

## **Emotional Textual Analysis, the circumstantial method and the history of cultures**

***Fiorella Bucci\****

### *Abstract*

The present article intends to bring light to a season of intense developments and interdisciplinary interweaving in cultural studies that took place in Italy during the

970s and the 1980s, within which the methodological perspective of the Emotional Textual Analysis came to be formed. In particular, my attention will focus on the connection between ETA and the perspective of microhistory proposed by Carlo Ginzburg, in the field of historical studies, more specifically his circumstantial paradigm. In the first part, I will review a series of writings in which Ginzburg refers to psychoanalysis, in particular to Freud's work; in the second part, I will say in which respect ETA proves to be, in a unique way in the field on psychological sciences, a methodology of a circumstantial type: I will dwell in particular on the study of etymology. The article also provides brief notes on the relationship between aspects of Carli and Paniccia's psychoanalytic cultural research work and Aby Warburg's cultural history of art.

*Keywords:* psychoanalysis; emotion; history; arts; myth.

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Bucci, F. (2024). Emotional Textual Analysis, the circumstantial method and the history of cultures. *Quaderni di Psicologia Clinica*, 12(1), 25-38. Retrieved from <http://www.quadernidipsicologiaclinica.com>

## **L'analisi emozionale del testo, il paradigma indiziario e la storia delle culture**

***Fiorella Bucci\****

### *Abstract*

Il presente articolo intende far luce su un'intensa stagione di sviluppo a livello interdisciplinare degli studi culturali in Italia, tra gli anni Settanta e Ottanta. All'interno di questa stagione, Carli e Paniccchia hanno elaborato la prospettiva metodologica dell'Analisi Emozionale del Testo. La mia attenzione si concentrerà soprattutto sul rapporto tra l'AET e la microstoria di Carlo Ginzburg, più precisamente il suo paradigma indiziario. Nella prima parte di questo lavoro, passerò in rassegna una serie di scritti in cui Ginzburg fa riferimento alla psicoanalisi, in particolare all'opera di Freud; nella seconda parte, dirò sotto quale aspetto l'AET si rivela, in modo unico nel campo delle scienze psicologiche, una metodologia di tipo indiziario: mi soffermerò in particolare sullo studio dell'etimologia. L'articolo toccherà anche, solo per brevi cenni, il legame tra l'opera di ricerca culturale psicoanalitica di Carli e Paniccchia e la storia culturale dell'arte di Aby Warburg.

*Parole chiave:* psicoanalisi; emozione; storia; arte; mito.

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Bucci, F. (2024). Emotional Textual Analysis, the circumstantial method and the history of cultures. *Quaderni di Psicologia Clinica*, 12(1), 25-38. Retrieved from <http://www.quadernidipsicologiaclinica.com>

## **Introduction**

In a previous paper devoted to Emotional Textual Analysis (ETA), I proposed the following statement: “In ETA, words are clues to infinite emotions” (Bucci, Romelli & Vanheule, 2022, p. 177). I take up this statement here and would like to let the present work start from it, because I think it is particularly capable of capturing and bringing together two core elements of the psychoanalytic theoretical roots of ETA: namely, the circumstantial – exploratory – logic underlying this methodology, on one hand, and on the other a conception of emotions as infinite sets linked to Matte Blanco's psychoanalytic theory of the unconscious.

ETA is a methodology of text and discourse analysis developed in the 1970s and early 1980s by Renzo Carli and Rosa Maria Paniccia as a tool for psychosocial intervention with groups and organisations through the study of local cultures (Carli & Paniccia, 2002). ETA is part of the epistemological turn that led to the emergence of qualitative research as a new research paradigm within the social sciences (Schwandt, 2000) in the above-mentioned years. Among the numerous qualitative text analytic methodologies that have been developed since then – thematic analysis, conversational analysis, content analysis, narrative analysis, ethnomethodological analysis, Foucauldian analysis, and phenomenological analysis, just to mention a few – the peculiarity of ETA lies in a specific approach to language that finds its roots in psychoanalytic thought.

Previous works have already highlighted the genealogical link that the concept of emotional density of words, in the methodological perspective of ETA, entertains with Matte Blanco's model of the unconscious as infinite sets (e.g., Carli & Giovagnoli, 2010; Carli, Paniccia, Giovagnoli, Carbone & Bucci, 2016). Carli and Paniccia's key contribution was to develop Matte Blanco's model in terms of a theory of social relations and of culture that was not present in the latter's formulation. This was enabled by the authors' participation in the Italian psycho-sociological movement (as a certain number of works have already well documented: see Carli, 2018 and Barus-Michel, Enriquez, & Lévy, 2005) but also, more broadly, and importantly in my view, in a season of intense developments in cultural studies that took place in Italy during the 1970s and the 1980s. I would like to focus the present work on this broader scholarly environment within which the ETA methodology came to be formed, at the crossroads between national and international exchanges and between different study terrains, in order to illuminate one particular component of it: i.e., the connection between the methodological perspective of ETA and the perspective of microhistory proposed by Carlo Ginzburg (1986/1989), in the field of historical studies, more specifically his *circumstantial paradigm*.

