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The Subjectified and Subjectifying Mind

Edited by
Min Han and Carla Cunha



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CHAPTER 5

IMAGINING SELF IN A CHANGING WORLD

An Exploration of “Studies of Marriage”

Tania Zittoun

“I’m happy. I’m very happy. And as I’ve said, I really enjoy life.”
Pavel & Ivana, 23 years after wedding

—(Třeštková, 2009).

Subjectivity is what makes a person a unique subject, different from other persons and her social environment, and distanced enough from her experience to be able to reflect upon it and create her own future. In this chapter, I will examine the life of married couples in a changing country. A country groups many individuals, and because of its social and political institutions, it constraints what is possible for people to live or want for themselves. A marriage is a curious alliance between two lives for an unpredictable period of time, which strongly canalizes each of the partners’ lives. However, a person is never reduced to his or her national history, or the story of his or her marriage: even in the tighter frame, a person keeps becoming a unique human being. This chapter is thus a modest attempt to account for the fact that, within a group of six couples married at the same time and living

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in the same societal conditions, each couple grows differently, and each person becomes absolutely unique... In order to explain the generation of uniqueness in such constraining forces, my proposition is to examine people's imagination of alternatives, and their personal life philosophies.

SUBJECTIVITY—AS EMERGENCE OF SUBJECTS

The notion of subjectivity has acquired its flavor of privacy out of a semantic inversion. Etymologically, an "object" was in Latin (14th century) *objectum*: "what is placed in front of," what affects the senses. A "subject" was in the 14th century "what is subordinated to" (but also, paradoxically 12th century: "what has a nature of its own"). Eventually, the "subject" becomes in the 19th century "the individual being, the person as the origin of an action or an influence" (Rey, 1998). Hence, the subject was at times the subject of something else, and it is today what escapes subjugation and stands detached, facing its object. This etymological excursion is here to suggest the idea I wish to illustrate: to become a "subject"—that is, a person with subjectivity, one has to create a distance from the surrounding, from other persons, and perhaps, from oneself, too.

Psychology has traditionally considered subjectivities as emerging out of one of two sets of determination: that from the world, and that from the inner life. The first locates an individual within streams of multiple social and cultural determinations—what has to do with positions, perspectives, classes, roles, boundaries in- and out groups, etc. The second designates the dynamics by which a person determines her own life—flow of experience, consciousness, or unique interpretations. These determinations have been examined by two classically distinct epistemological perspectives: some observe human trajectories or groups "from the outside," in a third person perspective; the others attempt to account for the "insider view," a 1st person perspective, or an "interiority" (Zittoun, Duveen, Gillespie, Ivinson, & Psaltis, 2003). Of course, these distinctions are hazardous, and overlap many others (Cornejo, 2010). However, sociocultural psychology is one of the disciplines that consider at once these two sets of determinations (Zittoun, Valsiner, Vedeler, Salgado, Gonçalves, & Ferring, 2013). Here, I propose to consider subjectivity at the meeting point of these two streams of determinations. For this, I need to further characterize the notion of subjectivity in a semiotic perspective.

A SOCIOCULTURAL VIEW ON THE LIFECOURSE

Time passes, and humans are immersed in it; their main mean to know they exist in the world is their consciousness, which it itself in permanent flow (James, 1890). One of the specificities of humans over other organisms is, within this flow, their attempt not only to order it, but also to have a grasp on it—humans are engaged in sense making and interpreting. In order to do so, humans internalize—find some form of translation, in the mind, of cultural tools, signs and

modes of interactions (Valsiner, 1998). Yet these means are not simple perceptual information; they also have cultural values and shared meaning. Hence, the person progressively learns to organize inner dialogues and operations, guided by the social world and other person's perspectives, from within (Janet, 1926, 1928, 1934/1935; Marková, 2005; Valsiner, 1998).

Life trajectories have been researched by many—starting with mythology and ending with attempts to decrypt DNA. In psychology and social sciences, there is a tension between studies who describe general patterns of life course by finding the "average" behavior of large cohorts, or specific life trajectories in case studies (see Elder, Kirkpatrick Johnson, & Crosnoe, 2004; Zittoun, 2012). Either way, it is consensually admitted that life development is best understood as a dynamic process, characterized by the mutual dependencies of lives, their social dimensions, the importance of transitions, etc. (Giele & Elder, 1998, Sroufe, Egeland, Carlson, & Collins, 2005; Valsiner, 2007). Here I will especially emphasize four aspects:

1. People are located in the world; they develop in complex system of interactions—in their immediate proximity, with other people, with objects, then with specific situations; yet these are also taken in, and shaped by wider social institutions, societal debates, generally spread ideologies, material limitations, etc. One cannot understand individual trajectories without taking these dynamics in consideration. Here, I will focus on interpersonal, situational and societal aspects.
2. People have to be understood as a whole—their understanding develops together with their emotional life, their physical changes, their relational experiences, etc. Here my focus will be on people's sense making of such diversity of experiences;
3. Development goes with logic of differentiation and undifferentiation: as much as people develop more differentiated actions and capacities through time, they also become more and more differentiated from others in their immediate environment. Of course, some movements can, at different levels of organisation, lead to loss of differentiation (such as general aesthetic feelings, Valsiner 2008, or mass phenomena);
4. Development occurs through forms of temporarily stabilized patterns of actions, thoughts, capacities, which are progressively integrated and hierarchically organized (Vygotsky, 1986; Werner & Kaplan, 1963). These relative stable patterns of actions become identified as a person's identity, her skills, her values, etc.

SPHERES OF EXPERIENCE

Through her daily life, but also, over time, a person moves through different social settings—first home and kindergarten, until the huge variety of settings than an adult might go through in a year. I propose to call these settings "spheres of

experience.” A sphere of experience designates a configuration of experiences, activities, representations and feelings, recurrently occurring in a given type of social (material and symbolic) setting—it is one of the various regular, stabilized patterns of experience in which a person is likely to engage on a regular basis. A given person might thus have a certain type of experiences at home with his wife; at work with his colleagues, or with his clients; in his football club. Each of these spheres of experience demand certain ways of doing and certain domain of knowledge and expertise; they activate certain relational modes, social roles and thus identity aspects; and they engage different emotional experiences, values and projects. The fact that people live different spheres of experiences has two types of implications: first, that new sphere of experience can emerge or fade out; second, that people have, on a regular basis, to navigate within and through these spheres of experiences, and have to articulate them with these of others.

