yes. I am fond of history; it has always been my passion, so I read quite often. **T** About France? **E** Mainly about France, because let's say in my family we have got a lot of books that came from generation to generation, we hoard stuff (laughs). Here I don't have so many with me but since we have a chalet in France it's all there. (...) Now I am into the Kings of France ... I like it ... Maybe I find there ... I imagine as well, how it would be to be there ... **T** [And what do you imagine]? **E** I put myself in the shoes of one character, I imagine I was there ... I was there without being there ... To be like a dragonfly, that sees what is going on from high ... as I said I am into the kings of France ... **T** But what period? **E** Philippe le Bel. So if you know this period, it is not very joyful, this period. It was easy to get poisoned at that time ... (laughs). But there were already men living together, and it was not the end of the world. When you see nowadays the taboos around it, while it has existed for years, it's a pity. One should ... People could try to read more often, it wouldn't hurt them. You can't force—yet I believe that if people read more, they would be less narrow-minded about this which they believe they invented, while it has existed for years.

Jean evokes the origin of this interest: her mother read history, as well as her grandfather and great-great-aunt:

E Many books come from my great-great-aunt. I loved, when she was alive—she died about ten years ago—I would go to her place, she would talk about the past ... she used to say ... for me it was great ... We were living almost next door, so on my way back to school, I would stop by, we would discuss [history]. She would give me books, she would say, Read this one, it's good, you'll see.

This great-great-aunt plays an important role in Jean's story; not only did she mediate her relationship to books, but probably also to Christian faith, as she used to go on pilgrimages to Jerusalem. If reading historical novels became important for Jean, then, it was with the guidance of this relative, who, in her way, became a "warden" of the specific cultural experience created there.

Jean also evokes Christian reading groups to which she used to belong, where people discussed biblical texts in the light of problems of actuality. Asked about similar links she could establish between historical texts and current events, she answered:

T Do you think you still do the same kind of things, when you're reading history—connecting history with actual events? **E** It depends on the historical book. Because it's hard to find a coincidence with the Kings' story. But—there are things that, yes, I read them and I try to put them into practice. When I see how, at that time, the ... women were calmer with the children, how they used to live, they used to explain a lot of things to them, trying to understand, too, then it's true that I try to do it with.... Well, at least with the older, with Benjamin. By trying to see why he is like this, he did that, I try to be quite open. And it's true that I read in the book that they used to act like that. **T** In what period? **E** Eighteenth, beginning nineteenth century ...

Thus, not only are historical novels highly invested in by Jean, but they are also approached with more expert hermeneutic skills: her experience of reading biblical texts facilitates her entrance and exploration of novels, as well as her ability to create links between the space of fiction and real life. Hence, historical novels become a transitional space in which Jean projects herself, and plays *as-if* she was living at that time. In turn, she can bring back to her real life some semiotic means that enable her to guide her action with her children and to make sense to their conduct.

Finally Jean also comments on her "research" in more esoteric approaches to the person, which she has learned from her sister-in-law: chakras, care for the body, numerology and astrology. Here, she mentions how these techniques first enabled her to be more attentive to her intuitions

and feelings, and to imagine the “life paths” for her children. Hence, these also become semiotic techniques used to open spaces to think about the future, and thus enable transitional experiences.

Conflicting Knots Arising

So far, the analysis has remained close to the content of the discourse: it has retraced the process of choosing names and, with it, some of the challenges of the transition to parenthood. In a second step, I have identified cultural elements significant for Jean, and especially, themes that she found particularly relevant. Now, in a third step, I propose to listen more carefully to what was said in the first part, to what remained implicit, and to what appeared as reflected, amplified or distorted through the magnifying glass offered by personally relevant cultural experiences. In other words, in this section, I use Jean’s externalisation as a way of inferring some past and current thinking processes. This analysis leads me to identify a few transversal themes, or “conflicting” knots related to the transition to motherhood.