The scientific and intellectual connection between Carli and Ginzburg, and further back in time with Aby Warburg, is something that we can grasp in many of Carli's works, but which has not yet been sufficiently researched and explored. Studying these links, especially from the point of view of a reflection on method, which the focus on ETA allows us to do, gives us a chance to advance our understanding of Carli's scientific legacy, which leaves us with a prolific field of study to pursue and build upon, in particular his contribution to a psychoanalytic theory of the social bond.

The article is divided into two sections: in the first part, I will review a series of writings in which Ginzburg refers to psychoanalysis, in particular to Freud's work and at a precise point in his research also to Matte Blanco; in the second part, I will retrace some characteristics of ETA to highlight the circumstantial logic that underlies this methodology at its core: I will dwell in particular on the study of etymology. In the conclusion, I will also provide brief notes on the relationship between certain aspects of Carli and Paniccia's psychoanalytic cultural research work and Warburg's cultural history of art.

## **Myths, emblems, clues**

In 1986, Ginzburg published the book *Miti, emblemi e spie (Clues, Myths, and the Historical Method*, English trans., 1989), in which he collected different essays written between 1961 and 1984. A common thread between these writings was a question that the historian had been asking himself for a long time over the course of his research, struggling to find satisfactory answers. A methodological question,

concerning the tools and boundaries of historical investigation. The original core of his study was the witchcraft trials held in Europe between the end of the 14th century and the end of the 17th century.

The hypothesis formulated at the conclusion of *Witchcraft and Popular Piety*, which saw the witch trials as a clash between cultures (as distinct from the other thesis, which viewed witchcraft as a primitive form of class struggle), found confirmation some time later in the Friulian materials studied in *I Benandanti* (1966). It was possible, then, to reconstruct a culture radically different from our own, in spite of the intervening filter represented by the inquisitors. But the benandanti ("well-farers," "do-gooders"<sup>1</sup>) themselves confronted me with a new contradiction. *The beliefs I encountered in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Friuli had disconcerting similarities with spatially distant (and perhaps also chronologically distant) phenomena: the myths and rites of Siberian shamans. Could this connection be dealt with in historical terms?* At the time I thought not – and not just because of my own limitations. Recalling an argument in Bloch's *The Royal Touch* (a decisive book for me), I thought it possible to oppose a typological comparison between historically independent phenomena, on one hand, and a more strictly historical analogy on the other – and I opted for the latter. This time the antithesis seemed insurmountable because it was tied to an intrinsic limitation within the discipline itself. And yet I wasn't certain that my choice exhausted the possibilities offered by the documentation on the Benandanti. For a time I toyed with the notion of presenting my work in two different forms: one concrete and descriptive, the other abstract and diagrammatic. Pulling me in the second direction was my encounter with the writings of Levi-Strauss, specifically his *Structural Anthropology*. Even if typological or formal connections were out of bounds for the historian (as Bloch maintained), why not analyze them anyway, I asked myself? (Ginzburg, 1986/1989, p. VIII; italics are mine).

By following the words of inquisitees and inquisitors, along the entire Alpine arc from western France to north-eastern Italy, Ginzburg was able to realise something: the trials literally fabricated the image of the Sabbath and with it, proof of the existence of a witchcraft sect devoted to devil worship. In this way, the persecution previously acted against lepers and Jews continued, in the context of a crisis in 14th century European society marked by plague and famine, which exacerbated the segregation of marginal groups. However, in those same texts that documented the crystallisation of the Sabbath stereotype (in a game of confusing projections between inquisitors and inquisitees), small details bore the traces of larger and more ancient cultural layers. Beyond the image of the Sabbath, Ginzburg was able to detect the account of ecstatic cults that were still active within the framework of agrarian communities and cultures. Female cults: women who went out at night in the wake of a beneficent nocturnal goddess who bestowed prosperity, wealth and knowledge (different were her names in the different territories); she could be accessed in ecstasy and transit, leaving the body in spirit or in animal form, since hers was the world of the dead. Male shamanic cults, including the Benandanti, centred on the struggle between good and evil for the fertility of the earth, fought in dreams or in ritual practices, in which metamorphosis occurred again.

The investigation of this deeper cultural stratum led Ginzburg far beyond the borders of Europe. It pointed to a space of Eurasian cultural connections whose material traces he went searching for.

Through this research, Ginzburg realised that the problem of historical method (and, at the same time, the problem of the very constitution of the objects of history) he was encountering was a problem of scale of inquiry. Just as, years earlier, Marc Bloch, Lucien Febvre and the *Annales* school had radically moved away from the history of facts towards the history of cultures, by choosing the local dimension as their focus of investigation; and just as, in turn, Warburg had sought new sources for historical knowledge in works of art, so Ginzburg directed his research towards the micro and apparently negligible details: he formulated his *circumstantial paradigm*.

