Published in Young 15, issue 2, 193-211, 2007
which should be used for any reference to this work

Symbolic resources and responsibility in transitions

TANIA ZITTOUN
University of Lausanne, Switzerland

Abstract
Since youth transitions have been redefined as flexible periods of change, it becomes difficult to conceptually distinguish them from any other transition period in people's life. Transitions are here defined as involving three types of interdependent processes (social relocation, knowledge construction and meaning-making). From a cultural psychological perspective, youth transitions can be qualified by young people's access to symbolic responsibility. Through a case study, the article shows how cultural elements chosen and used by a person can support processes of transition. Finally, the article sketches a model of uses of symbolic resources enabled by symbolic responsibility.

Keywords
symbolic resources, youth, transition, development, psychology, meaning making, culture

People are said not to live linear trajectories anymore; they are likely to go through ruptures, turning points and transitions at various points in their life-course. Youth has often been seen as a period of important transition, or of many transitions. If this is so, what are the specificities of youth transitions, over transitions in people's life in general? Also, we are used to see young people's fascination with music, arts, poetry or youth culture as some necessary phase; why is that so? Here, I argue that such exploration of music or novels reflects some deeper developmental move: the acquisition of symbolic responsibility, which is a specificity of youth. More, I suggest that such immersion in imaginary worlds plays an important role in the development of the young person.

In the first part of the article, I attempt to characterize the type of transitions that young people live from a cultural psychological perspective, which examines the transactions between them and their symbolic worlds. I propose to see the access to *symbolic responsibility* as the distinctive mark of youth transitions: the social obligation for them to account for their choices of consumption and their personal expression. A corollary is that young people are expected not anymore to work out problems raised by life through playing, like children, but to engage in 'adult' cultural experiences. Consequently, my proposition is to examine cultural experiences — what young people do with films, songs of novels that they choose and appreciate — to have access to processes of change. The second part of the article presents one case study. We will see the transition processes through which Julia, a young woman living the double rupture of losing her grandmother and coming to university, radically transforms herself through her exploration of pop music, literature and films, with a network of fans. In the third part of the article, the notion of *uses of symbolic resources* is proposed to account for people's active choice and uses of cultural elements, so as to facilitate the transition processes in which they are engaged.

YOUTH TRANSITIONS AND SYMBOLIC RESPONSIBILITY

Reflecting recent societal changes, social sciences and psychological research have moved away from a definition of youth as clear-cut phase between childhood and adulthood. Rather, youth has become a period of multiple processes of transition (see also Mørch, 2003). In this first section, I explore this idea and raise a question: if youth is made out of transitions and if transitions might be experienced all life long, can we qualify youth at all?

Youth from a psychosocial transition

Over the past 15 years, in the US and in European countries, socio-historical events, economic and technological changes, migration movements and the modification of the structures of families have reshaped average life-paths. Obtaining a stable job, creating a separate home, having a family and children, have lost their value as thresholds to adulthood. Young people can indeed leave their parents without creating a new family, stay partially financially dependent on their parents while having a job and children, engage in numerous short-time professional contracts, or opt for unstable

relationships, at an age that their parents would have considered as 'adult'. At some point corresponding to the end of the classical adolescence, young people's lives seemed to engage in a long and unclear period, characterized by multiple changes of role and status. Given the multiple fields of experience of a person, it started to become difficult to speak of one single transition leading to a clear threshold into adulthood (Cavalli and Galland, 1993; Evans and Furlong, 1997; Galland, 1997). Some authors have instead started to speak of various *role transitions* (Carugati and Selleri, 1996). Others distinguish the school-to-work transition from the housing transition (Coleman and Hendry, 1999; Galland, 1997), or more simply, separate social transitions (that is professional) from private ones (that is sexual and relational) (Durkin, 1995). These various '"small stories" about transitions inside and in different contexts of youth life' (Mørch, 2003: 54) appear not to be addressed at the same speed or in the same order for everybody (Carugati, 2004).

Although such facts suggest individualized trajectories, youth transitions remain bounded by social, economical and historical landscapes (Bangerter et al., 2001). Given national variations in the structure of education and professional training (Fouquet, 2004; Iacovou and Berthoud, 2001), in the modalities of social support (unemployment support, minimal allowance, etc.), or in its tolerance of young people's exploration of alternative or artistic lifestyles, each nation creates specific constraints and enabling conditions for young people, and thus produces various forms of pathways to adulthood (Resnick, 2004). Finally, social expectations about young people's role, place, expected abilities and achievements have changed as well (Anatrella, 1988; Freund, 2003; Griffin, 1993; Grob, 2001).

Social scientists and psychologists acknowledge the functions of such a psychosocial transition. Pragmatically, it appears to satisfy psychological needs: a 'floating' period allows for periods of trial-and-error, for the exploration of possible pathways and for variations in personal change. A long period of uncertain delayed youth transition, or institutionalized 'moratorium' (Erikson, 1975) seems to have emerged out of functional purposes, as enabling a longer maturational process to the individual for a life in a more complex and changing society (Perret-Clermont et al., 2004). Thus, speaking of psychosocial youth transition accounts for a particular period during which some of the psychological needs of human beings living in modern societies can be satisfied.

Youth is made out of transitions

However, even if the notion of psychosocial transition indicates some important period in people's lives, it raises some problems. If transitions become shifting processes of change, these cannot anymore be characterized by the starting and ending social status through which a person moves. So how can they be qualified? *Transitions* can be defined on the basis of their *structure* and of the psychosocial *dynamics* they entail.

In terms of structure, transitions in a life course designate processes of adjustment to new life circumstances. Usually, *transitions* follow *ruptures* — modifications of what is taken-for-granted in a person's life — which can be due to various causes. A rupture can result from an important change in the cultural context (a war starts, a new ideology

is spread, a new technique changes lives). It can also come from a direct change in a person's sphere of experience (a new boss enters the department) or a person's change of sphere of experience (a person moves away from a country). Alternatively, ruptures can be due to changes in the relationships and interactions the person has with others and objects (a child leaves home, or a computer refuses to function). Finally, a rupture can come from the persons themselves: they grow older, their bodies change, their ideas and their feelings bring them elsewhere (Zittoun et al., 2003). In all these cases, a rupture is psychologically relevant if it is *experienced as such by a person*. In situations of ruptures, changes put at stake relatively taken-for-granted routines and definitions (see also Rönkä et al., 2002). *Uncertainty* can designate a person's experience of blurred personal reality, *relatively* to a previous state of apprehension of things. Experiencing uncertainty might be paralysing or stimulating, but in most of the cases, it questions previous understanding, and might call for exploring possibilities and elaborating new conduct. These processes, which aim at reducing uncertainty, can be called *processes of transitions* (Zittoun et al., 2003).

