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Using Diaries and Self-writings as Data in Psychological Research

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Good science is based on good data. Psychologists as empirical scientists believe that producing and collecting data is an important phase of their work. However, producing and collecting data can take various forms, requiring more or less control over the phenomenon at stake. Experimentation has long been considered the most scientific method available to researchers because it entails the systematic manipulation of variables and assessment of the consequences. This strategy soon became a condition for science, and hence, "the complete scholar is the one that masters both the theory and the practice of the experimental method" (Bernard 1865/1963, 51, our translation). Observation also requires the active involvement of researchers as they create situations, develop techniques for gathering observations, and turn these observations into data. From this perspective, experimentation and observation belong to a continuum, from the most fully controlled experimental situation, to more naturalistic and less controlled contexts for observation (Deconchy 2008); yet, in any case the data is produced by the expertise of the researcher. If the quality of researchers is measured by their ability to create complex situations that will trigger specific behavior, which then will be treated as data, then a researcher that skips this stage in his work seems a very poor one.

However, researchers can start from a very different standpoint through considering material that has been produced independently of the action of researchers, such as newspapers, advertisements, official documents, etc. (Bauer and Gaskell 2000). As psychologists, it is documents informing about the self which interest us, such as diaries,

autobiographies, or letters. Diaries seem to constitute a crystal simple material: people write regularly about their thoughts and actions, without the awareness of an audience. However, scholars' reflection over the past years has shown the hidden complexity of diaries as data, to such an extent that one could write that

> scholars (…) can be judged based on their ability to deal with diaries, which calls for attention to the form (or genre), context, and individual subject simultaneously. (Paperno 2004, 573)

This tension between differing claims for complexity in the mastery of research techniques reminds us that research is as much about identity and position as it is about the emergence of new knowledge (Valsiner 2007b; Zittoun et al. 2007). Yet, in science, the ultimate criteria for evaluating the contribution of a technique or a method, is whether or not it enables the gathering of facts that support a research question. No method is good in itself: it is good only in that it has some purpose (Rorty 1981). In that respect, diaries (and to some extent, other forms of self-writing) might offer an important source of data for the scholar interested in human development.

In this chapter we reflect on the use of self-writings and diaries as data in psychology. We first explain why we believe that self-writings offer very useful data for sociocultural research. Of course, we are not the first to think so; but studies grounded on such methods have been strangely overlooked in the mainstream. Therefore, drawing on current insights in sociocultural psychology, we examine the process by which a person's experience is turned into a text. On this basis, we then propose some analytical strategies which enable the use of such texts as data informing us about psychological processes of sense making.

Why Work with Diaries or Self-writings?

If the quality of a research method can be evaluated only in regard to a certain research question, within a theoretical framework, we have to start by defining our standpoint. We are sociocultural psychologists, interested in people acting, interacting, and developing within sociocultural environments. Our work has a clear dialogical orientation, that is, we assume that thinking is developed through interaction with the social, material, and symbolic environment, and all this takes place in contexts structured by larger streams of social meaning (Marková 2003; Valsiner 2007b). Within this general framework, joining a large chorus of researchers, we realized the difficulty of capturing psychological

change—that is, a modification in people's understanding or acting in their changing environment. We came to identify four theoretical difficulties that have empirical implications and we found that we could solve them by engaging in research based on certain types of self-writings and diaries.

Firstly, if we assume after Bergson (2003) and James (1890), that human experience is inherently temporal, we also have to assume that change occurs all the time. How then to study "development"? If everything changes—the object of our research and also ourselves as researchers, how can we identify change? Is there more change in some moments than others? Classical authors answered this question by developing interests in extraordinary changes; irritation, accidents, situations that lead people to an adaptation or readjustment (Dewey 1910; Piaget 1974). This idea has been developed by systems theory as the idea of a "catastrophe": either through the accumulation of small factors or drastic events there is a discontinuity in the continuous flow of change calling for a radical reorganization. In our work, it has thus appeared extremely fruitful to examine events perceived as ruptures in people's lives. Such ruptures call for processes of adjustment, which can be called *transitions* (Baltes, Lindenberger, and Staudinger 1998; Zittoun et al. 2003).

Hence, if change is continuous, we propose the methodological strategy of studying ruptures and transitions, which offer natural windows on discontinuities in the continuous flow of change (Zittoun 2008a). This leads us naturally to look at narratives. Indeed, in our culture, narratives are classically triggered by, and organized around "incidents": a "fabula": a story is in that case the attempt to restore an order that has been disturbed by a "trouble" (Bruner 1990, 2003; Burke 1945; Propp 1968). Diaries, letters, and autobiographies do not escape this principle: the hidden assumption is mostly that "something" should happen for it to be written. Hence, it is not rare to see diarist writing that "nothing has happened"—revealing the expectation that diaries should record "happenings." In this sense, diaries and autobiographical writings are spaces in which people narrate as they reflect upon events, and very often render particularly explicit ruptures and transitions.

A second point, following from the assumption that time irreversibly passes, is that consciousness itself is constantly changing. How can we capture something that constantly changes? One of the possible answers is to gather information which is constantly evolving. This might lead to the observation of longitudinal, real-time events.

