

## CHAPTER 3

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# FREUD AND CULTURAL PSYCHOLOGY

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This chapter fully assumes a sociocultural perspective, and proposes to reread the work of Sigmund Freud from this perspective. This position highlights how much Freud had a deep sense of humans as “being of culture.” His enquiry has many more similarities with current enquiry than is usually admitted. I then explore some consequences of this proximity.

### CULTURAL PSYCHOLOGY AND PSYCHOANALYSIS

Today, the field of cultural psychology is interested above all in how human life is enabled through, and by culture. Cultural psychology has its origin in the work of the Russian psychologist Lev Vygotsky, and in some other pragmatist authors, such as William James, Dewey and Charles Peirce, as well as German *Ganzheit* psychologists (Diriwaechter, 2004). It was introduced to North America and Europe through the works of Jerome Bruner (1990), Michael Cole (1996), James Wertsch (1998) and Jaan Valsiner (1998). This psychology can be said to examine the *person*, actively constructing meaning and sense; this person is embedded in his/her social and cultural

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environment; he/she changes through time; and as the environment is itself also changing, cultural psychology attempts to identify the transactions taking place between the person and the environment.

So what about Freud's work today? There have been debates on what constitutes the foundation of Freud's work: the attention he paid to unconscious processes, his theory of libido, his topology of mind, his death instinct, or his work announcing neurosciences.<sup>1</sup> Here I want to emphasise another, rarely discussed aspect of Freud's work: his underlying conception of the human person in its world of culture. Freud can be said to have developed a new approach to the human person, seen in all its uniqueness. On the one hand he attempted to account for the complexity and richness of human interior life—the sort of richness described by authors such as Shakespeare, Dostoyevsky, or Goethe. On the other hand, Freud was interested in the way in which a specific person deals with the constraints of shared reality, interprets daily events, and struggles to make free choices, on the basis of the history of her past interactions. And this is the reason I want to examine Freud's work here: the psychoanalysis he defined can be seen as an attempt to consider the person as a unique, changing, culturally situated individual, in all his/her richness and contradictions.

In that respect, cultural psychology and Freud's work can be seen as two approaches with a similar goal: accounting for the complexity of humans in their world of culture. However, cultural psychology and psychoanalysis develop different methods, examine very different observables, and have radically different theories. So what is the interest in examining the two approaches together?

I see two main reasons to propose such a reading. First, the evolutions of cultural psychology and psychoanalysis have often been intertwined and have enriched each other. Second, the two approaches share a deep theoretical assumption. Consequently, beyond their differences, the two traditions can enrich each other.

## Historical Reasons

I will be very brief on the historical proximity of the two approaches. Firstly, historically, both cultural psychology and psychoanalysis can be seen as reactions to the dominant approaches to the human psyche.

Freud was trained as a medical doctor in Vienna, at the turn of the twentieth century. He was interested in neurology. He visited Charcot in France around 1885, where he encountered cases of hysteric people. Unsatisfied with both the treatment they received and the theorization of their symptoms, he was to develop his conceptions of repressed affects and representations that would constitute the basis of his theory of the unconscious.<sup>2</sup> Freud's model of mind differed radically from the theories of his time. On the one hand,

it differed radically from medical science of his time. On the other hand, it also diverges from current German speaking psychology. European psychology was moving on one side towards a *Völkerpsychologie*, a sort of cultural anthropology, and on the other side, towards a physiological, behavioral experimental psychology. Freud seems never to have been very interested in these two lines of research. For example, according to Farr (1988), *Totem and Taboo* might have been seen as a reaction to Wundt's work in *Völkerpsychologie*. Also, he might have been led to define a "meta-psychology" to talk about the unconscious, because Wundt strongly stated that experimental psychology was studying only conscious processes.

One way to see the proximity between cultural psychology and psychoanalysis is therefore to see them as proposing alternatives to a dominant paradigm more or less at the same historical time. On the one hand, one of the origins of cultural psychology can be found in *Ganzheitspsychologie*, which happened to concur and object to the dominant *Völkerpsychologie* and experimental approaches that were dividing psychological life. On the other hand, the main roots of cultural psychology lie in the work of Vygotsky, who was also in opposition with some over positivistic approaches to the human psyche (Vygotsky, 1926/1997).

