

## CHAPTER 1

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# OUTLINES OF A PSYCHOANALYTICALLY INFORMED CULTURAL PSYCHOLOGY

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*Sense-making*—the process by which people turn their experience into a meaningful experience, which has a value, a relationship with other events, and about which they can think or communicate—sense-making is a core psychological phenomenon, and therefore, represents an essential challenge for psychological enquiry.

In this chapter, we present the outlines of a general model of *sense-making*. One core component of sense-making, we argue, is the affective nature of our experience. However, cultural psychology has only had a limited interest in affects (with the notable exception of Valsiner, 2007). In this chapter, we intend to consider psychoanalysis as an alternative theory of sense-making, which addresses the specific issue of affects. We consequently argue that such psychoanalytical insights can usefully complement cultural psychology and thus enable the fundamental role of affects in sense-making to be accounted for.

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This chapter is divided into four parts. Firstly, we clarify our general assumptions on sense-making, and in particular, briefly introduce the semiotic and dialogical approach to cultural psychology that we adopt as a theoretical frame. Secondly, we address the notion of *affects* as it has been elaborated within the psychoanalytic domain. After briefly reviewing the various definitions of this concept, we discuss in greater detail the definition provided by intersubjective psychoanalysis, which models affects in a processual and semiotic way—as *affective semiosis*. We ground our reflection in this model because it is “naturally” consistent and integrable within the framework of a semiotic and dialogical cultural psychology. As we will show, the semiotic interpretation of psychoanalysis considers the notion of affects as the basic concept in any attempt to model psychological processes. In so doing, it offers a powerful bridge to link cultural psychology and psychoanalysis. Thirdly, we discuss the phenomenology and dynamics of affective semiosis in the model we define. For this purpose, we refer to Matte Blanco’s formal model of unconscious processes that provides conceptual devices to rethink the mind in a comprehensive way, integrating notions such as affects, emotion, and thinking. Fourthly, we make our fundamental claim concerning the role of affective semiosis in human experience—that is, that affective semiosis plays a constructive orienting function in sense-making.

## THE SEMIOTIC VIEW IN CULTURAL PSYCHOLOGY

Cultural psychology can be broadly defined as an approach within psychology that examines the activities and processes of meaning making by which humans and their social and cultural environment mutually constitute each other. It is a fluid theoretical field encompassing many perspectives, with their variety of epistemological, theoretical, and methodological choices (Valsiner & Rosa, 2007). In particular, not all of them place the same importance on the processes of sense-making. Without aiming at mapping the whole field (for this the reader can refer to, *inter alia*, Heine, 2008; Ratner 1994; Valsiner & Rosa, 2007), our intention is here to make our dialogical and semiotic perspective explicit.

### Semiotic Dynamics

We see the psyche as an ongoing process of shaping human experience through the mediation of semiotic devices (Zittoun, 2006). We consider these devices semiotic because whatever their source and support might be—words, images, ideas, objects, actions—they work as signs, that is, as

something standing for something else, or as signifiers for some signified. Semiotic devices enable human beings to go beyond the immediacy of the experience—to live immersed in the here and now and at the same time to treat it as something else that transcends the present moment and has form, consistence, and persistence (Rosa, 2007). These semiotic devices can also be seen as traces of other people’s experiences in time and space, and in that sense, are largely what culture is made of.

The meditational role of the signs consists, first of all, in orienting the person’s interpretation of reality. But also, more deeply, signs shape the objects or states of experience sustaining a person’s encounter with the world. This implies that sense-making is not just one of the various operations the mind performs; rather, it *is* the psychological life, the way the mind works. To use a Freudian expression: it is *the actual psychic reality*.<sup>1</sup>

Signs are not fixed entities with a stable content (Salvatore, Forges Davanzati, Poti & Ruggeri, 2009), their meaning is not something already given, stored in a imagined Platonic world and from there applied to human affairs. Signs are inherently polysemic—they are potentialities of signification (Linell, 2009) that are actualized according to contextual boundaries created by their use. Hence, their meaning depends on the way in which they are used (Wittgenstein, 1953/1958). Consequently, sense-making is a dynamic process.

## Dialogicality

Signs have no autonomous life. They are mobilized by people as they are engaged in activities that imply inter-subjective engagement. Sense-making is thus also intrinsically intertwined with action (Harrè & Gillet, 1994) and semiotic devices. Hence, sense-making is intrinsically dialogical. The idea of dialogicality can be understood in two complementary ways. First, it implies that any utterance or use of a sign is taking place in a flow of sign exchanges and other utterances. Integrating the propositions made by Bakhtin (1975/1981), current authors consider any use of a semiotic device as an answer to an earlier utterance, or as anticipation to a future one, this utterance being made by a present interlocutor, or by an imagined or imaginary other. In addition, any utterance is charged with the “echoes” of previous uses, effects of contexts, etc. (Bakhtin, 1986). In that sense, thinking is itself always and already a dialogical activity, inherently social (Linell, 2009; Marková, 2005). Second, the idea of dialogicality invites us to consider seriously the actual, socially situated conditions of the production of signs and discourse (Marková, Linell, Grossen & Salazar Orvig, 2007). From that perspective, utterances appear to be shaped by the intersubjective circumstances motivating their activation. To use Wittgenstein’s terminology,

the sign's psychological value is its function of regulating the forms of life carried on by linguistic games. And it is evident that this regulative function is not inherent to the sign, but depends on the virtually infinite circumstances of the social exchange serving as setting of the speech acts (Nightingale & Cromby, 1999).<sup>2</sup> Of course, broader contextual dimensions (cultural models, ideologies, or structures of power; Ratner, 2008) are just as constitutive of the dialogical nature of thinking and communicating, as the here and now circumstances of these activities. However, these dimensions have to be activated within the contingency of the life of people influenced by them—and it is at this level that we examine them here.

The dialogically based social-cognitive approach of Rommetveit (1992) is a representative example of an analysis of sense-making focusing on the intersubjective level, but by no means minimizing the role played by the socially shared ecological structure of meaning. According to this author, the world as a “*not-yet-verbally described* state of affairs” (1992, p. 22, italics in the original) is subjected to socially shared categorization, generating objects of experience. This process of socially shared categorization is carried out by means of intersubjective communication. Each actor carries with him/herself his/her own perspective reflecting specific interests and commitments and leading him/her to see some aspects of the world and not others, in one out of many possible ways. Within such constraints, actors engage in a dialogical process of reciprocal syntonization: an “attunement to the attunement of the other” consisting of the creation of a joint focus of attention upon selected objects of experience. Such reciprocal adjustment of perspectives is oriented by the cultural structure of meaning (“drafts of contracts for categorization” according to Rommetveit’s terminology<sup>3</sup>). Once and insofar as actors achieve their reciprocal syntonization, the resulting shared representation is instituted as a taken-for-granted reality and as such acquires a regulative function, allowing the actors to reduce the polysemy in which the meaning of every sign consists.

It is worth referring to the sketch Rommetveit (1992) offers as an example. He imagines a Saturday morning in Mr and Mrs Smith’s house. Mr Smith is pushing a lawn-mower around their lawn. Mrs Smith is sitting in the kitchen; she is sad and angry because she feels that her husband is avoiding being with her. The telephone rings and Mrs Smith answers. It is Betty, a friend of hers, who starts the conversation by asking: “*Is that lazy husband of yours still in bed?*”. Mrs Smith answers: “*No, he is working this morning, he is mowing the lawn*”. After a short while, the telephone rings for a second time. It is Mr Jones. As Mrs Smith assumes he is calling as usual to ask Mr Smith to go fishing with him, when he starts: “*Is your husband working this morning?*”, she answers: “*No, he is not working this morning, he is mowing the lawn*”. As we can see, Mrs Smith produces two opposing utterances (“he is working” vs. “he is not working”), to depict the same state of experience.

Yet, it is not hard for us to recognize that she is telling the truth in both cases. This is because Mr Smith's action of pushing a lawn-mower in the garden can be brought into language and made meaningful by means of a variety of fashions of categorization. Mr Smith can be seen as engaged in mowing the lawn, in enjoying a leisure-time activity, in avoiding the company of his wife, as well as in disturbing the neighbours with the noise of the machine.... Each of these ways of categorizing mirrors a cultural model of activity and offers a way of shaping the field of experience, by means of which a legitimate version of the reality is created. Mrs Smith selects one way among all the possible ones, in order to try to syntonize her perspective with the perspective of the other person. She does so according to her representation of the other's dialogical intentions, then according to the sense that she attributes to the other's speech act. Thus, as for instance we can infer, she interprets the question asked by her friend Betty as a kindly way of asking about her state (e.g., something like "why are you alone, where is your husband?"); therefore, she answers by selecting a fashion of categorization that enables her to be attuned to what she feels is Betty's perspective and at the same time to perform her own communicational act (i.e., "he is working, putting constraints on his time and in doing so he is avoiding spending the weekend with me"). In the second call, Mrs Smith selects a perspective that highlights a different possible meaning of Mr Smith's action: the area of sense concerning |leisure activity|, as opposed to |constrained activity|—signifying it by means of the expression "not working." Also in this case, this selection is carried out as the way and at the same time the result of Mrs Smith's attempt to attune her perspective to Mr Jones's act, as she understands it according to the representation of his communicational intention (she takes it for granted that he usually calls in order to arrange to go fishing with Mr Smith). To conclude on this example, three points are worth underlining. Firstly, the meaning is not "held" within the sign (in this case: the word "work"). Rather, the sign is a potentiality of meaning, a bundle of possible signifiers yet to be stabilized (Visetti & Cadiot, 2002). Secondly, it is the interplay between the participants of the communication that transforms the potentiality into an actualized meaning. In this interplay, each participant responds to the communicative initiative of the other and, at the same time, she/he contributes to shaping the sense of such an initiative with feedforward and feedback projections (Linell, 2009), prompting one or the other area of the potentiality of signification—Mrs Smith's use of the sign "work" is the way of attuning to the other; on the other hand, the sense of Betty and Mr Jones' communicative initiatives is not in the words they implement; it emerges from the combination of their utterance with Mrs's Smith's answer. Thirdly, one can observe that even if the meaning emerges locally, within and through the communicative interplay, it cannot come out from nothing. Signs are potentiality, but not

absolutely open—the word “work” is polysemic yet it cannot mean everything. It is a *constrained* potentiality, which can be actualized through its use. In the final analysis, this means recognizing the role of the cultural dynamics—transcending the communicative situation (Linell, 2009)—shaping the sign as constrained potentiality prompting situated sense-making.

