

Reflecting on reporting. The construction of meanings as research and intervention praxis.

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Introduction.

The case we want to argue in this article is that both in the area of social sciences and in daily living together, there is a great need for the construction of meanings and interpretations. Notice that we mean interpretations that are offered as such, unlike the acknowledgment of facts. We think in fact that the symbolic dimension of data, the interpretation of which is the basis for knowledge and intervention, must be respected and its importance must be known by both by the social sciences and by the social bodies that may make use of this data. These notes are being written after an interdisciplinary meeting between historians, anthropologists and clinical psychologists who have started a workshop on these issues¹. Before marking out the limits of this proposal and saying how we think it is connected to the process of reporting, we would like to present some travel experiences, which we will comment on after letting the reader start thinking about the insights and associations prompted by them.

Three encounters during a trip to France.

This summer one of the writers of the present article went to visit the castle of Grignan, in La Drôme Provençale. Whoever has been on the motorway from the south of France to the north has no doubt seen the castle in all its might. A high rocky outcrop is entirely occupied by its square, grey, excessive bulk. A medieval castle was rebuilt at huge expense as an enormous baroque and renaissance palace by a noble family, mainly during the reign of Louis XIV with François Adhémar de Monteil, appointed governor of Provence by the king. The castle was later sold by the ruined family and went through the vicissitudes of the scattering of its furnishings, and the actual dismantling of parts, of walls and then of stones thanks to the destruction brought by the Revolution, which however was not able to completely digest such a large mouthful. It was later bought by some commoners who as far as possible tried to reconstruct it, especially a certain Madame Fontaine. The part of the castle that can be visited today bears the traces of these phases, barely camouflaged and confused by the desire of the new owner, the Département of La Drôme Provençale, to give visitors the impression that apart from a few small losses, a piece of furniture here, a tower there, they are in the Louis XIV period building. This desire has pushed the Département to decorate the bare rooms of the castle with furniture and paintings that have been salvaged from other destroyed or pillaged residences, and that have come to Grignan in exile, in the hope that they evoke those of the Palace's renaissance and baroque epochs, now lost. Why that one in particular? Not only because it was the castle's last aristocratic period, but also because the mother-in-law of the noble who spent his whole fortune on refurbishing the palace in the gigantic forms that the Revolution then attacked with pickaxes, was Madame de Sevigné. This lady's letters and her elegant epistolary style made a great mark in French literature. So today, it is erroneously called "Madame de Sevigné's castle". And we must admit that those of us who have been there, did so to follow the traces of Madame, who wrote most of her vast correspondence to her daughter, who lived at Grignan for thirty

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¹ On this see Paniccia (2008) and Paniccia & Freda (2008). This issue of the *Rivista* contains two articles, one by Vincenzo Padiglione (2009), anthropologist, the other by Umberto Gentiloni (2009), historian, related to their talks at that meeting.

years. Madame came for a few visits, and in the end died there, not before passing on to posterity the fact that due in part to the continuous building works going on, the monstrous building was full of freezing drafts from which no woollen vest could protect², but that thanks to God there was an excellent table, with partridges fed on sweet provençal grasses, and so very different from those of Paris (Lévêque, 1996). I don't know whether such complex, overlapping matters are hard to follow; perhaps they are, but what we wanted to suggest was to imagine the depth, the density and the texture. As we were saying, one of the present writers visited Grignan castle as a tourist, taking the only thing offered, a guided tour which turned out to be very long. It was a very long visit not for the two hours it took, but due to the sense of imprisonment we had when, taken hostage by a guide who without drawing breath for a moment, pushed us into and out of room after room like an implacable shepherd dog, pointing, explaining, declaiming, and trying at all costs to show us the baroque castle, gleaming with its silk drapes, gold coated furniture and stone plumes, a castle that not only no longer exists, but certainly never did, at least in the complete and fantastic form the guide wanted to evoke. After a while with this treatment, the author present was surprised to find that she felt a strong feeling of desolation and emptiness: the guide's insistence on wanting to show what was not there not only failed to create the desired illusion, but gave the impression that everything had been lost and that there was nothing left. "But there's nothing left here!" one felt like shouting, freeing oneself of the spell, but also plunging into a sort of desolate emptiness, of final loss. Climbing back out of this bog took considerable effort, and an anti-conformist rebellion against the illusion that tourists seemed destined to be prey to, with no escape. This was made possible by picking up from the many clues scattered here and there, in the walls, the objects, some signs glimpsed in passing, from hints that the guide herself could not avoid giving, the complexity of the picture mentioned at the beginning. It was a far from empty picture that to be seen and decoded, required the acceptance of a complexity of signs and meanings that were far more intricate than the illusory linear simplification that the guide tried to propound. Louis XIV's centralising policy springs to mind, and connected to it, the apparent strangeness of a nobleman who instead of being invited to be at the centre of the kingdom, was encouraged to control a far-flung place, where he also tried to create a sort of Versailles which was to ruin him. We once more run into the ruin caused by the Revolution, and with it that complex feeling of undeniable celebration of a founding event of modernity, together with the unhealed wound that often accompanies it and that is evident all over France. Chance will have it that the French history museum is situated in the Hôtel Carnavalet, in Paris, in the Marais, the same Hôtel where Madame de Sevigné spent the last twenty-one years of her life, the residence she left when she went to visit her daughter at Grignan. In visiting the museum, when one goes up to the rooms that house the evidence of the French revolution, there is a noticeable break with all the rest. The atmosphere in the previous rooms, clear, orderly, quite celebrative as suits such a place, disappears. The objects are placed around almost anonymously and almost abandoned, and it looks as if it needs a reordering and rethinking. Some of our friends who know the curators told us that they were in fact uncertain as to the tone and the direction to give to those memories, still more bitter than might seem³. Among the traces of Grignan we also find, in Madam Fontaine, the bourgeois lady who saw to the

"M.me de Chaulnes me mande que je suis trop heureuse d'être ici avec un beau soleil; elle croit que nos jours sont cousus d'or et de soie. Hélas mon cousin, nous avons cent fois plus froid ici qu'à Paris. Nous sommes exposés à tous les vents. C'est le vent du midi, c'est la bise, c'est le diable, c'est à qui nous insultera; ils se battent entr'eux pour avoir l'honneur de nous renfermer dans nos chambres. Toutes nos rivières sont prises, le Rhône, ce Rhône si furieux n'y résiste pas. Nos écritures sont gelées; nos plumes ne sont plus conduites par nos doigts, qui sont transis. Nous ne respirons que la neige; nos campagnes sont charmantes dans leur excès d'horreur. Je souhaite tous les jours un peintre pour bien représenter l'étendue de toutes ces épouvantables beautés. Conte un peu cela à notre duchesse de Chaulnes, qui nous croit dans ces prairies, avec des parasols, nous promenant à l'ombre des orangers." Letter from Madame de Sévigné to Coulanges, 3 February 1695. From the site <http://pagesperso-orange.fr/jane/grignan.html>, which gives tourist information on Grignan.