Another way is to examine the way in which Vygotsky—as one of the key figures in cultural psychology—was actually reading Freud. Vygotsky read Freud, and edited some translations of his texts; he quotes full sentences and ideas—often without mentioning their origins (Van der Veer & Valsiner, 1991). Sabine Spielrein, who personally knew Vygotsky, Freud and Piaget, might also have facilitated the circulation of ideas (Santiago-Delefosse & Delefosse, 2002). Vygotsky seems to have officially renounced Freud's ideas as being bourgeois and individualistic, yet many lines of that thinking remain in his work, even if they are not explicitly acknowledged as such.

## Theoretical Reasons

The second reason to bring cultural psychology and psychoanalysis together is grounded in theory. Fundamentally, cultural psychology and psychoanalysis are theories assuming the semiotic mediation of mind and behavior (see also Salvatore, 2004, 2006). They consider that the development of the person requires the progressive acquisition of signs that enable the world where people live to be represented, distanced and created. Both of them also consider that culture can be transmitted through generations thanks to the objects and languages that encapsulate past people's experiences. In turn, these collective signs will become what constructs each person, in what is common to human beings, as well as in what makes each of us unique.

Of course, beyond this basic assumption about the nature of human life, cultural psychology and psychoanalysis have developed different methods

and theories. As we know, they have also concentrated on different aspects of the phenomena involved; the facts thus examined and explained are quite incommensurable. As a result, the two approaches can usefully complement each other. Because of the logic of disciplines, some issues addressed by one approach have been forgotten by the other one. Bringing the two approaches together reveals the blindspots of each approach. For example, issues related to *conflicts* (see Zittoun, 2005), *nonverbal meaning-making*, *emotional* and embodied life, which are the daily bread of psychoanalysis, have been overlooked by cultural psychology. Psychoanalysis can thus play the role of a mirroring other in order to reflect the limits of cultural psychology (Gillespie, 2006), and invite it to develop its theory so as to address these issues in its own terms. For example, recent developments of cultural psychology thoroughly explore issues such as emotions and their transformations (Valsiner, 2007), ambivalence (Abbey & Valsiner, 2004) and conflict (Zittoun, 2005).

### **THEORETICAL CONTRIBUTIONS OF FREUD FOR A CULTURAL PSYCHOLOGY**

In the rest of this paper, I will highlight Freud's view on culture, and then identify four themes in Freud's work which are all relevant for a cultural psychological enquiry. Some have been addressed by it, other still wait to be addressed.

I thus first examine how Freud understood the specificity of *man as a being of culture*. I do so by examining the text *Civilization and its discontent* (Freud, 1930/1961), which, in German, was called "*Das Unbehagen in der Kultur*" ("the uneasiness in culture"). Note then that in the Standard Edition, the notion of "Kultur" has been at times translated by "civilization" and at times by "culture." Hearing them both as translation of the term "Kultur," we see that Freud identifies three aspects of human culture:

1. Culture is the total sum of the realisation and settings through which our lives are distinct from those of animals and which have two goals: the protection of humankind against nature, and the regulation of human relationships. Here Freud includes agriculture, and the mastery of fire, and then all the tools, which extend the power of the human body: from microscopes to telephones and planes.
2. Culture includes useless things: playgrounds, flowers at windows — everything which has to do with order, cleanliness and aesthetics, which do not exist in nature; here, I assume we can include arts, poetry, literature, etc.

3. Culture finally includes higher mental functions (let us read “civilization” as “culture” as in the original edition and other translations):

No feature, however, seems better to characterize civilization than its esteem and encouragement of man’s higher activities—his intellectual, scientific, and artistic achievements—and the leading role that it assigns to ideas in human life. Foremost among those ideas are the religious systems, on whose complicated structure, I have endeavored to throw light elsewhere. Next come the speculations of philosophy; and finally what might be called man’s “ideals”—his ideas of a possible perfection of individuals, or of peoples or of the whole of humanity, and the demands it sets up on the basis of such ideas. (Freud, 1961, p. 94).