In our case, as we are interested in people's continuous interpretation of their environment, self-writing offers an interesting entry here. Diaries, or correspondences, are written on a regular basis, and can thus follow the rhythm of events. Writing regularly about self, a person reports these events, describes them, and at times, reflects on them, or expresses feelings or related thoughts. The act of writing a diary or an autobiographic text might bring the person to new ideas and understandings concerning recent or past life events in the light of the present (Wiener and Rosenwald 1993). In this sense, the written self-reflective text of a diary or an autobiographical text can be seen as a form of externalization of the flow of consciousness. Hence, the study of self-writings opens a window onto the changeability of life in two senses: on the one hand, like diaries or regular correspondence, they can be close to daily events; on the other hand, they reveal the microprocesses of meaning-making engaged by the process of writing.

Thirdly, our theoretical framework renders visible the fact that human conduct is always dialogical—a reply to others, or an anticipation of their statements. The "others" significant for a person can be immediate, like peers and families, or part of a wider community. A society as a whole offers another level of "otherness" with whom each person has to deal. Communities and society often appears to the person as a collective "other," although it might be organized around specific public figures; it comes to the person mainly through mediated means, that is, the radio, the press, internet, posters, etc. The otherness of society is mainly in dialogue with the person through semiotic means, although people are often not aware of this communication (e.g., people do not know why they find jeans cool, they just do). The empirical challenge following from such a statement is to identify data that captures the perspective of the person, but also her dialogue with immediate others, her interactions with a community, and her relationship with a broader society. In our case, we therefore found it important to identify the self-writings of not one, but two or more persons, living in the same environment and actually interacting on a daily basis. We also found it important to choose the self-writings of persons living in an immediate and more distant social environment that could be documented through different sources (historical documents, newspapers, diverse types or archives, etc.). This dialogicality of human experience also has implications at the level of understanding of the text itself, as we will see later.

The fourth issue we want to address is located at a metatheoretical level. We are aware of the apparent fragmentation of the field of social sciences and psychology in particular: researchers develop local theories; they work on specific datasets, but often they do not communicate with each other on the same issues or data. Local observations become incommensurable and knowledge can hardly become cumulative and integrated (Yurevich 2009). It seems to us that collaborative work in social sciences offer a good remedy against fragmentation, and can turn it into an occasion for development (Zittoun, Gillespie, and Cornish 2009). Collaborating on the analysis of the same data is one way in which research perspectives can be coordinated and thus mutually enriching. Collaborating on a shared dataset can be understood at two levels: at the first level a group of researchers with different theoretical orientations explicitly work together in a joint project on the same dataset. At the second level, the dataset on which researchers have worked can be accessible to any other researchers by being made publicly available. Diaries, autobiographical accounts, letters are often public data: they are published or they belong to a data archive or historical foundation. Using such publicly available data, can thus work against fragmentation in a double sense: by working as a group of researchers on the same dataset with different theoretical tools, and by enabling other researchers, through access to the data that we analyzed, to deepen, extend, critique or complete our analyses. If other researchers can access the primary data on which our analyses are based, we enhance transparency and possibly the quality of research (Gillespie 2005).

Historical Background

Psychological research has used people's writings as data for a long time (e.g., Allport 1965). The history of using such material is partly linked to the history of studying biographies or lifelong development. However, authors in that field are not always explicit on the sources of their information, often a mixture of interviews, self-narrative, and writing. One very explicit psychological research based on self-writing is Sigmund Freud's little considered book on President Wilson. In the book *Thomas Woodrow Wilson, A psychological study* (1967), Sigmund Freud collaborates with William C. Bullitt, an historian, to make a psychological analysis of the biography of President Wilson. In his introduction to the book, Bullitt notes that Freud was unsatisfied with his previous biographical attempts, on Da Vinci and Michelangelo,

which were based on limited material. In contrast, the analysis of Wilson is based on the speeches and writings of Wilson, writings about Wilson, and the diaries of people living in daily proximity to the president (his secretary and best friends). Additionally, Bullitt and Freud gathered interviews, diaries, notes, and letters of various people who knew Wilson. The analysis has been described as a great collaboration between the two men, first through discussion, then each author writing some parts, the other editing and changing them, until both would accept the document. In its final form, the study is preceded by two editorials, one by Bullitt, the other by Freud, and by two chapters, a presentation of the biography of Wilson's childhood and youth by Bullitt, and a "psychological portrait" by Freud. Although the two men do not propose a deep discussion of their method, we can observe the complex construction of the case study, the research of a diversity of sources and perspectives, and the collaborative analysis and knowledge construction process. Unfortunately, this writing by Freud and Bullitt has been overlooked in recent discussions (with the exception of Solms [2006]).

A later systematic use of self-writing material was made in the field of "psychohistory" or psychobiography. These approaches are rooted in personality psychology, and attempt to do psychological analysis of specific individuals on the basis of biographical information. These are also often based on analyses that consider the personality of a person as a relatively stable structure shaped by, but mainly conditioning, her life trajectory. In these cases, analyzing biographic material is used as a means to "analyse the person" in history, not about the development of the person. In some cases, of course, the ambition of authors is to elaborate more general theories about specific psychological processes (Gardner 1997; Magai and Haviland-Jones 2002) or about lifespan development (Erikson 1993a, 1993b). Often there is however no serious reflection on the nature of the data used to elaborate such analysis.