³ This happened a few years ago; the reorganisation may have taken place in the meantime.

reconstruction of the castle, the nth example of the bourgeoisie which, more than the State, between the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th centuries, recuperated the national heritage, recognising it and taking care of it⁴. It is precisely the reconstruction by madame Fontaine that is offered to us as the one that restored the building to its “origins”. However one cannot help being struck by what is mentioned in passing: some sculpted architraves show the coat of arms of madam, who therefore knew very well that she was marking the place with recognisable signs of contemporaneity. Each of these traces – the medieval fortress, Louis XIV, Madam de Sevigné, the Revolution, Madam Fontaine – is the promise of an intensity of meanings that can be found only if its pathway is followed. This offers a possible reconstruction of a far richer and more vivid meaning than the one dished up during the visit. The guide was ostensibly responding to the “wishes of the public”, who want simple, univocal, simplified stories, and above all they want stories they already know, nothing new: here is the princely castle, as you imagine it in your dreams. The stunned, bewildered faces of the flocks of tourists, however, gave the impression that more than one of them was experiencing the fantasy that “there was nothing left” there. We will add to the charm of this anecdote by adding that the guide was a handsome young man with middle eastern features, brown skin and an air that evoked Algeria or Marocco. The story is thus further complicated, making us ask ourselves about this young Frenchman’s history, which made us presume an interesting journey from those places to the castle of Grignan, as the representative of the Département of La Drôme Provençale.

In the cathedral of **Notre Dame a Le Puy en Velay**, in Auvergne, an important stopping place on one of the main pilgrimage routes going to Santiago de Compostela, a small coal black Madonna is worshipped. It is a statue from the 1800s that vaguely re-evokes a much older, original statue, burnt during the Revolution. Although the present statue has not much charm, it has **a lot of clothes** for all the possible rituals, like an Egyptian divinity. In the sacristy, a fascinating place due to the mixture of the familiar Christian atmosphere with suggestions of openly “pagan” worship, where the present situation is palpably the coexistence of times and cultures that are very different from each other, a little book showing the entire wardrobe is on sale. The original statue is said to have been donated by Louis IX on his return from a crusade. It is said to be an Isis holding Horus in her arms, adopted by Christianity after it was transformed into a Virgin Mary. In the cathedral there is also a more faithful copy of the burnt Madonna, based on a very detailed description of the original, including graphics, given by an 18th century geologist⁵ who had seen it. The scholar left an extremely detailed description of it, as a researcher who had touched and looked at everything, the product of an analysis carried out in front of the diffident, but at the right moment, distracted, clergyman who was guarding the statue. This second Madonna with her solemn pose, fixed and stiff, her strange features and very long nose, her large empty eyes, black face and singularly milk-white hands tells us to what extent the 19th century copy, though wanting to make up for the loss, did not dare to actually reproduce the original with its strange, alarming face⁶. Hence the clumsy characterless doll that is currently venerated. The whole story of the black Madonnas that populate France, with a production that began in the 10th century and ended in the 12th, at least as regards the “originals”, is marked by the same intense ambivalence expressed symptomatically in the rough reproduction: we want this black Madonna, but at the same time we are afraid of her, we don’t know exactly what she is. We want her as black as coal. For this reason, if she

⁴ We are thinking of Castelnau, Villandry, Cormatin, but also of the more recent example of Belcastel, which was rebuilt in the seventies, or the association of citizens that in recent years protected the Marais quarter from destruction, and with it, its *Hôtels particuliers*, of which the Hôtel Carnavalet is an excellent example.

⁵ The meeting between the scholar, Faujas de Saint-Faes and the Madonna, in 1777, seems to have happened by chance: the area of Puy en Velay presents very interesting volcanic phenomena (Van Cronenburg, 2003).

⁶ For a review of the black Virgins, including the two of Puy en Velay, see: http://lieuxsacres.canalblog.com/albums/vierges_noires/index.html

happens not to be black, we paint her: 19th century parish priests painted non-black Madonnas black. With a rationalist explanation, they are said to have done it to draw the faithful attracted by those images and fill the coffers of their poor churches. But no account is taken of the fact that they too shared the same cultural atmosphere as the faithful, and that the daily contact with the statue certainly tied them to it with emotions that were far more complex than mere instrumental use⁷. So we want it black. And black Madonnas still exert a great power. But then the comments that can be read inside the churches, like for instance in the cathedral of Puy en Velay, tell us that she is black because she has a tan, so as to be closer to the dark-skinned farmers; or it is said that she has been smoked by candles, blackened by time. At the same time they paint once black statues white, swinging between feelings of closeness and detachment imbued with these Madonnas. The black Virgin is placed on altars, people come from everywhere to pray to her. But she is also burnt, this outsider. When rushing towards the statue of Puy en Velay to burn it, the crowd is said to have shouted: "Let's burn the Egyptian!". One of the statues, with a golden turban on her head, in Notre Dame de Meymac, beyond any euphemistic reference, is directly called the Egyptian. And again, it seems that when the original Madonna of Puy en Velay, one of the oldest in France, was being burnt, from a secret compartment of her old wooden body there fell out an object covered in hieroglyphics, some say made of stone, some say wrapped in a papyrus, which nobody would pick up to see what was written on it. The chance to know something about the origin of the black Virgin was therefore missed. What would have been the feelings of a historian who was not swept away by the crowd's emotional delirium, on seeing the destruction of evidence that could have brought the document's wealth of information into the simplifications and confusions of myth? We do not know if the legend is true, but it already tells us quite a lot: people did not want to know these Madonnas, as their emotional representation, changing, different each time, was enough. And this seems to be still true today. And lastly, remember that Puy-en-Velay is, with Chartres, the oldest shrine to Mary in Christian Gaul. It stands where there was once a dolmen, and in the dolmen there was a magic stone which was, according to the legend surrounding the foundation of the cathedral, adopted by the Christian virgin who used it to heal several of the faithful. The stone is still there. In Italy too there are black Madonnas. The story of the restoration of the very beautiful Madonna of Tindari in Sicily, which led to interpretations of the statue's history being made: it is at the center of a tangle of fascinating paths and conjectures. Among other things, it is conjectured that the Madonna of Tindari was sculpted by a sculptor from Auvergne, the territory in the Massif Central in France where Puy en Velay is found, the home of many black Virgins, an area from which however they also went on crusades to the east⁸. The fact that these images brought together heterogeneous symbolic and material elements with a very pleasing result is documented by a surviving prototype, the famous Sainte Foy reliquary statue kept at Conques. It is not exactly a black Virgin, as it represents Sainte Foy, but it has the characteristic that