Here, then, Freud considers culture as the mental representations, or mental mediations, through which people fix goals, support intentions, canalize goal-directed attention; human activity is thus understood as a hierarchic system of semiotic regulation, with some “higher mental behaviors” that channel or constrain lower ones.

Freud’s work explores these three aspects of culture. Firstly, he examined the condition and the use of tools and rules which enable humans to survive and live together. We can see Freud’s analysis of everyday tools and discourses as extensions of ourselves, for example, in *The Interpretation of Dreams* (Freud, 1900/1953), *The psychopathology of everyday life* (Freud, 1901/1960), *Jokes and their relation to the Unconscious* (Freud, 1905/1960). Secondly, Freud was an active “culture consumer”; he read literature, poetry, collected sculptures and antiquities. This is reflected in his work, where he examines specific cultural artifacts, such as novels, poems, sculptures, and so on, as cultural production, representing and crystallizing some aspects of the human condition. See for example, in *The Moses of Michelangelo* (Freud, 1914/1960), the *Delusion and dream in Jensen’s Gradiva* (Freud, 1907/1959), his studies on Da Vinci, Dostoyevsky, etc. Thirdly, Freud follows political and social events closely. This is reflected in some of his writings, such as *Thomas Woodrow Wilson, Twenty-eighth President of the United States: A psychological study* (Freud & Bullitt, 1967). Complex symbolic and religious systems are examined in studies such as *Totem and taboo* (Freud, 1913/1955), *The Future of an Illusion* (Freud 1927/1961), *Civilization and its discontent* (Freud, 1930/1961), *Moses and the monotheism* (Freud, 1939/1964), etc.

This suggests that the work of Freud—the discovery of the unconscious, the analysis of the human person—is deeply rooted in analysis of cultural production, be these political and religious systems, works of art, or everyday action. I will now focus on Freud’s understanding of humans as beings of culture. On the basis of these texts, I will explore four lines in Freud’s work which, I will argue, correspond to four core questions in cultural psychology.

## Freud and Cultural Tools

In cultural psychology, we speak about the “use of tools” to designate different sorts of mediation of human action and thinking. We say that computers, language or toys are tools for thinking. The notion of tool comes mostly from Vygotsky. We are often unaware, however, that Freud had a very interesting sense of the way objects, textiles, images, artworks, become part of our thinking and our emotions: as mentioned above, Freud problematized the question of material and symbolic objects as tools to extend our power over nature and to enable life in society. In his clinical work, Freud also seems to see objects as tools mediating some forms of thinking. Freud is very attentive to the objects mentioned by his patients when they tell him dreams or phobias. Freud identifies these objects, and reflects on their psychological function. He seems to ask, what meaning do they have for that person, what thinking or emotions do they convey? Here an example taken from the *Interpretation of Dreams* (chap. VI, section D, pp. 347–348, emphasis in original text):

She was descending from a height over some strangely constructed palisades or fences, which were put together into large panels, and consisted of small squares of wattling. It was not intended for climbing over; she had trouble in finding a place to put her feet on and felt glad that her dress had not caught anywhere, so that she stayed respectable as she went along. She was holding a BIG BRANCH in her hand; actually, it as like a tree, covered with RED BLOSSOMS, branching and spreading out. There was an idea of their being cherry-BLOSSOMS; but they also looked like double CAMELLIAS, though of course those do not grow on trees. As she went down, first she had ONE, then suddenly TWO, and later again ONE. When she got down, the lower BLOSSOMS were already a good deal FADED.

Freud’s commentary is identifying the reported objects: fences, flowers, branches, white, and red. He sees them as “hieroglyphs” that have two levels of meanings. At one level, there is an explicit meaning (a woman climbing a fence, etc.). At the other level, each of the objects, their perceptual qualities, and their geographical organization, designates other thoughts and emotions. To find them, Freud will ask the dreamer to freely associate around each of the objects mentioned in the dream. Through these associations, other webs of meaning will emerge; these constitute the “latent” discourse.

