The clinical psychology report: issues and questions for a comparison with writing in sociology and anthropology

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1. Writing in human sciences

1.1 The "anthropomorphic model of man"

The capacity to use language has enabled man to write comments and reports on his own actions and plans, giving rise to a proliferation of diaries, letters, biographies and autobiographies.
We are referring to the memoirs produced by great figures, leaders, kings or heroes, but also, with the passing of time and advances in the means of communication, to biographies of ordinary people who recount the uniqueness and autonomy of their own experience, often from an individualistic angle.
Various components of culture and thought have helped to sharpen the individual's attention towards existence and daily life. This increase in biographies, autobiographies and memoirs aims to combine the pleasure of storytelling with the sense of shared belonging and identity.
With modern technology other ways of telling stories have emerged: tape-recording, interviews, collages of documents and writing, quick electronic messages. A sort of open laboratory has been created …"The ease of electronic communication and the transformation underway in the cultural models that involve making experience public have done away with the use of private correspondence and memoirs" (Ceserani & De Federicis, 1988, p. VI).
Moreover, today we have rejected the naive view that with writing we believed there was adherence to the reality described. "As soon as knowledge of the self and of the world agrees to be presented in the form of narration, it also accepts its characteristics of partiality and relativity" (Ceserani & De Federicis, 1988, p.V). It is a "fiction", in the etymological sense: a construction of reality with a symbolic value, in which the signifier is not the signified. Words themselves are endowed with a double reference, according to the theory of F. Fornari (1976; 1979), and as well as the intentional meaning, also convey an emotional, unconscious meaning symbolically shared by the actors who share the same context (Carli, 1987).
Whether the addressee is the general public or an intimate interlocutor, writing is considered a social act.
Harrè and Secord (1972) put forward an anthropomorphic model of man, alternative to a positivist mechanistic model, which can account for the greater complexity of human processes. Man in fact has the characteristic not only of being a subject that acts, but also a person who observes, plans, criticises and rethinks his own history. As Duranti writes: "*Language* therefore serves not just to describe the world, but also to change it […]. When we tell a story, an anecdote, or even a joke, as well as conveying information on events, we provide a perspective, we suggest" (1992, p. 16).
In their model, Harrè and Secord (1972) therefore put forward the idea of man as an acting subject that observes, plans and criticises. He acts and interacts guided by conscious and unconscious purposes which regulate his behaviour, allowing the control, modification and adaptation to the environment; he develops a series of capacities, such as decoding the expectations of others, measuring images of himself with social norms, and learns categories that allow him to coherently rearrange these experiences in his own reports.
The report is therefore conceived as a tool that enables one to know man's behaviour, and people's actions and interactions[1]. Through language we talk, comment, make reports, plans,

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forecasts and future designs. We are inside and outside the scene. Harrè and Secord also argue that comments reveal our plans and aims and that we can therefore also control the control, by means of an "awareness of awareness" that guides and corrects the control.
Third-level control is however provided by the reaction of others.

1.2 Constructing research reports in the social sciences

La "fameuse" angoisse devant la page blanche touche aussi le chercheur"[2]: so begins an article by Martyne Pierrot and Martin de la Soudière in an issue of the journal *Communications* devoted to writing in the human sciences (1994, p. 5). For social science researchers, "public" writing, consisting of articles, communications, research reports and, books, represents an important part of their work, underlying their professional identity itself. The question of writing is also tied to the history of the human sciences and to the very identity of each of them. If it is supposed, as some scholars argue, that the human sciences are a theoretical structure for the mere organization of a set of data, then writing will be nothing but what Roland Barthes defined, in *Communications*, as a vague final operation, executed rapidly thanks to some technique of expression learnt at high school, involving no other effort than adopting the codes of the genre (clarity, respect for the laws of logic), therefore falling into the illusion that research is expounded but not written (Barthes, 1972).
In a report, intertexts (IT) alternate with what is outside the text (HI), in other words what is left out in the editing stage. It is possible to trace the IT/HI systems in the notebooks or *journeaux de recherche* of Malinowski, Margaret Mead, Ferenzci, Wittgenstein, as Lourau (1994) has tried to do. If the writing of the report is considered an integral part of the analysis and collection of data, one can then identify a series of stages that are intermediate but also connected to the final research report, consisting of the researcher's notes, personal observations, memos, and bibliographical references. Diary writing as a "workshop" for research reintroduces the hidden dimension of the latter, i.e. the *temporal aspect of the process,* the continuity of the work, as opposed to the report focussing on the outcome. This writing therefore takes place in time but also in a context.
On this point, let us quote an anecdote of D. Percheron[3], who given the task of drafting a report of a Roberto Rossellini film for a newspaper, tried instead to report what aspects of the film had struck his attention, and probably, he says, not only his. *"Je crus donc bon d'écrire que "cette petite chose avait accroché mon regard". J'aurais du me douter que ce n'était pas le genre de la maison. J'aurais du, de moi-même, rédiger plus neutre, y aller d'un « le regard », comme ce fut imprimé. Ou peut-être aurais-je du appeler le journal pour bien leur expliquer que « hein, attention, si j'ai mis mon, ce n'est pas par hasard »* (1994, pp. 119-120)[4].
The relationship with the figure *commissioning* the job and the understanding of what D. Percheron calls "l'esprit maison" are related to the *readers*' demands, in the "sacred field " of the publication (Percheron, 1994).
Asking oneself who a report is being written for and why, in other words who are the addressees, what is the purpose, but also the context of the report, reminds us of the issues of the clarity of the writing in a scientific article and the *eternal gap between what is said and what is meant*. On this point Percheron stresses the prose and the continual work of final revision of an article or report to be published, which in the end will reach the printer - or the

