Published in The Cambridge Handbook of Sociocultural Psychology 4, chapter 16, 343-361, 2007
which should be used for any reference to this work

The Role of Symbolic Resources in Human Lives

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A person using a symbolic resource is a person using a novel, a film, a picture, a song, or a ritual, to address an unfamiliar situation in her everyday life. This person is thus not simply *having* the cultural experience of watching that film or hearing that music, or even not solely of remembering it: she has that experience, or remembers it, *in relation to something else*, located in her social world or in her inner life.

For example, when Paul comes back from work feeling tensed and irascible, and immediately listens to his preferred punk band, he is using that music as symbolic resource to modify his mood, and possibly, to prepare himself for a nice evening with Julie. After having been told that she would have to spend three months in Spain, Julie surprises herself reading Spanish novels, watching Spanish films and developing an interest for Spanish music. Julie is using these various cultural elements as symbolic resources to develop some representations about the Spain awaiting her, and to envisage possible futures. Hence, using a symbolic resource is something we all do, at times in a very unaware way – when we start to hum "I'm singing in the rain" because some pleasant idea popped in our mind while we were walking through a spring shower – or sometimes, in a more explicit way – when we discuss a romantic films we have seen with friends and relate them to personal events.

The Concept of Symbolic Resource and Its Use

Although the notion of symbolic resources designates a familiar phenomenon, it has only recently been the object of a systematic theoretical enquiry (Zittoun, Duveen, Gillespie, Ivinson, & Psaltis, 2003; Zittoun, 2001, 2006). This notion aims at offering a theoretical understanding of people's uses of cultural artefacts, or semiotic tools, as developmental resources when they face new, unpredictable situations. In this first section, I sketch the historical background of the notion of symbolic resource, and highlight its potential for socio-cultural psychology.

Cultural psychology is developmental, and thus examines the processes by which

a person changes in her evolving environments. Its emphasis is on the mediated nature of the transactions taking place between the person and world. Throughout their lives, people are exposed to unpredictable events generating uncertainty – events which are partly imposed on them, partly created by them. People do not always have the relevant knowledge or skills, the experience or the social support to face ruptures, or turning points (Erikson, 1968/1994) such as being in a country in war, moving place, becoming a parent, etc. However, culture presents people with material tools (wheels, computers) and semiotic tools (words, images, melodies) that enable dealing with such uncertainties. More particularly, semiotic tools encapsulate other people's experiences and interpretations of the world, in various times and places. Such semiotic tools might thus support the transition processes of turning the unfamiliar into manageable environments.

I will consider two sorts of cultural elements. *Cultural elements* as books, movies, pieces of art, and pictures are made out of semiotic configurations of various codes (musical, graphic, verbal, etc.), bounded by a material support. *Symbolic systems* such as religious, political, or ethnic systems are also organizations of signs, including texts or rules of reference, objects and places for rituals, and "wardens," or authorities that fix the system's boundaries (Geertz, 1972; Grossen & Perret-Clermont, 1992).

There are three important conditions for something to be considered a *symbolic resource*:

(1) a person must be *using* such a cultural element (e.g., a picture, a song, a film) or part of such a symbolic system (e.g., a religious metaphor), with some intention, that is, in relationship to something that is at least partially exterior to that cultural element (its "aboutness").
(2) The notion is restrained to uses of symbolic resources in situations normally not contained by the cultural element, that is, beyond the immediate cultural value or meaning of that cultural element (e.g.:,Julie does not listen to the song for its melody, but to feel closer to Paul).
(3) Additionally, the notion of symbolic resource refers only to the cultural elements that require an "imaginary" experience – the creation of a sphere of experience beyond the here and now of the socially shared reality (the "musical space" of a song; the sacred space of a ritual; the vicarious experience enabled by fiction, an "as-if" experience, see Abbey, this volume, Chapter 17).

A symbolic resource is not just a cultural object that can potentially be used as resource (for example Baltes, 1997). It is rather the fact of being used that turns a cultural device into a symbolic resource. A symbolic resource is to an artefact or symbolic system, what an utterance is to language (Bakhtin, 1979; Wertsch, 1998), or what a used "instrument," is to a potential "tool" (Grossen, 1999; Rabardel & Waern 2003). The notion has also to be distinguished from that of cultural scheme, or model, as these are meant to organize canonical situations in a smooth and automatic way (see for example, Strauss and Quinn, 1997 on marriage), whereas symbolic resources are by definition used "out of place." Third, contrarily to earlier definition (Zittoun et al., 2003), it seems theoretically fruitful to limit the study of symbolic resources as proposed here to *imaginary* experiences, that *clearly* present themselves as inviting to 'as-if' or vicarious experiences. I will thus not consider information-based resources (e.g., a geographical documentary), or processual resources (e.g., an argumentative style) (see e.g., Neuman & Bekerman, 2001; Psaltis & Duveen, 2006). Finally, a perspective focused on the persons' unique use of artefacts radically differs from cultural, social or cognitive approaches to films, the mass media or television (Forrester, 2000; Livingstone, 1998; Livingtsone & Lunt, 1994): it does not refer to analyses in terms of "gratifications," "effects," or "influences" of media (e.g., Fiske & Hartley, 1978; Nelmes, 1996).