This latent discourse can be more or less dissimulated. One can dream about eating strawberries because one wants to eat strawberries. There can also be some formal correspondence between the object of the dream and some desired object—for example, a hat can represent the phallus. And sometimes the processes that link the objects of the dream to the objects of

the thoughts are more complex. In this example, the association of the dreamer goes from the flower, that the dreamer identified as a camellia, to the paintings representing the Annunciation; yet the flowers are red, as in Alexandre Dumas' *Dame aux Camellias*. There is here the juxtaposition of ideas of virginity, and of menstruation—and to the end of purity, here the number of flowers referring to the number of her fiancés. Thus, Freud has a subtle theory of symbolization. Objects have the symbolic function of designating very complex ideas that are difficult to master. They have this function thanks to their double anchorage in culture and in individual life. Take the white flower. On one hand, it belongs to a complex culture, in which the flower is used by religious painting to represent virginity; on the other hand, each of us has been exposed to these flowers and someone has explained to us why it is so. Now every time we think about that flower we can at once mobilize this network of ideas, feelings, representation, etc. Thanks to their double cultural and personal anchorage, using objects for their symbolic function is thus a very economical tool for thinking.

This idea thus rejoins one of the core themes of cultural psychology: the importance of tools, objects and signs in mediating thinking and human action. It however proposes other routes for exploring how objects might convey parts of thinking. Cultural psychology focuses on complex artifacts or culturally constituted sign systems. Psychoanalysis calls our attention to trivial objects that can become important for a given person. It also tries to examine how objects from the environment can contain and convey some of a person's thoughts and emotions. Objects can thus convey feelings and thoughts, and by reflecting these to the person, can be part of new forms of understanding. The role of trivial objects in thinking and feeling has been explored in current psychoanalytical work (e.g., Tisseron, 1999) but not in cultural psychology.

## The Constitution of Signs

If we examine objects as carrying parts of thinking, we are moving towards a theory of signification, or of semiotic mediation. In such fields, one question is at the heart of current research in developmental and cultural psychology. How is it that children start to use an object for another, a doll for a mother, a word for an internal state? How does the ability to use signs emerge, and thus the ability to use the white flower?

Freud proposes an explanation in the *Interpretation of Dreams*. He proposes an ontogenetic explanation for the emergence of thinking through signs, starting with a model of mind as a reflex apparatus—a stimulus-response structure. At a certain point, internal needs appear in the organism of the infant, causing an internal modification (e.g., the experience of

hunger). To account for the fact that the hunger is perceived, one must postulate the existence of some intermediary between stimulus and response. Because of this internal modification, or need, the infant will be looking for satisfaction: she will make a noise or enter into a state of agitation. The mother, then, provides the child with some food (e.g., milk) which satisfies the need. The infant can now retain a perception of the satisfying object thus provided, and thus a mnesic trace of the object is united with the mnesic trace of the satisfaction of the need. Because of this mnesic trace, the need will now appear to the infant as a wish (for a certain satisfaction). The wish could be satisfied though the memory of the previous satisfaction, which would create a hallucinatory satisfaction (the real need, the hunger, is not satisfied by a memory of food). In contrast, the mother could acknowledge the need, and provide the child with an object to satisfy it. The real food would thus be united with the hallucinated food, the wish and the need would be satisfied at once. A sign is born here, at the meeting of wish and reality, thanks to the acknowledgement of the mother.

This might be now put into a triangle, the corners of which are the subject (the child), the other (the mother), and the object by which the mother satisfies the need she recognizes in her child. The mother recognizes and feels the needs of the child (and reciprocally), the object satisfies them; but as it becomes a sign, it re-presents these experiences. Then, the other replaces the object with a name or a sign, and the child learns to use the sign to act on the other to cause her to provide the object. This leads us to a second triangle, a subject-other-sign triangle. Finally, the subject is able to regulate him/herself thanks to signs, in a subject-sign-subject triangle (see Zittoun, Gillespie, Cornish & Psaltis, 2007).

Freud thus has a theory of the genesis of the ability to use signs or represent, a recurrent question of cultural approaches to development. We find a very similar structure in Vygotsky's account of the emergence of symbol in the early 30's (1978). It is only relatively recently that sociocultural approaches to development have proposed similar accounts elaborated through observational and experimental techniques (Nelson, 2007; Moro & Rodriguez, 2005), thus joining current development in cognitive-psychoanalytical research (Fonagy, Target, Gergely & Jurist, 2002). Such strong similarity in theorization might be seen as another call to examine possible contribution of psychoanalysis to cultural psychology.