Only recently in the social sciences, diaries have become objects of reflection in qualitative research and education. It is both their qualities of being dynamic, and of offering narratives modes of externalization, which make diaries powerful research and teaching resources. In his research on the socialization to university, Coulon (2005) asked students to keep a diary, both as means to inform him about the transition they experienced, and for them to have a resource for facilitating the changes they were facing. Crème (2008) sees students' journals as offering a sort of transitional space to "play" with new knowledge and

to slowly inscribe it into a narrative which then can be integrated into self-identity. On the other hand, Janesick (1999) reflects on the use of the journal as a tool in qualitative research: for her, the researcher has much to gain from keeping a diary of his or her own research process, hence enriching the process itself, mainly by allowing self-reflection: "The written text of the journal evolves, is reshaped, and for the purposes of the researcher, becomes a way to clarify, reinterpret, and define much of our work" (Janesick 1999, 521). For her, such diaries can then become public, and thus a way to communicate about research as "a way to illuminate what the researcher is studying in a highly disciplined and deeply personal way" (Janesick 1999, 522).

If the researcher's community seems to acknowledge the development potential of diaries and self-writing, there is still little reflection on the possibility of treating diaries and letters as data to learn about the narrator's change and development. It is such reflection that we develop in the present chapter. In order to do so, we draw on recent ideas in the theory of narratives, discourse, and semiotic mediation. The aim is to give some theoretical grounding to the use of self-writings in social sciences and psychology.

Theoretical Grounding: Externalizing the Stream of Consciousness

Working with diaries or self-writings implies treating written text as data. The written text is supposed to give an entry to people's thoughts and mental world. But to what extent? Can we believe that what we read is what the person once actually thought? How much is self-writing not always a form of self-fiction? There has been a lot of critical attention on these points in various disciplines of the social and human sciences (see, for instance, Auger 2006; Lejeune 1980). Here, we explore aspects of the problematic that have arisen in our research using diaries and self-writings.

The Written Text as Externalization of the Stream of Consciousness

Drawing on James or Bergson, we consider consciousness as a flow; humans are constantly engaged in the stream of existence, and whether they want it or not, "it thinks" as one might say "it rains" (James 1890). For James, the flow of thinking is not the flat succession of the wagons of a train; it resembles more the complex stream of a river, with waves covering other waves, undercurrent streams, drastic accelerations, and apparent countercurrents. It is continuous and ever changing, and it

would be an illusion to believe that two waves are the same, or that a whirlpool in some place is the same in time.

It is difficult for a person to be aware of all the movements of such a stream taking place within her; and it is of course inaccessible to external observers. A person pays attention to only some aspects of the stream. And a person can only render communicable some aspects of this stream to others. We call *externalization* the process whereby the internal flow of thinking is translated into a semiotic and communicable form (Valsiner 2007a; Vygotsky 1934), recognizing that externalizations can become part of the stream of thinking itself.

To clarify the relationship between the stream of thought and the stream of externalization, we can imagine three typical cases. First, the stream of thinking and externalization might be separated experiences. The person has a feeling or a thought; then another person (e.g., a researcher) asks about it, and the person has to report on it. This demands a sort of translation of the "inner" semiotic experience, into an external, discursive semiotic stream that is communicable. Second, the person might have a feeling and simultaneously, as part of it, externalize about it; for instance, when someone hurts her foot against a table and swears aloud, or is overtaken by a careless driver and shouts at him. Here the discourse is not a translation of a preexisting experience; rather, it is coextensive with the thought. It can be seen as an organic, expressive component of the thought, with no concern for its communicative or social function. Thirdly, as in the previous case, the person might have a thought or experience and externalize it. Yet doing so, she might hear herself shouting or swearing, and then blush, and apologize for having been abusive. In such case, the externalization is part of the thought process, and part of the self-reflective process that leads to the apology. Here, we have a recursive phenomenon: the externalization becomes a source of new information for the person. In other words, the externalization becomes a "secondary stimuli: it is a response to another action which becomes the start of a process of thinking, or a means to control mind from outside the mind" (Vygotsky 1934).

As a form of externalization, self-writing can take these three forms, and move through these. At times, the person reports and describes events or thoughts that took place earlier. At other times, she can spontaneously express feelings as she experiences them. And sometimes, the person engages in a reflective dialogue with her current

and past writings, and thus feeds and catalyzes her own thinking process. In that case, writing is not a mere externalization of preexisting thoughts; rather, it is the external, visible branch of the same stream of thinking. Externalization can adopt many semiotic modes, such as language, gestures, or graphics. Externalization can also be more or less deliberate. Someone can speak about how he feels secure in a situation (that is, externalize deliberately through language), but have his feet nervously tapping (externalize unwillingly through gestures), which communicates worry to his addressee.

For psychologists interested in the mysteries of mind, the challenge is often to bring people to externalize as much as possible, often much more than they would like to. Researchers have developed different techniques to facilitate this externalization: techniques of free associations (Jung 1906), for example, were meant to capture the processes of association within the flow of a person's thinking. Freud's design of the psychoanalytical setting is meant to facilitate the externalization of the stream of thought. The person lies down and talks to an unseen analyst sitting behind her. This was meant to lower her level of self-consciousness, and thus bring her to express, as closely as possible, her flow of consciousness. The rule of free association (to say whatever comes to one's mind) was meant to facilitate this. However, it also had another function: by inviting his patients to explore their free associations, Freud was trying to see traces, or cues, suggesting the presence of the stream of unconsciousness that could not be externalized. Freud assumed that, for reasons due to self-preservation in a social world, people could not become aware of some parts of their flow of thinking; if these could not be deliberately expressed through language, they could however find other forms of externalization, in neurotic symptoms, slips of the tongue or dreams. In turn, he identified various signs in people's action and expression which would be the basis of hypothesis about these deeper levels of the stream of unconsciousness (Freud 1953).