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<sup>1</sup>I understand why the English translators used the expressions "well-farers," "do-gooders" which are duly connected to Ginzburg's interpretation of the historical meaning of the agrarian cult, of which the Benandanti were members. I add here a more literal translation "good-walkers" as a better vehicle to understand the emotional density of the word Benandanti and the scope of the discovery that Ginzburg is suggesting with it.

In the essay *Clues* (1986/1989), Ginzburg narrates the silent emergence of an epistemological model in the humanities at the end of the 19th century to which, according to the author, insufficient attention has been paid.

Between 1874 and 1876, under the Russian pseudonym of Ivan Lemorlieff, an Italian art scholar, Giovanni Morelli, proposed a method for the attribution of works of art based on the meticulous study of marginal formal details. According to Morelli, the study of microscopic formal similarities within marginal details of the work – earlobes, fingernails, shapes of fingers and toes – made it possible to reconstruct the historical individuality of an artist. In these details the artist's control, bound to a certain school tradition, relaxed thereby yielding to purely individual touches without his or her being aware of it. Based on this method, Morelli proposed many new attributions for works hanging in the principal European museums.

Morelli's cabinet, says Ginzburg, littered with sketches of ears, nails and fingers, looked more like the office of a criminal investigator than that of an art connoisseur.

Castelnuovo (1968) had already shed light on the link between Morelli's circumstantial method and Conan Doyle's legendary fictional detective method.

Now, Ginzburg's investigation broadened the field by documenting the historical relationship between Morelli and Freud. He recalled how, in *The Moses of Michelangelo* (1914), Freud had reported that, at a time when there was not yet talk of psychoanalysis, he had heard of a Russian art historian (later revealed to be an Italian scholar) whose method had close affinities with psychoanalytic investigation. In fact, both focused on the unappreciated or unnoticed elements, the debris, the refusals of our observation, as keys to the construction of knowledge.

The threefold Morelli-Conan Doyle-Freud connection allowed Ginzburg to put forward the hypothesis that around the end of the 19th century, a circumstantial epistemology had made its appearance. An epistemology that, in his view, informs all human sciences, and whose closest and most documentable historical reference is medical semeiotics. Morelli, Conan Doyle and Freud were all doctors by profession or training. We are talking about a knowledge hinged on the deciphering of traces, of signs, of small data, which when linked together to give rise to a sequence, allow us to infer a complex reality not directly accessible to experience.

Precisely at that *fin de siècle*, when European societies were becoming more fully urban and industrial, and when the Galilean paradigm was growing dominant in sciences with its epistemological pillars (construction of general laws based on mathematical abstraction and search for empirical invariances), some minor areas and practices of knowledge kept an epistemology of a circumstantial type alive. They also held low and high knowledge in greater continuity with each other.

In this way, Ginzburg helps us understand the dual epistemological status of psychoanalysis, whose contribution has historically been central to the development of modern thought about man but at the same time always at the periphery of scientific discourse and modernity.

### *Dream, myth and history*

Such a duality and internal tension in the modes of psychoanalytic investigation is highlighted again, in a very significant way, in another essay by Ginzburg (1986/1989), dedicated to Freud's well-known case study of the “Wolf-Man” (Freud, 1918).

This case study takes its name from a dream. Freud's patient was a man of Russian origin, belonging to an upper-middle-class family from Odessa. His life and that of his family were shattered by the uprisings of the first Russian Revolution, after which the patient spent long periods abroad. During one of these, he met Freud and began an analysis with him. During the analysis, the patient told Freud about a dream he had had during his childhood: in the dream it was night, in winter, the patient was in his bed when the window suddenly opened revealing a large walnut tree in front of the house. Six or seven white wolves were sitting on the tree's branches. They were looking at him still, calmly, with their full attention. The patient woke up from the dream screaming in fear (perhaps of being eaten, he said) and the nanny rushed to his room.

The dream account was followed by a rich series of associations the patient made with memories of his childhood, fairy tales he had been told, stories about wolves he had heard from his grandfather, etc. Despite these rich associative elements, and being concerned, by his own admission, of forcing an interpretation, Freud concluded the analysis of the dream with the hypothesis that it was to be associated with the primal scene (*Urszene*): that is, with the patient's traumatic experience of having witnessed in early childhood sexual intercourse between his parents.

Ginzburg notes that the expression *Urszene* appeared twice in Freud's work: for the second time in this text written in 1914, years after it first appeared in a letter to Fliess in 1897. On both occasions, Ginzburg suggests, Freud was confronted with an ancient mythical content that he could not decipher because he lacked the cultural references that would have allowed him to orient himself. In the case of the wolf-man, the patient came from a cultural world far removed from Freud's and this dream was laden with traces referring to that world. The reappearance here of the *Urszene* was also to be associated with the contrast between Freud and Jung at that time concerning precisely the question of myth in psychoanalysis, disputed between ontogenesis and phylogenesis.