## **A Theory of Art and Play**

A third important issue in the modern study of humans in their world of culture is their relation to cultural artifacts and imaginary experiences,

such as that enabled by computer games, virtual worlds, films and fiction. We painstakingly try to describe the specific nature of these experiences. One way to explain them is to see them as an extension of children's play. But in doing so, researchers have been often confronted with Piaget's (1951) rather negative judgement on imaginative play. To go beyond this, authors have rediscovered Vygotsky's analysis of children's play and the arts, and also Winnicott (1971/2001)'s idea of the transitional area. Yet, these two authors were drawing on Freud's accounts of play and the arts.

Freud developed some important insights into children's play, and as mentioned, has a huge interest in the visual arts, literature and cultural creation. In a text called *Creative writers and day-dreaming* (Freud, 1908/1959), Freud is interested in the poet and writer's work. He announces that he sees the origin of the artists' creation in child's play:

Might we not say that every child at play behaves like a creative writer, in that he creates a world of his own, rather, rearranges the things of the world in a new way that pleases him? It would be wrong to think he does not take that world seriously; on the contrary, he takes his play very seriously and he expands large amounts of emotion on it. Then the opposite of play is not what is serious but what is real. (Freud 1908/1959, p.143–144)

Freud adds that the child knows perfectly well the difference between reality and the world of the play. The child uses objects coming from the material world and makes them enter his imaginative play-world; he then mobilizes affects coming from his inner life. We could say that the child deploys his inner life and emotions outside, on the scaffolding offered by the objects-in-the-play. Finally, the playing child satisfies needs, gains pleasures, and sometimes endures unpleasant experiences.

Freud will insist on the relationships between play and the elaboration of emotions. In *Beyond the pleasure principle* (Freud, 1920/1955), he develops the often-quoted example of the child playing with a spool tied to a string in the absence of his mother; he throws the object away in anger, and pulls the string to bring it back, saying alternatively "O-ooo," that Freud interprets as "Fort" (away), and A-a-a-a, understood as "Da" (here). Freud proposes two interpretations linking the play with the going-and-coming of the mother—the play itself is aimed at facilitating the child's acceptance of her departure, and simulating his desire for her to return (he plays happily at that moment). According to an initial hypothesis, the child moves from a passive attitude of suffering a painful abandonment to an active creation—he creates the object-mother's going away. In a second hypothesis, with that movement the child satisfies his aggressive drive against the mother (he throws her out).<sup>3</sup> On the basis of this text and

Freud's text on creation, we can say that play has mainly four emotional functions:

1. Child's play is guided by his desire "to be big and grown up. He is always playing at being 'grown up,' and in his games he imitates what he knows about the life of his elders" (1908/1959, p. 146)—it is related to socialization, and to the child's frustration of being excluded from the adult world.
2. Play is dream-like—it is a space to live and actualize fantasies.
3. In play, the child can live and experiment strong emotions that would find no room in real life, such as his aggressive feelings against the mother (here we are in a sort of "cathartic function");
4. In play, such as in the string example, an active manipulation and a repetition of a movement allow a progressive elaboration of painful experiences related to a human relationship (separation): it is active (vs. passive), and repetition allows a progressive assimilation, a "digestion," of the experience.

This fourth function has to be highlighted. Freud distinguishes between repeating past experiences, and remembering. One can only remember what has not been traumatic, what has been worked through—which is, related to images or representations that which can be symbolized, notably through language. Inversely, what is too strong emotionally, or too shameful to be digested will be repeated (Freud, 1914/1958): one re-enacts the same choices of object, identifications and actions, or one can become ill. This tendency to repeat would be the "death drive" in *Beyond the pleasure principle* (Freud, 1920/1955)—a sort of negative assimilation. Here, we see that it is possible to transform a repeatable item into one that can be remembered through play and active manipulation (in children and adults). Play allows the child to link and connect mnemonic traces and discontinuous images and emotions; it allows the transformation of something haunting primary process into secondary process, it facilitates a linking process.