A first transversal theme is quite directly connected with the acts of becoming a mother, implying giving birth and taking care of a child. There are various cues that suggest that this might have been a sensitive issue: through her story and the cultural experiences she mentions, Jean seems to have felt relatively isolated when involved in her first pregnancy. As a “migrant,” she cut her bonds to her family, and especially to the women that were close from her (mother, sisters, great-great-aunt, and friends). Studies in the migrant clinic show that the absence of this support might be difficult; gestures, rites, knowledge developed in the group which might help to deal with the newness, are then missing (Moro, 2001). In Jean’s case, the difficulty appears at two levels. First, we saw that Jean refused to see the images of her first child and to know his sex; she also found it very difficult to think about the child, found attempts to help her do so very confusing (the family’s help in choosing a name), and the name was chosen very late. This suggests that she had difficulties developing a representation of the child to come. Jean mentions how the help given by her sister in law, mediated by different esoteric techniques—numerology, discourses about chakras, developing awareness to one’s body—precisely enabled her to initiate an imaginary dialogue with the child within her. This seems to have helped her to develop a representation of the child and to pick a first name for him. At the time, her situation made her feel very isolated. Above, Jean mentions that she would have preferred to see birth on television—in that context, we might think that she would happily have accepted this type of information when she needed it. She also mentions her loneliness with

the children themselves. In that respect, her mention of the historical novels as sources of inspiration to guide her conduct with the children suggests, in the negative, that Jean seems to have lacked other, more relevant sources of support. Hence, Jean appears to have found herself very isolated when having to engage in the first care for her son, without the help of the women she knew; looking for other resources, she dismissed television, yet retained the historical novels in which she was already interested.

A second transversal theme is that of the trans-generational transmission. The young woman is the older of two sisters in a catholic French family, with a father from Alsace and a mother from Brittany, and grew up in central France, probably far from her grandparents. The father tried to find out information about the past of his family living in Alsace during the war. Apparently, the grandfather had to change his name so as not to be sent in Germany during WWII; the family line was lost because of some falsification of documents. The disappearance of this grandfather creates a doubt about the authenticity of the father's surname, and makes it impossible to identify more distant relatives. When the father wanted to find out more about this family, he was advised not to do so by people in Alsace. The forced secret surrounding the family history seems to have been experienced as shameful for the family. It is therefore better not to think about it. On the other side, the maternal grandfather from Brittany seemed to transmit more: he spoke about the family and its origin, and Jean transcribed her maternal grandfather's memories and research on his Breton roots.

This history is however a story of the mythical origins of the family, concretised in churches and places rather than in the living members of the family. Hence, even if this family line seems safer to emotionally invest, it is also somehow blurred into a "grand history." All together, from the two grandfathers—deceased before the birth of Baptist and Benjamin—there seems to be troubled family stories and blurred responsibilities, potentially generating shame (Tisseron, 1999). Jean's symbolic actions support this reading. On the one hand, she treats rather unequally the two family lines: the cultural space offered by Brittany is largely invested; Jean reads Breton tales, develops vivid fantasies in a Breton-like imaginary world, many of the first names considered by Jean are clearly Breton, and she seems to accept the "mythical" roots of this part of the family—while the Alsace family is hardly mentioned. Note that in doing so, she simply reproduces the symbolic interdiction promoted by her father. On the other hand, Jean is a passionate reader of historical novels of French Kings: as we will see below, these stories are mainly concerned with exploring issues of family transmission.

A third theme, which is harder to identify, is related to gender and sexuality. Jean's family comes from various places in France, and has lost touch with its regional anchorages. In contrast, the family developed a strong religious identity, which appears to offer more stability through time and

space. It might be true that this religious commitment also makes it more difficult to discuss certain themes. In particular, Jean's enthusiasm for historical novels in which it is common for men to go with men, suggests that she discovered there a space in which questions related to gender and sexuality can be discussed—which, in turn, suggests that she did not find such a place in her family. Connected to this, Jean mentions that her father's brother died without having had children; consequently, her father who had three daughters saw the extinction of his surname. Jean and her sisters have rather masculine first names. As a child, Jean had decided never to marry, in order to carry on her father's name. Of course, by marrying her husband Jean had to renounce to this idea. In this line of consideration, Jean mentions that she refused to envisage children's first names that were sexually ambivalent.