## THE ROLE OF AFFECTS: PSYCHOANALYSIS AS A SEMIOTIC THEORY

Psychoanalysis as a field is even more fragmented than cultural psychology: according to Wallerstein (2000; see also Pine, 1998) there is not one, but many forms of psychoanalysis. Therefore, we have to specify which area of the psychoanalytic discourse we are referring to. Given our interest in a cultural psychology focused on sense-making as semiotic and dialogical dynamics, our focus cannot but be on the part of psychoanalysis that can be conceived as a semiotic theory, that is, that which sees the mind as a process of unconscious/affective signification of the experience. This vision is typically espoused by a segment of contemporary psychoanalysis. Yet, a more careful look makes one realize that it is actually found throughout the whole history of the discipline, already being salient in some of Freud’s seminal elaborations. In this paragraph, we will briefly outline these roots; then we will highlight how an important domain of contemporary psychoanalysis can be fully considered a semiotic theory.

### Freud’s Semiotic Unconscious

Psychoanalysis is usually considered as an individualistic and at the same time a biological theory. It may therefore seem very far from the semiotic and dialogical approach we are trying to develop here. One of the basic constituents of the classic psychoanalytic architecture is the intrapsychic and quasi-biological notion of drive (*inter alia*: Brenner, 1973; Ellenberger, 1970; Modell, 1984; Rapaport, 1960). Freud conceptualized drive as an element standing on the boundary between the somatic and the psychic (Freud, 1915/1957): a source of stimulation coming from the body and working on, or through, the mind. According to Freud, the drive is a demand of work addressed to the mind. The modelling of the psychic processes in terms of dynamics of drives entails an energetic conception of the mind based on the concept of *cathexis* (*Besetzung*), which constituted a constant through the various formulations and revisions to which Freud subjected his thought. Freud depicted the drive forces as distributions of libidic (or aggressive, after having introduced the death drive) charges creating conditions of disequilibrium perceived by the psychic system in terms

of excitement. The activity of the psychic system is nourished by the need to restore the condition of equilibrium in the distribution of the charges, by means of motor and/or mental operations aimed at their discharge. This is what the Freudian principle of constants states: the psychic system tends to keep the stimulation as close as possible to the zero point; the satisfaction consists in the reduction, rather than the increase, of the stimulation (Freud, 1915–1917/1963).

In addition to the notion of drive, Freud also developed a semiotic conception of the mind. In *The Interpretation of Dreams*, Freud (1900/1953) conceptualized the unconscious as a *form of expression*: a language having its own syntax (characterized by the rules of condensation, displacement, plastic representation, symbolic transformation, absence of negation and absence of time) and creating a specific form of meaning. As one can see, this formulation implies a model of the unconscious which differs from Freud's topographical model (a spatial model, in which the unconscious is a place-container of the repressed thoughts) and his structural model (in which the unconscious-Id is an entity of the mind). In Freud's theorization of dream work, unconscious processes are depicted in a semiotic way: the notion of the unconscious designates a mode of combining signs, generative of images and texts.

Freud's main contribution is hence not the discovery of unconscious processes as such (Freud, 1933/1964—the concept of unconscious was already present in the scientific knowledge of his time; Bucci, 1997; Ellenberger, 1970), but rather, his description of the modes whereby the semiotic processes of the unconscious are organized. The notion of *secondary process* describes the logic of our diurnal mode of linking ideas, admitting succession, causality, no double contradiction, etc. The notion of *primary process* designates the privileged mode of working of the unconscious. This mode is not simply the weakening of the secondary process, a reduction of the constraints provided by the reality test. Rather, it is a specific, autonomous and totally different way of functioning of the mind (Freud, 1900; Matte Blanco, 1975; see below). *Primary process* is a magic and hallucinatory way the mind works, typical—yet not exclusive—of dreams. It is grounded on the possibility of freely combining (condensing, moving) representations, without the constraints imposed by the reality test and by the distinction between inner and outside world. The notion of primary process has allowed psychoanalysis to read the idiosyncratic expression of humanity not as a mere absence of thought, lacking in rationality, but as reflecting a specific modality of the mind, radically different from rationality, yet endowed with its own inner systematic logic. For us, one of the main contributions of psychoanalysis to psychology is the acknowledgement of this unconscious thinking process, and its attempt to account for its logic, different from that of rationality, however describable in semiotic terms.

The shift in the theory of anxiety is the other point in Freudian works where a semiotic standpoint is clearly evident. Initially, Freud (1895/1950) proposed the so-called “toxic” model of anxiety. According to this model, anxiety is the effect of the accumulation of instinctual energy that the mental apparatus has been unable to discharge. Yet, 30 years later (Freud, 1926) he radically changed his views, proposing that anxiety should be considered as a signal produced by the Ego in order to warn that an unconscious source of undesirable conflict is going to arise, thereby making the Ego itself ready to cope with it. This is quite a radical theoretical change, made possible and motivated by the elaboration of the second topography,<sup>4</sup> and the consequent centrality gained by the notion of Ego within Freudian thought.

This change has had highly relevant implications for the further development of psychoanalytic theory—and more specifically for the psychoanalytical theory of the affects. According to the toxic model, anxiety is a subjective reflex of the energetic flow—the psychological precipitate of a somatic state. The idea of anxiety as a signal entails a semiotic conception of this kind of affect: a given state of the body (i.e., the anxiety) is not treated in itself, but in its standing for something else (the emergence of an undesirable conflict).

As concerns the focus of our discussion, two aspects of the signal theory are worth underlining. First of all, this theory has opened the way to theoretical elaborations that have led the notion of affect to gain a central place within contemporary psychoanalysis. This is because with the signal theory the affects has been endowed with a specific, important role within the psychoanalytic architecture of the mind. According to the signal theory, the affects perform the function of connoting the state of the inter-systemic relationship (i.e., something like the following warning: “the relationship between the Ego and the Id is going to enter a critical condition”) and consequently of triggering the response of the Ego in coherence with this connotation (i.e., in terms of activation of defense mechanism for coping with the danger coming from the Id). In the final analysis, with the signal theory the idea of the affects as an epiphenomenal correlate of the dynamic of drives is abandoned and replaced with a vision of them as a fundamental source of regulation of the psychic apparatus. Secondly, the theory of anxiety as a signal provides a semiotic perspective encompassing biological and psychological domains, making them strictly intertwined. The theory asserts that a state of the body (anxiety) works as the signifier of the psychological condition (the undesirable conflict to be coped with), the latter being its signified. In sum, with the signal theory Freud allows affects to enter within the domain of symbolic phenomena, qualifying them in terms of the signifier/signified duality.

## **Affects in Object Relation Theory**

Melanie Klein and her followers have developed the seminal Freudian idea of the symbolic nature of affects. According to Klein (1967), from the

very beginning of their life, people are engaged with an activity of affective connotation of the world leading them to feel every experience in terms of a relation with a positive (loved) or negative (hated) object (i.e., inner representation of relational experiences).<sup>3</sup> Indeed, Klein conceives the affects as the process of attributing basic meanings to experiences—love and hate, which she conceives as the psychological precipitates of the drive of life and the drive of death. Thus, Klein keeps the Freudian concept of drive, but uses it in a very innovative way, making it part of a semiotic dynamics where it assumes the theoretical status of a basic, bodily rooted meaning according to which the state of the self-object is shaped. This is very clear in the way Klein models the relationship between mother and infant. From the beginning of its life, the infant has to deal with the alternation of presence and absence of the mother; she/he experiences this in terms of global and intense bodily states—for example, presence as a condition of satisfaction and warmth, associated with the mother’s care; absence as a state of suffering, associated with the sense of hunger. The infant has not the cognitive competences to modulate these bodily states, therefore, she/he experiences them as very intense, extreme affects—of total pleasure or of total catastrophic displeasure. As Klein maintains, these two affective conditions are not associated with the representation of the same external object—the actual mother—as she is alternately present with or absent from the child. Rather, the two affects are felt to be due to two different objects, according to the instinctual duality (life and death drives): the good object providing love and warmth, and the bad object attacking and seeking to destroy the infant. Given the centrality of the object, this model is commonly called “object-relations theory.”

Hence, in object relation theory, affects do not merely connote the experience—for example, in terms of positive, joyful, unpleasant reactions to the circumstances; rather they psychologically *generate* the object (Stein, 1991). This means that the affect associated with a certain circumstance (e.g., the pleasure associated with seeing a nice landscape, or of talking with a loved friend) is experienced (at the unconscious level) *ipso facto* as relating with the object qualified by that affect. For instance, the sense of pleasantness that a person may feel is experienced by her/him as the presence of a loved, pleasant object.<sup>6</sup>

## Unconscious Process as Symbolization

The semiotic perspective has been developed by other authors after Klein (Klein, Heimann & Money-Kyrle, 1955). The leading Italian psychoanalyst Franco Fornari (1979, 1981, 1983; for a presentation of the work of Fornari in English: Giannakoulas, 1984) proposed a model of the unconscious defined as a process of symbolization. Fornari (1981) described the unconscious as a semiotic device feeding the strive of the subject to signify

itself and the world in terms of very basic affects (or “coinems” in the terminology of the author), considered as fundamental emotional, preconceptual meanings attached to fundamental vital dimensions (life, death, parental relationship, parts of the body) connoting the experience.

“Psychoanalytic philosophy radically changes, if exploring the unconscious, we assume a subject wanting to signify her/himself, marked by a primal *facultas signatrix*, or we assume a subject that always has to hide behind the modes it manifests itself.” (Fornari, 1981, p. 13, italics in the text, our translation from Italian original)

According to this author, individuals reveal two coextensive ways of signifying: one working under the socially shared rules of formal thinking—the “diurnal” side of operative categorization—and one working according to the primary process—the “onirical” side of affective symbolization, which works as the mobilization of *coinems*. In brief, affective symbolization is the process of projecting every object of experience onto *coinems*. In so doing, the individual makes every element of the experience full of affective meaning (e.g., the student projects the teacher onto the affective category of “mother,” consequently feeling and interacting with him/her as if he/she were the student’s mother, that is someone having a function of holding, feeding and taking care of him/her). In this model, there are only a few *coinems*—Fornari speaks of the *coinems* as “the few things oniric symbolism speaks of” (p. 73, our translation from the Italian original); they thus work as generalized classes, homogenizing the experience: patterns of experience that have no semantic linkage can be made identical by being projected onto the same coinemic category.

Fornari’s model is relevant to our discussion for three reasons. Firstly, it offers a processual notion of the unconscious that leads to it being seen no longer as an entity but as a mental activity of semiosis characterized by a specific modality. Secondly, Fornari puts the notion of affects at the centre of his semiotic model of the unconscious. According to him, and thanks to him, a semiotic standpoint in psychoanalytic theory equates to a theory of the affects—better, a theory of affective semiosis.<sup>7</sup> Thirdly, Fornari’s way of modelling affective semiosis preserves the nature of primary process.<sup>8</sup>

However, the model also has a fundamental limit from a dialogical standpoint: it shares with the Kleinian object relations theory a Kantian vision of the mind. In both approaches, the basic meanings sustaining the affective semiosis of experience—drives and *coinems*, respectively—are conceived as universal *a priori*, inherent properties of the individual mind. Although the content of these universal *a priori* clearly connote and therefore regulate relational contexts, nevertheless, they do not depend on the intersubjective experience provided by such a context.