So if there is some continuity between children's play and adult's cultural experiences, how are these described? In *Creative writers and daydreaming* (Freud, 1908/1959), Freud distinguishes between children and adults as follows. In play, the child actualizes and explores his fantasmatic life<sup>4</sup>; he does so overtly, publicly, without shame. For Freud, from adolescence on, the person learns to hide his/her imaginary life and impossible desires. He/she can live these out in her dreams and private fantasies. Only artists have the privilege, like children, to have direct access to their desires and the complexity of their self—and to share it consciously with others. This is what makes the richness of the experience for which they account. For

example, in a classical novel, the writer shows us a representation of complex emotions and desires and of their dynamics. He acknowledges the complexity and the multiplicity of the parts of his psyche; he often represents and distributes these among the characters and all through the imaginary scenario.

Freud then emphasizes the reader's experience. Thanks to the writer's work and disposition, a reader has the possibility of living experience quite close to his own earlier, childhood play. In effect, knowing that this experience is "unreal," that it is offered by another (who takes the responsibility for it, with a public assessment), that it is still experienced in a private way, the reader can involve himself in the experience with confidence. He/she can feel the most violent emotions, knowing that he/she will later be able to stop (by stopping reading); he/she will be able to see part of him/herself with the support given by the text; all kinds of things happen to this part in the fiction-world, even the most dreadful and reprehensible; he/she knows that in most cases, all this will find a happy resolution, with the hero's victory, and he/she also directly enjoys the esthetic pleasure from it. The experience is therefore extremely advantageous: the person can experience as an adult what was possible in play; and on the imaginary level, she can satisfy some narcissistic needs and be successful.

Thus, here there is a strong similarity, and I would suggest, continuity, between child's play and adult's cultural experience. The main difference between play and cultural experience is the shared, social dimension of the latter, and the fact that is anchored in past experiences. Their main similarities are that they give access to unconscious experiences, and enable their active elaboration. In other words, Freud's account of a cultural experience is therefore very far from what is often mentioned about his account—that it enables catharsis, that it is a form of regression.

So what remains of these rich descriptions in cultural psychology? Vygotsky (1931/1994) knew these texts very well; he emphasized the social dimension of any imaginative, culturally based experience (both in terms of mediating structure and because of its embeddedness in a specific socio-cultural context) (Van der Veer & Valsiner, 1991; Vygotsky 1925/1971). Additionally, thanks to his developmental orientation, he would enable cultural psychologists to see play and imagination as part of self-generated zones of proximal development.

One of the current challenges of cultural psychology is to understand the role of virtual experiences all life long: for example, the way we interact through computer with absent others; the way in which we push the limits of our possibilities by engaging in culturally mediated actions; the experience we have at the movies or in a traditional celebration. I think that Freud, and after him Vygotsky, give us basic keys to approach the specificity of these phenomena. The great power of such cultural experiences is firstly due to

the fact that they take place precisely where the collective meets the individual. They thus enable the personal to be mediated with cultural tools. Yet, there is a specificity to these imaginary experiences, that they are part of the *transformation* of human experience (Zittoun, 2006). To show this, I now have to turn to a fourth aspect of Freud's thinking: the way he conceptualizes the progressive elaboration of human experience through signs.

## A Theory of Higher Mental Function

One core issue in human and social sciences has always been the following—that of the link between embodied, organic processes, and high-level phenomena. People refer to it as the body-mind problem and often go back to Descartes. Yet, non dualistic views would see the body and thinking as continuous, or as two emergent aspects of deeper common processes. Such ideas go back to Antiquity, have been beautifully supported by Spinoza, and are at the core of Freud's work. They are also central in current cultural psychology.

So let me present the problem simply: let's see human experience as a potato-shaped closed form. One of its sides is made out of embodied impressions and perceptions; the other side contains differentiated and precisely articulated thoughts. How does it go from here to there? In other words, how can embodied fears inhibit thinking and action (higher processes)? How can rules prescribed by others (parents, priests, and the social world)—become internalized and organize one's actions and feelings?

The answer given by cultural psychology as well as Freud is that it is precisely signs, or representations, or symbolic processes that enable these transformations.