RUPTURES, TRANSITION, BIFURCATIONS

Important moments of the life course are these demanding a reorganization of the dynamically stable system constituted by a person's various spheres of experiences. Such moments can be called *ruptures* (Zittoun, 2006), which call for, or usually are followed by, intense processes of change. Change might bring to the emergence or disappearance of new spheres of experience; they bring to a new form of adjustment within the person or, more likely, between the person and her environment. The notion of rupture can designate different scales of phenomenon, as any dynamic approach might, as long as they call for reorganization (Van Geert, 2003). From a psychological perspective on the lifecourse, ruptures are relevant when they are felt, or experienced by people as ruptures calling for a change. What the actual cause of the rupture is—a personal, interpersonal, material, social, or political event—is less relevant. From a methodological point of view, transitions thus become an interesting unit of analysis to observe and describe naturally occurring processes of development (Zittoun, 2009).

The notion of *transition* usefully designates processes of change triggered by a rupture. Transitions have typically been studied by lifespan and lifecourse researchers as sensitive moments or periods in a lifecourse, which might have consequences on the future trajectory (Baltes, Staudinger, & Lindenberger, 1999; Shanahan & Porfelli, 2002). In these studies, transitions often designate changes of status or position in the life, such as from student to financially independent person, or from young adult to parent, whether they are perceived as ruptures or not. However, the notion has the advantage of identifying comparable events all life long—from the first transition to kindergarten to the move to an old people's home—in different social environments; it thus has become a consensual cross-disciplinary unit of analysis (Levy, Ghisletta, Le Goff, Spini, & Widmer, 2005; Sapin, Spini, & Eidmer, 2007).

From a dynamic perspective, certain moments present themselves, either because of circumstances or because of personal change, as possible *bifurcations*—

at this moment, it is possible for a person to have a child or not have a child, to start studying, to move to another country, or to look for a job, to marry Paul, Bob or Andrew—these moments engage a person in a certain segment of pathways, in which some experiences are possible and other excluded, and that creates new opportunities while other are lost. Many bifurcations can be replaced, or compensated by other, comparable ones—hence, if one does not study age 18, one might still start studying aged 28, even if the conditions and the consequences of these studies will be different. Others are however exclusive—and hence, marrying Paul at age 18 excludes marry many other men. In theory, life presents people with infinities of alternatives—anyone could stand up, and walk away from one's life. However people usually remain in “their” life course, following certain routines; only ruptures force them to consider alternatives; and even so, people rarely radically change their lives. In order to explain this, we need to understand the joint role of social guidance and imagination in sense making.

A SEMIOTIC PERSPECTIVE ON THE LIFE COURSE

It is possible to describe people's trajectories from the outside—what people do, what they say, etc. Yet from a sociocultural perspective, the interesting question is how people interpret their life—how they confer sense to it, and how their ability to confer meaning to their life develops through time. Meaning making is a process that is essential and goes far beyond narrative processes; it is another way to call one's basic relationship to reality, which encompasses perceiving and organizing experience. The emergence of the subject occurs, there were the person starts to be able to reflect upon her organization of experience, reactions, feelings, actions and decisions.

It is through semiotic processes that people can psychologically move beyond the here and now from experiences: people are able to take distance from their immediate experience through signs (Baldwin, 2009; Freud, 2001; Vygotsky, 1986). Through semiotic (sign-based) processes, people can indeed step out of the flow of action and emotion, and observe it and link it with other experiences. It might be said that semiotic processes operate along three main dimensions (Zittoun, 2014). First, a new experience can be understood in time: how is it similar to past experience, how can it lead to new ones? This dimension organizes experience along a sense of time. Second, that here-and-now experience can be seen from more or less distance thanks to the use of other semiotic means: can a current impression be named, or associated to a category of events, or a general value? On this dimension, experience is organized in semiotic sets that can be of more or less general value, and that might be guided by more abstract signs. Such hierarchical organization might be more or less culturally constrained—such as when masters grammar, mathematics or a conceptual system—or idiosyncratic, such as when one learns from experience (Janet, 1928, 1934; Valsiner, 2005; Vygotsky, 1986; Zittoun, 2011). Third, experience can be organized along a dimension which moves from what is “real” (material, socially shared) or, at the contrary, to what

is imaginary—what could be, or what will never be. Hence, any requires semiotic work, which is a way of knitting the here and now to other traces of other experiences, either as mnemonic traces, or as already internalized and organized signs. This work of sense making, which is always socially guided, is however deeply personal and truly unique to each of us.

THE EMERGENCE OF A SUBJECT: INVENTING ALTERNATIVES, DEVELOPING A PERSONAL LIFE PHILOSOPHY

Imagination, one of the dimensions of sense making, is a core process in human life. It can be defined as the process of moving from “as is” to “as if” (Josephs, 1998, after Vaihinger, 1924; Zittoun & Gillespie, 2016; Zittoun, Valsiner, Vedeler, Salgado, Gonçalves, & Ferring, 2013). More specifically, authors recognize to imagination a great power of synthesis, produced in a manner which both escapes the immediate demand of the social and material world, and the specificities of one’s inner life (Baldwin, 2009; Winnicott, 2001). Baldwin defines imagination as “a release from the restraints of the external and from the impulses from the internal; from the conflicts of will and intelligence; from the opposition of means and ends, and idea and fact” (Baldwin, 2009, pp. 232–233).

Imagination, which occurs in children’s play or adolescent’s reverie, still occurs all life long—in science, arts and religion, and everyday life: in imagination “there is a detachment, a free play of ideas” (Baldwin, 2009, pp. 234). The free play of ideas is of course taking place about certain objects and guided, or constrained, by the rules or specificities of that domain. A film actor can imagine becoming the president; yet to actually become a president, the actor would have to imagine thoroughly all the possible ways, facilitators, and traps that might occur to his way to the presidency, based on a good enough knowledge of institutions, finance and psychology. And yet, this imagination might pave the way to actual realization. In that sense, imagination can be seen as generating a certain type of “zone of proximal development” (Vygotsky, 1997; see van der Veer & Valsiner, 1991, and Valsiner and van der Veer, 1993)—it is a dynamically changing space in which some new modes of thinking or organizing experience can emerge.