## From Object Relation to Triangulation

Once the centrality of affects was recognized, authors after Klein have however tried to expand the model. One of the criticisms addressed to object relations theory is the very immediate nature of the self-object relation, and the simplicity of its semiotic model: basically, any relation is reducible to a child/good-mother or child/bad-mother relationship (or the slightly more complex model of *coinems*). However, clinical work with children and adults has led authors to propose a more complex view of the semiotic processes involved. Indeed, in many cases, the problem for a child or patient is his or her inability to transform an affective experience into something “thinkable”—that is, into a sign-like experience. To account for this, Bion—another British author—has come to see the role of the mother in early interaction (the “object”) as active in the relationship: her work is to contain the strong love or hate of the child, and to reflect it to the child in an already symbolized way, by a vocal or bodily expression. The mother thus “transforms” brutal affects (what Bion calls *beta-elements*) into signs (or *alpha-elements*) (Bion, 1962). In that sense, the mother is for the child like an “external” system for “digesting” experience; eventually, the child will internalize this “alpha-function”—the ability to turn affects into signs. These basic signs are a means of distancing oneself from the affect and bringing them to mind, within a relationship. They triangulate the self-object relationship.

Similarly, the model developed by Winnicott—a third British psychoanalyst—is a critique of the binary nature of the Kleinian model. For Winnicott (1971/2001), the very fact that the child can stand being separated from the mother is due to the fact that he/she can use things or movements as signifying the permanence of the relation to the mother (the object). These basic signs triangulate and mediate the self-other relationship. They become progressively more and more complex, and can stand for affects and experiences which can be semiotically externalized within a relationship: the child who plays with a toy, or who draws with his therapist, is thus using basic semiotic modes to take his distance from, and represent relationships to present and absent objects.

Some of this work pursues the vein opened by Freud, seeing the discourse on dreams as the royal road to the unconscious, and Anna Freud, seeing children’s play as such a royal road. In any case, externalizations are seen as signs which, within a specific interpersonal relationship, offer a window on the semiotic dynamics of unconscious processes, a flow that can be guided through further uses of signs in the here and now of the interaction. Studies emphasizing the ternary nature of symbolization have developed in two directions. On the one hand, they have given rise to current studies on the limits of thinking in terms of various modes of

symbolization (Alvarez, 1992; Segal, 1991). On the other hand, they have led to give more attention to the intersubjective nature of the relationship in which symbolization might, or might not happen (Green, 2002/2005; Tisseron, 2006). Of course, these two strands have also been combined (Fonagy, Gergely, Jurist & Target, 2005). For us, an important point to retain is the fact that humans progressively, in interactions, come to use signs, which emerge out of, designate, and control fields of intense affective experience.

## Interpersonal Psychoanalysis

In parallel to these British and European developments of psychoanalysis, another development gives a more radical alternative to the overmonistic Kleinian model of mind and affect. A primarily American, postwar tradition has proposed a rereading of psychoanalysis with a strong focus on interpersonal relations (Gill, 1994; Greenberg & Mitchell, 1983; Hoffman, 1998; Mitchell & Aron, 1999; Modell, 1984). As its proponents emphasized the dialogical nature of the mind and the role of relational experiences in the organization of the psyche (Sullivan, 1953), they came to radically criticize the original Freudian theory of drives. One of the most representative authors of this approach, Mitchell (1988) thus stated that mind does not preexist relationships, but emerges within and by means of intersubjective communication. Consistently with this idea, interpersonal psychoanalysis underlines that affective meanings and the relational field are recursively linked, each being the source and the product of the other. Being part of an intersubjective field elicits patterns of experiences of self and the other made of sensations, fantasies, ideas, feelings, acts and so forth. These patterns acquire subjective meaning according to the constellation of generalized emotional and relational experiences associated with positive or negative affective value (e.g., pleasant, unpleasant; dreadful, disgusting and the like). Thus, the previous experience provides a context for giving sense to the present moment in terms of an affective meaning onto which the here and now is projected. At the same time this affective meaning works as the *interpretans* of the ongoing intersubjective field eliciting its emergence.

In place of Freud's topographical and structural theories of mind we envision an organized totality of lived personal experience, more or less conscious and more or less contoured according to those emotional and relational experiences. Instead of a container we picture an experiential system of expectations, interpretative patterns and meanings (...). Within such a system or world, one can feel and know certain things often repetitively and with unshakable certainty. (Stolorow, Orange, & Atwood, 2001/2006, p. 675)

Within this approach, Gill (1994) provides a hermeneutic and situated view of the psychotherapeutic process for which the clinical relationship is a co-construction of meaning, performed jointly by analyst and analysant. The co-construction of meaning is carried out through communicational processes working both at the level of intentional negotiation and unconscious semiosis. This vision radically questions the classical image of the “mirror analyst,” according to which the therapist would work aseptically, as if she/he were outside the relationship. On the other hand, Gill highlights how the analyst participates in the clinical exchange through her/his subjectivity which interacts with the patient’s. Everything that happens within the clinical exchange has to be considered the expression of an intersubjective field (see also Odgen, 2004; see also Grossen & Perret-Clermont, 1992, for an analysis of the therapeutic encounter).

### **And What About the Logic of Primary Processes?**

Contemporary psychoanalysis has developed a semiotic approach to the mind, giving room to the notion of affective semiosis and at the same time overcoming the hypostatization of the affective meaning entailed in the implicit reference to a transcendental subject. Nevertheless, in mainly Northern American streams of psychoanalysis, this has not been achieved without costs: a loss of the specificities of the notion of unconscious dynamics as primary process.

First, the quote by Stolorow and his colleagues above highlights that this interpersonal psychoanalysis tends to overlap the notions of *unconscious* and *unawareness*, and to conceive affective semiosis as a kind of sense-making that works according to the rules of rational thought (secondary process, in psychoanalytic terms) which keeps in touch with the reality, even if in a somehow fuzzier and less constrained way. In such terms, interpersonal psychoanalysis misses out the specificity of affective semiosis. What remains is a form of subjective reaction to the environment, and emotions commonly called happiness, sadness, or loneliness. The “experiential system of expectations, interpretative patterns and meanings” to which Stolorow, Orange, & Atwood (2001/2006, p. 675) refer to is a constellation entailing an idea of the psychological reality as strongly shaped and regulated by idiosyncratic passions and emotions, desires and relational memories. Nevertheless, this kind of constellation has nothing to do with primary process, that is, the specificity of unconscious processes as pointed out by Freud (1933/1964). Hence, this stream of contemporary psychoanalysis seems to have given up the specificity provided by the nuclear and foundational notion of primary process (Eagle, 1987).

Secondly, such developments of psychoanalysis have assumed a descriptive, nondynamic idea of the unconscious, defined in negative terms as what is *not-conscious*. Cues of this trend can be found in the work of authors revising psychoanalytic theory in the light of cognitive science (Epstein, 1998; Erderlyi, 1985; Singer, 1998). One way of losing the specificity of the notion of the unconscious is provided by models proposing a functional definition of this concept. According to this kind of definition, the unconscious is endowed with plans and goals, even though not under the control of conscious thought. A well known example of this approach is provided by Weiss, Sampson and the Mount Zion Psychotherapy Research Group (1986) with their clinical theory centered on the idea of “unconscious plans”. According to this approach, the patient engages with the therapist with the unconscious aim of being confirmed in his/her own pathogenic beliefs concerning her/himself and the other. For example, a patient asks the therapist to be held and understood; yet at the same time he behaves toward the therapist in a provocative way, so as to trigger negative feelings in the clinician. According to this approach, the patient is guided by the unconscious plan of finding confirmation of his unconscious pathogenic belief that nobody can welcome and understand him. Clearly, concepts as plans, aims, beliefs, goal-oriented action entail the idea that the unconscious has, or is a reflex of, a computational competence, that is, that it works in terms of secondary process.<sup>9</sup>

We consider that psychoanalysis that gives up its specificity—being a psychology of the depth (Salvatore & Pagano, 2005)—loses most of its heuristic power. In contrast, we believe that psychoanalysis can contribute to a dialogic and semiotic cultural psychology only if it can take into account both the horizontal dimension of intersubjective dynamics, and the vertical dimension of the intrapsychological processes unifying unconscious dynamics and conscious thinking (Green, 2002/2005).

## AFFECTS

The discussion in the previous paragraph shows the complex role played by affects in psychoanalysis. A cultural psychology that wants to capture the dynamics of sense-making has to account for this essential component of human experience. As already stated, this means that the bridging between psychoanalysis and cultural psychology passes through the development of an integrative theory of affective semiosis capable of deepening the psychocultural understanding of sense-making. Unfortunately, the notion of affects is one of the most ambiguous and polysemic within the psychoanalytic tradition, and more generally, the psychological realm, where it is subject to a wide number of definitions and uses. It is therefore necessary to clarify our position.

## A Notion Looking for a Definition

Freud did not use the notion “affects” in a unique way. In various parts of his writings, he implied a quantitative and somatic conception of affects, considering them as derivatives of the drive, as the amount of charge associated with the drive (i.e., as “sum of excitation”) or as the somatic process of discharge (i.e., as cathexis) of pulsional energy. In other part of his works, especially in those concerning clinical topics, affects are conceived as feelings working as *regulators*, rather than as a mere derivative of pulsional dynamics. This is already evident in *Studies on Hysteria* (Breuer & Freud 1893/1955) as well as, even more clearly, in Freud’s later work (Freud, 1926) on the signal theory, which depicts anxiety as an affective state associated with bodily sensations feeding a feeling of displeasure that pushes the subject to react.