[1] Let us recall that the theory of language acts of Austin (1962) and the ethnogenetic approach of the 1970s, which present the idea of man as agent, constructor, motivated by aims and intentions, capable of self-awareness as well as self-control and symbolic interaction.
[2] "The famous anxiety before the blank page also concerns the researcher".
[3] Among other things, also editor of the journal *Communications*.
[4] "I intentionally wrote "this detail struck my attention". I should have known it was not the kind of style chosen by the publishing house. I myself should have written in a more neutral way, "the attention", as it was in fact printed. Or perhaps I should have called the newspaper to explain that "hey, listen, if I wrote that it was certainly not by accident".

internet – with the illusion of having finally achieved the finished product. At that point, every slip, every mistake, will be ignored or forgiven. As long as one can say..."un texte existe, je l'ai rencontré dans une bibliographie"[5] (p. 126).
The style of the research report, the language, the verb tenses, the clarity of exposition and the repetition of information are all devices signalled also by Banister (1994) and again by Cicognani (2002). Presenting research results to the scientific community therefore poses problems, the formal problems being closely connected to those regarding contents.
While ethnographic research at once recognised the problem of the reporting of results and processes, solving the problem by elaborating "ethnographic" models and writing styles which often overlap into the literary genres (Ricolfi, 1997), this idea has not always been present in the rest of the scientific research in the field of social sciences.
"Drafting a research report, in the case of qualitative research, largely follows the conventions guiding the writing of any report of scientific enquiry, although certain aspects are more specific. The most typical model that can be considered is the article for scientific journals. It must be remembered however that different methods of qualitative research (such as ethnography, *grounded theory*, life stories and narrative research, conversation analysis, discourse analysis, content analysis) require rather different writing styles (on which the literature contains precise indications, see for instance Strauss, Corbin, 1990) and that, in the case of publication in journals, consideration must also be given to the preferences of the latter (for example the main psychology journals require respect for standard criteria, prevalently "objective", valid for all the other kinds of research, while those in the "qualitative" area generally leave greater freedom in style of presentation, also accepting more "narrative" styles if the researcher's contribution is more personal and creative) and of the readership to whom the article is addressed" (Cicognani, 2002, pp. 114-115).
Moreover, according to what Cicognani (2002) underlines, the research report varies according to the theoretical approach and the methods used. This seems to be a fundamental point, linked to the purposes of the report but also to the objectives that the research itself sets out to achieve.
Writing is therefore (Banister, 1994; Cicognani, 2002) an activity that requires a period of elaboration as well as consideration of its addressees, of the context of the reporting, the style and the purpose.

1.3 Assessment, subjectivity vs objectivity/generalizability and purposes of the report

Drafting a report of one's research for the scientific community inevitably brings up the question of assessing the research.
While in the domain of the positivistic sciences the criteria of validity are set in internal validity (demonstrating the causal relations hypothesised between phenomena), external validity (the possibility of generalizing the results to different persons, contexts, situations) and reliability (the adequacy of the tools for the measurement of the phenomenon studied), "many researchers have in fact argued that the traditional criteria are inadequate for the assessment of qualitative research, since they take no account of the peculiarity of the *process*[6] of qualitative research and are not consistent with the epistemological premises on which the various qualitative approaches are based" (Cicognani, 2002, pp. 118-119). Therefore in the attempt to claim a more meaningful role for qualitative research, since the mid 1980s some authors have been trying to elaborate specific criteria of validity in the domain of some qualitative approaches (such as for *grounded theory* cfr. Henwood & Pidgeon, 1992; for narrative research cfr. Lieblich et al, 1998). Others, however, like those who support the constructivist paradigm, challenge the possibility of adopting definite stable criteria and privilege flexible criteria linked to the broadest characteristics specific to all research: the constructivist approach underlines that also making a report always involves a co-construction between *assessed* and *assessing people*, and underlying knowledge

[5] "That book exists, I've seen it in a bibliography".
[6] Our italics.