Certain elements of the wolf-man's dream suggest to Ginzburg a connection with a sphere of peasant folkloric beliefs with which the child had probably come into contact through the nanny (*njanja*) or through his grandfather's tales also linked to Russian folklore. We know that the wolf-man was born with a caul and on Christmas Day, both in the tradition of the *benedanti* in north-eastern Italy and in that of the Hungarian shamanic *Táltos*, two characteristics associated with exceptional powers, such as that of transforming oneself into a werewolf in order to periodically travel to the world of the dead. Based on these elements, Ginzburg saw in the dream of the wolves, full of fairy-tale echoes, a link with the initiatory dreams through which the vocation of the future *táltos* and *benedanti* was manifested in early childhood or youth.

In the wolf-man's nightmare we discern a dream of an initiatory character, induced by the surrounding cultural setting or, more precisely, by a part of it. Subjected to opposing cultural pressures (the nurse, the English governess, his parents and teachers) the wolf-man's fate differed from what it might have been two or three centuries earlier. Instead of turning into a werewolf, he became a neurotic on the brink of psychosis. (Ginzburg, 1986/1989, p.148).

The case of the wolf-man poses forcefully that interweaving of myths and neuroses which so engrossed Freud and Jung, albeit from different points of view. I shall not try to explain the neuroses of the wolf-man by the myth of the werewolves. We cannot ignore, however, that the dream of the wolf-man was impregnated by a much more ancient mythical element, visible also in the dreams (in the ecstasies, in the swoons, in the visions) of the *benedanti*, the *táltos*, werewolves, and witches. In obviously different ways, this mythical content impressed itself, through other channels, on Freud, first in 1897 and later, unknown to him, in 1914 – and on this writer. It is not an archetype in a Jungian sense; phylogenetic heredity is not at issue. The go-betweens are historical, identifiable, or plausibly conjecturable: men, women, books, and archival documents that tell of men and women. (Ginzburg, 1986/1989, p.154).

In Freud's patient's dream, the historian finds traces to support his research otherwise unobtainable in ordinary historical documentation. Just as Warburg (1907/2015) before him had looked for clues in the study of works of art, unobtainable in conventional historical sources, of that complex historical interweaving of contrasts and transitions that made up the power and cultural vitality of the Renaissance. At this point of his work, Ginzburg is still searching for evidence that the morphological analogies he found in myths and rituals spread throughout a vast Eurasian area<sup>2</sup> could tell of historical connections: namely, about "men, women, books, and archival documents that tell of men and women", whose encounters and relationships had been the place of cultural transfer. Later on, the problem of the relationship between morphology and history would be somewhat overcome.

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<sup>2</sup> From Scotland to France, to the Rhineland, to north-central Italy, to Sicily; from Corsica, to Friuli, to Grisons, to Istria, to Slovenia, Dalmatia, Bosnia, Herzegovina, Montenegro, Hungary, Ossetia, Livonia, Lapland; from Hungary, to Bulgaria, Macedonia, Greece, Romania, Ukraine, Georgia (see map 3, *Cults, myths and rituals of shamanic origin in Europe*, in Storia Notturna, 1989/1991).

In *Storia notturna* (Ginzburg, 1989/1991), examining a complex of ancient myths having as a common feature an anomaly or asymmetry of deambulation, Ginzburg comes to a new hypothesis. Here too, the dialogue with psychoanalysis, albeit in the background, is always present. Ginzburg writes that a French anthropologist – he is talking about Lévi-Strauss – was writing a great tetralogy on Amerindian myths and, now almost halfway through his work, he had noticed an oversight, a “minor” detail that had escaped him and whose importance he had suddenly realised: the protagonist of a local myth on the origin of tobacco becomes lame at a certain point.

The anthropologist notices that lameness also appears in a Tereno<sup>3</sup> ritual, but not only there: it features in a great number of myths, and especially documented rituals, in the Americas, China, continental Europe and the Mediterranean. They are all connected – it seems to him – to the passage of the seasons. A trans-cultural connection that covers so boundless an area evidently cannot be traced back to particular explanatory causes. (Ginzburg, 1989/1991, p. 226; the note is mine).

The historian continues an investigation into lameness and extends it. This element also appears in the Oedipus myth, in the very name of the protagonist (“swollen foot”). Although the version that has come down to us, thanks to the elaboration of the tragic poets, has led us to recognise in parricide and incest the true “Oedipal” core of the myth, the mutilation inflicted on the child at birth (both ankles were pierced) before being abandoned, together with the resolution of the riddle posed by the Sphinx, are significant components. Ginzburg invites us to think that the mutilation may be the trace of an earlier fairy tale plot, in which Oedipus (“with the swollen foot”) was represented as a chthonic hero, liberator of Thebes from the Sphinx.