The *reference* of these affects is another source of variability in Freud’s conception. Two general ideas are traceable. On one side, affects are seen as representations and inner reproductions of experiences of the external world. Typically, in Freud’s theory of trauma the affect is a quasi-hypnotic state of the mind resulting from traumatic experiences. It works to keep such experiences continuously active—somehow moving the mind outside of time, in the suspended present of the trauma. When the affect cannot be metabolized and remains, as it were, “undigested,” then the traumatic experience preserves its power of colonizing the mind, and therefore of sustaining the person’s psychic reality. On the other hand, Freud provided an idea of affects as inner perceptions, that is, as representations of the body’s state of activation.<sup>10</sup>

## Contemporary Evolutions of the Notion

Contemporary psychoanalysis has updated the original Freudian thesis on affects, yet the fundamental conceptual articulation found in Freud’s writings is still considered valid. Thus, the initial physiological modeling of the affects in terms of drive derivatives has been updated as a result of the reelaboration of the concept of drive in accordance with advances in biology, ethology and neuroscience. For instance, Noy (1982, quoted in Stein, 1991), conceives affects as an inner program of action associated with fixed patterns of physiological activation. According to the evolutionary approach of this author, the fundamental function of affects is to regulate and coordinate the various bodily reactions to the stimuli and to activate the motivational systems, therefore to trigger behavior. The same relevance to the bodily state is entailed in the concept of *arousal* that plays a very central role in the psychological theory of affects. According to the classical theory of emotions of Schachter and Singer (1962), arousal is a state of generalized and

undifferentiated neuro-vegetative activation elicited by the environment. This state is then subjected to interpretation (*appraisal*), and so doing it is differentiated in terms of a given emotion, consistently with the contextual circumstances. What is interesting to notice here is that in the final analysis the concept of arousal is germane to the notion of drive, a sort of translation of the latter into psychological language (Stein, 1991). On the other hand, the notion of appraisal paves the way to the recognition of the connections between affects and meaning. In the psychological field this connection has been highlighted in terms of the close recursive linkage between emotion and cognition. According to this view, emotions are conceptualized as innate schematic values connoting the environmental objects and events in an unreflexive and unmediated way (Lazarus, 1991). Appraisal is thus inherent to the emotion: the individual enters in touch with the world primarily and very quickly in terms of generalized judgments (pleasant, unpleasant, dangerous, awful, etc.) selecting and orienting the further analysis of the experience.

This kind of approach is consistent with neuroscientific modeling of emotions. Le Doux (1996) distinguishes two circuits through which the brain processes the information concerning a dreadful stimulus. One path (that gets to the amygdala via the thalamus) is very fast, entailing only a rough computation of the sensorial information. The other path involves the cortical structure, and a more sophisticated, slower analysis of the stimulus. Moreover, the idea of the emotion as attribution of subjective value is close to the psychoanalytic theorizations that have tried to conceptualize the notion of affects in psychological terms, that is, in terms of feelings. For instance, consistently with the Kleinian view, Sandler and Sandler (1978) pointed out that affects are the way of representing and connoting the state of the object bond, thereby performing a fundamental function of regulation of the Self (and the relationship with the Object).

## **Unconscious Affects and Subjective Feelings**

The conceptualization of affects in terms of subjective value has constituted a major advance within psychoanalytic theory as well as a bridge between psychoanalysis and psychology for two main reasons. Firstly, this idea has allowed the recognition of the motivational and communicational valence of affects, evident for psychologists (Ekman & Rosenberg, 2005; Tomkins, 1970) and clinicians (Klein, 1976; Lichtenberg, 1989), as well as for the layperson. Emotions are subjectively felt as an impulse to act and are associated with reactions that work as very immediate signals for others, thereby working as powerful regulators of both the subject and the other. Insofar as affects are conceived as the attribution of subjective value to experiences and objects, then it is easy to understand that affects are a way

of mapping the world in terms of how to engage with it. In the final analysis, the notion of value leads to recognize that affects and action are strictly intertwined: affectively feeling an object means to be ready and inclined to move towards (against, far from, on, etc.) it, and at the same time, to express such an inclination to the object. Secondly, the interpretation of affects in terms of value connotation allows us to address a basic paradox that accompanies the psychoanalytic discourse on the affects: the issue of their unconscious nature. Briefly, the point at stake is the following. As far as one conceives the affects in terms of somatic activation, their unconscious nature is preserved. Or rather, the somatic conceptualization of the affects entails the notion of a dynamic (not repressed) unconscious, that is an unconscious that is so, not because is the container of ideational content kept out of consciousness, but because its way of functioning (primary process) makes it inherently ungraspable for thought (i.e., for secondary process). Hence, the somatic conception of the affects allows affect to be considered in psychodynamic terms, that is, consistently with the “true psychic reality” of primary process. On the other hand, insofar as one conceives affects as feelings, that is, as subjective representations associated with and connoting experience, this means that one is led to a secundarization of the unconscious, which means giving up the dynamic nature of the affects and conceiving the mental process in terms of representational contents that can be computed by the subject, as the subject computes the contents of rational thinking.

Some psychoanalysts tried to address this issue, proposing the idea that affects - intended as feelings—could be unconscious. Nevertheless, insofar as affects are considered mere feelings, alongside the path paved by Freud with his definition of the affects in terms of inner perception, this solution raises more problems than it solves, because it leads to the paradox of feelings that are unfelt. The definition of feeling in semiotic terms - that is, as a process of connotation of the object, of attributing value to it—seems to enable psychoanalysis to avoid this paradox. As a matter of fact, the meaning connoting the object can be conceived as an embodied significance, which is a meaning without a discrete representational content, which however motivates a specific disposition to act. In this way, affects can be conceptualized as part of the psychological realm, as a subjective process, and at the same time in dynamic terms, as an unconscious process working according to the primary process.<sup>11</sup>

In sum, the psychoanalytic discourse on affects, intertwining with the psychological and neuroscientific theorization, leads to this notion being conceived in accordance with the following basic processes:

1. *Somatic activation as embodied appraisal.* Affects are dynamics of generalized bodily activation, that is, the basic way of prereflexively experiencing the world in terms of embodied meanings, in terms of

- hedonic basic values (positive vs. negative, exciting vs. relaxing) qualifying and construing the experience.
2. *Self-other regulation*. The immediate appraisal of the experience has an inherent motivational and communicational valence, thereby making the affects a powerful situated, preconventional semiotic regulator of the social bond.
  3. *Symbolization as subjectivization*. The patterns of sense-motor activation sustaining arousal are subjected to a continuous and recursive process of symbolization (also sometimes called mentalization). One can conceive of this process of symbolization as a process of incorporating the embodied meanings within an associative chain of signs (Green, 1973), thereby transforming raw experience (Bion, 1962) into representations, that is, the subsymbolic into the symbolic (Bucci, 1997; Damasio, 1999).
  4. *Feelings* are the self-reflective output of this process, resulting from the introduction of the body into the realm of the secondary process, mainly through language. These feelings can then in turn enter the whole dynamics again, for instance as triggers for further affective activation.

This proposition results from a generic synthesis and is therefore very general. Different theories of affects could then be elaborated depending on how each of these dimensions is conceptualized and connected to the others. We will devote the next section to presenting our specific way of putting these building blocks together.

## **A PSYCHOANALYTICAL, SEMIOTIC VIEW OF AFFECTS**

In this section, we will propose a model of affects based on the idea that affective semiosis works according to primary process. Our presentation is divided into two steps. Firstly, we present a model of the unconscious in terms of which affective semiosis works. We do this by referring to the seminal contribution of the Chilean psychoanalyst Matte Blanco (1975) who conceptualized primary process in logical terms. Secondly, we describe some characteristics of the functioning of affective semiosis in the light of Matte Blanco's model.

### **Matte Blanco's Bi-Logic Theory of the Unconscious**

Matte Blanco (1975) proposed a theory of the unconscious to which we can refer, as we want to define a semiotic understanding of the dynamics of primary processes and their interactions with secondary processes. As far as we know, no other model addresses this central issue in such a systematic

way, a circumstance that makes Matte Blanco's "bi-logic" theory a cornerstone for those interested in modeling the processes of affective semiosis.

Following the Freud of the *Interpretation of Dreams*, Matte Blanco's bi-logic theory assumes the unconscious as a specific modality of the mind's functioning. His logical formal analysis, based on the principles of the unconscious that Freud had recognized as the basis of dreams (condensation, displacement, plastic representation, symbolic transformation, absence of negation and time), shows that the unconscious logic is different from the rational mode grounded in the principle of noncontradiction, but none the less systematic.

Matte Blanco suggested that the logic and semantic relations sustaining rational thought should be called *asymmetrical*, in the sense that the positions of the terms of any relation are not changeable and cannot be inverted without affecting the truth value of the proposition. For instance, if the proposition " $A > B$ " is true, then " $B > A$ " cannot be true at the same time, or if "Marco is the father of Bruno," then "Bruno is the father of Marco" is not the case.

In contrast, unconscious processes are free of these constraints, and Matte Blanco called the *symmetry principle* what he saw as their fundamental rule. Unconscious thought, that is, the mental activity working mainly according to the rule of the unconscious, *does not set limits to the exchangeability between the terms of a relation*. This means that from the point of view of the unconscious all propositions generated by all possible permutations of their terms are treated as the same. Therefore, for instance, from the point of view of the unconscious, if Marco is the father of Bruno, then Bruno is also the father of Marco. Hence, the principle of symmetry highlights exchangeability as the specificity of the logic of the unconscious: the logic of the unconscious openly and radically violates the noncontradiction principle. The full application of this logic cancels any differences and produces homogeneity among the signs that are part of any relation—insofar as Marco and Bruno are at the same time father and son of each other, they are not distinguishable from one another. In the final analysis, this means *that the logic of the unconscious transforms any relation of contiguity between two signs, that is, any association between these, into a relation of identity*.

Matte Blanco does not consider these two logics—that of conscious thought and of unconscious thought—as juxtaposed, but as complementary. Conscious (asymmetrical) thought works in terms of setting categorical distinctions-relations within the homogenizing (symmetrical) way of functioning of the unconscious. Thus, conscious and unconscious processes are two *coextensive* ways of mental functioning that are antagonistic and complementary: every psychological process is the output emerging from their interaction, and therefore, thinking is always a mixture of both. One can differentiate various forms of thinking according to the proportion of the conscious and the unconscious, that is, of symmetric and asymmetric

logic characterizing the mixture. In the case of formal thought asymmetric logic is strongly prevalent. However, even this mode of thinking retains a degree of symmetry, in terms of nonreflexive assumptions, analogical thinking, metaphoric linkages, unconstrained pertinentization, etc. (Matte Bon, 1999; Valsiner, 2009). Conversely, even a psychotic's thinking is never the implementation of the symmetric principle alone. This is because working in terms of pure symmetry would mean a condition where no relation, therefore no thought, would be possible. One can imagine the pure unconscious as an absolutely undifferentiated, presymbolic field of activation, produced by the encounter between the mind and the world, where no distinction has yet been made (Bucci, 1997; Valsiner, 2007).

In sum, unconscious thought is the mental activity characterized by the strong predominance of the symmetrical logic associated with a quantum of asymmetrical logic, which is however present. The asymmetrical logic introduces elements of differentiation within the unconscious totality (that is what we have mentioned above as the presymbolic field of activation), in so doing allowing the production of first basic relations, that is, the first proto-categories—in the final analysis, the first forms of experience.