From that perspective, it appears that self-writing is only one of the many possible modes of externalizing, that is, of transformation of images, impressions, feelings, memories, into words and sentences. We also know that in verbal language only one part of one's stream of thinking is deliberately translated, while other aspects might unwillingly be reflected in the discourse. However, other aspects of the stream of thinking are willingly or unwillingly denied access. Hence, writing a self-text requires a selection of some aspects of the stream

of consciousness which will become an external, communicable form, while the rest of the stream takes place as an undercurrent.

The externalized aspects have then to be conformed to the social rules of written language. This has various aspects: firstly, language is linear, that is, words have to be written one at a time—even if a writer might have the impression of having many ideas in mind. If inner experience is a complex web of evolving, intermeshed impression and thoughts, then any attempt to turn consciousness into language demands a reduction. Secondly, written language has grammatical, stylistic, orthographic demands that constrain, but also transform, the stream of thinking (Vygotsky 1934). Thirdly, narratives of the self are extremely sensitive to culturally shared patterns and motives. It seems that, willingly or not, anyone engaged in narrating his or her life will use life-narrative patterns available in her environment, such as narratives of redemption, self-realization, or fall (Bruner 1990; McAdams 2006). Fourthly, writing a diary or a letter belongs to a specific genre with implicit rules that have evolved through history, while social convention partly defines what can be said, how it can be said and to whom (Lejeune and Bogaert 2006). For example, in prewar Germany, educators would expect children to write a "factual" diary for pedagogical purposes. Hence, Henrich Himmler's father corrected his son's diary, purging it of any traces of subjectivity. Himmler kept a diary all his life, and it took him many years to use it in a more personal way (Himmler 2007). This is very different from an expressive, free associating diary giving space to one's inner thoughts and used as means of self-exploration. Similarly, Charles Darwin wrote his autobiography for his grandchildren; yet recent editions (Darwin 2008) of the text show that Emma Darwin, his wife, suppressed many passages that she judged dangerous.

Hence, if writing is externalization of the stream of consciousness, it is an externalization which requires its selective reduction and elaboration. This has empirical implications: firstly, a researcher interested in self-writings should never forget that he has only access to a very limited part of the writer's experience. Yet, some signs might be cues for forming hypothesis about implicit or unconscious thoughts. Secondly, one should not attribute to the writer all of the characteristics of his or her style, as the social and cultural environment might strongly constrain it. Thirdly, this implies that an analysis of a self-writing would be incomplete without an exploration of the immediate context of the writing (e.g., was the writer

aware that her text could be read by some hostile other?) and the more distant environment (e.g., the socially promoted genres of writings). The social nature of any form of private writing has further implications.

The Self-Written Text, Addressed to an "Other"

The paradox of any self-writing is that it is always addressed to another person, real or imaginary. That other of the writing can take all forms and proportions: to oneself today as distinct from yesterday, to siblings, to imaginary friends, or to posthumous humankind. In diaries or self-writings, the addressivity of the text is created by various semiotic resources: the address of the writing ("Dear diary.."), the text can be written as a dialogue with a "you"; the text can be requested by someone else, such as a parent (Himmler 2007) or a researcher, like when people write diaries at the demand of an anthropologist (e.g., Gillespie et al. 2008); it can be addressed to an audience (Obama 1995); posterity (Havel 2008), an anonymous, but same-minded audience, as in the case of online diaries (Lejeune 2000), or even, a superaddressee (Bakhtin 1986).

If any form of self-writing is always addressed to another, the writer's imagination of the other to whom the writing is addressed enables and constrains the actual writing. One might explain more than is required for that other, or analyze, judge, or evaluate one's writing from the perspective of that other; one might develop a specific writing style—as a scientist when a diarist feels that her diary is part of a general anthropological project (Gillespie et al. 2008) or as a story of revelation if a political figure wants to offer his own trajectory to his followers (Gillespie 2005).

The imagination of the perspective of the other thus mediates the process of reflecting upon self (Gillespie 2007); one sees self as one believes the other to whom one addresses the text would. Hence, writing about self necessarily engages a dialogical process. Again, the methodological implication of this is that an analysis of a self-writing should include an identification of the "other" to whom the writing is addressed. As it is likely to canalize substantially the text, it is important for the researcher's interpretation. Hence, any autobiographic writing is an externalization of the stream of consciousness, using the semiotic resource of the idea of another person; adding perspectives within the stream of consciousness, it aliments the dialogicality of mind.

Self-Writing as Elaboration of Experience

Because the other to whom the text is addressed is always absent at the actual moment of writing (e.g., when writing a letter), any self-writing can be considered as addressed to an imaginary other, that is, a fiction: it is a text produced *as if* it was revealing some part of self, and *as if* it was addressed to someone else. Even a letter remains such a fiction until it is actually sent—it keeps the possibility of being not sent.