Historical Background of the Notion of Symbolic Resources

The notion of use of symbolic resource is, first, rooted in cultural psychology as it has developed over the past 20 years, mostly in the Anglo-Saxon world (Bruner, 1990, 1996; Cole, 1996; Valsiner, 2000; Wertsch, 1991). The notion is an offspring of the idea of cultural tool – material or ideational – in Vygotsky (Vygotsky & Luria, 1994). Cultural tools, or instruments, mediate the relationship of humans to the world, to others, and to themselves. Researchers inspired by Vygotsky have explored such "mediating structures" (Hutchins, 1995). Some, following Bakhtin (1979), have emphasized the role of language, or language genres, as semiotic mediations (Bronckart, 1985; Wertsch, 1991). Others have focused on various sorts of artefacts – primary (tools to do things), secondary (tools that comment on how to do these things), and tertiary artefacts (that open a distinct reality) (Cole, 1995, 1996). The notion of symbolic resource aims at capturing the dynamics through which semiotic devices are used, with some intention (Bruner, 1990; Valsiner, 1998).

Second, the notion has an origin in French anthropology and sociology. Levi-Strauss (1962) observed people engaging in symbolic *bricolage*, using bits and pieces of the symbolic and material means available to them, to confer meaning to events. Sociologists also emphasize the logics of users of cultural goods: people often use new manufactured objects in a very unpredictable way, according to their needs and the context (De Certeau, 1980; Perriault, 1989).

Third, the notion of use has a psychoanalytical origin in the work of Winnicott (1971, 1989), who observed the emergence of the children's capacity to "use" their mother, and then transitional objects, and the potential space of cultural experiences. Use, here, is an emotional investment in an object, which can then acquire some psychic function: it externally supports and transforms feeling and thinking (see also Green 1969, 2000; Segal, 1991; Tisseron, 2003).

The notion of symbolic resource carries echoes from these various anchorages. It is a notion grounded in a semiotic understanding of human activity, in line with cultural psychology, some trends in anthropology, and psychoanalysis. It is a form of dialogical psychology (Grossen, 1999; Hermans & Kempen, 1993; Marková, 2003), emphasizing intrapsychological mediated dialogue (see also: Abbey & Davis, 2003; Benson, 2001; Josephs, 1997, 1998; Salgado & Gonçalves, this volume Chapter 30; Valsiner, 1997, 1998), or mediated interactions (Gillespie, 2005b, this volume, Chapter 34). It focuses on the knitting of social and cultural determinations and individual meaning-making. Finally, it acknowledges the centrality of emotions and the role of the unconscious in symbolic thinking (Janet, 1934; Freud, 1908).

Theoretical Relevance of the Notion in Socio-cultural Psychology

Socio-cultural approaches face recurrent issues. The notion of symbolic resource offers alternative routes to approach these. First, scholars regularly face the psychological/social divide (Cole, 1996), as the internalization/appropriation debate has shown (see Lawrence & Valsiner, 1993, 2003; Lightfoot & Cox, 1997; Matusov, 1998; Shweder, 1995; Tomasello, 1999; Toomela, 1996a, 1996b; Valsiner, 1998; Wertsch 1993). The notion of symbolic resource is located exactly there, where the person turns a socially shared element into a psychologically relevant resource; uses of symbolic resources necessarily constitute a bridging between inner world and shared reality.

Second, socio-cultural psychologies have recurrently signaled the danger of "losing the subject" (either reducing her to a cognitive structure, or dissolving her in the social) (Grossen, 1999; Valsiner, 1997). Here, a symbolic resource is always used by an intentional person, for whom that cultural element has a particular meaning in a given situation; the subject is thus restored. Third, dialogical approaches drawing on Bakhtin

(1979) are confronted with a methodological problem: how to identify, in a person's externalization, all the infinity of sources that are echoed, or answered to? The notion of symbolic resource offers a powerful analytical tool, for it enables us to trace the transformation of cultural elements as they exist for the community into a persons' unique externalization of these, which carry the trace of the psychic work through which they have been used.

Using a Symbolic Resource: A Model

Studying people's uses of symbolic resources offers a new access for investigating processes of change in people's lives. People are indeed most likely to mobilize cultural elements as symbolic resources when they face situations that question the taken for granted. What are the semiotic dynamics through which symbolic resources will help the person to reduce uncertainty, and to open new possibilities? In this section, I give a model for the analysis of uses of symbolic resources. I will show how symbolic resources participate to psychological development because of their mediation of three basic psychological processes: intentionality, inscription in time, and distancing.

Aboutness of Symbolic *Resources*

A cultural element that a person uses as a symbolic resource is always put in relationship with something that exceeds the cultural experience it offers: the experience of the person in her world. As with other cultural tools, when a symbolic resource is used, it can produce meaning or action about self, about others, and/or about the socially shared reality. A novel can be used "about" *self* when it is used to deepen one's understanding of oneself, to experience new aspects of self, or to change oneself. Jack London (1913) narrates the story of Martin Eden who aimed at educating himself and becoming a writer through patient and systematic readings; fiction becomes here a means to change his own identity and his social position. Choi, Han, and Kim (this volume, Chapter 15) similarly mention culturally designed uses of drama to change one's emotions. A novel can be used as a way to connect, to cooperate, or to share some experience with *others* – as when two friends discuss their readings, which will then become part of their relationship. Famous literary or philosophical friendships, such as the one between Jean-Paul Sartre and Simone De Beauvoir exemplify such uses of symbolic resources. A symbolic resource can be used to understand a contemporary historical or political *world* situation. Watching *South Park* can be used as resource to develop a new perspective on current politics. Hence, symbolic resources are cultural elements which, when used by the person, become *about* something else, with some intention (Zittoun et al., 2003).