### **Affects as Symmetrical Sets**

Matte Blanco depicted this function of differentiation performed according to asymmetric logic as the creation of bags of symmetry within the unconscious totality's indistinctness.<sup>12</sup> They are separate (therefore asymmetrical) from each other (one bag is different from another), but each of them conserves symmetrical homogeneity inside itself. This means that relations are possible among the bags, while within any bag only symmetry works (everything is everything else). The very basic differentiation of the unconscious totality is the one producing the opposition between the class of *goodness* as opposed to the class of *badness* (Klein, 1967; see also Carli & Giovagnoli, 2011; Carli & Paniccia, 2003). In this way, a basic distinction is made in the undifferentiated field of activation, and at the same time, the foundations are laid for a hypergeneralized assimilation of experience, that is, the experience-as-a-whole understood as goodness (or badness).

The idea of “bag of symmetry” is a way of modeling the emerging of the basic significance in the mind: symmetrical classes can be seen as the first classes of meaning emerging from unconscious processes. Inspired by mathematics, Matte Blanco called these as bags or classes, “sets.” Matte Blanco's idea of basic meanings as emerging from the encounter between conscious and unconscious dynamics provides a meaningful way of modelling affects. On this basis, we propose to define *affects* as *symmetrical sets*, that is, as hypergeneralized, homogenized meanings produced by asymmetrization within

the undifferentiated unconscious totality. Human experience takes its basic and primary shape in terms of these affective meanings (Salvatore & Venuleo, 2008).

The conceptualization in terms of symmetrical sets offers an innovative way of looking at affects. As we have said above, psychology and psychoanalysis tend to conceive the affects as bodily states of activation endowed with hedonic basic values (positive vs. negative, exciting vs. relaxing) nourishing and shaping the subjective experience of the world as well as regulating the relational engagement with it. Matte Blanco's theory does not contradict this general vision. Rather, it can be seen as a mode of interpreting it in a way that enables us to better understand the generative function of the affects for thought. In accordance with Matte Blanco, one can see the hedonic value sustaining the affects as the basic form of asymmetrization—that is of creation of symmetrical sets of meaning. In other words, the hedonic values can be conceived as the “antagonist” of the unconscious, introducing a quantum of differentiation within the symmetrical totality.

From this point of view, affective semiosis is a way of functioning of the mind characterized by the predominance of the unconscious, with the complementary action of the asymmetrization function that creates hypergeneralized and homogeneous symmetrical classes of embodied meaning.

## **Phenomenology of Affective Semiosis**

The reading of affects in terms of symmetrical sets enables us to conceptualize some aspects of the way they work.

### ***Randomization of the signifier-signified linkage***

Conscious thought consists of the mobilization of signs. A “sign (...) is something that stands to somebody for something, in some respect or capacity” (Peirce, 1897/1932). In the case of languages, it is generally accepted that a sign designates a link between a signifier and a signified (de Saussure, 1916/1977). Semiotics has highlighted that, for certain classes of signs, such links are conventional and stable within a given cultural system (Eco, 1975). They are conventional since nothing forces a certain signifier to be used in order to convey a certain signified: if an agreement is established, the signifier “ababa,” or the signifier “vvvv” can be used for denoting the concept |dog|. The extreme variability of languages is an argument supporting the idea of the conventional nature of signs, given that each of them has its own system of sounds to label concepts. However, once defined, the conventional link between signifier and signified acquires stability and univocity for the linguistic group within which the convention

keeps the value of stipulation, and for this reason works as a code grounding the interpretation of the sign.<sup>13</sup>

The symmetric principle is inconsistent with this property of linguistic signs. It works in terms of a *random linkage* between signifier and signified: any signifier can stand for a potentially infinite number of signifieds, and any signified can be expressed by an infinite number of signifiers.<sup>14</sup> Obviously, the randomness does not remain infinite. As we have already observed, the asymmetrization function tends to reduce—but not to eliminate—it. In the final analysis, this means that affective semiosis treats the signs as constrained-but-yet-infinite potentiality of combination. From the standpoint of affective semiosis no sign has an already defined content. Rather, it acquires its signified only within and through the web of connections that reduces its randomness (Carli & Paniccia, 2002, 2003; Salvatore, Tebaldi, & Potì, 2006/2009).

This statement is very clear for any psychoanalyst. Contrarily to the naïve idea of psychoanalysis, the psychoanalytic method takes as its target the contingent pattern of combination among signs as the vector of affective semiosis (Ferro, 2003; Fornari 1983; Odgen, 2004). Within the analytic situation, every sign acquires its significance in a situated and contingent way, according to the other signs it is connected to. Thus, for instance, if the patient evokes the image of an object with a cylindrical shape, this does not necessarily mean a penis. Suppose that, in his free associative flow, the patient speaks of how he is used to write with his fountain pen, even if this makes his handwriting hard to understand. Then, after a moment of silence, he goes on, telling the therapist that the day before he tried to phone his son and that the latter did not answer—and even though he thought that his son may not have heard the ring, he felt sad, as if he were purposely refusing to answer. Well, what could be the interpretation of this associative flow? A possibility is to interpret it as indicative of the patient's phantasy of having only bad things (his incomprehensible handwriting produced by the fountain pen) to offer to the loved objects (the readers of his writing; the son) and for this reason to be condemned to being rejected (readers that do not understand him, the son that does not answer his call). Obviously there could be other readings of this virtual sketch—and in the clinical reality many other aspects and data would be necessary in order to provide a valid interpretation. Nevertheless, the example provided is sufficient to highlight that the fountain pen does not necessarily mean penis. The word "pen" is a bundle of potentialities of signification, prompted by the infinite characteristics people can associate to it. Only one of these characteristics is the cylindrical form of the object at stake. Another characteristic is the quality of the handwriting consequent of its use, which in our example can be seen as triggering the chain of associations, and within it, can be

symbolically interpreted as standing for the capacity of engagement with a loved object. In sum, affective semiosis can be conceived as a dynamic field: the meaning is produced by the emerging effect of the whole organization of the signs, rather than by the cumulative combination of discrete signifiers conveyed by single signs.

### **Reification**

This characteristic is complementary to the previous. Conscious thought makes and keeps a distinction between the signifier and the signified, with the former standing for the latter. Thus, the signifier represents the signified, but does not substitute it. In other words, the picture of a portion of spaghetti can be used to denote the dish, but if one decided to eat it, one will not be fed.

On the level of affective semiosis things go differently. According to the symmetry principle, signifier and signified are linked through an identity linkage. The signifier does not stand for the signified: *it is what it represents*. The process of wish-fulfilment described by Freud concerns this characteristic: unconscious representations (oniric images as well as phantasies) are not mere figurations of the wished goal, but their hallucinatory satisfaction. In the same way, the infant who sucks her/his thumb is doing more than self-stimulating: she/he is experiencing her/himself being nourished. The thumb is not something standing for the breast: *it is the breast*. The same mechanism is evident in many circumstances where the affective semiosis is salient. Take the example of a flag, which in many cases, is felt and used as something more than the conventional sign of the Nation: it renders the value of the Country present and alive.

Recognizing the reifying valence of the symmetrical principle leads to conceiving affective semiosis as a device of *mental hypostatization*. Affective semiosis does not attribute meaning to objects of experience that preexist to it. Rather, consistently with the Kleinian idea of affects creating the objects subjected to emotional connoting, affective semiosis generates objects within the mind, through the act of connoting them (Salvatore & Venuleo, 2010).

It is worth recalling here the observation made by Bowlby (1961) concerning the elaboration of mourning. In this kind of circumstances, a feeling of anger against the absent object often takes the place of the first reaction of grief. The model of affective semiosis we are proposing allows for an understanding of this mechanism. Anger can be interpreted as the way affective semiosis makes (hallucinates) the absent object present-for-the-mind through the act of connoting it, albeit in negative terms: because it is gone it is bad, but it is present as being bad.<sup>15</sup>

The semiotic principle of reification is well known by those who work in the field of advertising. In many circumstances the message on the product

does not serve the function of informing about the object. Rather it is aimed at affectively construing (generating) it by making it present in the public's mental landscape (Klein, 1999). This circumstance is particularly clear in the case of paradoxical and negative advertising (i.e., "do not buy this product"; "it is a bad object").

The reifying valence of affective semiosis can be highlighted from a complementary standpoint, underlining that it has no intentionality, that is, no possibility of referring to hypothetical representations. This is an evident implication of reification. As a matter of fact, asserting that affective semiosis generates the object that it connotes is equivalent to saying that *affective semiosis always and only predicates presences*.

This comes back to Freud's seminal observation about the absence of negation in dream work (Freud, 1900/1953) as well as to Klein's model of the infant's affective transformation of the experience of the mother's absence into a present persecutory object.

### **Anthropomorphization**

The objects generated by affective semiosis as mentally salient are not discrete pieces of the reality ("objects" in the ordinary sense). Rather, they are *embodied experiences of relationships*. In other words, objects are animated by a communicational and relational dynamism oriented toward the symbolizing subject. Affective semiosis is a kind of picturing the world shaping it as engaging with the subject. We do not feel an object as bad, rather as bad-with-me/us. Such an addressivity is already entailed in the Kleinian model of affective semiosis of the absent mother, who is not symbolized as a recognition of a fact, but as a (subjective) object endowed with a destructive agency against the person who is symbolizing. And it is also evident in the child's way of beating and saying "bad" to the table she has just run into. On the other hand, everyone who loves knows that this circumstance is not limited to infancy. One who loves does not feel the lack of commitment (interest, attention ...) from the loved one as just a fact. She/he feels this lack as something that the loved one performs against her/him—the loved one is accused of lack of commitment, and is guilty of not loving. This is evident in episodes of marital unfaithfulness, which are generally experienced as a form of betrayal, that is, as a presence occurring against the partner, rather than an absence in the conjugal relationship produced as a result of the presence of another relationship.

### **Generalization**

Affective semiosis signifies anything in terms of generalized class: affective semiosis does not recognize a mother as an individual, but *tout court* as the whole class of all that is associable (then made identical) with being a mother—that is, in the final analysis, as *mother-ness* (Rayner, 1995). Examples of generalization are numerous: consider the awe we can feel in

front of our superior or another figure with some authority over us (a teacher, a policemen, an elderly relative ...). Such a feeling cannot be related to the actual attitude and power of the figure; rather, it reflects a meaning that we attribute to the generalized class of the authoritative and powerful figures we identify our interlocutor with, rather than to the specific person.