Alternative Futures

Living one’s life, a person can at times evaluate her current situation and her achievements. She might examine, alone or triggered by other persons or various artifacts, whether she is happy, satisfied, whether she has fulfilled some hopes, or would like to change. She might also anticipate some rupture or some transition, and to avoid facing the unknown, gather information about what might be the case—to become a father, to move in another country; doing so, drawing on various resources—past experience, other people’s perspective, semiotic resources—the person might elaborate various representations of what might be the case (Zittoun, 2006). Hence, such representations are always anchored in the past and oriented

toward the future. They draw both on personal feelings and expectations—what one wishes, fears, hopes to be able to do in order to satisfy his grandfather—and yet socially guided. When imagination is thus oriented toward the future and has a function to prepare, trigger, or guide change, it can be said to generate *alternative futures* (Zittoun & Valsiner, 2016).

Alternative futures are always located in a time that does not exist yet; when time gets there—when the bifurcation point becomes present—the only realized alternative is what is; the other alternative, or potential lives, lose their efficiency. From a historical perspective, non lived past alternatives are non relevant (they will never present themselves again)—“earnest historians come to a conclusion that *history does not allow of subjunctive mood*” (Anisov, 2005, p. 81, quoted in Zittoun, Valsiner, Vedeler, Salgado, Gonçalves, & Ferring, 2013, p. 91). Yet from a subjective perspective, people do think back about choices made. Former alternatives futures, as well as subjunctive pasts, might remain real; they become regrets or remorse—which might poison a life. In mythology, things that one should have done or should not have done—past alternatives—come back to people under the features of Erynies and Eumenides—as also shown by Sartre (1946).

Personal Life Philosophies

Semiotic process and imagination also lead to progressive generalization, and slowly turn into very broad and general understandings or feelings about one’s life, and about what it might bring. People thus develop “personal life philosophies” (PLP) (an idea developed by Jaan Valsiner, in Zittoun, Valsiner, et al., 2013, p. 198). These result from progressive internalization, reflection upon experience, learning, and feeling; they take various forms, generating values and generalized feelings—that life is beautiful, that everything is worst and worst. Because of their degree of generality, they are often below consciousness or hard to formulate. However, they can be captured or diffracted through various forms of externalization—in arts, flat arrangements—but also in general statements, often using available semiotic resources, such as proverbs or sayings, or more complex resources such as religion. Because of their degree of generalization, PLPs are likely to guide and canalize further decisions, limiting or expanding one’s generation of alternatives, guiding the narration one would give of one’s past, etc. Personal life philosophies are a synthesis—often not conscious—of past and actually imaginable future; they are thus the “signature” of one’s life, as much as the memory of a wine or a perfume characterizes its uniqueness...

If meaning-making processes are central in one’s life, I thus propose to consider two of its processes as likely to capture the subjectivity of the person—her capacity to take distance upon internal and social determinations, and participate to the making of her own life: *alternative futures* making, as the capacity to raise above the present, to generate and imagine future paths, in coming or required bifurcation; generating a *personal life philosophy*, as the synthesis of one’s experiences, likely to shape one’s life story. On this basis, I propose to examine a

group of comparable life histories—situated in the same sociocultural contexts, going through similar bifurcations and ruptures—and to examine how they are differentiated.

MANZELSKÉ ETUDIE

“Studies of marriage” is a series of six longitudinal documentary movies made by Czech director Helena Třeštková. Each film follows a couple over 25 years. The six couples were married in winter 1980, in the same town hall in the center of Prague, by the same mayor. The director films the couple right before and during the wedding, and then 2 weeks, six months, and one year after the wedding, and then more or less every six months. The participants answer a series of questions about their hopes, fears, the meaning they confer to life, their marriage, etc. Třeštková thus produced a cycle of six 30-minute black and white films, about the six young couples during the six first years of their marriages, between 1980 and 1986, *Manželské etudy (Studies of marriage)*, 1987, in Třeštková, 2009). In 1999, the filmmaker visited the couples again, and resumed shooting on a relatively un-regular basis until 2005, with a more open style of interview. The result is another six color hour-long films continuing the original cycle, *Manželské etudy po dvaceti letech (Studies of marriage 20 years later)*, 2006, in Třeštková, 2009). Eventually the two films were edited, and now it is possible to see, six two-part movies, named after the first names of the participants—*Marcela & Jiří, Ivana & Pavel...*—each documenting 25 years of a life of a family (Třeštková, 2009).

METHODOLOGICAL PRINCIPLE

These movies can be seen as very interesting research data. First, they have been produced over a long time span on a regular basis. They thus constitute original longitudinal data, precious for a developmental science (Gillespie & Zittoun, 2010; Hilčičin, 2009). Second, the data has been collected with a care and consistency: the couples have been chosen in the same cultural-historical environment (note however that the films hide differences in family background); people live in the same 100km, and their life course have been marked by the same major events: married in 1980, they lived most of their childhood, youth and entry into adulthood under the communist regime. In 1989, they all experienced the end of the regime and the access of Czechoslovakia to democracy, and the entrance of what became Czech Republic in the European Union in 2005. Hence, the films very strongly highlight how people made different choices in the same cultural historical environment. Third, in each case, the perspective of each of the partners is documented; in addition, when the couple had children, the children become also participants. The films thus show how life courses are mutually dependent and how the choices of some constrain or enable the decisions of others—one of the classical principles of lifecourse research (Elder, Kirkpatrick Johnson, & Crosnoe, 2004). Altogether, then, the six movies can be seen as data chosen

for theoretical equivalent reasons (Sato, Yasuda, Kido, Arakawa, Mizogushi, & Valsiner, 2007; Valsiner & Sato, 2006).

The six series have been watched several times, in their Czech version subtitled in English, and integrally transcribed in English together with indications of actions and stages and snapshots of the films. The data has then been analyzed qualitatively and iteratively with the help of Atlas-ti. For the present paper, objective times markers, ruptures, major occupations, partner's evaluations of each other, and self-reflective comments (thinking about self, about other on self, about one's achievement compared to expectations) have been examined.

25 YEARS OF SIX COUPLES IN AN EVOLVING COUNTRY

The first observation to be made about these six couples' stories is their progressive differentiation. Starting in the same situation with comparable experience, each of the six couples evolves further apart from each other. In addition, in each couple, the partners start to be more and more differentiated. Hence, a first way of describing processes of subjectification is to show how, as time passes, bifurcation points bring these couple to more and more specific pathways. In order to understand the specificities of the ruptures experiences by people and the possible bifurcations, in the light of social guidance at the time and place of people's lives, I draw here on available sociological literature.