Starting with Oedipus and moving along various associative threads Ginzburg reconstructs a complex of myths in which not only lameness recurs, but related to it, one-leggedness, leaping ritual dances, and divine one-legged animals. Hermes gives Perseus the gift of a single sandal before the battle. In ritual situations, wearing only one sandal or dancing by dragging one foot, allowed for a relationship with the subterranean powers through greater contact with the ground. We find anomalies and asymmetries of deambulation in many chthonic gods and heroes within different traditions. According to Ginzburg, myth invites us to recognise in the symmetry a characteristic of the living and in the upright, bipedal station a properly human characteristic. The transcultural spread of myths and rituals hinging on walking asymmetry probably has its psychological root in this elementary, minimal perception that the human species has of itself – of its own body. What alters this image, on a literal or metaphorical level, therefore seems particularly suited to expressing an experience beyond the limits of the human: i.e., the journey into the world of the dead.

In this moment of Ginzburg's research, the historicity of the cultural phenomena he is investigating does not consist of particular exchanges, encounters and relations that have served as a conduit for the diffusion and sharing of a certain system of representations within different social groups. Nor, moreover, does myth, thus analysed, point to symbolic universals that would populate human imagination, regardless of any historical experience: in the form, for example, of Jungian archetypes, which the historian has always strongly contested. No symbolic content (neither lameness, nor half-men, nor mono-sandals) is in itself universal, but he says the *ever open-ended series* that includes them is. One may assume that what holds this transversality of the observed phenomena and such formal similarities found within distant cultural traditions is the type of categorical activity involved in them. Namely, a categorical activity that reworks in symbolic form the concrete experience of the body: death being part of it<sup>4</sup>. It is the relationship with the body that gives experience a particular and therefore historical quality – albeit in a non-temporal sense of history.

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<sup>3</sup> Indian population of the Amazon.

<sup>4</sup> In postulating such a constitution of the symbolic, made of a process of infinite stratification and possibility of historical variation, Ginzburg, in a note in the essay “Ossa e pelli”, included in *Storia Notturna*, refers to Matte Blanco's principle of unconscious symmetry.

Ginzburg's profoundly interdisciplinary work (in continuous dialogue with anthropology, classical studies, psychoanalysis, and linguistics), in the brief excursus I have been able to give here, introduced us to: 1) ancient and pre-modern myths and rituals, as cultural forms in which the symbolic dimension of gesture and language is still closely linked to the concrete experience of the body; 2) with them, a layer of human culture consisting of an infinite web of variation and interconnection, concealed beneath a crust of temporal and spatial differences.

This layer tends to be elusive; to access it, we need methods of knowledge of a circumstantial type. ETA places itself within these methodologies. In the following section, I will expand on how ETA follows a circumstantial procedure.

### ***ETA's circumstantial work: how to investigate local cultures starting from the polysemy of words***

Carli and Paniccia's most remarkable methodological intuition, in my view, which represented and still represents an absolute novelty in psychological and psychoanalytic research, was to treat the words of speech like *clues*. Clues to a much wider set of meanings emerging from the possibility of creatively establishing new connections within a much larger number of semiotic elements brought into action by the research relational field.

This is achieved in ETA through a number of specific procedures, i.e.,

- breaking the discourse's logical narrative structure in order to let the emotional process ordering sequences of words to come forward
- retrieving the word's polysemy through the study of etymology
- conducting a very broad research, relying on a multidisciplinary range of sources, on the history of the context in which one intervenes, of the subjects, groups, institutions that characterise it, and of the discourses and practices that have informed its existence from a cultural point of view
- finding precise anchors of the interpretative process in the relationship, experienced in the here and now, with the organisation commissioning the research and in the research question posed by the latter.

The relationship between researchers and the organisation commissioning the research with its various internal articulations and participants is a fundamental aspect of the ETA method, which we recall was developed in the 1970s to work psychoanalytically with social groups and organisations, by studying changing organisational cultures in an age of systemic political transformation.

We will only be able to partially cover the ETA procedure in this paper. For a more complete and extensive discussion, we refer to the large body of research literature available. The aim of this work is to rethink some features of ETA under the angle of a reflection on the circumstantial paradigm – the way Ginzburg came to formulate this specific mode of knowledge, bringing together within the same family methods and approaches of inquiry that have emerged in nominally distant disciplinary fields.

Over several years of using ETA within numerous research-intervention projects, I have seen the involvement that this method is able to elicit in the participants, literally its ability to create participatory thinking. In the following pages, it will become clearer how circumstantial epistemology and relational/participatory foundation of knowledge are connected to each other.