### ***Homogenizing through absolutization***

This aspect is strictly interwoven with generalization. The fact that affective semiosis treats every element as identical to the class also means that all the qualities and characteristics of the class are attributed to the element, and that it will have them to the maximum degree (the unconscious cannot modulate!). As a consequence of this absolutization, every element is made identical—homogenized—to every other element that is part of the same generalized set of meaning. Stereotypic thought evidently shows hints of the affective mechanism we are discussing. All the objects that are projected in the stereotypical class are confused with each other regardless of their individual specificity, and treated according to all the properties associated with the class. Thus, to give another example, stereotypic thought tends to connote all Muslims as Arabs and all Arabs as extremist male chauvinists, terrorists ..., giving all of them the maximum extent of the qualities of “enemy-ness,” dangerousness, wickedness that are associated with the stereotype. The experience of falling in love is another manifestation of the process of absolutizing. When a person is in this state, he/she views the loved subject in an idealized way—that is as having, to the highest extent, the totality of the qualities associated with goodness and fineness. Obviously, a person falling in love understands that reality is different, but he/she does so by means of a further operation of asymmetrization, placing some constraints on the absolutizing feeling.

### ***Wholeness***

The statement made above makes it clear that the reference of affective semiosis is never the discrete object (i.e., a person, an event, a thing) working as the focus of attention. This is because, given the symmetrical quality of affective semiosis, the discrete object is in any case assimilated within the hypergeneralized and homogenising assimilative set of signifieds. In other words, every discrete object is experienced as the whole field provided by all the elements with which the discrete object is connected and therefore “symmetrized” (i.e., made identical). Hence, affective semiosis is the reifying transformation of the encounter with the world (i.e., the ongoing flow of stimuli) as a unitary experience of a total object. One can pick up a hint of this level of experience when a new situation is encountered. In those circumstances, sometimes we can be aware of how, though very briefly, we

emotionally<sup>16</sup> experience the situation as something of global value (as threatening, warm, distancing ...), before differentiating the experience through a specific attentive focus.

### ***Inherent intersubjectivity***

Intersubjectivity is more a quality already entailed in what has been said, than a further characteristic of affective semiosis. We present it on its own because of its theoretical relevance and for the sake of our later discussion. Affective semiosis is an inherently intersubjective process in accordance to three complementary points of view. First, affective semiosis is an emergent product of dialogical dynamics. Indeed, as we have previously stated (randomization), affective semiosis is the effect of the whole organization of signs—that is, of the way signs are combined within the dialogical stream. Given the fact that unconscious logic does not recognize differences between self and other; one has to conclude that the chain of signs that reduces the randomness and polysemy of the signs encompasses all the contributions to the dialogue, before and regardless of any distinction of their source. In this sense, affective semiosis is by definition the systemic effect of an intersubjective process. This point can be shown by coming back to the sketch of the patient and his fountain pen. In the example, the chain of signs is produced by only one person—the patient. Yet, given that the source of the signs is irrelevant at the level of affective semiosis, we can change the example and imagine that some of the signs have been provided by the therapist. For instance, it might have been the therapist who expressed concerns about her/his handwriting with the fountain pen used to write a note to the patient. At the level of affective semiosis, the result would have been the same<sup>17</sup>. (We will come back to this point – the dialogical emergence of affective semiosis – later). Secondly, as we have seen, affective semiosis concerns the whole field of experience, before and regardless of the distinction self-world. Then, as the Kleinian theory has clearly highlighted, affective semiosis is the way of emotionally connoting the relationship in itself. Thirdly, as the discussion on anthropomorphization should have shown, intersubjectivity is the content of affective semiosis—this was meant by the previous claim that affective semiosis shapes the field of experience in terms of relational engagement. In sum, one can say that the subject, the reference and the object of affective semiosis is the relationship.

To summarize, in this section we have focused on some characteristic of affects. In so doing we have pictured it as a dialogical-semiotic process, that we have called *affective semiosis*, whose product is the transformation of the flow of ever-changing contact with the world into a global, generalized and homogenized object of experience, endowed with an inherently subjective, anthropomorphic addressivity. Connecting this statement to the ones provided in the previous paragraphs, we can add that such addressivity

is signified and shaped through and in the terms of embodied meaning, that is, of hedonic values that can be considered the first form of meaningfulness, therefore of subjective mental life.

## THE ROLE OF AFFECTIVE SEMIOSIS IN SENSE-MAKING

Having defined our model of affective semiosis, we can now address the focal aim of our contribution: the conceptualization of the role played by affects in sense-making. In order to move in this direction, we first have to take a step back and refer to the whole, anthropomorphic object of experience generated by the affective semiotization of the ongoing encounter with the world.

### Affective Context

We propose the term “affective context” to designate the immediate experience of the affective object. In so doing, we give a specifically psychological and psychodynamic coloring to the notion of context. According to our standpoint, the *affective context* is the subjective construction of the environment, where the latter is conceived as the source of the shapeless flow of energy-matter triggering, nourishing and constraining sense-making (but not defining it, Maturana & Varela 1980). Thus, affective context is the unitary global mental state associated with the continuous of the experience the subject is embedded in, before and regardless of the articulations between past and present; here and elsewhere; me, thou, it, us, you. In other words, the affective context is the first, immediate output of the semiotization of being-in-the-world. It is a hypergeneralized, embodied semiotic construction sustaining the mind and giving content to it—that is, conferring the felt sense of being in relationship with a live animate object.

This definition of the affective context provides a framework for conceptualizing the role of affective semiosis in sense-making. In general terms, we maintain that *the affective context works as a hypergeneralized, basic and preflexive assumption orienting the way persons interpret experience, and therefore, their intersubjective fields.*

The affective context has to be seen as the basic, global mental state embedded within the encounter with the world, triggered and nourished by such an encounter. This means that any specific engagement with a discrete element of the reality (an object, an event, a practice, a person, etc.) occurs within the global semiotic field provided by the affective context, as its temporary specification or instantiation. And this leads us to say that any engagement with a discrete element of the world keeps the affective

valence of the context of its instantiation. Hence, when a person has experience of the piece of the reality  $\alpha$  in terms of the sign  $a$ , she/he is experiencing the context *A-ness*—that is, she/he is experiencing the infinite set of signs  $a_n$  in which the affective meaning consists of.

## Affective Context as the Ground of Dialogue

The concept of affective context that we propose does not underestimate the role of dialogical mechanisms involved in sense-making. As we have seen above (and we will examine in more depth later), affective semiosis unfolds within and thanks to dialogue, as well as it concerns and grounds dialogue.

The following example intends to show how the affective context is the semiotic ground of the dialogical sense-making in which people engage, and how they themselves contribute to it (we devote another section to the complementary issue of how dialogue produces the affective context). Imagine a very simple social exchange: persons A and B meet by chance; they do not share any current ongoing activity, and engage in dialogue (they are able to use the same linguistic code). Consider the following discursive scene:

**A:** “I am going to Rome by car. I know you have to go there too. Maybe you would like a lift.”

**B:** “Thank you, it is very kind of you.”

We can ask ourselves: what assumptions do A and B require sharing as premises in order to understand each other and, more importantly, in order to find the communicative attempt plausible and meaningful? We will show the limits of a traditional semantic analysis; an analysis in terms of the affective context enables to account for the situation.

First, A and B have to share some assumptions concerning *what* world they speak of and *how* it works (the semantic models, see Johnson-Laird, 1983; Sanford, 1987). From this standpoint, we can, for instance, deduce that B believes s/he lives in a world where saving effort, time etc. is a desirable event (if not B would not have described A’s offer as a kind act); we can think that in such a world, the value of the act is not necessarily in itself, rather it can lie in the actor’s intention to perform it (B denotes A as kind, even if A has just expressed a willingness); we might also consider that in such a world helping other people by doing something good for them is not an obligation, but a choice (otherwise the invitation would not be a sign of kindness); and so on. In sum, A and B share a certain knowledge about how the world functions. According to cognitive psychology, thanks to this

knowledge, A and B can coordinate the reciprocal understanding of the content of their exchanged signs. However, this is not sufficient. In order for the dialogue to unfold and for its content to acquire a communicational meaningfulness, A and B need something more than shared semantic knowledge of the world: they need to share an underlying system of assumptions concerning the pragmatic value of the relationship. As contemporary linguistics and discourse psychology have highlighted (Austin, 1962), this system of assumptions concerns the interpretation of the activity people are involved in—*what* they are doing and *why*—which enable them to grasp the sense of their reciprocal communicational acts. In order to make their communication meaningful, each of the participants has to assume a vision of their contingent world, that is, of the other, and of being involved in relationship with the other. Moreover, they need their assumed visions to be at least partially consistent with each other.<sup>18</sup> In effect, the same semantic content can be interpreted in different ways. B could interpret A's speech act as just a sign of courtesy, or as a mode of courting, or an endeavour to be forgiven, or to obtain willingness, or to show off the new car, or to underline B's not having a car at his/her disposal, and so on. At the same time, A could interpret B's answer in different ways as well: as a ritualistic answer, as a sign of appreciation, as a way of saying "Yes", or even of saying "No", and so on.

*Our fundamental thesis is that the selection of one path of interpretation from the huge amount of possibilities made available by the cultural domain<sup>19</sup> depends in the final analysis on the perspective that A and B have on their situated, contingent exchange. And these perspectives directly depend on the affective context shared by the protagonists.* In this particular situation, we could thus say that if A and B were attuned to a pragmatic interpretation depicting their communication as a game of reciprocal agreement-seeking—or of declaration of willingness, or of courting—they would be implying a more general affective assumption consisting of the symbolization of their intersubjectivity as a friendly relationship, as an affective context of *goodness*. On the other hand, if as A and B were attuned to a communicational game of reciprocal control, or of avoidance, or of subtle reciprocal aggression, this would be possible because their pragmatic assumption would be grounded on a symbolization of their communication as an affective context of enmity—an affective context of *badness*.

On the basis of these affective contexts, A and B will define the sense of their dialogue and the pragmatic value to their utterances.<sup>20</sup> The affective context indeed excludes possible meanings. For example, if A and B attune themselves to a representation of their dialogue as a game of ritualized cooperation aimed at neutralizing the interpersonal involvement according to the accidental nature of the encounter, it is probable that B will interpret A's proposal as a sign of courtesy devoid of functional implication, and

A will interpret B's answer as a way of closing the ritual, devoid of an information charge. On the contrary, if A and B attune themselves to a representation of their communication as a game of reciprocal attempts to get agreement, then, for instance, B might interpret A's offer as A's way of showing interest in helping him/her. On the other hand, A and B could be attuned to a vision depicting their exchange as a competitive game; consequently, B would be led to interpret A's proposal as a way of underlining B's not having a car at his/her disposal or a tactic aimed at playing a nasty trick on him. And A will interpret B's answer as an ironic way of taking up the proposal.

Hence, in our view, *pragmatic assumptions are embedded within the affective context* that works as the intersubjective situated scenario, according to which the exchange can be performed and interpreted (Salvatore, Ligorio & De Franchis, 2005). Since the affective context is the shared affective symbolization that actors make of their relationship, we can say that it defines and constrains the domain of signification within which actors perform their reciprocal attempts to attune.