In terms of dynamics, transitions in the lifetime can be said to involve *three interdependent streams of processes* (Zittoun, 2004a). First, transitions involve changes in the social, material or symbolic spheres of experience of the person. Transitions imply processes of *repositioning, or relocation* of the person in his/her social and symbolic fields (Benson, 2001; Duveen, 2001). Each of these movements creates new goals, orientations, possibilities, constraints on action and losses (Baltes, 1997; Valsiner 1998; Valsiner and Lawrence, 1997). Relocations also confront a person with others, who react and mirror that person's location. Thus, through one's own apprehension and through the mediation of others, repositioning implies *transformations of identities*. Such processes are numerous in youth transitions: no more adolescents, young people move to new educational or professional settings, leave their parents' houses or come back to their hometowns, change accommodations, enter into new groups of friends, start leisure activities, or move from an adolescent-wild life to a more settled-down life. Second, people's relocation might need social, cognitive and expert *forms of knowledge and skills*. In youth, it might require being able to cook, to participate in the civic world, or to improve one's academic or professional life. Third, through these relocations, encounters with others and learning, the person might be brought to engage in *meaning-making*, that is, to confer sense to what happens to him/her (Bruner, 1990, 1996). Meaning-making comprises the narrativization of experience and the semiotic elaboration of its emotional and non-conscious prolongations (Zittoun, 2004a). One will also need to maintain a sense of *continuity and consistency across spheres of experience* (Carugati and Selleri, 1996; Flammer and Alsaker, 2001). These three processes are necessarily linked; in youth, learning difficulties are often linked to the fact that the person feels his/her identity put at stake or cannot find a personal sense in the learning situation (for example, Charlot et al., 1992; Mørch, 2003).

What is specific about youth transitions? A cultural psychological proposition

The pair *rupture-transition* is proposed as unit for the study of change its three core processes — identity processes, learning and meaning-making. It enables to

compare different transitions in people's lives, at various ages and due to various factors (Zittoun et al., 2003; Zittoun, 2006). But doing so, we create a new problem: if youth is a period of transitions, and transitions all life long have structural and dynamic commonalities, what makes youth, youth?

Research on youth generally admits that adulthood is attained when certain psychosocial transitions have been achieved, related to physiological maturation, definition of personal goals and context-specific values (Grob, 2001). However, such a definition of youth raises problems. There is in effect no clear-cut definition of 'adulthood' in the contemporary world; any definition is *necessarily* ideological. Authors have thus expressed their skepticism about the possibility of identifying an entry point in adulthood (Resnick, 2004; Steinberg, 1993; Wyn and White, 1997). This difficulty might come from the fact that thresholds to adulthood have been looked for *either* at the psychological level (for example, a form of maturity) *or* at the level of social criteria (for example, being married). It seems more productive to look at the *articulation* of the social and the individual (see for example Baltes, 1997; Flammer and Alsaker, 2001). Our proposition is to approach the *symbolic world* in which the social world and the individual are articulated.

A cultural psychological perspective might thus help us to define a fresh perspective on the specificities of youth development. In effect, cultural psychology can be defined as a psychology interested in the transactions between the individual and the society, seen as a symbolic world — it thus examines the relationship between collective culture and personal culture; it traces how individual, intentional persons, render their life meaningful; it focuses therefore on semiotic processes (signs exchanged in the world, and signs translated in mind); and it assumes the always changing nature of the world and consciousness (Bruner, 1990; Cole, 1996; Shweder, 1990; Valsiner, 2000; Wertsch, 1994). From this perspective, the specificity of youth can be searched in the modalities of the person's interactions with culture, that is, symbolic systems. I thus identify the specificity of young people, first, at the level of their interactions with their symbolic worlds, and second, at the level of their intrapsychological counterpart.

Transitions to adulthood have been shown to be highly regulated processes in most traditional societies (Anatrella, 1988); narratives, rituals and identity markers were means to symbolize the person's transformations into an adult, both for the individual and the community. As the group provides the person with a symbolic system, the young person acquires a system of orientation and a sense of time through socialization. Nowadays, such shared symbolic systems do not seem to exist anymore, partly because these have been eroded, and partly because cultural diversity and the circulation of symbolic goods have created an illusion of free market of values and meanings.

In the absence of comprehensive shared symbolic system, people have to improvise their system of values and to invent meanings to their lives. It is quite likely that young people collect symbolic objects or discourses within the abundance of circulating messages. Their self-made collections of personally relevant symbolic elements might be heteroclite, yet young people's values and conduct are still supposed to be good enough for living in a given part of their society. Even in the absence of

consensus about the nature of 'adulthood', young people are still socially required to 'behave as adults'. In particular, I propose, in the actual multiplication of discourses, people are asked to account for their symbolic conduct; they are implicitly charged with a *symbolic responsibility*. Symbolic responsibility is a two-sided notion. On one side, in many societies, the young people are given the theoretical freedom to choose what cultural experiences they want to have, what objects they wants to interact with, what they consume; they also have an increased space for externalizing their thoughts, tastes and opinions. On the other side, the young people are now asked to stand and account for these internalizations and externalizations. There is an age (which tends to change) where a child is not responsible for being accidentally confronted by shocking images; the young people can now be judged or punished for downloading offending images from the Internet (they are personally responsible for making a 'bad' choice). Similarly, a child's insult or testimony is generally not taken at face value; but there is a moment where people are required to stand for what they say, vote, sign, sing, or even for their haircut. A corollary of symbolic responsibility is that young people wanting to experience possible lives and feelings that do not have 'real' consequences are not anymore expected to engage in role-playing in everyday life; rather, they are expected to go to the cinema or the theatre, that is, to engage in socially framed and culturally acknowledged forms of imaginative experiences (Freud, 1908; Harris, 2000). The first criterion to specify youth transition is thus that it marks people's access to symbolic responsibility.