Time Orientation of Symbolic Resources

As with all semiotic dynamics, uses of symbolic resources have a location within the flux of time (Valsiner, 2001). For one part, cultural experiences always require some knitting of past and future in the present. In order to "understand" the cultural experience, one has to mobilize memories of past impressions and feelings to nourish images, words, and melodies (Vygotsky, 1928); one also has to mobilize cultural knowledge (about narrative, musical or cinematographic genres) to create some expectations about what will come next. For the other part, the *aboutness* of the use is also located in time. One can see a film set in Paris, and remember one's own *past* trip to Paris. Before traveling to Ladakh, tourists watch films such as *Little Buddha* that enable them to shape a representation of their *future* (Gillespie, 2005c). Finally, symbolic resources can be used to support a current, enduring experience. In his movie *The Dreamers* (2003), Bertolucci shows a love triangle over a couple of weeks, in the Paris of the 1960s, during the glorious years of the French cinema. The young people are continuously watching films together, quoting these, and playing out some of their scenes.

Films – and especially *Jules et Jim*, a classical love triangle (Truffaut, 1962) – are here symbolic resources through which the young people are creating the *enduring present* of their love affair.

Level of Mediation of Symbolic Resources

Psychic life is possible through semiotic mediation, or symbolic elaboration, that turns perceptions, impressions, affects, intuition, actions, desires, into thoughts, or representations. It is through semiotic elaboration that these experiences can be linked to one's memories and understanding, that is, become part of semiotic dynamics and thinking. Semiotic elaboration is partly done through the mobilization of our knowledge and memories, but can also be supported by the semiotic environment – as for example, as when one realizes being sad while listening to sad music: the music, provides with an organization of semiotic means that enable distancing from sadness. It is because cultural experiences provide us with external means to support such elaboration of experience that symbolic resources can be "used" at all. Symbolic resources can thus enable to take a more or less distant position towards one's immediate and embodied experience. They can thus bring to various "levels" of distancing, each progressively less dependent on the specific experienced situation, or more generalizable (Janet, 1934; Valsiner 1997, 1998, 2005; Werner & Kaplan, 1963; Zittoun, in press, b). Following Valsiner's propositions (2004), four levels of distancing can be proposed.

A person can be in a state of diffuse feelings and impression. At a first level of mediation, the symbolic resource can group those here-and-now, embodied experiences, reflect them, and enable a person to identify them. Hence, Emma Bovary and her lover are watching the sky on the boat back home after a romantic escape: "The moon rose, and they greeted it with no lack of phrases, finding the planet melancholy and full of poetry. She even began to sing: 'Un soir, t'en souviens-t-il? Nous voguions' <footnote 1>, etc."(Flaubert, 1857/1999, p. 279). Here, Emma uses this song as symbolic resource to contain, reflect, and fix the diffuse melancholy, sadness, and anxiety she shares with her lover and which are diffracted onto the landscape. It mediates a first level of reflection that enables the acknowledgement of a state of experience.

At a second level, semiotic mediations offered by a symbolic resource can help to identify and label a specific current state of mind or situation. Hence, Emma Bovary finds herself in an incomprehensible state of exaltation after her first intimate meeting with a man; she then recalls romantic novels she used to read, which make her realize: *she has a lover!* She thus articulates in a symbolic manner her experience, which makes it thinkable and communicable.

At a third level, symbolic resources can be used to define class or categories of behavior or events, or attributes of self. Again, Flaubert makes a point at showing us that Emma Bovary has used all her religions and romantic readings to build a distinction between "friendly, but boring marital relationships," and "fascinating, exciting, adulterous passions." Based on these two categories, Emma aims at defining herself as belonging to the type of "passionate lovers". At this third level, the world and herself become classifiable and organized.

At a fourth level, symbolic resources can be used to define and clarify higher-level rules and principles or commitments. Such commitments have the power to organize categories (level 3), or to sustain specific actions (level 2). Hence, Emma Bovary seems to have used her romantic reading to develop the overarching principle that "life is not worth living without passion," which leads her to see herself as a martyr (a category to define self at level 3) and to commit suicide (a specific conduct at level 2).

At each level, thus, the semiotic mediators offered by the symbolic resource meet some aspect of Emma's experience, and represent it in a transformed, more distant way: from an embodied state, to contained and fixed emotional patterns; from these, to a labeled situation; from the latter, to categories grouping various experiences of self

and the world; and from categories to orienting values. Symbolic resources offer such distancing possibility, because they create an imaginary sphere where personal, unique experiences meet culturally elaborated versions of other people's comparable experiences (Zittoun 2004) – as signs can, more generally, integrate first person and third person perspectives (Gillespie, this volume, Chapter 34).

Generativity of Symbolic Resources

The tri-dimensional model artificially separates various modalities of uses of symbolic resources. In fact, people using symbolic resources usually combine dimensions and modalities of uses. The outcomes of such combinations can be extremely diverse. Emma Bovary's uses of symbolic resources are particularly dramatic: although they first open alternative lives (the young countryside woman lives new adventures), they quickly bring her to a point where she has no other option but to kill herself (at the end of the novel, she has lost her lover and ruined her husband; inspired by her readings, she drinks poison). Yet uses of resources can also be highly generative. A generative use of resources usually moves across a wide range of modality of uses. For example, Julia, a fan of a British pop-band, the *Manic Sreet Preachers*, uses their songs as resources to soothe her in a mourning period (*about* self); she then uses this music as a means to meet other fans (*about* others). Also, she realizes that the lyrics of that band have some political meaning; trying to understand them, she starts to see the world in a new way (*about* the social world). The uses also vary on the time perspective: Julia first uses the songs, that speak about mining areas in England, to think about the place where she grew up (*past*-orientation), before using them for making plans for her *future* (which professional position might bring her to improve this region). The songs finally enable here to progressively distance herself from her experience. The sad melodies first contain and reflect her sad and fuzzy feelings (level 1); she then realizes that the lyrics seem to name her feelings and re-present them to her (level 2); the lyrics also give her a position in the world: she is a revolted person, the world contains injustices (level 3); finally, they bring her to define political values that will guide her actions (level 4). At each of these changes of modality of uses, Julia picks up new symbolic resources (novels or poems mentioned in the lyrics) to support her moves. These uses of resources are highly generative: they bring her to new transitions and open up new possible situations of choices and uses of resources (Zittoun, 2006).