### *Emotion and multidimensionality*

ETA is usually carried out on texts collected through individual or group interviews. The interview is based on a single open-ended question, starting from which the interviewee is given full space to talk about their own experience of the issue the research aims to investigate.

The interviews are collected together to form a single textual corpus. Once the text has been collected, the analysis focuses on certain words within it, chosen by the research team, which are called *dense words*, that is words that are endowed with high emotional density and polysemy, i.e. high capability from an emotional point of view to generate meaning. Thus, all words with an auxiliary function are excluded, only full words are retained, and within these in particular those words that, even when taken



out of the phrasal context to which they belong, are capable in themselves of evoking a wide class of experiences and layers of meanings.

The concept of *emotion* proposed by Carli<sup>5</sup>, in relation to the process of sense-making in the social sphere mediated by language, stems from Matte Blanco's model of the unconscious. This describes emotion as a particular form of psychic experience in which the principle of symmetry (proper to the unconscious mode of being of the mind) prevails over the dividing order characteristic of conscious thinking. When we are “moved”, supposed factual reality – populated by objects distinct from each other and from us by reason of a certain symbolic order in place – becomes charged with multiple echoes and resonances, which confuse and at the same time broaden the sense of what we are experiencing. In Matte Blanco's words, the principle of symmetry points to a form of thinking, thus of propositional activity, based on the establishment of relations. These, however, must be of a specific kind: relations of identity; relations that, instead of making distinctions, assimilate elements of experience along potentially infinite associative chains that merge the experiencing subject and the world of experience, in an increasingly greater degree of fusion. The father is different from the son and is such, i.e. he is the father, because there is a symbolic order that prescribes the sense of this relationship in these specific terms. However, as we can clearly see in psychotherapy, in numerous areas of emotional experience the father is the son and the son is the father: that is, the aforementioned distinction loses its effectiveness whereas gestures, feelings and behaviour that we are used to attributing to the father, according to a certain representation of the world, are found in the son and vice versa. This model of the mind, based on the coexistence of two antinomian principles of symmetry and asymmetry, was initially proposed by Matte Blanco (1975) in terms of a bi-logic. However, we later find it formulated in a slightly different key. In *Thinking, Feeling, and Being* (1988), Matte Blanco invites us to envisage a multidimensionality (or an indivisibility, as he calls it other times) that continually encounters the problem of being translated into a smaller number of dimensions. It is only by this reduction that we are led to imagine a confusing unconscious logic that creates identity bonds where consciousness establishes differences. The confusion attributed to the unconscious could otherwise be read as the trace of a much broader system of meaning-generating semiotic connections, the articulation of which has been removed with the emergence of a principal and prevailing symbolic order that guarantees potential social consensus. Matte Blanco expressed this possibility very effectively with the help of geometry.

This passage from the opposition of two principles (still rooted in the dialectic between primary and secondary process) to multidimensionality is crucial in Matte Blanco as it meant the possibility of completely rethinking the problem of the relationship between object and subject and between internal and external reality in psychoanalysis from a spatial point of view. Even though he did not develop these intuitions fully, at least to the extent that I have knowledge of his texts.

ETA certainly takes up this legacy and, from a technical point of view, is able to do so thanks to the tools of exploratory multivariate analysis made available by French statistics, since the 1960s and more fully in the 1970s. Multiple correspondence analysis (Benzécri, 1973) explores patterns of association between qualitative variables within complex datasets by spatialising the interweaving of possible relationships between these variables in multidimensional terms. The use of this technique makes it possible for instance to see that the same word, which within a one-dimensional space would tend to become monosemic, when we study its behaviour within a multidimensional model can take on multiple values by becoming part of different clusters of words.

In fact, coming back to the analytic procedure, once the dense words have been identified, the analysis proceeds with the aid of textual analysis software to study, through multiple correspondence analysis and cluster analysis, how words co-occur within the text, forming clusters of significantly interrelated words. These clusters are projected onto a Cartesian space to visualise their mutual relationships and thus the constellation they form as a whole.

Thus, in each cluster, we will find in front of us a sequence of words: e.g. *to learn, environment, challenge, life, to share*, whose association in the cluster reflects the relation that these words had in the

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<sup>5</sup> For a collection of his most significant writings on the subject, see Carli 2020.

original text of the interviews by presenting themselves with a high frequency next to each other within the sentences.

However, we no longer see them ordered by the logical links that gave the discourse its communicative and referential effectiveness. We find them here in a new context that allows us to explore the emotional process through which the research participants experience the issues investigated in the research as meaningful to them, that is, as issues that exist for them in a multiplicity of meanings.

### *The study of etymology*

For the qualitative reading and interpretation of the clusters, in ETA one traditionally starts by researching the etymology of words. Here we come to a point that, more than others, seems to represent a specificity of ETA when compared to other qualitative text analytic methods. Why start from the etymology of words in a psychological (and not philological) study of meaning? We could wonder whether this might not be misleading, with respect to our goal of coming closer to the way the people we interview experience a certain subject, to start from the etymon of words. I will try to put forward here a hypothesis in this regard.