⁷ The study of the materials used in the black Vergins showed that some of them were painted black in a recent period, in the 1800s. However, it seems that there was no documentation of this action, no texts commenting on or in some way bearing witness to the thing, giving clues as to what was intended. Observing these painted Madonnas, one is struck by the fact that the eyes, too, are very strangely covered with black paint. At the same time, if one thinks of the huge fixed eyes, with pupils staring into space, of some of them, starting from Sainte Foy, the prototype that survived destructions and changes, what springs to mind is the annihilating power of their gaze, which meant that some sacred images from antiquity could not be put up. "Attributing a power, often lethal, to the gaze of the divinity (and to the gaze in general) returns in the most varied cultures" (Ginzburg, 1998, p.109). The author made this comment while pursuing, through time and space, the Lady of the animals, a very ancient goddess. He also gives some evidence of presumed witches, who in the early 1500s in Italy talked about goddesses whose gaze one had to escape so as not to be killed; these goddesses were often described as being black (Ginzburg, 1998). This idea is often found in the literature on the black Madonnas.

⁸ For documentation on the restoration, see the [site of the shrine](http://www.santuariotindari.it/): <http://www.santuariotindari.it/> and also: Restoration of the statue <http://www.santuariotindari.it/restauro.htm>.

distinguishes those Madonnas from all others, which is not actually the color, but the posture: the Virgin is seated on a throne, majestically, with a solemn frontal pose. This statue, which had an eventful escape from the Revolution, is in fact a human figure seated on a throne, with hands reaching out in a gesture that suggests thaumaturgical power⁹, a solemn face, white eyes with black pupils staring into space, all covered with gleaming gold studded with cameos and precious and semi-precious stones offered up by pilgrims¹⁰. Art historians tell us that the primitive assembling of the statue dates back to the 9th century; this means that it predates all the images of this kind, namely of the Madonna in Majesty, as all the black Virgins are typically depicted. To see how typical this is, think of the Gothic ones that followed, softly enveloping their baby, replacing the majestic with the maternal. In contrast the black Virgins have the baby “hooked” onto the front of their body seated on the throne, as if it were a sort of emblem. This child lacks the chubby sweetness of the Gothic child, and is often presented as a miniature adult, almost subordinate to the powerful mother. The head of the Sainte Foy reliquary is presumed to have originally been that of a Roman emperor of the Lower Empire (Fau, 1999). This image, like those of its sisters, arouses feelings of great ambivalence. It is said for instance to be very intriguing, but not beautiful. One is bewildered by the fact that it should show a woman, but it looks like a man. It is hard to accept that it is a Christian saint and at the same time a Roman emperor. We believe that the fascination lies in bringing together these contradictions which are not simplified and made plainly coherent, but neither do they remain conflicting and unresolved. It is very interesting to see the ambiguity of the literature on them, which is either extremely terse, or mixes information that on the one hand studies the phenomenon and on the other alludes to myths, digging up the Great Mother of pre-Christian religions more to bring her back to life than to provide us with a critical history of the black Madonnas (Van Cronenburg, 2003; Graveline, 2008)¹¹.

In this same journey to France, while we were getting deeper into the Massif Central, at a turn in the road, we saw on a windy hill dominating the wide granite plateau where the city of Saugues is situated, the statue of the *bête de Gevaudan*. This is perhaps the last medieval monster, and at the same time an example of a media event which the simplifying rhetorical needs of the sensationalistic press – we are talking about the 18th century – helped to create. At the time of Louis XV, in the wild outlying areas of France’s Massif Central, snow-covered, poor and sparsely populated, land still administered under a feudal system, there were various bloody deaths, especially of boys and girls, some women but no adult males. The bodies, mangled by deep wounds, were found in the frozen fields, and the deaths were linked to a wolf of unnatural size and ferocity, for which an exceptional hunt was organised, with the participation of the king’s militia. Notice that there were many witnesses who survived. But if ever there was the need to verify how difficult it is to establish something with one’s own eyes, if these eyes are not supported by appropriate, shared conventions about what is being seen, then the case of the *bête de Gevaudan* would be a perfect example. So, there were many witnesses, and no certainty about what was seen. Wolf-men? Werewolves? Criminals dressed up as monstrous animals? Unexpected animals, enormous

⁹The black Madonna often have very large hands which evoke the divine power directed towards humans; rationalistic explanations are not lacking here either: the medieval sculptors were unsure of the proportions of the human body. This forgets that they had perfect mastery, sculpting statues which when placed on top of the pinnacle of a cathedral, were so correctly de-formed that to the eye looking at them from below, they were perfectly in proportion. Similarly, the stiff pose evoking the relationship between the statue and another non-human world, for which it served as the intermediary through an extreme, composed tension, is certainly not due to the inexperienced sculptors not yet being able to produce the supple, loving Madonnas of the Gothic age. With their withdrawn facial expression and posture, the black Madonnas suggest a UFO, a meteorite, that has come to land momentarily on earth. In fact, one of them, now lost, is said to have been sculpted in a black meteorite.