The intra-psychological counterpart of this new responsibility in societies without shared systems of values and beliefs is that young people have to define their own time perspective and a system of orientation. First, youth is considered as a period for stabilizing values, choices and orientations. This requires for the person to acquire a form of psychical autonomy and to construct a hierarchy of values and orientations (Brandtstädter and Lerner, 1999) on the basis of a relative acceptance of her conflicting sides (Blos, 1962). Given societal requirements, this *system of orientation* must also be turned into real options and commitments in 'niches' provided by the environment, while renouncing (at least temporarily) other possible life choices (Waddell, 1998). Second, the person has to integrate *a time perspective* (childhood is seen as relatively timeless; adolescence is commonly depicted as the experience of the 'here-and-now'). Time inscription appears to have an especially great importance in youth in our societies. A personal sense of historicity, related to one's past and childhood and possible selves in the future, has to be found in order to define professional or personal goals. Commitments to learning, working or creating need to be supported by such time orientations to be psychologically possible: they require a delay of gratification (Bajoit and Franssen, 1995) and they need to be grounded in traditions (Erikson, 1975; Winnicott, 1971, 1989). The organization and hierarchization of values and the construction of a time perspective are central marks of the end of the transition to adulthood for clinical as well as for cultural perspectives: they are indeed necessary for living in complex symbolic worlds in which people, said to be autonomous, have to generate their own temporality and confer meaning to events.

Finally, youth can be qualified as the period during which people live through ruptures and transitions; they are required to exert their symbolic responsibility so as

to confer a time perspective and a system of orientation to their conduct. Hence the following tension: young people are free to generate their systems of orientation and develop their own sense of the meaning of the world, yet they are responsible for the discrepancies between these and the consensual norms.

What resources for young people exerting symbolic responsibility in transitions?

People do not confront ruptures without resources, or means to enable coping processes. They have some life experiences, a history of past ruptures and a memory of past transitions. People are part of social networks in which they can mobilize others for their expert or relational support; they can also draw upon social knowledge to determine how to act with people in certain situations: such mobilizations can be said to constitute *social resources*. People can then mobilize forms of technical, reasoning or heuristic expertise, and practical or formal knowledge, which we might call *cognitive resources.* These two broad families of resources have been widely studied in developmental and learning psychology. There is, however, one more sort of resources.

Earlier, three lines of processes have been said to participate in transitions; we can link these to possible resources. S*ocial resources* are likely to support repositioning and identity processes; *cognitive resources* would facilitate learning. But what are the resources for sense- making and the construction of a time perspective and a system of orientation? These psychic activities share one feature: they require distancing from the immediate here-and-now. *Distancing is precisely enabled by semiotic mediations* — elementary signs, language, or more complex symbolic entities (Vygotsky and Luria, 1994). In the absence of overarching shared symbolic systems, it is likely that young people will satisfy their need for sense-making through their interactions with symbolic objects such as books, movies, pictures, videos, that encapsulate shared ideas, meanings and beliefs (see also Fuhrer, 2004; Lightfoot, 1997).

Cultural elements

We will concentrate on two particular sorts of cultural elements: artistic or fictional artefacts such as books, movies, pieces of art and pictures; and components of religious, political or ethnic symbolic systems such as foundational texts, objects and places for rituals. These two sorts of cultural elements can be defined on a series of equivalent criteria. First, they are made out of *semiotic configurations* of various codes (musical, graphic, verbal, etc.). Second, these semiotic configurations are *bounded*. Books or novels have material boundaries; a religious system is symbolically bounded through rules and the regulating activities of 'wardens', or authorities that fix the system's boundaries (Grossen and Perret-Clermont, 1992). Third, they always convey socially shared meanings, and require a person to engage personal affects and memories; in that sense, having a cultural experience is located at the meeting of the societal and the individual. Fourth, cultural elements require people to engage in interactions which generate an *imaginary experience* — the creation of an 'intermediary' or 'transitional' sphere of experience, beyond the here-and-now, and

beyond the socially shared reality (Winnicott, 1971) (the 'musical space' of a song; the sacred space of a ritual [Koepping, 1997]; the vicarious experience enabled by fiction).

USES OF POP MUSIC IN TRANSITIONS

The questions are thus, how do young people exert their new symbolic responsibility to choose cultural elements within their spheres of experience in a given society, and how might they use these to work through their transitions, that is, to facilitate identity change, learning and sense-making? To answer such questions, we have interviewed young people about their life ruptures and the resources they found to support transitions. In this section, the methodology of that research is outlined, and the exemplary case of Julia is presented.

Methodology

Thirty young people, women and men, were interviewed in an academic town in England. The sample was defined on the basis of events *likely* to be perceived as ruptures and to produce transitions (for example, entering student life [Coulon, 1997], coming back from a religious form of life to the secular world [Lawrence et al., 1992], leaving school for entering the professional world [Perret-Clermont et al., 2004]). New students were informed about the project by a colleague lecturer and accepted to be enrolled on a voluntary basis, without retribution; religious people were contacted through my ethnographic participation in the community's activities; school-leavers were contacted at a local pub, partly through snowball effect. It was ensured that people would come from a wide range of socio-economic backgrounds. All these young people had lived events that *they perceived as causing a rupture* and that were followed by some processes of transition; their trajectories were thus theoretically equivalent (Valsiner and Sato, 2004). Recruitment stopped when data came to saturation in terms of the diversity of uses of resources mentioned.

All interviews were led by me. People were told that the research was on the role of cultural experience in people's lives, especially in periods of change or transitions 'like the one you are in'. The general interview schedule was two-dimensional: one axis was chronological and aimed at identifying events felt as ruptures, in the context of the person's life story and future plans. The other axis, transversal, was aimed at identifying possible resources and their uses. People were asked about objects in their room or taken on a trip (on personal objects, see Fuhrer and Josephs, 1999; Habermas, 1996, 1999; Tisseron, 1999, 2003).

The interviews were digitally recorded and analysed as sound files with Atlas.ti, a flexible software enabling qualitative analysis (Muhr, 1991). The analysis combined a transversal analysis (comparing all the cases on specific dimensions); in-depth case studies; and theoretical elaboration (Valsiner and Connolly, 2003). The theoretical model was developed and modified until it was strong enough to account for all the single cases, that is, until the cases could be described as variations of the dimensions of the model. The model was then confronted to additional data — other life transitions, or data gathered by other researchers. The data presented here is analysed according to such a theoretical model (see also the last section).