The inherent dialogical and fictional quality of self-writing has brought many commentators to note their "transitional" quality (Crème 2008; Wiener and Grunewald 1993). Writing a diary appears to be one of many transitional phenomena as identified by Winnicott (2001). Diary writing occurs in a protected space, and is located between inner life and the social shared reality, social means enabling one to have a grasp of inner experiences. It enables a form of playing with one's experience and ideas, engaging in *as if* and exploring different voices, perspectives, and imaginary scenarios. In that sense diary writing might have an exploratory function, in a similar way to what Vygotsky called a self-generated zone of proximal development. These observations all suggest that the process of writing is not only a process of selective reduction of experience, but it is also a process of exploration, elaboration, and transformation of experience. It is as such that it offers extremely interesting data to a psychologist interested in change.

It is possible to better understand how such exploration might lead to psychological change by having a closer look at the semiotic processes involved. First, a powerful process enabled by the dialogicality and the fictionalization of experience is *distancing*. Both adopting the perspective of another person, or imagining that something that is could not be (or the opposite) brings the person to abandon an initial perspective. If I think about now, and someone mentions tomorrow, I immediately can think at once about now and tomorrow, and thus take distance and see a wider time-span. If I look at my house, and imagine having a bigger house, I stop considering that the possibilities are limited to my house as it is, and new options open. More essentially, distancing is the process by which humans can disengage from immediate embodied experience triggered by circumstances, turn them into thinking, and render them communicable, that is, sociable, and thus, often, controlled. Hence, a student nervous at an exam can feel pain in his belly; this might induce him to run away; yet he might also remember other people's comments, explaining how their fear was

expressed in such pain; having "named" the pain as fear, he might also reflect on the actual reasons to be scared; and he might remember that he has studied enough, or that fear is a good stimulant, and therefore feel confident enough to remain and face the examination. Distancing here is produced by various semiotic resources: the idea of another person; the use of an emotional category; or the knowledge associated with the fear and thoughts about the past days of hard work (Valsiner 2007a; Zittoun 2006). Because self-writing is addressed to others, demands the use of written language as powerful semiotic resource, is canalized by implicit rules of the genre, is a process linking present and past, it is necessarily, and constantly, operating a process of distancing from experience. A diary or a self-writing is both a means of distancing, and for the reader revelatory of the processes of distancing, its difficulties, and the prise de conscience to which it can lead.

Second, these processes have as a by-product the creation of a *continuous* and complex experience of oneself. It is because a person can distance themselves from the here and now of immediate experience, and relate it to other moments in time and space, that the person can have the experience of being "the same" person through the years and in different places. Of course, given the fact that the person might have very different experiences in different social contexts, distancing also enables the progressive construction of a rich narrative of self. All forms of self-writing are powerful tools both to give voice to various aspects of experience, in time and space, but also, because a diary or an autobiography brings these experiences into the same frame (that actual notebook, that narrative that I wish to write), necessarily creating new links between disjoined parts. Writing is thus both a means to create continuity and consistency, and an expression of the work of exploring the diversity of self. The study of diary and self-writing reveals many of the processes by which the experience of self-continuity and consistency can be produced.

Hence, through exploration, distancing and the creation of links between otherwise disjoined parts of one's experience, the process of writing a diary is a process of elaboration of one's experience. Even more, a long and regular practice of self-writing might also progressively bring a person to deeply transform her own ability to reflect upon her experience, notably through the internalization of the dialogical movements and uses of semiotic resources demanded by the process of writing; it might thus be part of a deeper process of development of the person.

Status of Self-Written Texts

Using self-written text to learn about psychological processes requires considering it as a part of the flow of thinking that can be mediated by language, while acknowledging that it is always a reduction; let us hence call it a flow of thinking/writing. Such flow is always addressed to another person. It is dialogical, through the distancing power given by language, the social nature of the language and writing genre, and the communicative intention of any act of writing. As such, the flow of thinking/writing is also always the result of a transformative process, that is, the process of elaborating experience though semiotic means addressed to another. In other words, the text of a diary, a letter, or an autobiography is never a pure window on a person's soul, nor a pure fiction: it is a part of a process of self-making and becoming. It is as such that we propose to read it.

Methodological Challenges: How to Analyze Diaries and Self-Written Texts?

How can we learn about the stream of consciousness by reading a diary, a letter, or an autobiography? And how can we learn about the emergence of new ideas, and the development of the person's ability to think and act? This section is methodological: it aims at showing how the theoretical ideas and notions seen above can be turned into analytical tools. In what follows, we give examples of our methodological reasoning and analytical choices, taken from our research on war diaries. In particular, we emphasize the aspects linked to the process of diary writing.

Which Diaries?

The present reflection is based on our experience of working with diaries drawn from the Mass-Observation Archive (Sheridan, Street, and Bloome 2000). Mass-Observation (MO), established in Britain in 1937, aimed to create a "people's anthropology" to redress the relative neglect of the perspective of ordinary people in social science (Bloome, Sheridan, and Street 1993). Following public appeals by the founders of MO, several hundred ordinary people across Britain volunteered to keep daily diaries about their lives and their communities and to respond to regular surveys (called "directive replies"). MO has archived these diaries and survey responses at the University of Sussex, making them available to interested researchers.