Initial rupture: non-differentiation. All the couple got married in the same town hall in Central Prague at the same period, between winter 1980 and spring 1981. They are all married by the same mayor; the defile after the wedding is more or less formal, and all of them are followed by a dinner at a restaurant, where people eat, drink, and dance—at this level the wedding all look “the same.” The only difference is that the filmmaker reports two incidents: Pavel lost his ring in the toilets and has to fetch it; and Antonín falls asleep during the party...

Another similarity between these wedding is the reasons why they take place. In communist Czechoslovakia, being married facilitated access to housing and enabled to have a wedding loan to start a life as a couple. The young people depicted in the six movies are quite typical of that time: sociological studies describe that in the 80s, a large proportion of people are marrying very young—just after secondary education—55% of children being conceived before wedding due to poor access to contraception (Fialová, 2007; Fialová & Kučera, 1997). Hence, four of the six couples expect a child when they marry and their child was born six months after the pregnancy. They mostly say they marry because they love each other, but most also say that they have to, as for example Mirka: “First because we love each other. And second, because we have to.” Vladimír and Zuzana, who will wait 5½ more years before having a child, express a different motive for getting married, as Vladimír says: “Because we love each other. Also, we can start making our life the way we want it to be. Someone has always organized our life for us all the time. For once we can try it ourselves, see what it's like when we start organizing it.” Zuzana and Vladimír are here an exception—they don't marry

because they "have to," yet marriage is also the only way they found to escape to what they feel as too strong social constraints—so in other words, marriage is also the only way to have a life on one's own.

Differentiating rupture: having a child six months after. Consequently, four of the six couples experience the rupture of becoming parents six months after their wedding. Marcela & Jiří's daughter was born 9 months after the wedding. Only Zuzana and Vladimír differ again, in that their first daughter was born 5 ½ years after the wedding.

Differentiating rupture: moving to a flat of one's own, or not. Even though marriage could facilitate access to housing, there was a massive shortage of flats under communism. People had to register to long waiting list; marriage and the birth could accelerate the attribution of flat, but not always. Young couples who could count on a family flat where thus lucky and keen to use whatever space was available. Thus, only Mirka and Antonín have a flat in which they can move in straight after the wedding. Three other couples have the possibility of moving to a flat given to them by a grandparent, once they have redone it. These construction works usually last longer than planned, as the young couple also has to work and take care of their young child: 2 years for Ivana and Pavel and Zuzana and Vladimír, 1 year for Ivana and Václav. Therefore, most of the couples start their married life living together with one of the partner's parents. It is a problem for most of them—lack of intimacy, strong presence, and intervention of the parents, young women's apprenticeship of "woman tasks"—such as cooking and washing—under strong supervisions by mothers or in-laws. Stanislav and Zuzana even live each at their own parents for the first 3 and half year after the wedding—Zuzana having to take care alone of her child. Jiří and Marcela live at his parents' place, and she moves away shortly after the birth of their daughter—apparently for the deep disagreement she had with her mother in law. Note that Marcela did ask for a flat at the time of the wedding, but she did not obtain one before 3 and half years later, as she was already divorced.

Differentiating rupture: second child. Given the non-planned first birth, an important decision a few of the couple address is that of having, or not, a second child. Four of the couples will have two children—Marcela having a son with a new partner; Vladimír and Zuzana will have 3 children, and a rarity, Václav and Ivana choose to have five children. At that time, the option for not having children after two—which was the dominant pattern—was abortion for the third pregnancy (legal since 1958, Fialová & Kučera, 1997).

Weak differentiation: Occupation. In communist times, people would be provided a job after completion of their compulsory school or further training (Fialová & Kučera, 1997). This also meant that young people often did not really choose their training—which depended on the needs of the economy (Roberts, 2008). Also, for political reasons some people were forbidden to some type of schools. Among the six couples, only one couple is studying in higher education—Václav and Ivana, who both will obtain their MA in architecture. The others

have technical professions (construction workers, electro-mechanic, locksmith, sales clerk, accountant, transport manager, hairdresser) with the exception of Zuzana who just completes secondary school. Some change jobs in the first years of their marriage, to increase their salaries or for health reasons—like Antonín who has to renounce driving trucks after a car accident or because of their lack of interest—as Pavel—but most of the others reorient their professional life after the revolution—with the exception of Mirka, who will always work as hairdresser. Only Vladimír quits his job as construction worker to be a freelance photographer a couple of years after the wedding. This suggests indeed that people were moderately satisfied with the initial training, strongly socially guided.

Differentiating rupture: end of maternity leave and women employment. The Czech government was offering a maternity leave lasting up to 2 years after the birth of the last child, and women could work back in the position in which they were working before (Fialová & Kučera, 1997). However, like a majority of Czech women, many of the filmed women start to work after a year to contribute to the family money income. Ivana, the wife of Václav, is on maternity leave during the first part of the movie, yet during the army period of her husband, she sells small hand made paintings on the market. Her second pregnancy prevents her from starting a real job. Later, in the 2000s, she will work with her husband in the family business (doing the accountant, supporting the husband, attempting to have her own boutique)—all this while managing a 5 children household. Mirka will start working as hairdresser—her initial training—as soon as she is off maternity leave, to her greatest relief, but only for a very short time as she is soon pregnant again. Zuzana, the wife of Stanislav, just finishes high school as she is nine months pregnant; she lives at her parents, and as she has two close pregnancies, she never works in her youth. In 1999, being unqualified, she will work as cleaning assistant in a pharmacy. Marcela will be on and off jobs from 1999, although she never lives from her initial trained job as horse trainer. Zuzana, the wife of Vladimír, a photographer, is supporting the couple in the early 80s, and in 1986 she just has her first child; in 2000, we learn that she works and has had three daughters but do not have more information.

Differentiation: hobbies. In what appears as a form of compensation for the lack of freedom on the vocational front, most of the men in the couples have substantial hobbies, for which they spent a certain numbers of weekly hours. Hobbies open new spheres of experience that partly escape to the constraints of political guidance. These are also spheres in which playfulness and creativity can be let free. They sometimes allow other forms of group belonging and are often spheres in which new friendship or networks are generated. However, because hobbies are generally not shared within a couple, they can also be a source of tension in the interpersonal relationship. In what follows, I shortly present the couple's hobbies and evaluations.