(Westmeyer, 2003). This is linked to the age-old question of dividing nomothetic sciences on the one hand from idiographic sciences on the other.

"The problem of the *transferability (or generalizability) of data* - writes Cicognani- is one of the most difficult issues of qualitative research, because its prevailing focus on specific contexts and situations and on particular, unique cases makes it almost impossible to establish whether the results are valid independently of the context in which they were recorded" (2002, p. 121).

The issues concerning the standardization of procedures, the generalizability of results, the validity of interpretations and the replicability of the research are connected to the use of reports. The question of the *objectivity* and of the *subjectivity* of the research report and of reports in general is one of the first that strikes the researcher's attention. Essentially, it can be said that the type of approach to the formulation and reporting of clinical cases that is still dominant is the psychometric or diagnostic approach to the pursuit of objectivity (Bell, 1992; Westmeyer 2003a; 2003b).

There is a certain difference between the statistical report and for instance the report of what happens in the psychoanalytic domain. On this point, Liotta (1995) insists on the need for caution in drawing conclusions and in developing a technical system that uses the analytical process in the verbal collection of the material from sittings as if it were the truth, or in using the patient or the analyst's word as objective data. The attention shifts towards the uniqueness of the relationship, the doubts, and the hypotheses to test rather than towards the replicability and the generalizability of the results. We can say that in the psychoanalytic area this pursuit of objectivity serves as the background of an extreme subjectivity of the working material. In relation to this, the objectivity and reliability of the account seem to become important aspects due to the fact that the original psychoanalytic event cannot be observed directly. Various authors have investigated the validity of the clinical account and given their opinions. Merendino (1984) suggests considering the text of the clinical account a public document. The account-text would assume an intermediary role between the psychoanalytic experience *in* the setting and the operation of theoretical elaboration and assessment *outside* the setting. It is proposed as an element that shapes and constructs a network of signifiers and meanings, with the value of knowledge. Merendino insists on the value of the clinical account as a public document that would enable the theory drawn from the experience described in it to be tested and confuted and a scientific discourse to be constructed. Gori (1990) however states that no report is able to reproduce the wealth of emotional events experienced in analysis.

In research the problem was therefore posed of how to collect the data related to the clinical interviews and take it out of the analysis room. The solution often found is that of audio recording as a method useful in research, but also in discussing cases under supervision. The issue of *recording* data is closely connected to the first question dealt with, that of assessment, and therefore to the correlation between the process and the therapeutic outcome. The use of technology for the reporting of clinical cases seems to suggest a fragmented and piecemeal use and, if it is used in the attempt to achieve objectivity, it could lead to the loss of a wealth of material that could come from reflection on the relational aspect and on the process.

The questions dealt with so far are closely tied to the *purposes* of the report in the context of the intervention and of the process of knowledge; the questions that seem interesting in this respect are: what use is made of it? Who are the addressees? What parts are alluded to or explored? What cultural models are conveyed? How far is the process underlying the relationship taken into account?

2. The report in the praxis of the anthropologist, the ethnographer and the sociologist

2.1 Reporting in anthropology and ethnography: the use of the notebook

The report is commonly used in anthropological-ethnographic research.

Between the 19th and 20th centuries in this context there emerged the technique of participant observation. It was the anthropologist Malinowski, in the Introduction to *Argonauts of the Western Pacific*, considered the founding work of modern anthropology (Van Maanen, 1988), who codified this technique, challenging the traditional model of 19th century anthropology which saw the indigenous people as primitive savages to educate to western civilization[7].

With the disappearance of primitive societies anthropology shifted its interests towards the study of modern societies, focussing on specific social and cultural areas: think of the development of urban anthropology, the anthropology of medicine, autobiographical sociology, community studies or studies on subcultures, where social emargination, immigration and urbanization are examined (Corbetta, 1999). But think too of the participant observation in so-called "organizational ethnography", which aims to analyse organizations seen as cultures, whether they be health or political institutions[8].

The technique of participant observation features the researcher's direct involvement with the object studied. As well as watching and listening, the researcher has to participate in the life of the subjects being studied so as to develop a vision "from the inside" in a perspective that is "emic" (describing how interactions work, using the categories of meaning used by the participants), rather than "ethical" (using categorizations constructed *a priori* by the researcher him/herself). Such a vision "from the inside", which enables the researcher to immerse herself in the social context that is being studied and to live like and with the people being studied, sharing their daily life and discovering their beliefs, their world view, their motivations for action, is, according to anthropologists the precondition for understanding and is alternative to the distance and condition of extraneousness that characterizes anthropological work (Corbetta, 1999). The balance in this process of involvement is between two extreme cases, called by Davis (1973), the Martian and the Convert, which constitute the extremes in the continual dilemma between involvement and detachment[9].