Hence the three thematic knots emerging from the interview have to do with the main questions raised by the transition to parenthood and identified in the clinical literature: giving sense to the conception, the birth and the development of a child; trans-generational transmission; sexuality and gender conflicts.

Cultural Experiences as Symbolic Resources

The last step of the analysis is now to focus again upon the cultural experiences which have appeared particularly significant here. Jean mentions many of them: her Christian and biblical knowledge, and her practice of the bible reading group; her readings of French History; the written stories by the grandfather about the mythical past of Brittany; Breton tales she reads; esoteric research with her sister-in-law. In what follows, I will only focus my analysis of Jean's reading of French historical novels.

As we have seen, historical novels appear as transitional spaces in which Jean can think about questions related to family, as well as issues related to gender and sexuality. Interestingly, historical novels were very frequently mentioned as relevant cultural experiences during pregnancies by the women who were interviewed for this research, and especially the version written by Maurice Druon (1973). The main narrative structure is organised around issues of continuation and survival of the royal family through history—the figure of Philippe le Bel is an important character, faced with questions such as: how to save the name of the family, to be sure of the purity of the ascendants, to find an acceptable wife, and to be sure to have a symbolic and material heir? The figure of Philippe le Bel is also associated to war between families and between sexes, his main enemy being a woman who wants to recuperate the royal blood for her descendents. In a French dictionary of reference, le *Petit Robert des noms propres* (Rey, 2000), the note

on Maurice Druon indicated that it belongs to a certain Romanesque tradition of the 19th century, “renewed by a certain obsessive fear of sex and death” (my translation). Hence these historical novels renew with a certain type of narrative in which the mixing of affects and representation is particularly strong (Green, 1973/1999). In that sense, it is likely to offer a reading experience which particularly works out the elaboration of affects. Also, the themes treated (family lines, loyalty and betrayal, gender conflicts) are likely to find echoes in people’s personal experiences. Furthermore, as they particularly insist on the idea of historical time and transmission between generations, they are very close to questions typical for the transition to parenthood.

In the case of Jean, these stories have a double connexion to transmission, and historical inscription: on the one hand, they are about transmission and continuity; on the other, they are themselves the object of transmission in her family. These stories thus have a double function. First, as we have seen, the story seem to “offer words” for issues which seem hard for Jean to think about. The issues thus become fully and semiotically articulated. These representations take place in a specific frame of reference—the past history of France—that isolated them in a quasi-imaginary space. Losing oneself in the story is clearly an experience separate from one’s daily life. In that sense, there is a safe containing space, enabling a cultural, transitional experience. Second, these issues and problems are not only represented, they are also part of full, complex narratives. The reader’s emotional investment in a text can be seen as due to the fact that he projects some parts of herself into the text—we could say, she links some representational, affective contents to the semiotic structure. In doing so, these parts are “delegated” to the text, which then follow its own narrative logic. Hence, two characters which are enemies might enter into conflict and solve it, or one character might change and find new solutions to a problem. The idea is that the part of the reader’s experience attached to the text—or represented through the semiotic means it offers—are in turn transformed by the narrative (Freud, 1908/1959; Vygotsky, 1971; Tisseron, 2003). Also, more generally, all the aspects of a fictional experience might find an anchorage in the person’s experience. These descriptions find more perceptive actualisations in the reader—e.g., a description of the desert evokes memories and impressions of heat, dryness, loneliness, danger, whereas the description of a promenade under the trees along a riverside might evoke the feeling of coolness, smells of vegetation, the sound of the water, and with it, some form of calm and comfort. Just as the landscapes in which the narrative takes place might evolve through the story, so the reader’s general emotional tone is also likely to evolve.