The Study of Symbolic Resources in Changing Lives

Symbolic resources are of interest for many researchers aiming to understand the role of culture in human lives. These are especially relevant to examine the trajectory of people inhabiting contemporary societies. In such societies, there is no overarching meaning system that provides people with meaning for important events in their lives; people have to discover how to deal with their striving for sense on the basis of available cultural devices (Zittoun 2005, 2006). Even more, such society diffuse the idea that people are responsible for their life trajectories and for the sense they confer to it, as discussed by Lawrence and Dodds (this volume, Chapter 19).

In our current work on symbolic resource, we have defined *a unit of analysis* for human development: we examine *ruptures* in people's lives – that is, events that question what the person holds as taken for granted – and the subsequent process of *transition*, through which the person engages in restoring some sense of personal integrity, regularity, and continuity, and reduces uncertainty. In our analysis, transitions appear to engage three interdependent processes: identity redefinition and repositioning, skills and knowledge acquisition, and meaning making. Ruptures and transitions can be caused by a wide diversity of events, but we are interested only in these that are perceived as such by a person, and following which she engages

in active uses of her resources (Perret-Clermont & Zittoun, 2002; Zittoun et al., 2003; Zittoun 2005, 2006). This section is organized by a distinction between different classes of ruptures. I examine symbolic resources used by people perceiving their own life as interrupted, symbolic resources used to mediate interpersonal relationships, symbolic resources used to work on one's relationship to a changing environment, and finally, to support one's moves from between environments. In each case, I first indicate studies led by explicit mention of the notion of symbolic resource. I then mention descriptions of uses of symbolic resources in the social sciences and in literature, thus indicating directions for further studies.

Symbolic Resources and One's Life Trajectory

Symbolic resources might be used to address personal ruptures – a person matures, develops new ideas, or has an accident that questions who she is. Becoming a parent is an important change in the course of a life, which will affect bodies, couples, and one's responsibilities. In a study on the transition to parenthood (Zittoun, 2004a, 2005), I have shown two types of symbolic resources used by future parents that help them to define a name for their coming child: on the one hand, traditional cultural elements transmitted through generations, such as naming principles or repertoires of names; on the other hand, names taken from films, songs, novels, the Bible, places, or events. These symbolic resources appeared to support the whole process of transition to parenthood. They would be used to link current changes with a personal and collective past, to generate representations about possible events, and to shape representations of the child to come and of oneself as parent. These symbolic resources appeared to contain complex emotions, ambivalent feelings, and unconscious thoughts about death and life. In some cases, the resources were used to keep these thought apart, where in some other cases it enabled the person to work through them. It appeared that people engaged in *bricolage*, combining traditional symbolic resources (e.g., religious naming rules), and some resources taken from the media (e.g., a fiction character). The former are often linked to inclusive systems of orientation; they can thus help to represent one's own changes in time (e.g., becoming a father) within a collective definition (e.g., a lineage) (Zittoun, 2004b; 2005).

In the scientific literature focused on individual change in adolescence and youth, researchers have examined the role of objects and cultural elements as resources. Fuhrer (2004), Fuhrer and Josephs (1999), and Habermas (1996, 1999) have shown young people using familiar and preferred objects as they leave home, to support and define their identities, for their soothing functions, and to negotiate their relationship to their social worlds. Csikszentmihaly and Larson (1984) noticed the emotional functions (as dissipative structures) of literature in difficult moment of youth. Heath (1996, 2000), Hundeide (2003, 2004), Kamberlis and Dimitriadis (1998), and Lightfoot (1997) have given detailed analysis of the use of objects, music, narratives, "styles," in adolescents' identity creation, socialization, and learning. Abbey and Davis (2003) have analyzed how rap music can be used to support autodialogue in adolescents' identity processes.

Symbolic Resources in Interpersonal Interactions or Relationships

Symbolic resources might be precious to support a person's real or imaginary relationship to specific others: to facilitate a common project, to get closer to someone, to keep a relationship alive or to accept its disappearance. Analyzing people's discussion as they watch *Dallas*, Liebes and Katz (1990) showed how the serial was used as way to confer meaning to their own relationships. A social scientist, Fonyi (1994) interviewed psychoanalysts about their uses of literature and art in their practice. Some analysts use the fact that patient's discourse awake in them particular echoes of cultural experiences, to guide their interpretations; other

use novels and arts to increase their knowledge of the variety of human lives; other prefer to keep cultural experiences as way to switch off their practice; in all these cases their analyst are using novels, music or paintings as symbolic resources to work out their relationship with their patients.