¹⁰ For an image of the statue, see <http://www.conques.com/visite11.htm>

¹¹ On the net, see <http://viergesnoires.marie-madeleine.com/index.htm>

lynxes, wolf-molossian hybrids, even tigers? Everything was suggested, presumed, discussed. And every hypothesis so far seems to have been conclusively rejected. A confused hunt with an uncertain outcome. It was not known what was being hunted, or if it was killed; several large wolves were killed, but this left all the skepticism alive. The events remained wrapped in uncertainty and in vague, sinister fantasies. In people's imagination, fed on newspapers showing picturesque engravings of boys and girls not only killed but also denuded by the bête, there continued to thrive an animal monster, or a human monster, or better, a combination of the two. The events produced a lot of press attention, not only in France but also in England, where they satirised a king who could not catch a beast with his army. This made the government issue a censure on the events, which led to it being forbidden to write in parish registers that someone being buried was killed by the bête. Combined with the "news" that the monster-hungry press reported, this censure helped to totally confuse the clues and encourage the belief in an indefinable, evocative, and ultimately untouchable creature that was not human, but superhuman. Many images were also produced that still instil fear with the spell they can weave through the mixture of cruelty and bloody sexuality¹². In the course of time it was suspected to be the work of a sort of local Balkanic prince hungry for maidens' blood; blame was placed on the wild environment and the harsh living conditions of the mountain people; it was presumed to be the responsibility of a violent local family that was supposed to be on the side of the hunters but that might have been body and soul of the beast; it was also rumored that it was government plot against the local people, who were not strong enough supporters of the monarchy. We discovered during our stopover in Saugues in Auvergne, in the center of the area covered by the bête, and on our visit to the local newsstand-bookshop, that in the numerous publications on the matter people are still debating what happened without reaching any solution, still divided between beasts and men, and although many suspicions come to rest on the latter, in the iconography the winner is certainly the picturesque beast of great imaginative appeal. It is in fact so picturesque and has such an imaginative appeal that it has been adopted as the icon of the place, which seems to have decided to use this legendary story to make its entrance into modernity. At Saugues the bête is found not only in numerous books that are still sold to travellers passing through, but also, and without toning down its perversion in the slightest, in comic books for French children.

Exploration methods with complex objects. The function of the report.

Let us get back to our subject, reporting in the social sciences, with specific interest in clinical psychology. Remember that it is a question we are working on in a very exploratory way, and that although there is very little literature, there is, at least in the clinical psychology domain, a great wealth of practical experience. From the interdisciplinary exchange, we expect a contribution towards its conceptualisation. What did the historian we invited to the discussion with clinical psychologists have to say on this issue? The brevity of his article must not deceive: the density of questions raised should satisfy the most demanding of the clinical psychologists. Gentiloni in fact deals with the question in terms that we consider highly relevant to our own issues as psychologists¹³. First of all, he reminds us that in dealing with the diachronic nature of time, when from a present we look towards the past, the selection we make from an infinite range of data through the delimitation of methods and themes can be neither objective nor neutral. Let us keep this point in mind. A potentially infinite field of data is delimited by choices that are not neutral. This means that one cannot avoid taking a position towards the data and being aware of it, and therefore declaring one's choice and subjecting it to criticism. The central question becomes that of the relation between the subjectivity of the person making these choices and the data, which is infinite not only in quantity but also in quality: it is made up of traces and clues that are not self-evident, and lack the coherence and completeness that precede the historian's work

¹² See for example <http://www.betedugevaudan.com>

¹³ See Gentiloni (2009) in this issue of the *Rivista*.

and are apart from it. No object from the past tells its own story. Every seeming proof and sign of the importance of a historical event is the result of previous choices and constructions of sense, which have to be interpreted when one goes back to ask questions about that event and to consult the data, and the documents about it. No seeming evidence will stand up, in its perhaps necessary but certainly temporary simplification, when the choices that produced it are subjected to analysis. In this sense, all historiography is offered as an infinite and uncompleted process of successive interpretations, marked by the changes that come about in the relation between the knowing subject and the object being known. However, points out Gentiloni, there is an opposing tendency, which is expressed in the history offered to the general public by non-specialists: a tendency to present historical events as the single- cause answers to questions about the past and about the sense that it has in the present. In this bad history events seem to be objects endowed with an immediate, self-evident meaning. Gentiloni thus points out the emergence of a bad history that gives univocal, simplifying answers, essentially confusing in their apparent clarity, which do not accept differentiated and articulated views, and in which everything and the opposite of everything is held together. This point is worth noticing carefully: the fictitious, univocal coherence and the confusion that rejects the careful critical expression of differences go together. Psychologists would say that the acted out emotionality in relationships, for the purpose of controlling and influencing them, is prevailing over the possibility of reflecting on the collusive emotional dynamics in play. The emergence of a tendentially univocal communication style that simplifies complex questions underlines the question of the demands made on history. The need to recognise the public role of history and to adopt it fully appears clear, thus challenging the gap between specialists, reliable and rigorous but locked into their own domain, and popularisers, completely unconcerned about the reliability of the method they use to interpret the information they provide. This gap seems to confirm the failure to take full responsibility for the social accessibility of history in both the first and the second group. Both specialists and popularisers seem to avoid the critical analysis of the demands on history, and their positions, which may initially seem conflicting, may prove to be joined in a collusive agreement.

It may be surprising to see how many questions, crucial for historians, are equally so for clinical psychologists. In the first place, we see the centrality of the method. While the knowing subject changes in the variety of positions he can adopt, of tools he may use, and while the data about the object is potentially infinite, the method for the specific profile we call reporting, must be more rigorous than in the so-called exact sciences. This is so at least insofar as they rely on the conclusive stability of the object, which although not knowable in its entirety, acts as the ideal goal and anchorage for the research. The research in this case will "only" have to control the variables within which the knowing subject organises his attempts to approach the object, which stands stable and conclusive, waiting to be known. If the object is changeable, undefined and infinite, and if the subject too is changeable in the historicised, relative positions he can take, the reporting on their delimitation and on the choices that defined them must not only be included in the research, the scope of which thus expands, but must also be made highly reliable and detailed. Instead of talking about reporting, Gentiloni talks about traceability, about critical, thorough, published documentation, about every step taken in the process of choice characterising the work of history. This traceability makes it possible to verify the historian's interpretation. This accounts for the relation between the interpretation and the data and offers it both for criticism and for the development of knowledge of the thing being studied. Traceability, with its intrinsically relative nature, opens the way to later processes, the expected outcome of historical work that is done well. Let us sum up some points that clinical psychologists have in common with historians, initially ignoring the differences: the central importance of interpretation, the traceability of the process leading to it, results leaving the way open to further interpretations, the split between scholars and popularisers, the social responsibility of the meaning it assumes in relation to the demand made.