A post-Freudian psychoanalyst, André Green, (Green, 1973, 2000) has developed Freud's theory of the psychic apparatus. I will follow his presentations. For Green, from a "topical" perspective, six zones of experience can be identified: (1) the body, where sensations, needs, drives are experienced—and also called the id; (2) the unconscious; (3) the preconscious; (4) the conscious; and (5) the real (the external reality) given through perceptions. (6) The *Ego* is the part of the psychism that the person experiences as being him/herself. It encompasses the zones of consciousness, the preconscious, and part of the unconscious. These three parts are, in some conditions only, accessible to consciousness.

Note that the *unconscious* designates all psychic activities that are beyond the direct apprehension of the person. It is not to be confused with the "cognitive unconscious" evoked by Piaget and by some approaches in cognitive psychology, where the unconscious designates the invisible and noncontrollable work of automatic information processing (see also Wilson, 2002).

It is also understood as a set of processes and dynamics that have dynamic relationships with the body, drives, and consciousness. Furthermore, it admits that it is partially constituted by repressed drives that have not accessed consciousness. It can be the locus of conflicts, which may have consequences on thought, behavior, relationships to oneself or the real, also *in the long term*. Unconscious psychic activity is regulated on one hand by factors linked to reality (the Freudian reality-test) and, and on the other hand by a sort of originary fanstamatic structure.

The idea is here that any psychic formation—any idea, representation—is an intermediary between the body and the real. Two movements are at the origin of psychic images (representation). One movement comes from the external world, what is not the person, through perceptions; the other movement comes from the body, and is constituted by sensations and drives. Drives can be defined as embodied (somatic) desires or needs, tending to seek satisfaction in the world; affects are their visible aspects.

Drives tend to diffuse through different layers of the psyche where they are transformed, before eventually finding a form that can bring conduct within the socially shared reality. From the soma, they access the unconscious under the form of *psychic representation of the drive*, where they can be connected to *representations of things* (conscious or unconscious mnemonic traces linked to interactions with objects-in-the-world), and progressively, be linked to *representation of words* (allowing reflectivity). Such doubly linked emotional experiences can thus enter consciousness, under a symbolic form (Green, 1973, 2000, 2002/2005). In this model, then, the transformation of embodied motions to higher-level thinking is a question of progressive semiotic linking; it is a model of *gradients* (in Green's words, 2002/2005).

Comparable models, depicting the progressive move of ideas through various layers of elaboration, can be found in current psychology. This “topic” organization is seen as a hierarchy of psychic processes, in which we differentiate more or less distanced modes of thinking, several layers of representations (Nelson, 2007), or lower level and higher psychic functions.

To finish here: very often our cultural experiences are interesting because they “map out” various parts of this gradient, and transform them. For example, we might hear a folk tale which awakes unconscious fears of being abandoned; yet, the fears are expressed in words understood by consciousness; and the tale goes towards a nice, moral ending, which becomes here a high-level, abstract mediation (Green, 1992; Zittoun, 2005, 2006). In that sense, the folk tale that we are reading can transform embodied experiences into conscious, verbalized ones. In other words, Freud's models can help us to see that many cultural experiences have a developmental function, or play an important role in our lives, because they might bring unconscious and invading emotional and representational processes into consciousness.

## CONCLUSION

Freud's work has often been said to have modified our western culture: it has transformed common sense, philosophy as well as clinical practice.<sup>5</sup> In this presentation, I had a limited purpose: I have tried to show that one possible contribution to current cultural psychology was due to Freud's often overlooked analysis of the dynamics of culture in the mind or of the mind in culture. I have explored four aspects of this analysis:

1. The idea that human thought is mediated or enabled by the use of various cultural tools for thinking.
2. Such mediation is possible, because humans have the ability to use signs, and Freud developed a convincing account of the emergence of signs in children, confirmed by current research.
3. Freud then explored people's relationship to two types of cultural activities, children's play and adults' artistic and cultural experiences; he showed their commonalities and the communities of the processes involved. I have suggested that such ideas might be very helpful for those of us who try to understand the role of different culturally mediated activities in human development.
4. Freud's work is based on a nondualistic understanding of humans functioning. Note that his model of the psychic apparatus, might give us a way to understand how various cultural experiences are part of the elaboration of our experiences.