Out of the several hundred available diaries, we chose to focus upon a single diarist, who will be referred to as June, diarist number 5324. The procedure for selecting June had two stages. First, we selected all the diarists with a family member also submitting diaries to MO as this gives a second point of view, enabling triangulation (Flick 1992). Second, out of this subset we selected the pair that had, together, sent the greatest number of diaries to MO. On these criteria, June, and her sister, Bella (diarist number 5323), were selected. Since June wrote significantly more than Bella (about one page per day for six years), our analysis mainly focused upon June.

The genre of June's diary changes over time. In August 1939, just before Britain declared war on Germany, June and her sister responded to MO's open request for diarists to write and submit regular diaries and observations. June at the time was eighteen, and Bella was twenty-five. June continued to submit her diaries to MO until the war ended in 1945. These six years and 200,000 words of diaries plot, in detail, June's day-to-day relation to the War. June's approach to writing her diaries is initially guided by her understanding of MO's goal of creating "an anthropology of ourselves." A considerable proportion of her diary is written in a reportage style—reporting on other people's behavior, attitudes, and reactions to local, national, and international events. Initially, June is particularly keen to record the changes occurring because of the onset of war, such as details of rationing, shortages, and the arrival of evacuees in her village. Occasionally, she attempts to present more systematic evidence of the impact of war, such as counts of the number of people she observes adhering to government advice to carry gas masks. However, the pages of June's diaries are also filled with her own opinions, reactions, daily activities, dilemmas, and relationships. As the years of diary writing progress, the diaries become increasingly personal, and reflections on her personal life come to take precedence. These developments in the content of her diary coincide with the mounting changes and challenges she confronts as the war begins to affect her more directly. Hence at the end of the war, June uses the diary to work through her conflicting allegiances, thus giving us a window onto her dialogical thought processes. This slow change of addressee and writing genre is a clear indication of the dynamic, dialogical, transformative nature of a diary. It highlights the importance of not treating data as a transparent window upon the mind. This, of course, had to be taken into account in our analysis.

Historical Facts

Following a classic method in narrative analysis (Kohler Riessman 1993), we first identified objective facts and events within the data. Basically, we identified the units of time and space: main locations, social contexts, and historical events in the life trajectory of June. These objective events can be documented through other sources thus showing the broad setting for her personal life. In this particular case we learned that, at the outbreak of the war, June is living at home, in a small, close-knit village on the East Coast. She lives with her mother and older sister with whom she has a very close relationship. In April 1941, following Labour Minister Bevin's call for women to enter the workforce, she moves to the southwest of England, where she trains and works as a gardener. In March 1943, she moves once again, this time to be head gardener at a war hostel. After several months, June suffers from appendicitis and is unable to continue with arduous physical work. She therefore takes a position as a shop assistant and "front desk" receptionist in the hostel where she remains until the end of the war. Once these objective facts have been identified, we can examine how these translate into subjectively perceived events.

Ruptures and Transitions

As mentioned above, events perceived as ruptures by people are likely to be followed by processes of change and they thus offer a good window on developmental processes. But how can we identify a rupture in a diary or an autobiography? Objective facts do not always correspond to ruptures demanding specific elaboration: for instance, the declaration of war is a historical event; but what might be perceived as a daily problematic event, is the shortage of specific goods. In the text of the diary, formal and content-based indications enable us to make a hypothesis that an event has been perceived as a rupture in daily life. We paid attention to the following cues:

1. The narrator explicitly refers to a disturbing event and signals it as such, for example, "yesterday an incident occurred":

Example 1

> *Fri Dec* ["D" written over "N"] *1st.* Today was outstanding by me [written over "my"] having half an hours [sic] heart to heart chat with the boss ["o" overwritten], in which I came out top. Yesterday an incident occured [sic] in which we asked for his support. In a weak moment he sided with the resident in question, [comma in

> faint pencil] going back on the rule he had only made three weeks ago. It made us all furious, so I made it my business to attack him in his office & tell him what I thought of him on the subject. He was marvellous about it & admitted his fault & after some home truths [some overwriting] we parted good friends. I shall never minded [sic] asking him anything again or telling him because he is so understanding and sensible. (December 1, 1944)

In this sequence, the narrator explicitly mentions an "incident" which turned out to be an "outstanding" event, that is, breaking the normal variety of daily life: the boss did not follow a rule proposed three weeks earlier. She also reported how she "restored" the order, by deciding to speak to him and "tell him what she thought of him." Hence, she engaged in an active transition process, where she probably reassessed people's roles and positions, the values that should rule actions, and from that, reoriented future actions.

2. The flux of writing seems interrupted: there is a brutal change in the mode, rhythm, and amount of writing, as here, in the last days of 1941, when June is working as a landgirl:

Example 2

> *Mon Dec 15th*. Work and nothing unusual.
>
> *Tues Dec 16th*. Much the same with visit to the library in the evening.
>
> *Wed Dec 17th*. Work again.
>
> *Thurs Dec 18th*. More work.
>
> *Fri Dec 19th*. Work very cold. Putting off scrubbing the greenhouses & making the scraping the walls take longer. I frightened the others by falling off a ladder looking at the soldiers drilling. Did not hurt myself fortunately. Evening went for a bath & writing Xmas letters.
>
> XSat DX Today British Restaurant shut [? word unclear] before Xmas & we had Xmas pudding. The lady who runs it carried it in singing "Noel. Noel." It was decorated with holly & everyone clapped & cheered.
>
> *Sat Dec 20th*. ½ day at work & aft & evening spent in preparing to go home for Xmas on Wed. I am getting quite excited.
>
> *Sun Dec 21st* Got up late & still getting ready for Xmas. Afternoon went for a walk. (…)
>
> *Wed Dec 31st*. Last day of 1941 spent washing down greenhouse. The soldiers gave us some hot water & it was much better than icy cold. I have had many happy hours in 1941 & I do not regret any