Hence, Pavel from the very beginning is doing theater, where is play and sings, and hockey in the winter and football in the summer. He will keep doing theater

all his life and keeps doing regular sports as well. His wife, Ivana, likes her husband's hobbies and assists to the theater pieces. She does a bit of gym as well.

Václav likes to work with wood—furniture, construction; outside of his work as teaching architecture, he develops a workshop. After the revolution, he becomes the owner of a large furniture store; his wife Ivana supports him. She, on the other side, develops all kind of skills—she knits, paints small frames, does small objects with various materials and fabric; for a short period after the revolution she will open a boutique for such object but will have to close it.

Jiří collects taps of bottles which he exchanges with colleagues, and plays cards with them (it has no significance upon the couple as he and Marcela early divorce). She, on the other hand, likes to take care of horses, and attends country concerts and hikes.

Antonín likes to build up cars; he competes on a rally, and also learns to take care of animals to improve the couple's food income. Mirka, his wife, just sees these hobbies as taking her husband away from the chores and the daughter. She is disappointed by his interest for farm animals and resents him for his passion for cars, and eventually forbids her husband to continue rallying. She mainly mentions her pleasure in dancing. As an older couple, they both take care of a small garden.

Stanislav is extremely absorbed in building electronic artifacts—transistors, small computer, and telescopes—and also in his motorbike. He keeps on such leisure all his life, building his own hi-fi stereo, a low consuming house... His wife, Zuzana, complains as the hobbies prevent him to participate to house chores, discussion and family life—but never seems to ask him to reduce his hobbies. She on the other hand only mentions reading some young people's magazine, and later in her life, watching TV series.

Vladimír develops an interest for photography next to his work, and the couple decides that the wife, Zuzana, will bring the main income while he can develop his skills—first trying to enter the FAMU, a prestigious art school, then working as a freelance photographer.

Differentiation: the Revolution. All the couples experience the end of Communism, or revolution, in 1989. For all the men, 1989 has been the occasion to try opening their own companies, with more or less success. Pavel started with a squash center but then managed a billiard; Antonín tried to have his own garage, which did not survive the concurrence, and eventually worked as manager for a large car piece company; Stanislav started his advertisement company but then came back to work as translator for a company; Václav started his own furniture shop. Vladimír opened a successful studio in New York but his few attempts back in Prague seem to fail. We do not know about Jiří. All of them have strong opinions about the political change.

Differentiation: Divorce. Half of the couple divorces, which is quite typical of current numbers all around Europe. According to Fialová & Kučera (1997, p. 97), young couple married because of an early pregnancy were quite unstable—they

estimate that only one fifth of the couples lasted 10 years. Among the participants, Marcella and Jiří divorce one year after the wedding, shortly after the birth of their daughter; Vladimír and Zuzana after 23 years of marriage (she asks for divorce after the long experience of having her husband abroad); Stanislav and Zuzana after 13 years of marriage (he meets another woman). The three other ones have had their crises—but were still lasting in 2005.

LIFE BIFURCATIONS: PROGRESSIVE DIFFERENTIATION AND SUBJECTIFICATION

What can be said from this quick overview? If these couples were married in comparable situations and constraint by the same political and economic forces, each couple progressively defines its own, more and more specific, trajectory. In the beginning, the main differences are whether a child is born in the first six months, and whether they couple can move to a place of its own. If these issues preoccupy the couples quite a bit, the consequences of these changes are quite minor in the long run. Hence, among the participants, it is impossible to say, for instance, that unplanned pregnancy is more likely to bring to divorce than a planned one. Also, not having a flat of their own might have catalyzed the disagreement between Marcela and her husband, yet living a few years at one's parents does not always lead to divorce. Thus, differentiation does not appear, in the long run, as due to simple causalities.

On the other hand, differences in adulthood are much more attached to what made already these young people quite different from each other—which, in these movies, appear in their hobbies and passions. In effect, interestingly, the skills developed as hobbies in men's youth under communism will become central in their later professional life. Václav, who likes working with wood, opens a furniture shop; Antonín, who likes playing with car pieces, will open a garage and later becomes specialized in selling wheel rims; Stanislav fabricates as satellite which enables him to capture foreign channels, and so learns German—which eventually will bring him to be translator; Vladimír who likes photography turns it into his job. Pavel discovers billiard in 1995, falls in love with the sport, and eventually turns it into his main occupation. All these men will, at one point or another, say that they are lucky enough to do their "dream work." This could thus be one of the cues signaling that they eventually came to define the occupation that correspond to their personal imagination of what might be good for them. In that sense, part of their work of becoming "subjects" was to achieve, within an extremely constraining social environment—communism and then a very competitive free market—their chosen, satisfying work. Note, however, that none of the women turn their hobbies into their main occupations...

From the perspective chosen here, one differentiating aspect would have to do with meaning making, the generation of alternatives and personal life philosophies. These need a closer analysis, and in order to do so, I chose here to focus

on one trajectory, that of Pavel and Ivana—partly because, although they live a happy marriage for 25 years, they seem to have had contrasting life trajectories.

SHAPING MARRIAGE AND FAMILY: PAVEL AND IVANA

The major transitions in Pavel and Ivana's life are the following: Ivana, trained as sales clerk, and Pavel, trained as a locksmith, marry in January 1980, and have their first child after 6 months, Dominik. They have inherited Ivana's grandmother's flat, but they live at her parents more than two years. Pavel delivers sodas, and in his free time, plays theater in an amateur group, and football and hockey, depending of the season. Ivana starts to work again one year after the birth of their child for money reasons (as they are still fixing their flat). Two years after the wedding she also starts going to the gym again. In 1999, the couple still lives in the same flat, with their two children, a young girl, Rosie, being born in the meantime. After various professional experiences, Pavel is managing a billiard center; over the next few years, he expands his center, organizes tournaments, publishes a journal, and teaches billiard to children. He then develops an archery center, a transportable casino, and a life jukebox. He still plays theater and football, then squash and golf. Ivana takes care of the household and the children, especially Rosie, who is intensively training salon dance and figure skating. Dominik sells mobile phones. Pavel and his two children are billiard champions.