Let us think about the words I mentioned above – *to learn, environment, challenge, life, to share* – these are the first dense words of one of the clusters produced by a study that we carried out a few years ago, within a nationwide programme regarding youth employment (Bucci & Vanheule, 2020): in this study, we asked a group of young people at their first work engagement within large corporations and their company mentors to tell us about their experience; then we conducted an emotional textual analysis on the interview transcripts. The interviews were originally carried out in Italian. The words above are ordered according to the significance of their statistical contribution to the cluster formation, the first being the most significant and so on.

Let us think of the word *to learn*, translation of the Italian word *apprendere*: from the Latin *ap-prendere*, literally “to grasp, to take hold of”; or of the word *environment*, translation of the Italian *ambiente*, from the Latin *ambi-ens*, from PIE root \*ambhi- “around” + \*ei- “to go”: going all around, encircling, lying all around; and the word *sfida* (challenge), from Latin *fidere*, “to trust, confide” + privative *s*: take away the trust, where the PIE root of *fidere* \*bheidh- connects trust with a more ancient layer of meaning related to *bide*, wait, remain, stay firm; and so on.

The single words and then the associations between words in the cluster, give us clues on the polysemy of meaning that the experience of work takes on for the young people interviewed. We see at least two components more clearly: on the one hand, starting work comes emotionally with being able to get a grasp on reality, to come into contact with worldly matters. At the same time, on the other hand, it instils a fear of being embedded into a system that will overwhelm you instead of giving you stability. We found precise and specular traces of these emotions in another cluster, obtained from the same ETA, which mainly collected the words of company mentors and was placed in opposition to the one just mentioned within the factorial space.

I used this example to highlight one aspect that brings us back to Ginzburg's studies: unlike the other methods of text analysis known to me, ETA sheds light, also through the study of the etymology, on a primary substratum of language in which categorial activity reworks in symbolic form the concrete experiences of the body: *ap-prendere* brings with it the experience of grasping with the hands; *ambiente* implies the ancient and polysemic experience of being enveloped; *sfida* is connected to the experience of staying and staying firm; and so on.

In this way, ETA, as mentioned by Carli several times, comes close to dream-work.

At the same time, etymology is a glimpse, a flyover, into the (infinite) series of historical forms in which this primary substratum of experience continues to spill over. A sequence of voices, people, memories, traditions, material exchanges and connections that ultimately make the fabric of culture. Of course, when you see/feel the past journey of words within a variety of contexts of use and relationship, this is a clear invitation to resume cultural activity.

Thus, we can go back to an ancient symbolic core, but at the same time we can see its process of cultural transformation through history up to us: up to the point of seeing us engaged today with our experience

and our body, in a reworking that has not exhausted its creative scope and is still founder of meaning, sociality and life. Through the infinite metamorphoses of its (also linguistic) forms, one can trace the sense of one single life (Coccia, 2022).

### ***Beyond the qualitative: micro, circumstantial, exploratory***

Ginzburg's work showed with extraordinary clarity in my view, the process by which a certain configuration of meaning comes to crystallise in stereotypical form until it becomes a model of collective identification (e.g. the Sabbath); yet, in the texts, we find traces of traditions and cultural components whose contours have been lost in the consolidation of the stereotype. From a microscopic investigation, clues of unlikely connections between seemingly distant temporal and spatial elements come to emerge.

In a similar way, by posing attention to words as clues – thereby breaking the blurring given by a particular structure of meaning – ETA has always represented a setting within which research participants have found the opportunity to rethink the meaning of their shared experience, beyond the cultural normative codes through which the relationship between those people was established upstream by the organisation. This resulted in not only breathing new life into the groups' initiative, but also in culturally renewing the organisation's aims in forms closer to present demands.

The lesson we can draw from these proposals is clear and compelling: problems such as the relationship between manifest and latent content in a text, as well as between subjective experience and objective reality, could be completely reconsidered in qualitative research if we paid attention to the scale of investigation. At a micro level, the very distinction between subject and object is blurred, because we enter the realm of the manifold, of the multidimensionality of relationships or, in other terms, of polysemy, as Carli would say.

Yet this line of research despite its strength, has been somewhat lost in subsequent years, probably due to the complex interdisciplinary theoretical foundation work that its maintenance would have required. For this reason, with this paper it was my wish to pick up the thread and the historical contexts of such a precious, in my view, reflection on questions of method. In order to do so, in conclusion, it seems important to me to link up again, albeit only with very brief references here, with an author whose work lies decidedly upstream, at the source, of the direct and indirect collaboration between Ginzburg on the one hand, and Carli and Paniccia. on the other: i.e., Aby Warburg.