Finally, symbolic resource might play important emotional and meaning function in terms of interruption of relationship. A young woman having dramatically lost her brother found a great support in Khalil Gibran's book *The Prophet*. She thus explains how the verse, "The deeper the sorrow carves into your being, the more joy you can contain" helped her to overcome her sadness (Zittoun, 2006). Similarly, in his *Book of Illusions* (2002), Paul Auster narrates the story of a man deeply affected by the sudden death of his wife and children in a plane crash. Eventually, he becomes fascinated by the silent movies of an unknown and forgotten moviemaker. The narrator's long descriptions of these films and of the story of the moviemaker appear to enable him to realize and transform his own feeling of loss of his close ones. Uses of symbolic resources might thus offer, as the process of artistic creation (Aberbach, 1989) or other forms of semiotic mediation (Josephs, 1997, 1998), individualized forms of mourning or working through losses (as all transitions imply).

Symbolic Resources and Modification Within One's Sphere of Experience

A person lives in various settings that she holds for relatively stable or predictable. Her family life, her experience at school or at work, can be called her "spheres of experience." These spheres of experience can be disrupted, for example because new technologies are brought in the work place (Perret & Perret-Clermont, 2001). Such ruptures are often imposed, and require meaning work. They can question the position of a person within a given structure or social networks, or the meaning of her actions. They can also affect the circulation of devices that might be used as symbolic resources.

A literary critic, Najmambali (2004) analyzes the success of new romantic novels in Iran, which she links to societal changes. Young people engage their transition to adulthood with claims over new forms of sexualities, whereas the adult society does not have the means to control these. The novel offers a space to give shape to these claims and needs, and for reflecting upon their possible consequences. Similarly, collective historical re-enactments in Poland, although an old tradition in Eastern Europe, became widespread in the end of the nineties (Zagórska & Tarnowski, 2004). Their role as symbolic resources can be examined in relation to the countries' difficult integration in the European Union.

Literature and cinema abundantly explore the importance of access to, and use of cultural elements as symbolic resources under authoritarian states. At times, literature is a symbolic resource to maintain one's sense of humanity and relationships to others (Levi, 1985); at others, developing a particular care for books becomes a way to externalize one's disapproval of the current situation (Hrabal, 1976; see also *Fahrenheit 415*).

Symbolic Resources and Moving to New Spheres of Experience

Many ruptures experienced by people are due to their own geographical and social moves and relocations. People change settings of activity or sphere of experience, which questions who they are, what they can do, and what that change means. We have examined the process of transitions of young people coming back from a religious school to the secular world, using the Bible, but also novels and films to confer meaning to the rupture itself (Zittoun, 1996, 2006, in press, a). Gillespie has shown how people traveling to Ladakh use films, pictures, and guidebooks to understand the world in which they find themselves (Gillespie, 2005c, 2006). Immigrant populations are in similar situations: in order to confer meaning to the new situation, they can try to use

symbolic resources transmitted in their families, or available around them (Zittoun & Cesari, 1998).

The problem of people's transitions from one sphere of experience to another one is of great social and political relevance. Research on children of migrants has shown how culture might or not be used as symbolic resources in new context, for questions of loyalty to one's group (Dinello & Perret-Clermont, 1988). In the therapy of migrants, ethno-psychoanalysts create a setting that supports operations of bridging between the patients' traditional symbolic systems and the demands of the host society; pivotal objects becomes symbolic resources taken from the traditional system, that can be used in the new setting (Nathan, 1993, 2001).

Artists and novelists have frequently accounted for the important role of cultural elements as resources for social mobility, or as resources when one is propelled to a new setting. In the best-seller *The Beach*, the narrator finds himself in a highly dangerous and unknown island; from this point on, his description of the event become shaped by, and intermeshed with, memories of Vietnam War films (Garland, 1997). Many autobiographic novels insist on the emancipatory role of literature, enabling social relocation. *Kaffir Boy* is for example the narrative of an illiterate, starving inhabitant of a South African slum, who, through his becoming literate and access to literature, eventually migrates to North America (Mathabane, 1986).

The Lost Use of Symbolic Resources: Meaning and Emotion

Four types of ruptures have been distinguished on the basis of external criteria. Focusing on the intrapsychic, interpersonal relationships, one's relationship to a social group, or to a societal state, these types correspond to four possible levels of description of the psychosocial world (Doise, 1982). An analysis in terms of symbolic resources requires a focus on the perspective of the person and her interiority, which is a systemic whole. Symbolic resources work because they are connected into one's emotional and embodied experience. Yet they are likely to generate distancing effects, to change one's intention or time perspective, and through the elaboration of emotions and the creation of new perspective, to generate more ruptures. Above, Julia's initial use of songs as resources was a mean to mourn her grandmother's death (interpersonal rupture); yet the songs bring her to new feelings and understandings of the world. She then decided to join groups of politicized music fans (rupture of spheres of experience).

Studying symbolic resources thus calls our attention to the interdependence of various phenomena often held as distinct. Analyzing autobiographic narratives, we have thus shown how people such as Carl Rogers (Zittoun, 2003) and Malcolm X (Gillespie, 2005a) used literature to transform themselves and to operate important social and symbolic moves (i.e., leaving religion and becoming a psychologist; or quitting a hustler life to become the minister of the nation of Islam). This then led them to change their new sphere of experience (i.e., proposing a new theory, or a new political discourse).