Main themes. On a more subjective side, Pavel and Ivana have changing *dominant themes* over the years. From 1981 to 1983, the dominant issue is the flat to be fixed. The couple then learns to take care of their child, Ivana starts to work as an office cleaning lady to bring money for the renovation, and the couple is partly organized around the partner's leisure. The *dominant themes* from 1999 are quite different. This is how Pavel summarizes his last 19 years:

I don't deliver sodas anymore which was my job back then. I've done quite a bit since then. For 2 years, I delivered coal around Prague. I walked about with a carrier. One of my nicest jobs. Then I went crazy and two years later I began carpet cleaning. I started a cleaning company at the end of the communist regime. Then I bought Ivanka a deep fryer and really liked the French fries it made so I decided to sell them to the public in the square on Otakarova Street. I put up a double axle trailer and sold fries from there. (...) At the time I came across a place on Stvanice, at the winter stadium and decided to put in a squash court but finally made it a billiards hall, a place people waiting for a bowling lane could play some pool. It ended up the other way around and today it's billiards I make my living at. (Pavel, 1999, 19 years after the wedding)

As his discourse marked by activities and decision-making, the dominant themes seem to have been his developing occupations, professionally and privately. Ivana, on the other hand, comments more simply: "I am basically at home, cooking, washing, and cleaning for everyone. And taking care of our daughter. I don't know what else to say." In her description of the past 15 years, Ivana

described a long and quite repetitive flow of actions. In addition, both parents are very proud of their children's achievement, and the theme is frequent in their discourse.

Evolution of the relationship. When they marry, Pavel and Ivana have already had a stable relationship for 4 and half years. In the early 2000s, Pavel comments retrospectively: "I was lucky in that I met her early. Ivana and I started dating when I was 17. It was like, wherever Pavel went so did Ivana and vice versa." From the beginning, the couple seems to like each other quite much and to find a way to function. They are very happy at the time of the wedding, and at the birth. They declare minimally argue (in contrast with other couples). Evaluations of the marriage are stable: a year and quarter after the wedding, Ivana answers to the interviewee about Pavel: "As a husband? He's excellent. We understand each other well. He takes care of the family. He loves Dominik, me. He's good. He helps at home, if he's not at rehearsal or something. I really think it's a very good relationship we have." Similar comments are made 3 ½ years after the wedding and 6 years after, when each of them explains about their trust in the other and the satisfying evolution of their intimate relationships (when many other couples describe a loss of interest). Asked about happiness in 1982, Pavel says: "Happiness? Well, peace at home and the basic family needs met. I think that's the best. I can't ask for more because a lot of our well being is due to this flat. Then is a matter of how we get along and we get along great so..."

In 1999, the couple's arrangement becomes clear in a little scene during which Pavel uses his mobiles phones to coordinate the moves of his daughter and his wife, urging the former to hurry up, and the latter not to be worried. He then comments: "That's why I want, while possible, to keep Ivanka at home, so I have peace of mind about what's going on with Rosie. (...) Peace of mind is the most important thing to be able to work, knowing there's nothing wrong at home. That fulfills it perfectly." Hence, it seems that the couple functions as Ivana offers stability and safety by staying home and taking care of the children, which enables Pavel to engage in his risky activities.... Thus, the difference in the roles of the couples have polarized: although for a while the relationship seemed more equal, Ivana is fully dedicated to the children and the home, which gives Pavel the "peace of mind" he needs to be fully committed to his adventurous life. Let us see this closer.

Generating alternative futures: playing in spheres of experience. As a young man, Pavel's hobbies demanded invention and playfulness— theater and team sports. He also wrote poetic and inventive love letters; in the early 20s, he suddenly appears with newly curled hair, a consequence of an unhappy bet. In 1984, he and Ivana express their current frustrations and hopes. Pavel presents aspects of happiness that have to do with his other spheres of activities—job and hobbies:

Maybe I'm a too demanding, but I want to be happy. And I don't know... It's hard work at the soda bottling plant and I would't want to stay there. Maybe I'll get in-

spired, finish school and find some other work. I don't know. It's up to the starts right now. My hobby is time consuming but I wouldn't want to leave the theatre.

At this time of relative dissatisfaction, he clearly creates space for alternative futures: he would not want to stay there, he is waiting for inspiration, might study or find another job. Ambivalence is present, future options are opened; the goal is obtaining "happiness." In contrast, Ivana expresses her wishes differently:

Sometimes I'm frustrated that there's no time for me to enjoy my hobbies. I've only just now started exercising because it's in the evening, at seven, which is good for me. Otherwise? I just have less time. Pavel has theatre, which takes up a lot of his time. As a result I don't have as much time to do the things I want to do.

At that time Ivana is working and taking care of the household; although she supports her husband's hobbies, she feels she remains with little time. She observes the states of things and describes it; although things change—she has started to exercise—in contrast with Pavel, her discourse leaves no place for ambivalence and she does not seem to consider alternatives or ways of changing her daily life.

In 1999, 18 years after the wedding, Pavel's playfulness seems intact. He presents the camera crew with their flat rearranged and the family's pets, death and alive, with the greatest seriousness—which is hilarious. His playfulness appears through different modes. In the sphere of professional experience, things have evolved a lot, as seen above: quitting soda delivery, as announced in the late 80s, for the coal delivery; stopping them because he "went mad"; trying to open his own company; deciding to sell French fries because he liked the one made by the machine her bought his wife; deciding to develop a sport center. Somehow, his professional choices seem always to be driven by his interest, curiosity, or fun. The same year, Pavel is filmed going to work, riding an improbable yellow Harley Davidson decorated with a small pool board on the reservoir, wearing a lather jacket with long fringes. He comments his professional situation:

I'm now doing billiards and I'm doing what I like. I figured you can play right into retirement, and enjoy it. I've created tournaments which now lots of people like to play. I woke up one day and said: I could make a competition. So I tried it. I put a lot of time into it. Promoting it to different people. And it worked out. This new era has made it possible that I, and industrial locksmith, could decide one beautiful morning to publish a magazine about billiards. (...) my biggest satisfaction is when I go to a tournament somewhere and I hear people quoting from my articles while playing.

Pavel comments' suggest that he is aware of both the constraint and opportunities offered by the world and of his own power to act upon it; hence, he perceived the revolution as a field of possibility. He could radically reorient his life trajectory, discover what he liked, create the possibility to do it, and bring it to others—thus engaging his creativity (Glăveanu, 2010, 2011). It is the same com-

binations of perception of externally-offered opportunities and personal action that is expressed one year later, when Pavel manages a new pool center: "It's the most interesting thing which I could've encountered. This one company gave me the opportunity to manage this beautiful games hall, which is the most beautiful in Czech Republic."