Julia is a first-year student of politics who presents herself as someone who has quite changed over a recent period of time, thanks to the 'influence' of a pop band. Her case documents how a young person's exercise of symbolic responsibility brings her to use cultural elements to support processes of transition. Her case has been chosen for grouping in a coherent manner a wide range of possible uses of cultural elements. Discourse abstracts are chosen to reveal relationships between four elements: a cultural element and its socially shared meaning; the person; a real or imaginary other; and the personal sense of the element for the person (Zittoun, 2006).

Julia's ruptures and transitions

Julia experienced going to university as a strong rupture. From a former mining area and a low middle class family, she had neither been to boarding school, nor had she taken a gap year. She had always lived with her family, and coming to university:

> That was, that was, quite a big event. I am very close to my parents, and I am very close to both the sides of my grandparents especially on my mum's side ... It was very … The longest time I had been away from my parents it was like 10 days in a school trip. The longest time I had been away from my house, from my town, was two and half weeks. I've never been away more than that. [inaudible] … And me and my parents were very quite worried about it. And also because I am 18, I am very young, [inaudible] I am the first one to go away, I didn't know what to expect, and I can't cook, I can't clean, I am not so domesticated.

Julia expresses her initial position as closeness to her family, in emotional terms, but also in geographical and temporal terms (she was never away for a long time). Going to university thus means taking a triple distance. Julia describes herself as young, not skilled enough to deal with everyday situations and uncertain about what to expect. The uncertainty seems also acknowledged and reflected by Julia's close relatives, since none had been to university. Going to university can be said to be experienced as rupture. Moreover, the interview reveals that a previous rupture had deeply affected Julia: the death of her grandmother who took care of her as her mother was working, an event likely to be felt as a major rupture during adolescence (Bagnoli, 2003). At the term of the double transition processes lived by Julia, she has undergone a deep transformation: coming from a religious, conservative family, Julia now presents herself as an agnostic, active left-wing person.

What resources did Julia find to support such transitions? In contrast to families where parents and siblings have received higher education, no elder can offer guidance to Julia's rupture to university. Also, even if religion used to offer ritualized forms of mourning, we will see that Julia, who describes herself as formerly religious, finds semiotic resources outside of religion (as many people do, Josephs, 1998; Zittoun, 2004b). So what are the resources that she found and used to work through transitions? How are these linked to her transformation?

Symbolic responsibility: choosing resources

Julia's symbolic responsibility is manifested through her exploration of available cultural elements and her choice of the ones she will use. We see her exerting it when anticipating the new room she will have at her university residence. Here is the description of that room:

> I used various things … to cover my entire wall (laughs) … It is just white and boring! It doesn't have purple … I really like purple. Because my room at home is purple. I really like purple. My mum has got me a vase of purple iris [I put everything possible purple on the wall, using bits of magazine]. I was just, 'Go away, white!'

Julia and her mother find ways to keep some resemblance between her home room and the university's through the use of purple elements. Julia also assembles and frames a collection of pictures of her relatives that she calls 'a kind of memento'. These objects can then be used for their 'containing' or 'holding' function (Tisseron, 1999; Winnicott, 1971): purple textiles transform her foreign room into a motherly holding space; pictures frame specific memories. These objects that can be touched and manipulated, operating in an embodied manner they can become resources to support Julia's link with her family and her childhood and thus sustain her sense of continuity. These objects are here used as 'private' (not socially shared) resources.

Asked about other objects she brought with her, Julia mentions books and compact discs, like most other interviewed young people. Among the compact discs are those of a popular band, the Manic Street Preachers. She immediately says that the band played a very strong role in her life. Also, according to Julia's narrative, 'The time when I got into the Manics was about the time my grandmum's burial, and just after she died'. I will thus focus my analysis on that first rupture and the turning of the songs of the Manic Street Preachers into various symbolic resources, linked to her developmental moves.

We might first ask how Julia met the band in which she will 'go into'. Julia had known the music of the Manic Street Preachers for a couple of years; she had bought an album, listened to it and 'hated it', regretting having spent money on it. Yet after her grandmother's death, she 'meets' the band again. During the holidays — probably after the burial — Julia found herself with a group of peers discussing about that band. This is, in Julia's narration, when things suddenly started to change:

> Then someone says the story of the singer who had vanished, and nobody knows what happened to him, and I found on the web this story — and I said, 'Oh this is quite interesting', and then I bought another album, and I knew I was going to end up with all the albums.

How can a hated album be turned into a loved one? It might be that, when represented to Julia after the grandmother's death, the songs were more apt to reflect Julia's grieving mood than her earlier feelings. Also, the mediation of others (a group of friends) seems to enable Julia to look closer at what the cultural experiences have provoked in her. The story of the lost singer might have enabled Julia to find a personal sense in the album, linked to feelings of loss: the loss of the singer resonates with the loss of the grandmother, of the loss of part of herself. This might have enabled Julia to turn that music album into a useful device, *something that can be used* in relationship to self — what I will call a *symbolic resource*. After that meeting, Julia chooses to buy other albums and she starts using that music as resource directed toward herself:

> I was not especially well at that time. And therefore the music kind of … I don't exactly [k]now how it worked, but it was as a kind of companion. [inaudible] it kind of articulated

> ... [inaudible] It is not a particularly happy music. It just kind of kept me a company when I was not particularly happy. It was not a very happy time of my life.

Julia first appreciates the music for the physical experience, the soothing and emotional wrapping it offers. It is also, by its very presence — or possibly because of the imaginary presence of the dead singer — a 'companion'. Here, music becomes a symbolic resource for its melodic and rhythmic qualities, that is, beyond verbal language.

Later, the songs suddenly reveal her to be organized around language and the lyrics appear to 'articulate how [she] was feeling'. As she says:

> I think I am not a poet, I am not a writer. It is very difficult for me to — put down on paper how, how I would be feeling … When I say it articulates, it kind of represents what I'm feeling, what I can't, I can't actually articulate it with a bit of paper.