The contribution of the anthropologist, with whom we have been debating for years, gives us a great many opportunities for reflection. Such are the suggestions of interconnectedness between history, anthropology and psychology that we want to find differences so as to

benefit more from them. First of all, we notice that for Vincenzo Padiglione the crisis of self-evidence, empiricism, the detached observer, the neutral language of science, of raw data, seems to be accepted more easily, with greater unconcern, with a greater feeling of belonging to a scientific community that shares this perspective, than is the case for historians and psychologists. If this is true, why is it so? We can answer this question in a few words: anthropology is constitutionally "more marginal" than history and psychology, and therefore has more freedom. That it is marginal is fully consistent with the approach proposed by Padiglione of exploring the cultural hermeneutics, dealing with anomalies as a central factor of knowledge and essential source of information about the cultural dynamics being studied. But let us try to go further. More freedom (perhaps) from what? From the needs for control expressed by the social mandate in psychology and history, disciplines that work on meaning, on the interpretations that are made of the contemporary reality in which we all live. Psychology and history work on the identity of our community and its members. This field of activity cannot but stimulate the controlling bodies of that community. Just think how often history and psychology are pushed into becoming the operative arm of those demands. Confining ourselves to psychology, we will remember that it can be called on to settle conflicts, to identify individuals considered troublemakers so as to exclude them from belonging to an organisation, and to modify people's behaviour. The demands for control translate into the need for "strong" knowledge which does not interpret events in the context of the social situation, but that states facts, preferably in the direction of the dominant conformism, and hopefully in a scientific way, seen as being authoritative and unquestionable until proven wrong (this must always be left open). The demands for control do not seek knowledge of the events, but legitimation of their decisions, of their interventions and of their symbolic world. This means that the demands for control tend to be structurally opposed to recognising the symbolic importance of events, that is, their contingency and cultural relativity, which would weaken the force of their effects. In the case of the black Virgins, it is interesting that different demands for control are in conflict with each other: to what degree is catholic orthodoxy concerning the Madonna compatible with scientific testing of the statues and their stories? What happened between the geologist and the priests who had the statue in their custody? We would very much like to have the report, which might hold together the two points of view without suffering from the fact that one failed to be victorious over the other. This unreported conflict produces the confusion which still remains around the black Madonnas. This confusion also generates its own socially effective emotional event, to be read with no other categories than the emotions it arouses. With this kind of event anthropology feels at ease. It can interact with them, being able to tolerate the confusion, finding meanings, coherence, and a social role. In short, anthropology knows how to report them, and it is expected to do so. What would clinical psychologists and historians do if confronted with the black Madonnas? We are back at the question of the demands made of the three disciplines and the fact that it is one of the most relevant criteria for exploring differences.

We were saying that the social bodies controlling the meanings a community gives of itself, especially in the phases of their political life that we call right-wing, translate into the need for "strong" knowledge which does not interpret but asserts. On the other hand, reporting and data traceability are intrinsically and structurally open to the discussion of the method. Notice that the openness to discussion is their methodological strength and not their weakness. A not inconsiderable part of this methodological force is the fact that reporting and research traceability involve the researcher reflecting critically on the position he takes. The researcher who accounts for the position he assumes towards the research does not acritically accept the demands of the controlling bodies, nor does he ignore them in the illusion that his science is exempt from them, but he reflects critically on his relationship with them. Perhaps anthropology is safe from the controlling bodies as long as it is thought to be talking about other things, and other people. But Padiglione tells us that anthropology is no longer like that. Let us say at the outset that Padiglione immediately identifies with reporting

as the structural modality of producing scientific knowledge¹⁴. Reporting is taken in the sense of giving interpretations and knowledge back to the scientific community, but also to the new interlocutors of anthropology. The subjects studied are no longer relegated to distant places and past times, but are present, also as possible readers of anthropological reports. The cultural hermeneutics offered by Padiglione is an open anthropology, which takes into account the need for interaction between the subject and the object to be known, and that does not close the interlocutors inside the supposedly unbreakable walls of their culture. The premise of interaction is that the knowing subject accepts the limits of his own culture and sees them incarnate in himself. If he takes this position, he can push his own limits in meeting the object, which is always an interlocutor participating in the dialogue. In this type of anthropology, they know each other within the relationship: within the limits and thanks to the limits created by the relationship as a context constructed together. This entails the ability to accept and use the crisis of one's own identity and of one's sense of belonging.

We see this as a fertile area of confrontation and difference between anthropology and psychology. Concepts of identity, boundaries and belonging have also been studied by psychology. A decontextualised psychology may imagine a given, finite pathway that does not have to be explored, to which the individual being studied must adapt. This type of psychology may anchor the identity to relatively stable individual contextless characteristics. But psychology, and this is our position, marginal but significant in the broader disciplinary movement which is however moving towards a biological anchorage of individual traits, can also adopt a constructivist perspective. There is a specific difference from cultural psychology, with which anthropology is more accustomed to debating. When we use the word culture, we are not borrowing from anthropology as happens with cultural psychology¹⁵, but we base it on a model of affective symbolisation of the world and of the specific relations of psychology. As a premise, this model, based on the unconscious working of the mind, hypothesises the polysemic confusion of the subject. We are referring to the individual in relation to his context if we are speaking in general terms, but the same condition concerns both the researcher carrying out his research and his interlocutor, when we talk about the clinical psychology intervention. This individual has a polysemic, relational mind which is in search of limits and containment as the basis for his knowledge. In this perspective, the individual only exists in relation to a context of symbolically described relations; this context is neither given nor defined before the individual interacts with it. In this case the construction of the contingent world one believes one is in, is a constant activity for the subject. Any hypothesis of a definite conclusion concerning this search for boundaries is illusory and leads to a crisis. From this point of view, reporting traces the process by which these boundaries are defined, making it verifiable and also open to further developments. To use Carli's terms, reporting domesticates the polysemy of the unconscious through language, and produces emotional thinking on the experience through which relations are constructed in the context (Carli, 2007; 2008).

Let us go back to Grignan. One might say that we feel the need to escape from the fake simplification of the "Grignan Castle visit" event, which tends to prescribe for the other person, the visitor, a role in which disdain is joined to the desire to manipulate and of which a critical analysis should finally be made: the role of the tourist¹⁶. The visiting stranger is transformed into a known object that can apparently be influenced however one likes, and

¹⁴ For a broader treatment of this issue, see Padiglione (2007). For a reflection on the importance of ethnographic writing in anthropology and on the questions that anthropology poses concerning this, see Fabietti (2001), specifically the chapter "Descrivere", pp. 112 – 157. Here we recall: "Without ethnographic writing no anthropological knowledge would be possible" (Fabietti, op. cit., p. 114).

¹⁵ "Letting such a large and ungainly camel as anthropology into the tent of psychology will stir things up quite a bit rather than bringing order", as Geertz says when talking about Bruner (Geertz, 2000, Ital. trans., p. 200).