Altogether, the cultural experience enabled by a cultural element is likely to function like a symbolic resource (Zittoun, 2005, 2006). In Jean’s case,

historical novels are not only a mean to represent various contents. They are also quite likely a mean to transform the various affects and representations attached to the story. Firstly, as we have seen, the novel has its own evolving structure and narrative. As such, it is likely to play the role of a sort of “external thinking processor,” supporting Jean’s own elaboration of experience. Secondly, once in a semiotic form, these representations and affects can become objects of further reflection and externalisation; they can thus undergo further semiotic elaboration. Thirdly, Jean has developed some hermeneutic expertise through her participation in bible reading groups. These skills are guided attention procedures to identify common patterns between narratives and real life, and to elaborate various links between these two sets of meaning, representations or narratives (e.g., analogical, metaphorical thinking, and so on). She draws upon these skills when she is in need of specific skills to transfer from narrative to real life (e.g., using the mothering behaviour of late 18th century French mother to develop hers).

In Jean’s case, the novels by Maurice Druon function as symbolic resources facilitating her transition to motherhood: they support identity processes—the reinforce her French identity, and scaffolds her elaboration of the idea of a transgenerational story; they enable her to develop concrete skills, such as mothering conduct; and they offer a transitional space for containing and elaborating complex issues related to family secrets, gender, transmission, violence, origins and death.

Finally, Jean’s passion for historical novels has been legitimated by a significant person: the great-great-aunt that she used to visit on her way back from school. This relative guided her interest in these books, and mapped out her path as a reader. She is also the person with whom Jean started to discuss what she had read, her likes and dislikes and what it did to her. Hence, it seems that Jean actually developed this symbolic resource thanks to the active mediation of this great-great-aunt. It seems that Jean has understood the importance of this part of her experience, as she intends to transmit it to her sons. Hence, as there is a blurred and uncertain family story which renders intergenerational transmission very difficult, it seems that French History has itself become the mythical story which is transmitted through generations in the family.

CONCLUDING COMMENTS

Accessing thinking processes is one of the challenges of psychological research. Interviews are mostly at best considered as useful to get information about specific contents, about which a person intentionally expresses herself, the discourse being thus constructed as the interaction unfolds.

In this chapter, I proposed to draw on psychoanalytical insights to overcome these limitations. Especially, I consider that, although the discourse is a sequential reconstruction, there are traces and underlying currents in the discourse to which more attention can be paid. In doing so, hypotheses about preconscious thinking and elaboration in the making can be formulated.

Two main ideas were necessary to make such an analysis. Firstly, what legitimated the use of psychoanalytical analysis of the language of a patient in a clinical setting was my identification of some common features between a therapeutic setting, an interview setting, and more surprisingly, a cultural experience. To enable certain forms of thinking in which primary and secondary processes can be involved, a safe frame is required, where a transitional experience can take place, under a semiotic form connecting primary and secondary processes and thus transforming experience, and addressed to a real or imaginary person that guides or legitimates this processes. Secondly, because cultural experiences can offer a space in which people can engage in a process of semiotic elaboration of their experience, the externalisation they make about their experience usually suggests the issues which are currently the most relevant for them. In other words, as there are good reasons to believe that largely unconscious or preconscious issues with which a person is engaged find a semiotic elaboration in the cultural experiences reported by interviewees, a researcher can make hypothesis about an interviewee's preconscious thinking processes.

There are various ways in which the common semiotic grounding of sociocultural psychology and psychoanalytical thinking can be explored, as this volume suggests. Here I proposed one methodological exploration of this proximity, and I suggested that taking the developments of the two fields into account can only help us to explore human conduct beyond the immediately visible.