Julia now sees her feelings as re-presented to her in a symbolic form; these are now semiotically mediated, and it becomes possible to say and think about them. As a consequence of this recognition, Julia becomes more interested in the band:

> There must be some kind of … something … I feel, you know, I recognize in myself something that I understand what they are saying, that means actually something to me … It has to be something like that. Or if they think something I have been thinking as well. … Or: they seem to have articulated something through their music that I was thinking as well. That's why I do listen to them that much, that's why I trust them and they can guide you through books and things like that.

Feeling 'acknowledged' in her feelings and experiences, Julia can acknowledge the 'presence' of an intentional power behind the songs. There is someone to understand her — the members of the band — who can show her something and bring her somewhere else; she feels close to them, as if she knew what they were thinking. Julia starts to use the songs as symbolic resources to learn about the band itself.

For this, she identifies other elements that might be used as resources. Julia starts to watch television programmes about the band, to read the biographies of the musicians and to explore the worldwide web. This enables her to know about the band, but has more outcomes.

First, she meets online a community of fans with whom she establishes contact, exchanges ideas and meets to go to concerts. Her social life is thus changed. Second, she comes to discover other texts and ideas. As she reads the lyrics, which are sometimes in Welsh and need to be worked out to be understood, Julia finds explanations on the Internet. Fans' web-pages advise to read the literature that had inspired the singers and texts about historical events mentioned by them:

> There is actually … the front page is compiled like a - reading list. What books, you know, they read … there is a whole range … Keats, Albert Camus, Sartre, erm, Soviets. They'll tell …, it is books that they have read themselves and have enjoyed. … There is actually … there is a song called Patrick Eightmen. … referring to the character of *American Psycho*, and because [inaudible] so I went and read it. Or a song called [inaudible] referring to *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*- so, you read that. … Sometimes it's very explicit, sometimes it is not … you have to figure out.

Julia thus expands the realm of the cultural elements she might possibly explore. She reads Marx and George Orwell, Sartre and Camus, and learns about the Spanish civil war. These texts slowly become resources to think about the social and political realities. In effect, it starts to modify Julia's understanding:

> It entered all different areas of your life, … like political views … not because of them, but because of this stuff I've read in Manic, it makes you think. It challenges the way you think, it contested my own views, that I had whatever by my parents, or whatever by the institution.

Manics as symbolic resources for transitions

We can now show how Julia uses these cultural elements as symbolic resources to work through the three lines of processes of transition. First, symbolic resources are used in link to *identity changes and repositioning*. Here, entering in the Manic's nebula corresponds to such a social relocation. Julia met new friends through fan web pages. Then, Julia adopted a style of clothing reflecting her link to the band and related political views. When she changed school, she looked for people who would identify her outlook and who shared her new interests. A third form of positioning occurs in everyday interactions: during discussions, triggered by this or that word, Julia might recall Manic Streets Preachers lyrics and start to sing or talk about them. The songs are thus used as symbolic resources in inter-personal relationships, mediating exchange and positioning her: quoting is an externalization about her own location, as much as clothes are visual cues. In turn, these dynamics of recognition produce self definition.

Second, the songs are used as resources in link to *construction of knowledge and skills*. Julia's interest for the band renders available a whole range of wider cultural elements. She starts to listen to the music (from the 1970s and 1980s) and read the texts (philosophical essays and novels) that have inspired the Manic Street Preachers. Then, she explores the real social world. Through her research about the lyrics, Julia learns the geography of Wales, visits the area and goes to the cafes which the band went to. Also, the songs awaken, sustain and orient Julia's interest in history and politics in various ways: through the references indicated in the lyrics or their backgrounds, through allusions to national and international events that invite Julia to document herself and to watch specific historical programmes. This expansion of knowledge is likely to go with some skills — finding relevant information, discussing it, developing social skills through group activities. A direct outcome of this knowledge acquisition is quite amusing: in the interview that preceded her acceptance at university, she was asked about political events; she could answer with precise names and dates that she had learned through her explorations of the songs! Julia's new personal culture also triggers her critical reflection and analogical thinking. Exploring the singers' references, she becomes familiar with their historical and political analysis of the Welsh situation. On this basis, she reflects upon her region of origin and its historical and social situation:

> I'm not from Wales. … But in saying that, I think that the area where I come from has a lot of similarities with the area where they come from. It is not about Wales, it is about an

> ex-mining town. There are a lot of similarities. Not to the same extent. The town is very detached ... you feel very distanciated from London. You feel quite isolated, not exactly, because they grew up in the eighties … but you feel kind of … slight similarities.

With this use of her understanding of the Manic Street Preachers applied to her own area of origin, Julia starts to develop a personal agenda. As she explains: 'It is just a CATALYST, just to different aspects. You know, they lead you somewhere, and then you go in your direction from that, which is a bit like a guide, that gives you a sense of direction'. With 'sense of direction' we move to the third aspect of transitions.

The third aspect of changes enabled by the use of symbolic resources is that of *sense-making*, which has been said to be dependent on two dimensions: *a time perspective and a system of orientation*. In terms of time, Julia's interest in the Manic Street Preachers is connected to her early youth, *before* the death of her grandmother; her entrance 'into' the band's world is also, somehow, the end of her childhood. During the depressed period of her mourning, the music offered a continuous support, a companion in her ongoing present, a musical wrapping. Now, Julia is using the music as a symbolic resource to define her future. As Julia sees the analogy between the world described by the singers and her region of origin, she starts to reflect on what might be improved there. She then sketches a project for herself, that of bringing education to a deprived youth:

> [I am] not particularly ambitious. All my family is from [that area] and my aunt lives next door. [My family has always been around — I couldn't imagine myself moving away.] That restricts a bit what I can be doing. I have benefited so much from learning about politics and it has enriched my life so much — Also, you know, the books, I've read so many of my books, and through the music I've listened, it has open[ed] my eyes so much, so many stories, so many things I've learned, so many things I've gained. – I want to bring it to other people … [Music is a very good way to educate people …]. Because it has enriched my life so much I want to bring it to others.