Finally, we can formulate our comprehensive model of sense-making as follows: *affective categorization generates the symbolization of intersubjectivity. Such symbolization, working as an affective context, limits the possibilities of reciprocal positioning and pragmatic interpretations of the dialogic exchanges. In so doing, it allows people to perform their dialogic strategies of reciprocal attunement, which in turn leads to activate and make relevant an area of meaning for the signs exchanged in the contingency of dialogue.*

## The Salience of the Affective Context

According to our thesis, the affective context works as a constraint delimiting the landscape of the virtually infinite polysemy of signs and their combinations. Hence, it is nothing but a distribution of probability of combinations among the signs embedded within the intersubjective communication<sup>21</sup> (Salvatore, Tebaldi, & Potì, 2006/2009). The salience of a certain affective context is a structure of probability defining the opportunities of sign combination: it renders the generation of some combinations of signs more probable, others less probable, or very improbable. Thus, the affective context can be conceived as the first fundamental constraining of the signs within a finite region of the totally open infinite dimensional space describing their reciprocal combination—that is the virtually infinite trajectories of sense-making; such delimiting makes some combinations of meaning possible.

The role played by the affective context in sense-making is thus conceivable in terms of a catalytic form of causality: the affective context as a promoting sign (Valsiner, 2009) defining—in terms of constraining—the

conditions thanks to which a given pattern of meaning is the most likely to emerge.<sup>22</sup> In other words, the affective context mainly performs its orienting function in an indirect way. It is not a normative rule prescribing the way of sense-making. Rather, it shapes the conditions according to which signs combine to each other and thus generate meaning.

The salience of the affective context is evident in the circumstances in which persons are in a state of strong emotional activation. In this kind of situations, ideas, evaluations, reasoning, every act of meaning appears to be “polarized” by the emotional state. Let us think a circumstance in which we feel very happy. Our attention is more easily focused on aspects of the situation consistent with the mood we are experiencing. The same happens to our interpretations and evaluations; even the commitment in the situation tends to be shaped by the emotion we are “caught” by—thus we can be willing to attempt an unpleasant task and be subjected to boring routines that we usually avoid. And one can compare this movement of sense-making to what happens when our emotional activation takes different directions: we become very competent in finding new reasons for remaining upset; our interpretations and judgment become sharp and ungenerous, and so forth.

Our previous example refers to situations in which intense feeling is involved. Most of these cases feature the capacity of our emotion to orient our evaluations, ideas, modes of thinking, as well as our way of selecting aspects of experience to be considered as pertinent. We are somehow adjusted and in various cases aware of the polarized valence of the emotions (e.g., take an expression like: “I’m sorry. I do not actually believe what I said to you yesterday. The fact is that I was very angry”). Nevertheless, emotional experiences are like the tip of the affective semiosis-iceberg. Indeed, affective semiosis is ubiquitous: it works even when we have no feeling of its working. No situation is affectively neutral. People cannot help affectively making sense, just as they cannot help perceiving or thinking. Every experiential encounter with the world triggers a movement of affective semiosis.<sup>23</sup> This means that the orienting function of the affective context is always in action, even if we are able to be aware of it only in situations where the affects are particularly intense.<sup>24</sup> Hence, people engage in an affective presemantic activity of interpretation of the experience which orients the subsequent process of thinking and judging the situation, and more in general, of conferring sense to it.

## **The Embeddedness of the Affective Context**

It is worth highlighting one last point. The affective context is not a separate moment from other levels of sense-making: we represent the discrete elements of the reality accordingly to an affective context, and our

representations constitute an experience of such reality as a whole. Thus, for instance, at this very moment I am typing on the keyboard striving to elaborate and express some ideas on sense-making. At the same time, I am “immersed” in an affective context. It emerged this morning, when I sat down at the computer, as the local stabilization of the infinite flow of interacting signs (my feeling on my activity, my ideas, how I slept, the sensation associated with the chair I am sitting on, etc.). I can grasp this affective context only partially and vaguely, as it partly escapes to language. I would depict it as a state of pleasant tension. According to the model proposed in this chapter, this state is not only a feeling: it is the cue of a hypergeneralized homogenising meaning that is active in my mind and sustains the sense of myself in the present moment. Insofar as this affective meaning is an infinite set of signs, one can only give an impression of it, by resorting to metaphoric terms. In this case, the image I find useful is the following: “being in relation with a lovable and active object, activating me and enabling my enjoyment.” This image encompasses a very large class of experiences through one’s lifetime, unified by the fact that they share the same hedonic value. This basic affective tone can be said to have its origin in the experience of the infant playing within an interaction with its mother, thus producing a pleasant movement of increasing-decreasing tension—this tension being the content of a transmodal presymbolic experience of the intersubjective field (for an analysis of this kind of process, see Stern, 1985). The point at stake is the following: while I am typing and working on ideas that I am trying to make meaningful, obviously I am in a functional relationship with the concepts and the mediating devices - I am engaged with a discrete activity, dealing with specific object. *Yet, at the same time I am living the experience of mother-infant playing.*<sup>25</sup>

In conclusion, the affective context is embedded in the course of sense-making, conveyed and reproduced moment by moment by ongoing acts of meaning. Obviously, persons are usually somehow able to differentiate, to place constraints on generalization. In so doing, they generally succeed in focusing their attitudes and evaluation on the specific objects to a certain extent. Nevertheless, this does not mean that the affective contextual meaning disappears. Rather, the differentiation adds a further source-level to sense-making, but it does not cancel the salience of the affective context.

## CONCLUSION

In the previous pages we have proposed a view of the affects grounded on psychoanalytic thought. Our model of the affects has taken various aspects into consideration, as they have been elaborated by different streams of

psychodynamic and psychological theory (e.g., object relations theory, theory of coinems, interpersonal psychoanalysis, Matte Blanco's bi-logic theory). We have tried to integrate them in a concept of the affects as the basic semiotic process that constitutes the intersubjective dynamics of sense-making. For this purpose, we have taken as central the fundamental Freudian intuition, namely that the unconscious is something different from and beyond unawareness, being a specific way the mind works – what he called the primary process. The primary process (rather than the unconscious) is what Freud considered his fundamental discovery. Following Matte Blanco's logical formulation of the notion, the primary process is the homogenising and generalising activity of the mind, blind to any kind of difference among signs. Accordingly, affects can be defined as the modality of sense-making within which the primary process dominates over the complementary function of introducing differentiation—that is, of the secondary process. Reading the affects in terms of semiosis shaped by the primary process has allowed us to highlight some aspects characterizing the subjective and social phenomenology of the affects—namely their reifying, generalizing, absolutizing, anthropomorphizing, homogenizing valences (that can be partially retrieved in the emotions and in emotional acting). We have thus provided a view of affective semiosis as the dialogic-semiotic transformation of the flow of experience into a global, generalized and homogenized mental object, endowed with an inherently anthropomorphic addressivity, signified in terms of embodied meaning (e.g., pleasure–displeasure). We have called this mental object affective context, proposing that it be considered the basic, prereflexive assumption orienting people's way of giving sense to their intersubjective fields. Affective semiosis, therefore, represents a fundamental dynamics of sense-making, grounding, orienting and constraining the way people use signs in thinking and communicating.

In sum, in this chapter, we have tried to develop the psycho-cultural view of sense-making by taking into account the psychoanalytic lesson concerning the role affects play in personal and intersubjective feeling, thinking, dialoguing and acting. Nevertheless, before concluding, it is worth at least noting that the dialogue is not only unidirectional—also psychoanalytic theory has something to gain from the encounter with cultural psychology. As a matter of fact, the semiotic and dialogical view of sense-making provided by cultural psychology represents a promising source of development for psychoanalytic thought. As we have said above, psychoanalytic thought seems to be caught in a dilemma: to keep itself within a static, individualist conception of meaning, in order to preserve the specificity of the unconscious, or to renounce such specificity in order to grasp the dialogical nature of sense-making. As we hope our discussion has showed, our dynamic, contextual and dialogic approach to sense-making

provides a theoretical framework that enables psychoanalytic theory to be re-thought in one of its central topics—the concept of affects. Moving ahead in this direction is one of the results we would like to achieve with this work.

## NOTES

1. Valsiner (2007)'s model of the recursive differentiation of the field of experience highlights the latter point in an efficient way. In his semiotic reframing of sociocultural psychology the author underlines how objects of experience are the emerging products of a process of symbolic generalization transforming the shapeless flow of occurrences into complex signs, that is, into fields of signification by means of which people are enabled to grasp the “fuzzy, always floating personal experience—intrapersonal and inter-personal” (Valsiner, 2007, p. 47; see also Valsiner, 2001). Symbolic generalization performs such a function by allowing the transfer of the value of a given object of the experience onto other objects, in so doing creating a symbolic equivalence between the elements thus becoming part of the field of meanings.
2. The latter consideration echoes Vygotsky (1934/1986)'s distinction between sense and meaning. The Russian author defines “sense” as the “totality of the psychological events aroused in our consciousness by the word,” and “meaning” as “only one of the zones of sense that word acquires in the context of some kind of speaking” (p. 305, as translated by Valsiner, 2001, p. 89). Hence, Vygotsky thinks that sense and meaning are not immanent properties of the sign, but something that the sign gains in the interaction with the subject (“aroused in our consciousness”) and—as regards the meaning—in the contingency of a circumstance of speaking (“... word acquires in the context of some kind of speaking”). This calls for the dynamic mutuality of these two processes to be addressed.
3. As Rommetveit (1992) highlights, “ordinary language provides us with culturally transmitted draft of contracts for categorization of states of affairs within a multifaceted ‘Lebenswelt’...” (p. 23). These drafts offer different “options with respect to perspectives on states of affairs entering human discourse [that are regulated according] to the range of possible human interests, commitments and concerns with respect to those states of affairs” (p. 23).
4. Freud has proposed two “topographical” models of the psyche: the “first topography” (from 1900) sees the psyche as organized into unconscious, preconscious and conscious parts; the “second topography” (from 1920) identified the Ego and the Id.
5. In psychoanalytic terminology the term “object” is used as a generic term to mean the piece of the world the subject relates with. Therefore, the object can be a person as well as any other content of experience.
6. The generative capability of the affect is consistent with the fact that Melanie Klein conceives them as a very basic dimension working according