In parallel, Pavel is still member of his amateur theatre group, and he comments on this aging troupe: "When you look at it, even though you can't tell, some of us [the actors] are over fifty. You know how many people that age sit in their slippers in front of the TV? If they were to jump around, roll on the ground, get up, sit down, it would be a problem. I really appreciate the fifty year olds here. They get up, sit down. Joint creak, their backs are sore, but they do it." Pavel admires his older actor colleagues; and on his side, keeps interested in the new surprises of life. Also, unlike many of the other participants (such as Antonín and Mirka, Václav and Ivana), he never complains about the speed of time or the impression of not having the time he wishes to achieve his goals.

Thus, twenty years after the wedding, Pavel comments about his life:

You think about your life and what you've already done. I've lots of jobs, done a lot. And I think that I have nothing to be ashamed of, even what I'm doing today. I could basically finish with billiards, finish with the magazine, which is a hobby. It doesn't support me. On the contrary, I pay for it, but I enjoy it. I enjoy the written world. I've even thought about a book. I thought I'd try writing a book because I've got lots experiences.

In his idea that he "could finish with billiard" and that "he has nothing to be ashamed of," Pavel seems able to imagine the perspective he might have in the future on his past life and thus evaluate his judgment (for similar strategy, see Zittoun, 2008). These points suggest that, as Pavel reflects upon time pasts and futures, he does not experience alternatives as better, or more likely, than the ones in which he is engaged or could still be, there is no "subjunctive pasts" (see above).

This contentment, and impression of having had many experiences, also brings Pavel to teach billiard in his school:

I do it for kids up to 18, so they don't have time for drugs and can enjoy a sport. One thing about billiard: whether you want or not, it forces you to be nice to others. You could say that billiards helps in upbringing. I won't teach them to smoke, to do drugs, to drink. It's not that I'm a puritan or anything. It's just that I don't need those things to live, thank God, and that's what I can pass on the kids.

In this description, billiard goes with a whole set of implicit norms: to play billiard one "needs to be nice with another," and it demands a life style and commitments that exclude drugs. Thus, behind these choices there are more general values. Finally, the project of teaching billiard might correspond to what Erikson (1959) called generativity, the need to transmit one's skills and experience to the next generation.

In the same vein, Pavel seems more generally to keep the future open. In 2002, Pavel takes his family to vote about the possible entrance of the Czech Republic in the UE. His analysis is quite critical: "I'm only worried about those above us, our leaders who are capable of making a joke out of this whole thing. I don't really trust them. That's the only thing I don't like about it, that I have no faith in our politicians. I'm trying to be a businessman and everyone who does has to take care of his money because it's his. But in '90, '91 they supposed to take care of all our finances and they took care of it in a way that they let the money be stolen. That's the source of skepticism." However, beyond his negative view on politicians, Pavel decided to vote "yes"—for his children's future. Thus, reflecting about the social situation, Pavel seems both distanced enough to be critical, yet keeping the future ambivalent and open to surprises for the next generation.

Personal Life Philosophies

In the last segment of the films, in 2004, the filmmaker brings the couple to be more reflective. Pavel first comments about the entry of the Czech Republic in the UE: "*For me nothing has changed. If I want something I have to work for it. Nobody ever gave me anything for free and it always takes a lot of time, effort, thinking and work. I'm used to it, so the opening up of the country only really helped me in that I can now travel out of the country, go to Germany. I don't even need a passport nowadays. But I still need to have something to travel with so I can pay for things there. Nobody's going to give that to me. In that way the revolution did me no good*" (my emphasis). The exchange continues, and so a few turn later:

- Reporter:** Do you enjoy it (the business)?
- Pavel:** *I enjoy it. I enjoy it because of one very important thing. I do it alone, so I alone make the decisions and if I want to do it really well then nobody can interfere with that. If I organize two or three events and I do them poorly then I'm done. I enjoy doing it well, then waiting for the customer to pay me. That's also very nice. (...) I don't owe anybody anything. On the contrary people owe me. And when they owe me, they disappeared from my life. That's very interesting. If I want to get rid of someone I lend them money and they're gone.*
- Reporter:** This theme of lost and found recurs the whole time we've been filming.
- Pavel:** You mean losses as in life? That would mainly be both my parents. That's been the biggest loss I've ever encountered, that our family has encountered. *And I've realized because of that that I am no longer a child anymore. Now I'm truly an adult because I don't have any parents.*

Here Pavel's explicit life philosophy seems to be grounded in a few principles, which he himself reports to the loss of his parents: the fact that one has to take care of one's own life and that nobody is going to give us anything. A consequence is that he can be very happy of not owing anything to others, and also, proud of his own achievements. In other words, Pavel seems to have developed a strong sense of having to be himself the "subject," the author of his life, not given by others, and not to be dependent on others.

Note that this explicit life philosophy seems coupled with other elements identified so far: Pavel's identification of satisfying hobbies or activities, his long-term commitment into them, and at the same time, his capacity to distance himself from them, analyze critically situations—personal, social and economical, but also needs in the market—envisage alternatives, and possibly, to try out new options, while keeping the future open.

Hence, Pavel seem to maintain a playful life, at two different levels. First, in his relatively stable hobbies, theater and sports, there is the playfulness of the activity: fiction and acting in theater, games in sports. Here, playfulness is strongly bounded socially and culturally, by the rules of the play or game, the fact of playing, the group with whom it is shared, the public, etc. Yet at a superordinate level, playfulness appears as general piloting principle for his life—as a tolerance for ambivalence, the exploration of alternatives, and an actual strong commitment and responsibility in the chosen one. At this level, playfulness has to be invented: rules are not given as such. This is where various aspects of one's personal life philosophy come into play.

What about Ivana? As we have seen, she seems slightly shadowed by her buoyant husband. There are thus less occurrences revealing her position in life—but here a few. Questioned about the entry in the UE in 2002, Ivana answers: "The EU... I'm not much for it even though it's true I don't know too much about it. (...) These things go over my head, whatever has to do with politics and the state." The interviewer then asks her about her interests, and she replies: "What engages me? My family does. And I pay a lot of attention to our girl. I'm involved a lot in her sport. We've got a new partner, who you saw, and he's a super boy" (she then develops at length on the new partner). Hence, her main interest seems to be oriented toward the wellbeing of her family and success of her daughter. Later on, end of 2004, the interviewer bring her to speak about the future:

- Ivana:** I think, in my advanced years, I'm going to get a German Shepherd and exercise with him because I love animals. [laughs]. That will be my hobby. I don't have time for that now, for a dog. There really isn't time for that now, for a dog, Bobina, she died, you know. So we wanted to get another one, but that's just impossible because essentially we're home so little... so we have two cats. And the tom is great for going on a leash, like outside. He's awesome. So in the future I'll probably get a dog,

a big one. Otherwise I don't know what to say. *Something will occur to me later.*

Reporter: So what's life like?