With such a project, the music links past, present and future, and thus ensures continuity through ruptures in her life. Such a project is dependent on Julia's new system of values. As mentioned earlier, Julia used to be a 14-year-old, discrete religious young girl, attached to her family and interested in sciences. Through her use of the Manic Street Preachers, she redefined her whole system of values and commitments (see also Valsiner and Lawrence, 1997 on modifications of trajectories). In effect, her readings of philosophical essays and novels, her understanding of history and her analysis of Wales and her region, make her realize that the world is not the nice place she once took for granted. This leads her to concrete actions, such as supporting local workers' strikes, and a wider project, such as the educational one. Such actions depend on changes of commitments and long-standing beliefs:

> I used to truly believe in god, you know, truly believe in god, and then, until I was 15 or 16, then it changed. I don't know why it changed. Looking back, I don't quite know why it changed. Because my grandmother died, or because the music - [inaudible] Not because it is so anti-code … But there was a definite change — I use[d] not to believe in god for quite a while. Not so much because of the music, but because of the literature. It brought me through the music … It challenged … Not only my political views, that where challenged, but my religious views as well.

For a young person to avoid alienation from herself or from the others, she needs to ensure that her projects and system of orientation are not too disjoined from the actual reality in which she lives. Here, we see that Julia has found a concrete social niche in which she might develop the means required to act according to her projects and ideals. She is indeed a student in social and political science, at a good university; and she is involved in local political action. Her actual activity might thus appear consistent with her whole system of orientation.

Finally, Julia's trajectory seems to have been radically changed as she has come to assume and play with her new symbolic responsibility. It authorizes her to move away from the cultural values and elements shared within her family, to explore the range of available cultural elements, and progressively find some which have resonance with her evolving needs and understanding, within a new social environment. In turn, the symbolic responsibility requires from her to stand for her left-wing choices and commitments in front of adults and peers in her new university.

In this case, the use of symbolic responsibility turns out to enable a highly *generative* exploration and mastery of societal and cultural knowledge, in which each change brings more possibilities of change. The emotional support found in a pop band initiates an identity transformation and relocation, and in turn, these bring Julia to new knowledge. This factual and social knowledge and identity changes facilitate a wider social repositioning, that of entering university and joining specific social groups. This knowledge also transforms Julia's outlook of the world, that is, the world in which she lives. Her studies then become a means to achieve some newly-defined ideals and projects. Overall, Julia herself elaborates a complex narrative of transformation, though which she gives meaning to her own transitions.

FROM SYMBOLIC RESPONSIBILITY TO THE USE OF SYMBOLIC RESOURCES IN TRANSITIONS

Julia's case allows us to move one step forward in our understanding of what symbolic responsibility enables. Symbolic responsibility demands people to choose among cultural elements available to them and requires them to account for their uses. When cultural elements are used in a way that participates in the three processes of transitions, I call them *symbolic resources*. Symbolic resources are cultural elements used by a person in order to do something, that is, with some intention which can be more or less reflective. The cultural element is thus associated with something else: one can listen to a Mozart symphony — a cultural element — for the beauty of the composition; one can rather listen to it *in order to* feel closer to an absent friend; in the latter case, the symphony becomes a symbolic resource.

Julia's case can help us to illustrate a three-dimensional model of uses of symbolic resources that has been developed through careful analysis of a wide range of cases (Zittoun, 2006; 2007). The first dimension is the 'aboutness' of cultural elements. Julia uses music to understand her own state (it is used about *self*); she uses it as a way to facilitate exchanges with other young people (*about* others) and she uses it to understand the social and historical world (*about* the world). The second dimension of uses of symbolic resources is their time perspective. Some uses maintain links to the past, as when Julia uses textile to feel connect to her home. Some accompany the

present, as when Julia maintains her sense of self through music during her mourning period. Some uses enable explorations of possibilities and futures, such as when Julia makes projects for a better world on the basis of the literature. The third dimension of uses of symbolic resources is that of their progressive distance from the here-and-now of embodied experience, or the degree of semiotic elaboration. Julia uses music first for its containing function, or for the mediation force of musical codes, that represent emotional states; she then uses verbal means to articulate feelings; she later singles out abstract categories, about the fairness of the world, or the self-labelling as 'leftwing'; she finally abstracts general principles, which will become commitments affecting various spheres of her experience.

All young people use symbolic resources to some extent. What makes Julia's case belong to a minority is that her uses of resources are very generative (they generate further changes). The three-dimensional analysis of uses of symbolic resources reveals that her set of cultural elements are used as resources both to retain the past *and* to explore the future, to be able to experiment embodied emotions *and* link them to abstract ideas. What conditions enable a person to do such uses of symbolic resources is, of course, the question raised by such an approach.

Finally, to qualify youth as a period of transitions, I have proposed to adopt a cultural psychological perspective and to identify symbolic responsibility as one major acquisition of youth. Symbolic responsibility brings young people to find in their environment elements that can be used as symbolic resources.

Uses of symbolic resources are very common phenomena; we all listen to music to change our mood, discuss about a film to facilitate social exchange, etc. What the approach proposed here reveals is how such uses, particularly abundant as young people exert their newly-acquired symbolic responsibility, participate in the work of transition through which people can extend their time perspective and system of orientations and confer sense to the changes they are living.

With its attention to cultural imaginary experiences, this approach examines processes taking place within the margin of freedom that young people can find in any situation of constraints. We might thus be surprised to observe the creativity and the invention of young people — using improbable cultural elements like scouting for knowledge, tales, songs and novels (Zittoun, 2006) — in various social spaces to ground and facilitate important decisions, learning and actions.

Acknowledgements

The redaction of this article has been enabled by a research fellowship by the Swiss national research foundation. The research described here has been supported by a Corpus Christi College Research Fellowship (Cambridge), a Marie Curie European Fellowship and the Swiss national research foundation. I thank Viggo Vestel and two anonymous reviewers for constructive comments on an earlier version of this article.

References

Anatrella, Tony (1988) *Interminables adolescences. Les 12–30 ans, puberté, adolescence, postadolescence. Une société adolescentrique* (Endless Adolescences. 12–30, Puberty, Adolescence, Post-adolescence). Paris: Cerf/Cujas.

Bagnoli, Anna (2003) 'Imagining the Lost Other: The Experience of Loss and the Process of Identity Construction in Young People', *Journal of Youth Studies* 6(2): 203–17.

Bajoit, Guy and Franssen, Abraham (1995) *Les Jeunes dans la Compétition Culturelle* (Young People in the Cultural Competition). Paris: Presses Universitaires de France.

Baltes, Paul B. (1997) 'On the Incomplete Architecture of Human Ontogeny. Selection, Optimization and Compensation as Foundation of Developmental Psychology', *American Psychologist* 52(4): 366–80.