- to the primary process. And the primary process is unable to make distinctions between the self and the object (see below). Consequently, every state of the self is experienced as a state of the undifferentiated self-world totality.
7. In so doing, Fornari goes beyond the Kleinian semiotic use of the notion of drive, radically freeing the psychoanalytic theory of this notion (substituted by a reference to linguistics and semiotics). Actually, this change of reference cannot be considered an absolute necessity. As a matter of fact, the concept of drive is not as surpassed, and its validity is not as dubious as it is often pictured. Various psychoanalysts have proposed a revision of it, in order to make it more consistent with the contemporary knowledge produced in biology and neuroscience. For instance, Kernberg (1990) (cf. Stein, 1991) has defined drive as a hierarchical system of affects, thus reversing the traditional Freudian idea of the affect as a derivative of the drive. Moreover, other authors have set out to reconceptualize the drive in terms of motive (Lichtenberg, 1989). In these approaches, the reference to the concept of drive generally entails a functionalist vision of the mind (i.e., the mind as a mechanism to be explained in terms of causes and/or goals). Therefore, despite the path of integration between drive and meaning proposed by Klein, contemporary psychoanalytical approaches referring to the concept of drive (inter alia, Brenner, 1973, 2002; Busch, 1993) are quite far from a semiotic vision of the psychological process.
  8. This is for example evident in the way Fornari (1983) reconceptualizes the method of free association. The author highlights how, according to the traditional mode of using free association, what the patient says after having recounted a dream, in answer to the therapist's request to freely saying what is passing through his mind, is conceived of as a content of the unconscious connected to the images of the dream. On this basis, the content of the free association is very often used as the signified of the dream, the latter considered as the signifier. For example, if the patient says he has dreamt of a policeman getting angry with him, and afterwards, when asked by the therapist to freely associate, says that the day before he had been shouted at by his father, then the therapist would interpret that the policeman is the signifier of the father. Fornari highlights how this way of using the free association contradicts the primary process principle, because it assumes a structural difference between the patient's account of the dream—treated as a signifier—and the following statement produced in regime of free association—treated as signified. If one does not make such a distinction, in so doing keeping the “primariness” of the dreaming activity, then one cannot but assume everything said by the patient as signifiers, whose combination has to be interpreted.
  9. Storolow and colleagues (2001/2006) define the unconscious as the affective dynamics that the subject subtracts from the intersubjective communication, because she/he feels incompatible with the regulation of the relationship. Typically, such a definition condenses the two previous criticisms: it is merely descriptive and negative (unconscious as what-is-kept-not-expressed); it entails the reference to a function of directionality—the unconscious does something in order to avoid overcoming a state of incompatibility. Note that this definition of the unconscious

is germane to the conceptualisation of the psychoanalytic notion of repression proposed by Billig (1999, 2003) within the frame of discursive psychology.

10. "In 1915 and in 1923, in the first and second topographical theories, affects were placed in a system and were seen not only as springing from the drives but also as being activated by the ego as well, being regarded as inner perceptions (...). They were seen as unmediated inner perceptions, more primordial and influential than external perceptions and more commensurate in intensity and quality to inner bodily processes (...)" (Stein, 1991, pp. 32–33).
11. The idea of the affects as embodied, unmediated and unreflexive connotation of experience forms a bridge between the psychoanalytic theory and the phenomenological vision of the situated and embodied nature of experience (De Leo, 2009; Ziemke, Zlatev & Frank, 2007). According to this standpoint, affects can be interpreted as the basic way of shaping experience, or more, of knowing the world—the individual unfolds through and in the terms of her/his body, that is in terms of hedonic basic values consciously or unconsciously experienced (positive vs. negative, exciting vs. relaxing). Being in the world is inherent to the body and is lived in/through the body. The affects are the first way the subject experiences the "lived" body embedded in and shaped by the world. Therefore, feeling the body and its movements is ipso facto the experience of the world. This idea is clearly expressed by Green (1973, p. 221) when he speaks of the affects as the glaze on the moved body.
12. "The fact that the classes are differentiated from one another means that there are asymmetrical relations which differentiate them. Viewed in this light, a class, if and when the principle of symmetry rules, can be considered a portion of "symmetrical being" surrounded by a layer or skin of asymmetry. As the mind and the unconscious deal with various classes, we can say that there are as many "bags" of symmetry surrounded by films of symmetry as there are classes in our unconscious." (Matte Blanco, 1975, p. 104)
13. This statement can be maintained even though one assumes a sociopragmatic and situated vision of sense-making, as we do. From this perspective the code is not an abstract a priori normative model. Rather it is embedded within the use of the signs itself (Wittgenstein, 1953/1958). This means that the significance of a sign ultimately consists of—and is provided by—the way of combining it with other signs. On the other hand, the possibilities of combination are constrained, and these constraints—which are what indeed defines the significance of the sign—even though they are not rigidly fixed, are however stable (at least in a given temporal range). For instance, the probability of combining the signifiers "dog" and "gallop" in an utterance as "The dog gallops" is quite low.
14. This characteristic has been highlighted by the Freudian conceptualization of over-determination of the symptom and more generally of oniric symbolism (Freud 1900/1953; see Cabell & Valsiner, 2011).

15. To use the terminology of linguistics, affective semiosis entails an inversion of the relationship between subject and predicate. It is not the subject that logically precedes the predicate (as happens on the asymmetrical level, where the predicate follows the subject, adding something not-yet-given to the latter). Rather, it is the predicate that precedes and produces the subject.
16. The feeling—what we can make correspond to the naïve term “emotion”—is not affective semiosis, which according to our thesis follows the rule of the primary process, for which it cannot be exhaustively represented by conscious thought. Nevertheless, feeling is one of the domains of human life—together with dream and delusion—where the clues of the symmetric quality of affective semiosis are clearer. For this reason here and later we sometimes refer to emotional experience in our examples.
17. This consideration means that the affective semiosis keeps its inherent dialogicity also when instead of an external dialogue performed by two or more people engaged in a communicative exchange, there is one person producing her/his idiosyncratic chain of signs sustaining an inner dialogue. This is consistent with the dialogical theory stating the intersubjectivity of thinking as well as of perception (Linell, 2009).
18. This does not mean that this vision has to have a representational format that is a declarative content that is reflexively conscious to the persons. Moreover, the sharedness of the assumption among the persons not necessarily—indeed rarely—is the result of an explicit negotiation (we address this topic in the final section)
19. “Ordinary language provides us with culturally transmitted drafts of contracts for categorization of states of affairs within a multifaceted ‘Lebenswelt’ (...) [Yet these drafts offer different] options with respect to perspectives on states of affairs entering human discourse [that are regulated according] to the range of possible human interests, commitments and concerns with respect to those states of affairs” (Rommetveit, 1992, p. 23).
20. In saying this we do not imply a logical and/or temporal separation between the system of assumptions sustaining the vision of the communicational exchange and the practice of this exchange—that is, the specific interpretation of the dialogical occurrences. Rather, the assumptions are activated and reflect the history of the intersubjective field, and are in circular linkage with the contingent acts of dialogue. In the final analysis, the assumptions are the products of the sedimentation of the previous acts of dialogue. At the same time, the assumptions active in a given moment regulate the acts of that moment. And through those acts and their consequences the assumptions reproduce and consolidate or change and are accommodated. In sum, the fact that the system of assumptions performs a regulative function on the participation of the people in dialogue does not necessarily mean a static idea of these assumptions, as if they came from the outside. Rather, we maintain a dynamic and situated idea of them as interwoven with the process that at the same time they regulate, emerging from them (for a similar approach, see Bickhard, 2009; Christopher &

Bickhard, 2007). The concept of symmetrical hierarchy discussed by Valsiner (2007, 2009) is consistent with the vision just proposed.

21. We are led to think that our definition of context is consistent with Bartlett's interpretation of the notion of "schema," stressing the active, embedded, systemic and dynamic nature of the concept: "I strongly dislike the term 'schema.' It is at once too definite and too sketchy. The word is already widely used in controversial psychological writing to refer generally to any rather vaguely outlined theory. It suggests some persistent, but fragmentary, 'form of arrangement,' and it does not indicate what is very essential to the whole notion, that the organized mass results of past changes of position and posture are actively doing something all the time; are, so to speak, carried along with us, complete, though developing, from moment to moment. Yet, it is certainly very difficult to think of any better single descriptive word to cover the facts involved. It would probably be best to speak of "active, developing patterns"; but the word "pattern," too, being now very widely and variously employed, has its own difficulties; and it, like "schema," suggests a greater articulation of detail than is normally found. I think probably the term "organized setting" approximates most closely and clearly to the notion required. I shall, however, continue to use the term "schema" when it seems best to do so, but I will attempt to define its application more narrowly. "Schema" refers to an active organization of past reactions, or of past experiences, which must always be supposed to be operating in any well-adapted organic response. That is, whenever there is any order or regularity of behavior, a particular response is possible only because it is related to other similar responses which have been serially organized, yet which operate, not simply as individual members coming one after another, but as a unitary mass. Determination by schemata is the most fundamental of all the ways in which we can be influenced by reactions and experiences which occurred sometime in the past. All incoming impulses of a certain kind, or mode, go together to build up an active, organized setting: visual, auditory, various types of cutaneous impulses and the like, at a relatively low level; all the experiences connected by a common interest: in sport, in literature, history, art, science, philosophy and so on, on a higher level. There is not the slightest reason, however, to suppose that each set of incoming impulses, each new group of experiences persists as an isolated member of some passive patchwork. They have to be regarded as constituents of living, momentary settings belonging to the organism, or to whatever parts of the organism are concerned in making a response of a given kind, and not as a number of individual events somehow strung together and stored within the organism. Suppose I am making a stroke in a quick game, such as tennis or cricket. How I make the stroke depends on the relating of certain new experiences, most of them visual, to other immediately preceding visual experiences and to my posture, or balance of postures, at the moment. The latter, the balance of postures, is a result of a whole series of earlier movements, in which the last movement before the stroke is played has a predominant function. When I make the stroke I do not, as a matter of fact, produce

something absolutely new, and I never merely repeat something old. The stroke is literally manufactured out of the living visual and postural “schemata” of the moment and their interrelations. I may say, I may think that I reproduce exactly a series of text-book movements, but demonstrably I do not; just as, under other circumstances, I may say and think that I reproduce exactly some isolated event which I want to remember, and again demonstrably I do not.” (Bartlett, 1932, pp. 201–203).

22. In a similar way, one of the present authors has been involved in depicting the context as the attractor of the intersubjective dynamic of sense-making (Salvatore, Tebaldi & Poti, 2006/2009).
23. This movement is carried out in situations of both external and inner dialogue.
24. It is worth noticing that conceiving the affective context as ubiquitous means that it cannot be thought of as a kind of structural obstacle/limit of sense-making, as associating them with the situations with strong emotional implication might suggest—on the other hand this vision of the affects as the enemies of thinking is typical of the naïve vision of the emotions. Rather, according to our thesis, the affective context has an essential, constructive role in sense-making that it performs in a constant way.
25. Accordingly the symmetric principle, it is meaningless to decide whether I am living it as the infant or as the mother. The context is the sense of the intersubjective field as a whole.

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