Finally, in this section, we have seen that literature and cinema identify the importance of symbolic resource in personal emotional elaboration, mourning, the definition of collective values in social change, and meaning making when one's personal is in radical mismatch with the socially shared culture. Such issues are raised by modern societies, through the extension of the life course, technological and political transformations, migrations, and the rapid alteration of life styles. However, studies in psychology and the social sciences that investigate changes mostly focus on the work of identity, socialization, and communicative strategies. In contrast, the notion of symbolic resource offers a precious entrance to emotional and meaning making dynamics. These are central for the understanding of how a person can maintain a sense of integrity and continuity, while changing enough to develop beyond a rupture. They thus deserve a full status in

socio-cultural approaches addressing change in life.

A Developmental Understanding of Symbolic Resources in Human Lives

From a developmental perspective, two questions can be raised: how does one learn to use symbolic resources? And how does a person's modalities of using symbolic resources change over life?

Learning to Use Symbolic Resources

Learning to use symbolic resources is quite likely to be an extension of the acquisition of early symbolic function in infant, and of language in children. Psychologists from various orientations seem consensually to admit that early symbolic acquisitions require regular patterns of shared and culturally defined actions with adults, that will progressively be internalised by the child, thus provoking qualitative changes in her possible thinking and actions in the world (Moro & Rodriguez, 1998; Nelson, 1989, 1996; Piaget, 1945, 1951; Valsiner, 1997). To summarise these dynamics, a *semiotic prism* can be proposed (Zittoun, 2006). Ontogenetically, this prism includes the infant, a state of the world, a reflecting parent and a symbol with which the parent will reflect the child's recognition of the state of the world (Fonagy, Gergely, Jurist, & Target, 2002; Green, 2002). Basic symbolic abilities are fundamental for later uses of symbolic resources. It is also quite likely that later uses of symbolic resources will emerge within similar interactive pattern. In short, the transformation of cultural experiences into usable symbolic resources is likely to occur *when two persons interact on a regular basis about a symbolic object, and come to an acknowledgement of what that designates (the shared and objective referent) and a mutual acknowledgement of the fact that it does personally mean/feel for each of them (within each person's internal, embodied representational and emotional world)*.

When parents read a goodnight story to their child, or sing her a lullaby when she is anxious, they create such a semiotic prism encompassing them, the child, the story or the lullaby, and the emotional state of the child (reflected by the parents, perceived by the child, adjusting in a feedback loop). The child who then asks for her preferred lullaby or goodnight story is already a user of a symbolic resource: she uses that element as a way to regulate her emotion, open an imaginary space, in the comforting and mediating presence of her parents. The parents might, or might not, acknowledge the function of that use. The child might then be confronted with a multitude of such semiotic experiences, in which the parents might be replaced by other adults, or peers. Hence the pole "other" of the semiotic prism is changing, until it might become a generalised Other pole; the mediating position of these others or the generalised others will eventually be internalised by the child. Mother singing rhymes to their babies (Nelson, 1996; Tucker, 1981) or telling them traditional tales (Mathabane, 1986), father supporting their child's reading taste (Lloyd, 1999; Oz, 2004), parents commenting on their children's television watching (Livingstone, 2002; Tisseron, 2000), teachers accompanying children in their discovery of stories (Henri, 2003; Tucker, 1981), pictures (Fasulo, Girardet & Pontecorvo, 1998), or the Bible (Zittoun, 1996) can support such semiotic dynamics. Eventually, these mediations and the presence of others will be internalised, and the child will take a progressive distancing from cultural experiences (Lawrence & Valsiner, 2003). The developmental hypothesis proposed here is thus that the internalization of such interpersonal semiotic dynamics, or semiotic prisms, will enable further uses of cultural elements as symbolic resources (see Gillespie, this volume Chapter 34 for another account of the semiotic dynamics involved).

It is likely that in good enough conditions, and independently of socio-economical factors, people develop a way to relate to stories, images, symbolic objects, and to link these with one's experience in the world. Social or cultural differences can affect *what* will become a symbolic resource – a traditional

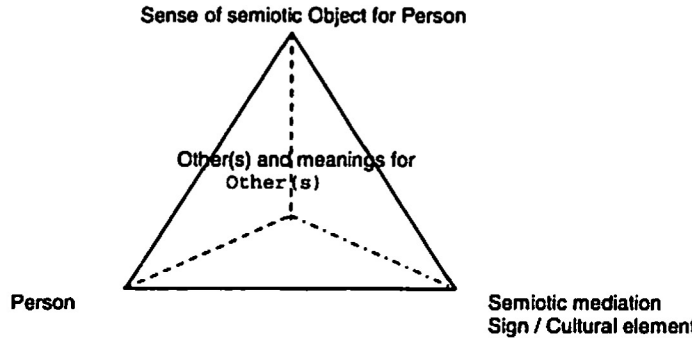

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Figure 16.1. Semiotic prism.

tale, one's preferred videotape, a painting in a museum – but not *how* these will be used.

Transformations of Uses of Symbolic Resources

Modalities of uses of symbolic resources are likely to change through life, along two developmental lines that are difficult to separate. On one side, there is a change in a person's whole structure of thinking and remembering over time, which is due to biological maturation, but also, diversification of her life situations, and of the breadth and depth of her social, cognitive, emotional and symbolic experiences. On the other side a person might also develop a specific reflectivity on what she does, or can do, with symbolic resources.