> experiences. It is a good thing another war year is over. I am where I never dreampt [sic] of being this time last year. Doing what I always never imagined. I am not sorry. The time passes so much quicker with something to do all day. Goodbye & good riddance to 1941! I shall not forget the year I became a land girl. I wonder where 1942 will find me. (Décember 1941)

During the week of the fifteenth to twenty-first, there is "nothing unusual" to describe, all the writing is descriptive and factual, and follows the days events. There is a sudden change in style of writing on the thirty-first. Note that there is no rupture in terms of "accident"; but the "social event" that is New Year, with its conventional call for yearly assessment, is used by June as a semiotic resource to create distance from the flow of daily life and reflect on her situation. From there, she uses past and future forms, which enables her to contemplate her present within the wider scope of a year of her life. There is also a move from factual description, to positions mediated by values and specific perspectives. When this occurs, the flow of her writing/thinking becomes more clearly dialogical: she had many happy hours in 1941, and does not regret any, while writing "good riddance," which suggests some relief about the end of a period. Hence the narrator seems to be working though her own ambivalences.

3. The narrator's perspectives are extremely volatile: we observe "dialogical knots" when June is looking for an interpretation of an event and she very quickly shifts perspective, mentioning a great variety of social contacts who have actually been consulted or whose position is simply tried out during the process of writing. Here, at the end of the war, June has to decide about the evolution of her relationship with a young man, D, that she has been seeing for some time. She is in the midst of a situation of ambivalence, and she describes how her stream of consciousness is made out of divergent voices:

Example 3

> This last month I have not known what to do to decide my future. I am constantly changing my mind. Some days I want to marry D as soon as he can afford it, the next I think he is not the right one for me. Then comes the uncertainty of if I reject him shall I ever replace him by anyone as true. Then I think single life is all I want, the next day I feel crazy for love & sex. Sometimes I decide to leave here & go to Devon to him as he wishes, then I want to stay here. Then I want to go home. Home with its many attractions will be another

> two hundred miles from D and it will annoy D immensley [sic] if I go. I like my present job & will have a difficulty in getting one with so many benefits. When B goes it will be less attractive here and I shall be lonely. I think then I shall not mind leaving, but feel I could do with two months rest before going to another job. This will annoy [Small, pocket notebook size paper; same writing.] D who thinks I can go to him straight away from here. Lately my nerves have been very bad and if they do not improve after B goes I intend to see the doctor. The slightest thing makes me jump lately. I feel a bundle of nerves. Lots of the staff are on sick leave, I suppose the war & food has got most of us down. (May 26, 1945)

In this passage, switches of standpoints are extremely rapid; more than indecision, we see here an active process of exploring possible futures by imagining their outcomes for self and others. And if there is some active search for a solution, we can infer that a situation has been perceived as problem.

In our work based on war diaries, we grounded our analysis around such ruptures. In what follows, we show how we can read diaries as reflecting or participating to processes of sense-making, by focusing on the various forms of semiotic mediation participating to thinking.

The Dialogicality of Writing

Looking for the dialogical nature of the text, we coded the data so as to identify various "perspectives" or semiotic positions from which the diarist writes, or that give a complement or counterpoint to the flow of her writing. These traces of otherness in the discourse can be identified through different means:

1. Others are mentioned in the text and real or imaginary sentences are reported and attributed to others; hence individuals and communities can be given a voice within June's diary (as indirect speech, or reported speech, or simply mentioned). Here, the voice of Mr. S is explicitly mentioned, yet his surprise at the statement of the woman is only indirectly mentioned:

Example 4

> We don't often hear the war talked about in the gardens but this morning Mr S. said "We've won the first round in Africa all right. He'll come out of there like a scalded cat." I think we all feel we are winning now. P & I frequently talk of when the war is over & the employment situation with regard to women gardeners. Before

> things looked so good we frequently talked about whether the war would drag on long enough to conscript us from land to the forces. We both thought it would, but now we say "Perhaps by the time this job wants doing next year the war will be over." "Perhaps we shall be off the land." "How long will they want the women in the gardens?" Last week one of the unskilled ["e" overwritten] women gardeners after being lectured on some deplorable gardening error said to Mr S. "Oh well, the war will soon be over, then you can have all men ["e" overwritten] back in the garden & you'll have everything done just how you want it!" He was surprised, but not convinced of the certaintity [sic] of getting what he liked from the men. In fact I am sure he really prefers the work of the women, as they are more adaptable, quicker & less dogmatic than his former men under-gardeners. (November 23, 1942)

When trying to identify the origin of the perspectives mentioned, secondary sources also helped us to identify discourses shared in communities of which June was a member, through newspapers, radio broadcasts, and films. For example, we could find out which events are designated by the comment about victory in Africa, and possibly, also see how this news had been reported by various media available to June.