¹⁶ In the book already cited, Padiglione (2007), we find some interesting points on this cultural role.

at the same time he is attributed with the desire to be treated in precisely this way. For his part, the visitor forced to transform into a tourist, besieges the place as well as he can. The old wardrobes, stripped of their history, offended by being uprooted from their original places to go and pretend to have always been at Grignan, humbly suffer the offence of the backs and hands of the tourists, who exhausted by the endless explanations, lean here and there, mindless both of the signs forbidding it and of the groans of the venerable wardrobe whose joints can no longer bear the weight and whose peeling painted surfaces vainly beg for mercy. There is the need for history, so as to avoid falling into that feeling of being under a spell and at the same time of anguished emptiness caused by losing oneself in the falsity of a false coherence. There is the need for history, for good interpretations, to avoid the violence inexorably aroused by the blindness and the ignorance about where you are and who you are with. There is the need for that good history that Gentiloni talks about, not simplifying, but careful about the complexity of the sources and also about the choices made when a certain point of view about the past is adopted. It could be objected that the Grignan visit was actually nothing but entertainment, a visit that presupposed that the people doing it wanted nothing better than to be put under a spell, that a broader discourse would have been unsuccessful and that if word spread of guided tours that were more interested in the complexity of the place, then soon the castle would be deserted, resulting in a loss for all, tourists and Département. But Gentiloni's words again tell us of the urgent need to bridge the gap between the cultured and the popular discourse, between specialists and popularisers. Why is there this need? Because there is the need for good interpretations of contexts, events, places, and these interpretations must be disseminated, shared, offered to a broader public. The role of the social sciences is to attenuate the violence present in contexts of living together where simplified readings of the social reality are given, and to make it possible for diversities to be integrated. Good interpretations bring together the otherness of the data about parts of reality up to that moment unknown or separated, and the symbolic sense, of emotional recognition, which can be given by those who are called to share and participate in the interpretations. There is the need for history, for a wealth and articulation of information, there is the need for anthropology and for well organised emotional confusion, there is the need for psychology that tells us how thought feeds on differences and at the same time on polysemy and emotions.

Historians, anthropologists, and psychologists found themselves in agreement, during the meeting after which we are writing these notes, in challenging the universalistic codes that seek to dominate, related to scientific and technical rationality, imposed by a significant part of contemporary culture. Remember that this universalistic demand arouses the response of claims for cultural specificity, exemplified by the rebellion of cultures different from western ones, but also by the rebellions that take place in the realities of large western cities. This crisis reveals the limits of the enlightenment concept of the gradual progress of scientific reason, which was supposed to extend progressively to all the fields of life all around the globe. This is while contemporary democracies are unable to respond to their members' need for symbolic identification and the social and political theories of the symbolic so far developed prove to be inadequate¹⁷. How many of us as children heard adults explaining

¹⁷ In this criticism of universalistic codes, we adopt the terms proposed by Marramao (2000). Remember that the author talks from the viewpoint of political philosophy, and that this discourse is developed in the debate underway in economics between individualists and communitarians. Specifically, Marramao thinks that in criticising individualism, which he at any rate finds inadequate, by referring to cultural symbolism, there is the desire to make a sharp differentiation between one culture and another. He adds that this may be due to the influence of anthropology, which as we can see, quite unlike Padiglione, he sees as the affirmation of the irreducibility of cultures. In this case there would be an inversion of individualist universalism into its opposite, a relativism based on the incommensurability of cultures. Marramao hopes for the emergence of models that present the symbolic dimension as a space not of separation but "of transit" between cultures. One could therefore achieve a new universalism with no desire for hegemony, but a means of debate between different cultures and experiences. It is interesting to notice that the broader conceptual picture of which Marramao's arguments are part is the individual-atom crisis, that is, the individual seen as an indivisible basic unit. On this last note we are back in agreement with the author.

science: "Once they believed that thunder was the voice of the gods. Today we know that a great increase in pressure and temperature causes the rapid expansion of the air. The expansion of the air produces a shock wave manifested in a clap of thunder". In this explanation there is the implicit erroneous theory that the ancients were lost in the mists of strange fantasies, with which they made sense of events for lack of anything better, while we moderns, on the other hand, possess a rationality based on science which enables us to find the true causes of things. This rationality is our rudder, which must be wisely kept firmly in hand, without letting ourselves be enchanted by the sirens of fantasy, which must be kept at bay¹⁸. This theory does not contemplate the idea that we, just like the ancients, give an emotional, symbolic sense to events. And that we cannot do without this emotional organizer. When an octopus is being cooked, some people put a cork in the water, claiming that this will help to make it tender. We have no scientific proof of this. In fact, it should be remembered that for some time now this area of human competence, cooking, which had been protected from scientific knowledge, is being studied closely. Expert chemists work with expert cooks and together they not only experiment with ways of cooking and preparing food never imagined before, but they also put the old beliefs to the test. So now you know, and may you make good use of it, that all the stories about the good stock that is made by putting the meat in cold water and the good boiled meat that comes from putting the meat in when the water reaches boiling point, are baseless. Laboratory experiments have shown that whatever you do the result is the same. In other words, the meat gives out its "juices" when the cooking starts in cold water but also when it starts in boiling water. However, it has been discovered that if it is left to cool in its stock, it absorbs part of the liquid and its mass increases by ten per cent. So it takes back part of the juices. But, adds the chemist, who in this case is luckily also a gourmet, why not let it cool in a truffle juice? (This was in 2004). This is undoubtedly a step forward for cooks, and we will also spread the word. However, we would like to invite you to think about the cork in the octopus cooking liquid. If we say it is useless after doing the correct laboratory tests, it shows we have understood nothing not only about cooking, but also about the world, at least the world involving humans. In fact, while the cork does not affect the octopus, it certainly affects the cook. It represents the ritual element needed to organise the cook's emotionality. To avoid misunderstandings, remember that a confusive emotionality, which if not organised will cause the recipe to fail, is not typical of "immature" or "oversensitive" cooks, but it belongs to all cooks, with no distinctions. Confusive emotionality is the organiser of the relation with the objects of knowledge, obviously including ourselves; it is a basic function of our thinking¹⁹. It cannot be excluded; it can only be integrated or separated. The emotional function of the cork in the cook's mind can be replaced by the expert, hopefully with the same efficacy. In what we have called scientism, and which at least in the psychology domain demands the presence of a detached observer who uses neutral language and deals with raw data, preferably biological and not cultural, we are rashly suggesting splitting, and ignoring the symbolic components of knowledge²⁰. We should keep it in mind that psychology is a weak science compared to the strong powers that organise our systems of living together, and that it tends to conform. Think of a science that is decisive in our daily life, close to the strong powers, and which perhaps coherently excludes symbolic dimensions from its models: economics. The recent dramatic crisis in markets and finance is proof of the limits of the so-called rationality that ignores the symbolic dimensions of the thought on which economics is based. We wonder whether it will be treated as feedback on that model and whether the way will be opened to interpretation less separated from reality²¹. Let us try to give a reading of scientism, often present in the social disciplines and certainly making a comeback in psychology, based on an understanding of the emotional components that organise it. With

¹⁸ The term fantasy, which in antiquity was associated with the soul's imaginative capacity, took on, under the Church fathers, a sense of the false image of things and the devil's trickery.