NOTES

1. However, such free associating flow of thinking and speech makes the person very vulnerable, given the fact that this discourse is always addressed to another person, to which the authority of the expert is conferred by the situation itself. It is partly to prevent analysts from abusing this power that the second rule is that of the abstinence of the analyst.
2. Of course, one important condition for the externalisation of rich discourse in this setting is the quality of the interpersonal relation between patient and analyst. It has been largely discussed under the name of transference (Freud, 1938/1964) —counter transference (Searles, 2005). Psychoanalysts considered that, because of the relative regression and lowering of control induced

by the setting—physical arrangement, trust, free association—the patient would recreate within her relationship with the therapist some of the emotional qualities of other relationships. In turn, the analyst might emotionally react to the attribution made by patient, which might find an echo in her own experience. These movements are analysed within the interaction; some trends of analysis are even essentially based on the analysis of these reciprocal movements. The setting thus creates a situation in which the analyst can be “used” by the patient to reincarnate the “others” of many of his past significant relationships; the externalisations generated by this process are used to make hypothesis about unconscious traces of present and past relationship which might be activated by the person in diverse settings.

3. It thus belongs to a series of studies about ruptures and transitions (see Zittoun 2006).
4. A second reason to be interested in this population lies in the fact that the transition to parenthood is one of the life changes which was traditionally heavily culturally mediated, by ritual practices, and narratives. Hence, the question of the origin of life is such a grounding mystery for all human groups, that all of them have developed, in parallel to the natural begetting, rituals of symbolic, second, cultural birth, in the realm of the human group. The question which interested me was thus, if it is true that collective modes of symbolisation of birth tend to vanish, yet if people’s need to confer sense to their experience remain, what are then the modes of symbolisation of experience? In other words, in so-called traditional societies, people’s individual modes of understanding are quite similar to the collective culture; in contrast, contemporary societies are characterised by a great distance between personal culture and collective culture, and by great individual variation. So what is it in people’s individual culture, which has the function of conferring sense to this part of a person’s experience?
5. Based on their clinical work, anchored in attachment theory, Ammaniti and colleagues (1999) defined a precise coding scheme to analyse mother’s discourse. On this basis, they distinguish three types of representation in the discourse of women according to their openness to the new, the richness of their perceptions, traces of affective investments, consistency, differentiation etc. These three types of discourses are: (a) “balanced,” where they are consistent, realistic and affectively invested; (b) “reduced/disinvested” when the discourse rationalises, excludes emotions, is abstract and disconnected from experience; and finally (c) “non integrated/ambivalent” when coexist different tendencies towards the child, and unsolved affective conflicts. These categories overlap with these proposed by Green: one might say that the first type of discourse gives the impression of an integration of representations and affects, that the second is characterised by defensive representations, and the third one, by the emergence of unbounded affects. Given this similarity—due to the psychoanalytical rooting of the two approaches—I used Ammaniti and colleagues (1999)’s coding scheme as a means of operationalising Green’s clinical insights in a research setting (Zittoun, 2005).

6. This fourth, interpretative analysis constructs and combines four layers of meaning:
 1. A reconstruction of the present transition period of the person, and of its relationship to his or her biographical lines (Bar-On, 1991; Riessman, 1993);
 2. A review of the cultural elements mentioned by the person, and a close examination of the most relevant books, songs, movies etc.; particular attention is given to the specific reports the person makes of the cultural elements. As I also have access to the cultural element, I can compare the shared meaning of the cultural element, to what the person reports; the second version, or the difference between the two versions, enables hypotheses to be made about the work of sense-making in which the person has engaged;
 3. An identification of the “conflicting knots” in the person’s discourse, or of the less elaborated problems related to the transition to parenthood. When not explicitly mentioned as problems or difficulties, such “conflicting knots” are indicated by changes of emotional intensity in the discourse, by repetitions, contradictions, by cross-thematic semantic fields, by phonologic recurrences (Ammaniti et al., 1999; Freud, 1900/1953; Green, 1973/1999; Tisseron, 1998);
 4. A parallel reading of the personal story with its non-elaborated questions and in the cultural elements mentioned, both in their presentation by the person and in my own reading. This finally allows it to be seen whether and how these references could be seen as “symbolic resources” for individuals (Zittoun, 2005).
7. Interviewed transcribed in French and translated by me. Transcription conventions: E = mother, T = interviewer; ... is interrupted sentence; (...) represents long sequences not reported; :: indicates some long vowel; - marks a silence; [text in brackets] is added to facilitate the reading.
8. This took place before the large commercial success of Angelina Jolie.

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