From the developmental angle, modalities of symbolic resources will depend, first, on one's abilities to think associatively, to think in concrete terms or to think abstractly, and to imagine the state of mind of others (Bennett, 1999; Harris, 2000; Piaget, 1945, 1951). Second, uses of symbolic resources are heavily dependent on memory. It seems that memories of younger children do not necessarily have the same features than those of older people (Kavanagh, 2000). Autobiographical literature highlights the embodied quality of childhood memories: places, colours, lights, temperatures, and emotions. Memories of older life might become much more abstract, as synthesis of many similar situations. Third, uses of symbolic resource depend on one's socialisation to media and cultural objects. Very young children might not master the graphic convention necessary to understand a story or a cartoon; a young child might have difficulty to understand character's intentions that are contradictory with their actions (Tucker, 1981). Fourth, uses of symbolic resources will depend on personal needs, which are partly socially shaped, partly idiosyncratic. On the one hand, psychosocial development will confront people to typical transitions. Children becoming siblings might have particular anxieties and fantasies about death and sexuality (Mitchell, 2003), for which some tales might offer good potential symbolic resources. Starting school might call for symbolic resources to stand the frustrations imposed by a highly normative life. Adolescence might incite uses of symbolic resources for personal and social identity definition, or to give space to otherwise invading emotions. Young adulthood requires symbolic resources to support meaning making as one defines life commitments (Zittoun, 2006). On the other hand, people are different, and change through time: at some point, children or adults need to be reassured about their understanding of their world; at others, they might want to explore new possibilities and horizons (Tucker, 1981; Zittoun, 2006).At times, people use symbolic resources to expand or reinforce their social networks – for example, when children can discuss about the film they have all seen (Kavanagh, 2000; Livingstone, 2002); at others, they use them to explore or fill loneliness (Taylor, 1999). Hence, various modalities of

uses of symbolic resources (different combinations on the three dimensions of uses) can be more typical at some ages, or in some moments of life. However, progressively, one can expect people to experience a wide range of uses of symbolic resources.

Reflexivity of Uses of Symbolic Resources

People can be more or less reflectively using symbolic resources. In hat follows, different degrees of reflectivity are proposed. All along this hierarchy, uses are likely to support some psychological change. Ppeople can use symbolic resources with different reflectivity in different contexts and at different moments.

First, people can have cultural experiences and appreciate these experiences for the direct and immediate impression they cause, or meanings they carry. A movie is seen because it is "good fun," a painting is nice because it is "well done" or has beautiful colors, and so on. In such *a degree zero* of uses a person would not have to be aware that the cultural experience is relevant within her sphere of experience. This does not mean that the experience is less significant; but the shaping of the experience occurs without distancing.

Second, people mostly have a vague sense that having cultural experiences do affect them, make them feel things and change them. We can call *quasi use* this vague acknowledgement: seeing a good movie and feeling good afterwards, or listening some music and realizing one's state of mind.

Thirdly, *intuitive uses* indicate an acknowledgement, even if not clearly conscious, of one or many effects of having a cultural experience or remembering it. Bringing objects back from holidays, with the intention of conferring them a memorial value, or putting homely objects on the walls can be seen as intuitive uses of symbolic resources. People seem in effect to guide conduct on the basis on a minimal understanding that symbolic resources might maintain memories, support self-continuity, and so on.

Fourth, uses of symbolic resources can be said to be *deliberate* when a person is actively looking for a cultural element that might be used as a resource to achieve a certain end. This requires her to be, more or less consciously, aware of the functioning of resources and their possible effects. Examples would be people calling upon a vignette from a text or the Bible or a movie to choose among possible conduct (Zittoun, 2006). Deliberate uses can be slowly developed out of progressive reflective understanding of intuitive practices, or can be systematically trained, as is the case in groups of Bible readers.

Fifth, deliberate uses might become object of one's reflectivity. In such *reflective use*, a person might clearly know that she does such uses, and reflect upon her uses and the changes these enables. A person aware of the impact of using symbolic resources, deliberately looking for them, might also start to transform existing elements or ways to use them (such as in mixing music), or creating his own resources (writing poems).

Deliberate and *reflective* uses can be called *expert uses* of symbolic resources. These enable planning and exploring possibilities, in relation to what the person is currently facing. Such uses achieve the full symbolic functions of cultural elements: personally relevant *aboutness*, inscription within a time perspective, and changes of level of mediations. Even though *zero*, *quasi* and *intuitive* uses do support psychological dynamics and might enable new conduct, *reflective* uses are likely to be the more transformative, as they can accompany the process of reorganizing systems of orientation and linking symbolic resources to concrete situations, so as to develop new perspectives on one's conduct.

A Social Understanding of Symbolic Resources in Human Lives

Uses of symbolic resources are always culturally, institutionally, and socially located (Grossen, 2000; Perret-Clermont, Perret, & Bell, 1991), and therefore constrained.

For economical, geographical, political or social reasons, a person's access to cultural elements might be reduced. Yet it seems that socio-economical factors do not predict how these symbolic resources are used (Livingstone, 2002; Zittoun, 2006). Rather, it is important to question the frames of activity (or spheres, or fields) *in which* the person is embedded. These might indeed legitimate or prohibit some uses of symbolic resources (Duveen, 2001). Gender differences in uses can be seen as reflecting such forces: lonely women have constituted the first readership of fiction (Rieger & Tonard, 1999); at school, boys would avoid "girlish" readings in front of their peers – yet it has been suggested that boys raised by their mother alone often develop stronger links to literature (Kundera, 1986; Tucker, 1981; Zittoun, 2006). Girls might be using resources in a more narrative way as a result of socialisation (Gilligan, 1982), but such differences disappear under stressful conditions (Tisseron, 2000). Also, in a given school setting, girls might feel unauthorised to display their understanding in some types of gendered interactions (Duveen & Lloyd, 1990; Psaltis & Duveen, 2006).