Bangerter, Adrian, Grob, Alexander and Krings, Franciska (2001) 'Personal Goals at Age 25 in Three Generations of the Twentieth Century: Young Adulthood in Historical Context', *Swiss Journal of Psychology* 60(2): 59–64.

Benson, Ciarán (2001) *The Cultural Psychology of Self.* London: Routledge.

Blos, Peter ([1966] 1962) *On Adolescence.* New York: Free Press.

Brandtstädter, Jochen and Lerner, Richard L. (eds) (1999) *Action and Self-development. Theory and Research through the Life span.* Thousand Oaks/London, etc.: Sage Publications Inc.

Bruner, Jerome S. (1990) *Acts of Meaning.* Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Bruner, Jerome S. (1996) *The Culture of Education*. Cambridge MA/London: Harvard University Press.

Carugati, Felice and Selleri, Patrizia (1996) *Psicologia Sociale dell'Educazione* (Social Psychology of Education). Bologna: Il Mulino.

Carugati, Felice (2004) 'Learning and Thinking in Adolescence and Youth. How to Inhabit New Provinces of Meaning', in Anne-Nelly Perret-Clermont, Clotilde Pontecorvo, Lauren Resnick, Tania Zittoun and Barbara Burge (eds) *Joining Society: Social Interaction and Learning in Adolescence and Youth*, pp. 119–40. Cambridge/New York: Cambridge University Press.

Cavalli, Allessandro and Galland, Olivier (eds) (1993) *L'Allongement de la Jeunesse* (The Lengthening of Youth). Paris: Actes Sud.

Charlot, Bernard, Bautier, Elisabeth and Rochex, Yves (1992) *École et Savoir dans les Banlieues et Ailleurs* (School and Knowledge in the Suburbs and Elsewhere). Paris: Armand Colin.

Cole, Michael (1996) *Cultural Psychology. A Once and Future Discipline*. Cambridge (MA)/ London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press.

Coleman, John C. and Hendry, Leo B. ([1980]1999) *The Nature of Adolescence*. London and New York: Routledge (revised edition).

Coulon, Alain (1997) *Le Métier d'Etudiant* (The Profession of Student). Paris: Presses Universitaires de France.

Durkin, Kevin (1995) *Developmental Social Psychology. From Infancy to Old Age.* Malden, Mass and Oxford: Blackwell.

Duveen, Gerard (2001) 'Representations, Identities, Resistance', in Karen Deaux and Gina Philogene (eds) *Social Representations: Introductions and Explorations,* pp. 250–70. Oxford: Blackwell.

Erikson, Erik H. (1975) '"Identity Crisis" in Autobiographical Perspective', in Erik H. Erikson (ed.)*, Life History and the Historical Moment,* pp. 17–46. New York: WW Norton and Company INC.

Evans, Karen and Furlong, Andy (1997) 'Metaphors of Young Transitions: Niches, Pathways, Trajectories or Navigations', in John Bynner, Lynne Chisholm and Andy Furlong (eds) *Youth, Citizenship and Social Changes in a European Context*, pp. 17–41. Aldershot, etc.: Ashgate.

Flammer, August and Alsaker, Françoise (2001) *Entwicklungspsychologie der Adoleszenz. Die Erschliessung innerer und äusserer Welten im Jugendalter* (Developmental Psychology of the Adolescent. The Resolution of Inner and Outer world in Youth). Bern, etc: Verlag Hans Huber.

Fouquet, Annie (2004) 'Joining Society in Europe: Convergence or Sustainability of National Specificities', in Anne-Nelly Perret-Clermont, Clotilde Pontecorvo, Lauren Resnick, Tania

Zittoun and Barbara Burge (eds) *Joining Society: Social Interaction and Learning in Adolescence and Youth*, pp. 267–85. Cambridge/New York: Cambridge University Press.

Freud, Sigmund ([2001]1908) 'Creative Writers and Day-dreaming', in James Strachey (ed.) *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, Vol. 9, pp. 141–53. London: Hogarth Press.

Freund, Alexandra M. (2003) Die Rolle von Zielen für die Entwicklung (The Role of Goals for Development), *Psychologische Rundschau* 54(4): 233–42.

Fuhrer, Urs (2004) *Cultivating Minds. Identity as Meaning-Making practices.* Hove/New York: Routledge.

Fuhrer, U. and Josephs, Ingrid E. (eds) (1999) *Persönliche Objekte, Identität und Entwicklung* (Personal Objects, Identity and Development). Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht.

Galland, Olivier (1997) *Sociologie de la Jeunesse* (Sociology of Youth). Paris: Armand Colin.

Griffin, Christine (1993) *Representations of Youth. The Study of Youth and Adolescence in Britain and America.* Cambridge: Polity press.

Grob, Alexander (2001) 'Transition from Youth to Adulthood Across Cultures', in Neil J. Smelser and Paul B. Baltes (eds) *International Encyclopaedia of the Social and Behavioural Sciences,* pp. 16678–682. Oxford: Elsevier.

Grossen, Michèle and Perret-Clermont, Anne-Nelly (eds) (1992) *L'Espace thérapeutique, cadres et contextes* (The Therapeutic Space. Frames and Contexts). Neuchâtel/Paris: Delachaux et Niestlé.

Habermas, Tilman (1996) *Geliebte Objekte: Symbole und Instrumente der Identitätsbildung* (Loved Objects: Symbols and Tools for Identity Construction). Frankfurt: Suhrkamp.

Habermas, Tilman (1999) 'Persönliche Objekte und Bindungen im Prozess der Ablösung vom Elternhaus' (Personal Objects and Attachments in the Process of Separation from the Parental House), in Urs Fuhrer and Ingrid E. Josephs (eds) *Persönliche Objekte, Identität und Entwicklung* (Personal Objects, Identity and Development), pp. 109–33. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht.

Harris, Paul L. (2000) *The Work of the Imagination.* Oxford/Malden, MA: Blackwell.

Iacovou, Maria and Berthoud, Richard (2001) *Young People's Lives: A Map of Europe.* Colchester: University of Essex, Institute for Social and Economic Research.

Josephs, Ingrid E. (1998) 'Constructing One's Self in the City of the Silent: Dialogue, Symbols, and the Role of "As-if" in Self-Development', *Human Development* 41(3): 180–95.