Ivana: How's life? I think it's good. You have to be able to savour it, to rip as much as you can from it.

Ivana obviously seems to have a less voluntarist life philosophy than her husband. She does envisage alternatives, but modest ones, in the realm of domestic animals and pets, and exercising—she has also often expressed the wish to loose weight. And she remains with the idea that “something will occur to her.” However, such view on her future does not seem to prevent happiness and enjoying life. Her last statement, which might be based on a culturally shared metaphor as semiotic resource, seems thus the expression of her own capacity of enjoying her daily life.

DISCUSSION: TWO SUBJECTIVITIES

Pavel and Ivana's case enable thus to observe the lifelong process of subjectification in two ways: as progressive differentiation from other persons, and as progressive distance taken upon the events.

First, we observed Pavel and Ivana's progressive differentiation from other young married couples. They were one of many couples who got married young, in the 80s, while being pregnant, and having to wait a few years before having a flat. During the first few years of their married lives, what distinguishes this couple over others is, on the one side, the quality of the couple's relationship, where trust and mutual understanding seem to grow, and where each one seems aware of the other's needs, and on the other side, the balance between work, family and leisure that seem to be found (Stroufe, Egeland, Carlson, & Collins, 2005). At the revolution, although many of the couples—the men in particular—attempted to open their own business, Pavel is one of the two, together with Václav, who was successful in the Czech context, and apparently the only one who did it without owing money.

Interpersonal differentiation also operates within the couple. If, at the beginning of their relationship, “wherever Pavel went so did Ivana and vice versa” (Pavel), we progressively saw gender roles being established within the marriage. After the revolution, these differences are more important, Ivana keeping the household and accompanying their children in their spheres of experiences, Pavel taking playful risks in the professional and social sphere of experience—thanks to the peace given by the stable home. Of course, these differences also are visible in what regards personal life philosophies.

In effect, the second aspect of subjectification examined here has to do with people's distancing from the situations, through the generation of alternative futures and personal life philosophies. Here, we saw how, before the revolution,

Pavel described and analyzed his situation while considering alternatives. After the revolution Pavel has quite systematically these reflective stances; he is constantly analyzing the reality of the society and the economic situations, and actively creates alternatives activities, takes risk, learns from them; he develops new skills and understandings, and seems enjoying the newness of it. On the other hand, the analysis Pavel makes brings him to a quite critical understanding of the social situation. His personal life philosophies seem to have various components. A first component is a strong sense of playfulness, translated in contentment with what life offers to him as it passes, which eventually lead him to transmit his own experience to others and younger generations, or possibly leads him not to fear aging or regret time or past experiences. Another component, however, is that he has to work himself for what ever he wants to achieve—which has consequences in his choices not to owe anything to anyone, not to borrow money, not to keep contact with untrustworthy people, and to be his own boss.

As a young woman, Ivana also seem to be describing and analyzing the situation, yet without really seeming to generate alternatives. After the revolution, Ivana follows the career of her husband, and her children; she probably has to learn and understand the world of competition in which they move, and in that domain, she explores possibilities for them (e.g. finding new dancing partners for her daughter). In contrast with her husband, though, she seems to have little or no views on the economical or political situations, and has more modest alternative plans for herself—such as having a dog with which she will be able to exercise. Her personal life philosophy also appears as having two components. One is a form of passivity—“something will occur.” Yet this might also be due to her very position of observer of her husband's affairs; if he takes the risks and evaluates the alternative, she probably assists to how situations sort out, tensions resolve, and time tells... The second component of her life philosophy is expressed as a need to capture the best of life and savor it. Hence, if Pavel's active sense of responsibility differs from Ivana's passivity, eventually his playfulness might rejoin her enjoyment...

CONCLUDING WORDS AND OPENINGS

It might be beyond the reach of social scientist or psychologists to figure out what is the essence of a person's life in a changing life context. However, recent development in sociocultural psychology, drawing on classical, and at time forgotten authors (Diriwächter & Valsiner, 2008), call for paying more attention to what has long seemed irrational, or non-measurable in people's lives. Hence, it invites to examine how people confer meaning to their experience, and especially, how they imagine and actively construct their lives—beyond genetic, personality or early-childhood determinations.

Here, I have proposed to focus on two temporary constructs—the generation of alternative futures, and personal life philosophies—to examine how subjectivity is being shaped. The present analysis, with its modest focus, is thus an attempt to

highlight one aspect of the evolving work of sense making in the lifecourse. Of course, the limitation of the data—the partial choice made by the filmmaker—does not really allow clearly retracing the evolution of the person's personal life philosophies over time, and of her style of generating alternatives. However, I have tried to suggest the complex configurations in which life choices in specific bifurcations, personal philosophies, quality of social relationship, actual actions, can support and complete each other, thus enabling one to make one's life in a demanding world.

This attempt can thus be seen as part of a series of studies examining the meaning making in people's life trajectories through various materials. Every time, it is one specific aspect that is taken as tracer of such processes and their evolution over time: a person's changing uses of symbolic resources (Zittoun, 2006, 2007, 2009), the transformation of inner dialogicality (Gillespie, Cornish, Aveling, & Zittoun, 2008) or semiotic sets (Zittoun, Aveling, Gillespie, & Cornish, 2011).

On the other hand, understanding lifelong development also demands very specific data, often difficult to obtain. Here, I proposed to analyze longitudinally produced films. Such data is both constrained—as any set of data—and extremely rich, and hopefully more case studies will be made on the same, and on other comparable material (See, for instance, de Saint-Laurent & Zittoun, in press; Zittoun, 2016; Zittoun & de Saint-Laurent, 2015).

More generally, such an analysis—with all its limitations—is an invitation for the theoretically informed approaches to rich longitudinal data, in order to plunge into the complexity of human subjectivity, so as to develop richer psychological understandings.

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