Spheres of activity can also render legitimate, or not, some uses of resources *out* of their own frame. For some orthodox Jews, it might be impossible to use their knowledge of biblical texts to give meaning to everyday struggles out of the religious milieu (Lawrence, Benedikt, & Valsiner, 1992; Zittoun, in press).

Finally, societal forces (political, economical, ideological) can impinge on these spheres of activities: they can impose or prohibit access to cultural elements (through cultural monopole or censorship, or control of circulation); they can control the uses made out of these resources (controlling interpretations and critics); they can endanger the social and psychological space in which these resources are used (by controlling interpersonal or group communication about symbolic resources; by imposing forms of life that prevent people to become absorbed in worlds of imagination; by condemning symbolic thinking).

Intersubjective and Psychological Constraints on Uses

Using a symbolic resource requires a form of thinking that acknowledges emotions, is analogical and metaphorical, and has similarity to Freud's dream work (1900, 1901). Reflecting on one's uses of symbolic resources might be done through verbal language (but also through other semiotic forms). In that sense, interactions that encourage narrative reasoning around cultural experience might support such uses. Children who go to the museum with mothers that give them *narrative* accounts (stories) of painting, rather than *paradigmatic* ones (causal and argumentative explanation, Bruner, 1986), develop a better memory and can recall these narratives easier (Tessler, 1986; Tessler & Nelson, 1994, quoted in Nelson, 1996). Narrative comments develop children's memories and understanding of time. Such styles of talking and thinking are *not* the one that is encouraged by schools, which promote paradigmatic forms of thinking. Various socio-cultural groups may develop different ways of talking about and referring to cultural experience (Ochs & Capps, 2001), encouraging school-like forms of discourse.

Partly linked to such social and interpersonal conditions, uses of symbolic resources are also restrained by intra-psychical constraints. First, uses of symbolic resources rely on the mobilization of memories and images. These must have some aliveness, that is, be representational and emotional, in touch with both a person's conscious and unconscious thoughts, and on the other side, her experiences of the real world. Traumatic events or psychic pain can endanger this aliveness. In such cases, experiences can resist semiotic mediations (they are "indigestible") (Bion, 1977; Kaës 1994, 1996; Tisseron, 2003). Second, uses of symbolic resources require clear boundaries between a person's zones of experience – her inner life, what belongs to the shared reality, and what belong to the imaginary zone, where the cultural element and her inner life meet. Such boundaries are necessary for avoiding

acting out fictional ideas, or for distinguishing one's feelings from feelings created by the cultural experience (Winnicott, 1971, 1989). Personal breakdowns, stressful events, or forms of interpersonal or societal influence, can distort these boundaries. Third, to be transformative, these processes need to be located in time: they need to be connected to memories, and to have a future orientation. If memories are not accessible (when they are repressed or cleaved), or if the person's sense of integrity is too fragile to be imagined in an "as-if" world, such processes cannot take place (Tisseron, 1996).

Methodology and Further Directions

How should one study symbolic resources? To capture the uniqueness of personal uses of symbolic resources, methodologies have to preserve the perspective of the user, and the dynamic, temporal nature of semiotic dynamics. The methodological principle is simple: the researcher has to identify resources mentioned by people, the cultural elements at their origin, and the events about which these have been used. Analysis will identify the transformations and semiotic work at stake, and the constraints exerted upon these.

Reconstructive methods are powerful to elaborate descriptions of uses of symbolic resources that took place in the past. Reconstructive methods work with data based on people's externalization linked to uses of symbolic resources. The analysis aims at reconstructing what cultural elements people have met, internalized, and used as resources. *Interviews* have been used to reconstruct elaborations during the transition to parenthood or in youth (Zittoun, 2004, 2005, 2006). Symbolic resources are often captured by indirect ways. The interview schedule can be designed to bring people to talk about concrete occasions of uses of symbolic resources. For example, students can be asked about the objects they brought with them in their new accommodations; parents are asked about name choices. It is often while evoking things *about* which the symbolic resources have been used, that these are mentioned (rather than when talking about books or films) (Zittoun, 2004, 2005, 2006). *Historical* data can be used: diaries can be seen as forms of externalizations, and combined with other archival sources to recreate the cultural environment of a diarist (Gillespie, 2005b; Zittoun, Cornish, Gillespie, and Avelling, in press). *Observational* data might be exploited as well: people can be observed interacting in settings in which they mobilize symbolic resources (Zittoun, 1996); people can also develop introspective technique to think their own uses of resources (Zittoun, in pressd, b2006). Uses of symbolic resources can then be studied as case studies, or compared: on the base of the uses, of the resources, or of the users' trajectories (see Chapter 4, this volume; Valsiner & Sato, 2006).

The study of uses of symbolic resources offers a new perspective on semiotic dynamics and change. It offers tools for studying everyday learning, in and out of formal settings. It also proposes a way to apprehend the "user" of films, books, and cultural elements. It might contribute to the exploration of children, youth, and adult learning, to the study of migration and transition to new cultural communities. It helps us to examine interactions between the individual and the societal. It raises questions about the development and the evolution of symbolic resources in the life course, and about the social and interpersonal settings that might support or hinder them. It also questions the boundaries between normality and pathology in using resources. In this chapter, we have seen that symbolic systems and artefacts have as major property the fact that they encapsulate human meaning and experience; people are constantly striving for meaning, especially in moments of change. However, it appears that social sciences are still unable to account for how cultural tools participate in people's personal meaning making, and emotional elaboration as part of psychic transformation. Studying

symbolic resources might contribute to such understanding.

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