¹⁹ For a theory of thought organised by the biological functioning of the mind, see Matte Blanco (1981); for a theory of social relations based on this functioning, see Carli & Paniccia (2003, 2005).

²⁰ On this issue see Paniccia, Giovagnoli & Giuliano (2008).

²¹ On this see Renzo Carli's Editorial in this issue of the *Review* (Carli, 2009).

knowledge that is not interpretation but assertion, there is the attempt to lock thinking into a constraint that forces it into already known lines, and that does not bring it into contact with the boundary that while marking out its own known territory, suggests other unknown territories. When the constraint is obligatory, this allows the easy coexistence of the transgression of the obligation, which leads to the denial not of the constraint, but of the confusion that brings together everything and the opposite of everything, which Gentiloni talks about when he makes his diagnosis of bad history.

Data as a symbol.

In the travel encounters recounted we can trace the coexistence of different symbolic worlds, which seem to coexist without one of them dominating the others, reducing them to zero and establishing itself, finally single and transparent, in all its coherent entirety. When this coherence seeks to prevail, then what appears is a meaning vacuum. The Département of La Drôme Provençale organises an entire rhetoric, in offering the Castle of Grignan to us, which tries to make us see a renaissance building, untouched and complete - apart from a few missing pieces of furniture, a few rooms demolished - that never existed, not even at the time of François Adhémar de Monteil. For all the other divergent clues, one pretends they are not there. Instead of being fascinating, this empty coherence provokes a painful sense of loss. It is different in the case of the black Virgins spread across Europe with their singular, eccentric presence. To bring them back to the sphere of the known, it is suggested that they are suntanned or blackened by candles. And yet the Virgin of Le Puy en Velay coexists with a pagan stone, and with her strange image evokes divinities from the orient and from pre-Christian times. More than two hundred years have passed since the time of the bête of Gevaudan, and yet it has still not been decided to adopt an interpretation of the event without the unknown monster.

What questions are signalled by these events? Think of the loss of meaning the black Virgins and the bête of Gevaudan would suffer if the outcome of a study on these events were: it is not the voice of the gods, but the air pressure. How can research be done without emptying data of its symbolic meaning, therefore of its contextualisation, of its emotional contingency? Research must be carried out without denying that the object is far more complex than our initial perspective envisages, and the tools and method must be far more exploratory than demonstrative. We can also ask ourselves to what extent we need to find completely new models for this, or whether it is more useful to start to recognise its presence in our practice, with an effort to reflect and conceptualise. Let us suppose that conceptualising reporting, not surprisingly adopted by all three disciplines we are looking at, is an initial response to this question. We think that the three disciplines, in very different ways, deal with a common question: they consider symbolic realities, complex not only for the amount of variables involved, but also confused, since their features are emotional. History, anthropology, and psychology deal with different symbolic worlds living together in our social reality, and with their contingent contextualised interaction. The idea is not to raze this to pursue a pure, or purified, science or to confine oneself to acting out the emotional efficacy, but to try to understand it, to recuperate and restore it as a resource. Think of the case of the bête of Gevaudan. Let us suppose that a stop is put to the persistent confusion between facts and their representation, in which the event is immersed. Let us suppose that a rigorous distinction is made between the two levels. That the research into who the beast really was stops, and that instead it is asked what happened in that area of France in the 18th century. And that it is asked what is happening today with the event that began at that time, making the research focus on the current confusion in which the event is immersed, and its meaning. Let us suppose that both the limits of the documentation of the events, and at the same time their symbolic richness, are recognised. We are unlikely to ever know who the beast was. But we certainly have a good number of sources that could say what happened in the mind of the people involved, for instance. At least there are a good number who left us their testimony.

In the clinical psychology experience that explores the fantasies with which we organise our individual and social identity, we often meet the fantasy of the whole, of the complete, of the integral, of the intact. What is intact has not been touched by anything and does not lack any of its parts. Remember that in everyday language whoever is “a bit touched”, whoever has been touched, is rather mad, not in himself. In the fantasy of the integral, one thinks of one’s identity as the part of oneself that is always the same, unchanged; a central part, a stable nucleus that nothing can touch or change. “That’s the way I am”. In this fantasy, identity must be known in its essence, defended from the influence of others, strengthened and consolidated in its integrity. “I want to know who I really am”. “First I have to think about myself, then I can think about others”. In the psychotherapy experience, for instance, autonomy will be promoted as the ability not to need others, to know how to be, to know how to get by alone. But there is also the desire to be constantly in the same balanced mood, calm and tranquil. A research project designed to explore the assessments of the psychotherapy experience, addressed to a group of people who declared they had had psychotherapy and had completed it, identified among the three main ways of beginning psychotherapy the expectation that it would help to remove all involvement with others and with the world, seen as a source of pain, together with a tendency to acquire autonomy to free them from the constraints of relating²². In the psychotherapy process, a possible pathway starts from an absolute, empty coherence, in which someone makes bad, tendentious, univocal and simplified history about himself, to achieve an articulation of the picture, from which emerge seemingly incoherent experiences kept apart by dissociations, which, if connected together allow thoughts to emerge. The fact that they are talking about experiences had during psychotherapy should not make us think that they are pathological aspects. In research carried out in an organisation that offers highly specialised services, we found that a high degree of satisfaction connected to the perception of being autonomous in one’s work is accompanied by a feeling of dissatisfaction at not belonging to the organisation itself. The two experiences, split, stopped the second from working as critical feedback on the first. It may be thought that autonomy, in the sense of not needing others, is a shared emotional position in our culture and is supported by cultural codes that are coherent with it, that make it not only acceptable but something to be augured. In the object, complete and univocal, one can see something of which one can take possession, and that can be manipulated. It corresponds to control fantasies of the individual, but that are also shared by groups, and the community.