Koepping, Klaus Peter (1997) 'The Ludic as Creative Disorder: Framing, De-framing and Boundary Crossing', in Klaus Peter Koepping (ed.) *The Games of Gods and Man, Essays in Play and Performance*, Vol. 2, pp. 1–39. Hamburg: Lit Verlag.

Lawrence, Jeanette, Benedikt, Ruth and Valsiner, Jaan (1992) 'Homeless in the Mind: A Case-History of Personal Life In and Out of a Close Orthodox Community', *Journal of Social Distress and the Homeless* 1(2): 157–76.

Lightfoot, Cynthia (1997) *The Culture of Adolescent Risk-taking.* New York/London: Guilford Press.

Mørch, Sven (2003) 'Youth and Education', *Young* 11(1): 49–73.

Muhr, Thomas (1991) 'ATLAS/ti – A Prototype for the Support of Text Interpretation', *Qualitative Sociology* 14(4): 349–71.

Perret-Clermont, Anne-Nelly, Pontecorvo, Clotilde, Resnick, Lauren, Zittoun, Tania and Burge, Barbara (eds) (2004) *Joining Society: Social Interaction and Learning in Adolescence and Youth*. Cambridge/New York: Cambridge University Press.

Resnick, Lauren (2004) 'Prospects for Youth in Post-Industrial Societies', in Perret-Clermont, Anne-Nelly, Clotilde Pontecorvo, Lauren Resnick, Tania Zittoun and Barbara Burge (eds) *Joining Society: Social Interaction and Learning in Adolescence and Youth,* pp. 11–25. Cambridge/New York: Cambridge University Press.

Rönkä, Anna, Oravala, Sanna and Pulkkinen, Lea (2002) '"I Met this Wife of Mine and Things Got Onto a Better Track". Turning Points in Risk Development', *Journal of Adolescence* 25(1): 47–63.

Shweder, Richard (1990) 'Cultural Psychology: What Is It?', in James W. Stigler, Richard A. Shweder and Gilbert S. Herdt (eds) *Cultural Psychology. Essays on Comparative Human Development,* pp. 1–3. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Steinberg, Laurence (1993) *Adolescence.* New York etc: McGraw Hill.

Tisseron, Serge (1999) *Comment l'Esprit vient aux Objets* (How Spirit Comes to Objects). Paris: Aubier.

Tisseron, Serge (2003) *Comment Hitchcock m'a sauvé la Vie* (How Hitchcock Saved my Life). Paris: Armand Colin.

Valsiner, Jaan (1998) *The Guided Mind. A Sociogenetic Approach to Personality.* Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press.

Valsiner, Jaan (2000) *Culture and Human Development.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage

Valsiner, Jaan and Connolly, Kevin J. (2003) 'The Nature of Development: The Continuing Dialogue of Processes and Outcomes', in Jaan Valsiner and Kevin J. Connolly (eds) *Handbook of Developmental Psychology,* pp. ix–xviii. London: Sage.

Valsiner, Jaan and Lawrence, Jeannette A. (1997) 'Human Development in Culture across the Life-span', in John W. Berry, Pierre R. Dasen and T. S. Saraswathi (eds) *Handbook of Cross-cultural Psychology*, Vol. 2, pp. 69–106. Needham Heights: Allyn and Bacon.

Valsiner, Jaan and Sato, Tatsuya (2004) 'Historically Structured Sampling (HSS): How can Psychology's Methodology become tuned in to the Reality of the Historical Nature of Cultural Psychology?', in Juergen Straub, Carlos Kölbl, Doris Weidemann and Barbara Zielke (eds) *Theoretical and Methodological Advances in Cultural and Cross-cultural Psychology,* pp. 215–51. Bielefeld: Transcript.

Vygotsky, Lev S. and Luria, Alexander (1994) 'Tool and Symbol in Child Development', in René van der Veer and Jaan Valsiner (eds) *The Vygotsky Reader,* pp. 99–174. Oxford: Blackwell (based on a 1930 English-Language Manuscript Given by Luria to Michael Cole).

Waddell, Margot (1998) *Inside Lives. Psychoanalysis and the Growth of Personality.* London: Duckworth.

Wertsch, James V. (1994) 'The Primacy of Mediated Action in Sociocultural Research', *Mind, Culture, and Activity: An International Journal* 1(4): 202–08.

Winnicott, Donald W. ([2001]1971) *Playing and Reality*. Philadelphia/Sussex: Bruner-Routledge.

Winnicott, Donald W. (1989) *Psycho-analytic Explorations*. Edited by Clare Winnicott, Ray Shepherd, Madeleine Davis. London: H. Karnac.

Wyn, Johanna and White, Rob (1997) *Rethinking Youth*. London: Sage.

Zittoun, Tania (2004a) 'Symbolic Competencies for Developmental Transitions: The Case of the Choice of First Names', *Culture and Psychology* 10(2): 161–71.

Zittoun, Tania (2004b) 'Memorials and Semiotic Dynamics', *Culture and Psychology* 10(4): 1–19.

Zittoun, Tania (2006) *Transitions. Development Through Symbolic Resources*. Greenwich (CT): InfoAge.

Zittoun, Tania (2007) 'The Role of Symbolic Resources in Human Lives', in Jaan Valsiner and Alberto Rosa (eds) *Cambridge Handbook of Socio-Cultural Psychology*, pp. 243–361. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Zittoun, Tania, Duveen, Gerard, Gillespie, Alex, Ivinson, Gabrielle and Psaltis, Charis (2003) 'The Uses of Symbolic Resources in Transitions', *Culture and Psychology* 9(4): 415–48.

TANIA ZITTOUN is interested in transitions in young people's lives and especially in the resources that people find to facilitate these, in their everyday lives and in fiction. Her main past studies have addressed teenagers' transition to work, adults' transitions to parenthood, and various ruptures in young people's lives. As a developmental and cultural psychologist, she is currently researching and teaching the psychosociology of transitions at the University of Lausanne (Switzerland). She would join University of Neuchâtel (Switzerland) as professor of education in August. *Address*: Institut de Psychologie, Université de Lausanne, Humense, CH – 1015 Lausanne, Switzerland. [email: tania.zittoun@unil.ch and tania.zittoun@unine.ch]