In a well-known piece of writing, Giorgio Agamben (1984) speaks of a “science without a name” to convey the breadth of Warburg's intellectual legacy: it was impossible, he argued, to scientifically situate the kind of study of culture Warburg had undertaken and pursued throughout his life since he literally invented it. Warburg's way of studying cultures made the very stuff of history tangible, Edward Wind (1983) stated in those same years. There was, perhaps, still the basis for thinking about scientific empiricism in a way that held together the sciences of spirit and the sciences of nature. I wonder if the time is not right today to resume that research in a new way.

In 1890, Warburg was in Florence studying Botticelli. At some point, the study of Renaissance art, and in particular the traces of pagan antiquity within it, awakened such a deep intellectual interest in him that he made it the focus of his entire oeuvre (Gombrich, 1970). We find the account of this turning point in an exchange of letters with his friend, the Dutch writer, André Jolles. It all started with a detail from Ghirlandaio's fresco *The Birth of St. John the Baptist in the Tornabuoni Chapel in Santa Maria Novella*.

A few years later, also in Florence, Warburg invented what Edgar Wind called ‘*un jeu d'esprit*’ with a friend, the Dutch writer André Jolles. It was an exchange of letters based on a fictional element: Jolles' falling in love with a female figure that appears in Ghirlandaio's fresco *The Birth of St. John the Baptist in Santa Maria Novella*. The two correspondents called this figure ‘the Nymph’. In the room of the puerpera Ghirlandaio shows, on the right, four figures advancing: three with severe bearing, the first – who looks like a Florentine maiden of the time – dressed in a heavy and precious fabric that forms perpendicular folds. Behind them, as if propelled by a breath (but it is not clear from where it might come), a maiden of great

beauty walks, with swaying robes and a light, flowing, quivering step. Behind her shoulders her robe arches like a sail. She is the Nymph. In her figure we find all the features that Poliziano had added to the Homeric hymn and passed on to Botticelli. With her, a being who traversed the centuries unharmed strides now into the austere Florentine interior and insufflates into this new world her *brise imaginaire*. She is a '*pagana procellaria*', writes Warburg, who breaks into 'this slow respectability, this controlled Christianity'. In the solemn partition of the fresco, that figure is like an inlay belonging to another layer of reality, at once foreign and pervasive. 'I lost my reason,' Jolles notes, but it is Warburg's voice that speaks within him. (Calasso, 2021; the English translation is mine)

At this point of his studies, Warburg abandons all stylistic reasoning to throw himself into purely historical-cultural research: he wants to know about the mind of the Renaissance being, of those men and women of the emerging bourgeoisie in Medicean Florence who were the patrons of Ghirlandaio's works of art. What did they think, what did they experience? He was able to describe (see a masterful work in this respect, Warburg, 1907/2015) how the appeal to the pagan goddess had helped these men and women to find a formula that reconciled the opposition between the medieval belief in God and the self-sufficiency of the Renaissance individual. His documentary sources expanded to include literature, epistolary correspondence, manuscripts, artefacts and objects of various kinds: a vast material that would in time give rise to the Mnemosyne Atlas.

I hope to return in a future paper to the concept of *emotion* in Warburg, in relation to the ability of the artistic image to capture and evoke the dense cultural stratification which forms the body of history (Warburg, 1939).

If what I have written so far has been sufficiently understandable, I hope the link between these earlier and coeval experiences and the cultural psychoanalytic research work of Carli and Paniccia is now as clear to the reader as it is to me.

I conclude by recalling a seminal work of theirs from 2011, in which the two authors reported on their investigation of Norwegian stave churches. This is in effect an example of emotional textual analysis, the text being represented in this case by an artefact and work of art. Ancient wooden churches, left in small numbers in forested areas, the *Stavkirker* are presented in the history of art as emblems of a politically unified Norway, around the year 1000, under the sign of the Christian religion. By studying these wonderful buildings in detail (i.e., going literally beyond the surface of the visible), travelling and living in Norway at length, analysing architectural features, history and art, the two authors brought to light the traces of a transition between paganism and Christianity, by no means drastic and never quite complete, that lasted some two hundred years and heralded a rich syncretism; traces in the architecture of the transition from a civilization based on navigation to a now settled society whose organization into local communities was giving way to increasingly centralized political structures.

This psychoanalytic study by the authors of ETA is considered an international benchmark in the field of architecture, history and art for knowledge of these ancient artefacts.

Such a strongly circumstantial quality aimed at soliciting thought and participation is the reason why the authors of ETA have always called their methodology *exploratory*, not qualitative as opposed to quantitative methods (also because, as we have seen, ETA is to all intents and purposes a mixed method). Making psychoanalytic investigation a device for research, relationship and cultural transformation was a distinctive feature of Carli's teaching.

If we were to try to define, in the light of this teaching, the object of psychoanalysis as a science of culture, we could say that cultural work symbolically reconstructs the dynamism of the living in the form of a psychic multiplicity that transcends distances in space and time.

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