In the travel events described earlier the desire to bring complex matters back to a coherent integral unity fails. Their varied, uneven texture continues to be glimpsed, despite some efforts to make them into a uniform, smooth fabric. At Grignan the current French state is involved in this effort. In the case of the black Virgins, it is the catholic church. It is a matter of the instituted powers trying to make the events conform to their symbolic universe. At Saugues, the place of the bête of Gevaudan, there seems instead to be the intention of maintaining all the legendary confusion needed to keep the bête as the local emblem. The more these failures of coherence remain without problematic effects in the system of living together, and in fact offer people many uses, the more they seem suited to the anthropological reading, ready to interpret the resources inherent to symbolic systems just as they appear, with nobody coming to try to change them. Something different happens to psychologists, especially to clinical psychologists. They may be called to intervene in cases of failed coherence, when they work in systems of living together in which there is the need to read the events not only in an emotional key. This opens the complex question of the clinical psychology intervention, which we will not dwell on here, apart from trying to give a very concise summing-up. In the demand addressed to the psychologist, whether it be from

²² The other two modalities are the expectation of an omnipotent control over the relationship and the emotions, and the expectation that psychotherapy should be incorporated in its own mode of acting out emotions in relationships. The results of this research (Giovagnoli, Dolcetti & Paniccia, 2009) are published in this issue of the *Rivista*.

an individual or an organisation, there are two requests. On the one hand there is the demand to confirm the prevalence of fantasies, of the emotional meaning given to events, taken as being conclusive and exhaustive, in other words, as omnipotent. On the other, there is the demand to learn to disprove the omnipotence of these fantasies, characterising the thought and the acting out of the client when it is an individual, and the collusive dynamics if the client is an organisation²³. The hoped-for outcome is that the omnipotence of the fantasies can be disproved and that they can be integrated with elements of reality different from themselves, so as to have access to a relationship that simplifies and distorts reality less.²⁴ This involves a major difference between history, anthropology and clinical psychology. For the latter, research is always intervention. Not only is it assumed that with his presence the psychologist changes the field being observed, but this change is guided. The intervention guides the change, giving it aims that are negotiated with the interlocutor, who at this point it would perhaps be better to call the client. This confines the clinical psychologist's research to the domains where there can be an exchange between himself and the interlocutors of the research, where knowledge can produce development for the client. A further limit, connected to the first one, is that the relationship between the psychologist and the client dominates the presence of other interlocutors so much that it is difficult for the latter to participate in the knowledge produced in that context²⁵. In a psychotherapy intervention, or in a clinical psychology consultation for an organisation, what is considered is only the difficulty encountered concerning privacy when one wants to report with precision. It would be hard for a clinical psychologist to be called for a consultation on the black Madonnas, and even if he happens to have the idea of taking the initiative himself, he will not be able to do it without seeking a client to make the demand, somebody who, by participating in that process, can at the same time give him information and in turn benefit from it himself²⁶. The clinical psychologist will never have an informer. The report is never mainly description of the other person, but says what happens in the relationship between psychologist and client. For the clinical psychologist the other person does not "do this" or "say that". But he does it with him, he says it to him. The report on an intervention talks about the way the relationship between the psychologist and the client proceeds.

The three disciplines in their diversity all seem to involve the need to freely produce interpretations and diverging thoughts, the only way to enable the affective and symbolic dimensions of data to be comprehended. At the same time, the interpretations have to be continually compared with the limits and constraints of the same data. This explorative intention entails circular work involving a non-linear method. The interesting thing is that the creativity of interpretative thought is fostered by the limits of the data, and that as soon as one abandons them to follow one's own associations, one realises that one is in a dead-end. The dead-end often proves to be what the researcher already knew before starting the research. This produces a way of proceeding that swings between seeking the limits of the data – all these sciences are equipped for rigorous data collection – and questioning oneself about one's own associations and interpretations, and about the method being used. This is

²³ Collusive dynamics is the set of fantasies shared by the people that are part of the same context.

²⁴ For example an organisation full of conflicts and inefficiency may want everything to return to a mythical "before", and at the same time want to learn to cope with a contemporary situation that is different from that of the past. During the intervention, psychologist and client confront each other with the ups and downs entailed in such opposing intentions, with the aim of finding a new modality of integration between fantasies and demand for reality, between the inner world and the external world. For an intervention of this kind, see Paniccia, Di Ninni & Cavalieri (2006).

²⁵ All the efforts of psychotherapy research to introduce a third figure, a controlling agent, into the psychotherapist/client relationship have not solved this problem, in part because so far the figure has simply been ignored without however making it disappear.

²⁶ Psychological research always envisages the restitution of data to the people who are consulted. In the clinical field this deontological condition becomes an integral part of the method: if the people consulted are not interested in the process of knowing that is to be pursued, the data is either unusable or directly unobtainable.

in the research, in its design and during its development, not only before or after. Reporting and the traceability of the research account for this process and organise it together.

As we know, the symbol was an object, the “hospitalitatis card”, a small tablet (the card), but also a ring or other countersign that could be broken in two. Each of the two pieces was kept by two families who in this way certified an alliance, a pact of reciprocal hospitality. Whichever member of one family arrived with his half of the symbol, even if he was not personally known, would receive hospitality. Let us think about that: these were two families, so far from each other that without a sign of recognition their members would not have been able to certify the reciprocal understanding. The symbol brings together what is different in the relationship of alliance between diversities, not of levelling within the same identity. The symbolic relationship, like thought, feeds on differences placed in a relationship of alliance with each other. If they are identical, there is no symbolic relationship. Anthropology, psychology, and history look for differences inside the levelling or standardising of meaning, in order to reopen questions that seemed concluded, and to offer new integrations between the parts involved. For anthropology, history, psychology, confusion and the unexpected are information and the object of study within which to make explorations; they are not noise or deviation on the road to knowledge. Methods are studied by which confusion can be discovered in its unexpected meanings, reordered into categories, given a communicable sense and offered to others, who are not just members of the same discipline, so further paths can be taken. We think that the relationship with the user is one of the main points of difference, and therefore of debate, between the three disciplines. Let us think of the relational system in which the time of knowledge unfolds. The researcher asks it of his interlocutors, thanks to the social mandate that both accept, and this fact legitimates him. It is obtained, in a confrontation between alterities that do not share any kind of social mandate, that do not know each other and that have difficulty finding shared aims, through seduction, and the capacity to be accepted. It is agreed on through a difficult and complex exchange, where the knowledge produced is at the service of the interlocutor. And also: the interlocutors are alive and present, or dead, they speak with their words, or with their silences, their objects, their material traces. And then: are they fellow-citizens with whom one shares the same material and cultural resources, or are they distant others? And how is so-called globalisation changing, and how will it change the latter state of things?²⁷ But let us leave all these themes among the open questions.

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²⁷ This question is important in the anthropological debate, also in relation to the changes in the discipline and in its fields of study. Concerning the conflict that an anthropologist may experience in looking for interlocutors that will enable him to know a culture, with a feeling of not being able to give anything in exchange, see Geertz (2001) in the chapter “Il pensare come atto morale: dimensioni etiche del lavoro antropologico sul campo”, pp. 35-56 (Thinking as a moral act: ethical aspects of anthropological field work).

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