Freud's work has many meeting points with current cultural psychology, which can be defined as a psychology of human meaning-making, as the meeting of the social and the individual, in time. One core similarity is that cultural psychology and psychoanalysis are models trying to capture semiotic processes in meaning-making. One core difference is that Freud's work is mostly interested in unconscious processes, while psychology tries to avoid addressing these. My reading suggests that, if there are so many overlaps between psychoanalytical investigation and that of cultural psychology, then we might also gain something on reflecting on these unconscious dynamics. But I will leave this here and go back to a more general observation.

Freud has often been criticized—or admired—for getting us to understand that people are prisoners of their unconscious and of acting out beyond their control. However, it might also be argued that Freud proposed a theory of human emancipation. Freud certainly shows us how deeply our thoughts are rooted in our affects and emotions. He also shows us, quite extensively, what might happen when individuals, politicians and large groups of people ignore these powerful forces, which might then

govern us. Yet, Freud also showed us how we might become aware of these constraints and of our own fears, and use the tools provided by the culture in which we live to recognize these energies, channel them, and use them as agents, fully aware of their limits.

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## NOTES

1. Each time one aspect has been emphasized by some commentator, others have risen to show the inanity of the notion. Freud's work has often been rejected as a whole on the grounds that this, or that aspect, appears too poetic to be true. Yet, Freud's work represents over fifty years of clinical observations, the systematic attempt to analyze, the enrichment of case study with theory, and daring interpretations, etc. It was produced in a specific context, and Freud had to account for his observations with the theoretical models and metaphors at his disposal. Contemporary critics of Freud are often unaware of the historical context of the production of Freud's idea, or use it to discredit these ideas; they are also often unaware of the most creative explorations of contemporary psychoanalysis. This paper goes beyond partisan quarrels, and my perspective on Freud is informed by recent evolutions of psychoanalysis and cultural psychology.
2. The idea of an active unconscious is, in brief, the following: people have wishes and desires, for example they want to have strawberries in the winter, or to marry a handsome but poor young man; these wishes and desires are not possible, or not socially acceptable; they thus have to be hidden or repressed. The idea of the active unconscious is that these ideas are not frozen, but are dynamic; their emotional load pushes these ideas forward, so that they might be heard in various ways. A person not able to have strawberries might thus dream of them; or a woman whose love is forbidden might start to hear her young man's voice ...
3. Later authors would add that, by manipulating the string, the child reinforces his own ability to symbolize, through his manipulation of the space between the mother and herself (Winnicott, 1971/2001), or thanks to his manipulation of the string, as a concrete link, facilitating the ability to symbolize the notion of relationship and to master it, and therefore to have access to an understanding of the notion of separation (Tisseron, 1999).
4. Play therefore has some affinity with the dream; Anna Freud will thus use child's play as another Royal road to the child's unconscious.

5. Freud's influences on our society are deep and numerous. They all follow from his identification and theorization of unconscious processes, as they are explored systematically in the *Interpretation of the Dreams* (Freud, 1900/1953). On this basis, Freud's work has affected the medical treatment of psychopathology; it has questioned the border between health and disorder in mental life, and the reflection on the doctor–patient relationship (Major & Talagrand, 2006, p. 37). It has then also questioned the teacher–student relationship. It has made people think differently about their choices—of partners, of activities—and about their everyday mistakes—since every slip of the tongue is now “revealing” some hidden discourse. Serge Moscovici's (1961/2007) important work on the social representation of psychoanalysis examines how French people in the '60s started to use Freudian notions in their everyday life, for example, they came to say things like “This guy has an inferiority complex.” In the USA, psychoanalysis met a huge success. In some spheres of the society, it was a must to undertake a personal psychoanalysis; in the '40s and '50s most people working in the arts and entertainment underwent personal analysis. This has made a certain sensibility to unconscious processes widespread. Woody Allen is a caricature of that sensitivity. More radically, authors such as Thomas Mann, then Paul Ricoeur (1965/1970) and many postmodern theorists have seen in the idea of “the unconscious” a fundamental challenge to people's illusion of mastering their lives. Freud would thus have introduced “suspicion” about human's freedom.

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