2. The narrator's position is usually expressed in relation to others, and the relative position usually can be identified by a close attention to the narrator's use of "I," "we," "us," "them," "they,"etc. In Example 4, June first uses "we" in "we don't" often hear the war talked about" to refer to the group working in the gardens; when June writes "I feel we are winning now," she is speaking from her we-perspective of being a member of the British community; when she ends the day's entry with "in fact I am sure he really prefers the work of the women," she is speaking from the perspective of a critical young women facing her male employer.
3. The narrator can speak from their perspective to varying degrees, and so we could differentiate utterances which were highly modulated and of which June takes full responsibility ("I think that"…) from utterances which could be identified as juxtaposition from other discourses and thus denoted ventriloquation (Valsiner 2002). In Example 3, June's diagnostic of her discomfort as being due to her nerves: "Lately my nerves have been very bad (…)I feel a bundle of nerves" (May 26, 1945) can be seen as an uncritical reporting of another person's (or a general other) perspective.
4. These voices or positions can have a relative importance throughout a text; we tried to identify dominances, recurrences, and the evolution of the relationships between voices through time.

> For example, many of June's statements at the beginning of the war position her as distinct from "these women" who lack respectability, do not take care of their homes, and have many affairs, while at the end of the war, she has a very different discourse as a women, free to choose her occupation and relationships (Zittoun et al. forthcoming).

Analyzing the Elaboration of Experience

Writing a diary or another form of personal text engages a process which might lead to change and personal development. In turn, analyzing a diary gives us an entry upon microprocesses of elaboration of experience. Empirically, through the analysis of diverse writings, we developed a close attention to various cues:

1. *Indication of distancing* (Valsiner 2007b): The experience can be reported as very close to nonconscious, embodied experiences. This can be marked by a lack of a position of the narrator (see beginning of Example 2) or by an absorption in descriptions of physical experiences, as in June's description of her nerves, end of Example 3 (also, Zittoun 2008a). In contrast, the discourse can show distance, using more general terms, categories, and concepts.
2. *Indication of location in time*: Is the text considering events in the present, or is the present linked to the personal past or future, as at the end of Example 2, when June reflects upon her year 1941? Are there markers of time? Are they personal, or social markers? How is self-continuity created through time? How does personal memory root one's imagination of the future? (Zittoun 2008b).
3. *Indications of changing degrees of reality*: These can vary from matter-of-fact descriptions, to *as-if*, hypothetical explorations, as in Example 3, when June reflects upon her options: if she leaves D, "shall [she] ever replace him by anyone as true." She also imagines herself going home, staying, etc.

Identifying Uses of Social and Symbolic Resources

Writing a diary is a socially and culturally situated activity. In the stream of thinking/writing, we can also observe the presence of the social world, either because it is mentioned, or because various symbolic resources have been used in the process of making sense of events. For example, our analysis questioned what social knowledge was used by June during the war (Zittoun et al. 2008), and how her belonging to various communities through time was reflected in her stream of thinking (Gillespie et al. 2008). Each of these analyses then required specific methodological decisions.

From Theory to Analytical Tools

In this section, we have followed the theoretical idea according to which the process of self-writing is part of the stream of thinking and elaborating experience. Current research on thinking as a semiotic process has shown that dialogical processes, semiotic mediation enabling distancing or the creation of continuity, and the use of cultural elements and social knowledge as symbolic resources, are part of the process of thinking. Here, we turned these propositions into analytical tools. Drawing on a recent research project, we have shown how each of these propositions could actually be seen in operation. Each of these dimensions leads one to identify in the written text specific cues that we treat as both mediators and markers of thinking/writing processes.

Practically, we usually analyze the data by following each of these streams on its own (e.g., the evolution of the "others" of the text through a certain portion of text, the variable time-span considered, etc.); we then articulate them to one another, and try to understand their mutual relationships. Hence, it might be the fact that the narrator has seen a film which could have been the resource enabling her to take some distance upon her present situation and enabling her to relate it to her past (Zittoun et al. 2008). In other words, these dimensions are mutually dependent; and the work of identifying developmental processes demands we retrace their evolution through time, that is, the semiotic streams that constitute thinking and lived experience.

Openings

The proposition to use diaries and self-writings as data for developmental research follows a theoretical and methodological rationale. Diaries enable one to follow changing processes through time, mainly after ruptures—that is, what narratives are about. Self-writing is also located at the articulation of the individual process of sense making, and of the social world with its norms and conventions. It reveals the articulation of shared history and personal life story, shared culture, and personal culture. Additionally, diaries and self-writing are often public data (more than observation and interviews) which offers an opportunity for scientific collaboration and debate. As such they are a source of data which can contribute significantly to the empirically informed development of theory.

Using diaries and self-writing as data has been largely overlooked in the social sciences, possibly because their status as data

was problematic. It is not produced thanks to clever manipulations of expert methodologists. It is "well written" intimate discourse, which has been often seen as the realm of literary critics, not social scientists. However, our proposition is theoretically based. It is based on the assumption that the stream of consciousness is not only an "inner" process, but also, that it can have an external phase, observable through people's various forms of externalization (Gillespie and Zittoun 2010). Hence, studying diaries and self-writings appears to be a way of studying a portion of the stream of thinking/writing. Certainly, the analysis of diaries and other self-writings must be cautious, and we have outlined several issues that researchers must be aware of. Yet, along side the risks, there are significant benefits. Analytical and theoretical tools developed over the past few years to analyze thinking, can be used to analyze diaries. Hence, diaries and self-writing can be said to offer a unique entry into the analysis of sociocultural and developmental processes.

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