The communication model underlying the process of knowledge-gaining is a *"dynamic" model* in which communication serves not only to describe reality but also to construct it and change it, to offer a new perspective and suggest interpretations. What is the goal that is pursued in ethnographic research? "The ethnographer's interest in interpreting is no different from that of the indigenous people, but the awareness of the interpretative process and the will to make it explicit changes, to take in elements that are useful for the cognitive discourse on human behaviour" (Duranti, 1992, p.25).

Ethnographic-based research is, as Corbetta defines it, a "*meeting of cultures"* (1999, p. 371): here therefore is the problem of whether or not the role of the observer should be made

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[7] Malinowsi conducted his research in the Trobriand Islands in New Guinea, sharing the inhabitants' life and cutting himself off from all contact with the western world.

[8] From the theoretical point of view, the technique of participant observation has been used in different approaches in sociology and anthropology. The works of George Herbert Mead and Herbet Blumer founded the school of symbolic interactionism which places central importance on the process of interpretation. From this perspective, human beings behave on the basis of the meanings that things or people have for them; these meanings are triggered by the way men act towards a thing or a person. Meanings never have individual, but social value, learnt as they are in the course of man's social interaction with his fellow-men. The set of shared meanings is what is called "culture". Meanings are therefore appropriated by the individual through a process of interpretation of the social events surrounding him, which depends on the cultural premises of each person. The technique of participant observation, consistent with this theoretical vision, emerges precisely from the need to understand the meanings individuals attribute to their actions, to see the world through their eyes, and to draw the researcher's attention to small events and rituals. This interest in the analysis of daily life received a powerful incentive in the 1960s and '70s due to the work of I. Goffman, and with the development of ethnomethodology, a term coined by Garfinkel in the '40s, deriving from the Greek words èthnos (people), mèthodos (method) and logos (discourse).

9 To carry out this process of ethnographic knowledge, the ethnographer must be simultaneously "inside" and "outside", as G. Lapassade reminds us, adopting a viewpoint both from within and without: by assuming the indigenous people's point of view, but never completely.

explicit. The fact is that if the human being knows he is being observed, he may behave differently from how he would normally behave. Labov (1972) called this condition the "Observer's Paradox", arguing that anthropological work would like to observe how people behave when they are unobserved. What is to be done? Conceal one's identity and behave deceitfully? Corbetta writes: "There are however strong factors against this. The first is of a moral nature" (1999, p. 376). The same view is expressed by the sociologist F. Dubet (1994). Other times the problem can be solved not by deceit but by omission, i.e. by not making one's role as a researcher clear.

The meeting of cultures is therefore not a simple matter. "Once the case to study has been chosen and the method of observation has been decided (concealed or open), the first problem the researcher has to face is the "access". Gaining access to the environment being studied is probably one of the most difficult phases in participant observation. Patton (1990, p.250) says that researchers' *reports* on this point bring to mind Kafka's *The Castle,* when the protagonist known only by his initial K, with no other identity, wanders around the castle: he wants to become part of that world but any effort to enter into contact with the invisible authorities who regulate entry causes only frustration and anxiety. He imagines that there must be rules about entry but he cannot find them. He doubts himself, breaks down and blames himself for his own incapacity" (Corbetta, 1999, pp. 377-378). Corbetta argues that while Kafka's protagonist never managed to get into the castle, the participant observer usually succeeds in gaining access to the field of study, although the problem is never easy to solve and often requires the intervention of so-called "cultural mediators": the reseacher relies on the credibility and prestige of a group member to legitimate his observation and get him accepted by the group. Other interesting figures are the "informers", individuals belonging to the community, from whom the observer acquires information and who therefore establish a privileged relationship with the researcher. Crucial elements in the researcher's work are therefore the collection of *data* and of *information*.

A precious tool used for this purpose is the *notebook,* where notes are taken daily, a log book in which a thorough, detailed record is kept of information and of personal comments based on everything the researcher has observed during the day. In participant observation, typical of field research, the notebook is therefore an important tool in that it makes it possible to annotate all significant experiences, providing a report on local, habits, customs and beliefs[10].

Writing notes in the notebook is an integral part of participant observation. The social research methodology entails a thorough, systematic observation and transcription of the material, selecting it "funnel-like", to achieve a "dense description", as C. Geertz (1973) defines it, enriched with meanings and interpretations, composed of descriptions of events, theoretical comments, reports, material from the indigenous person and the researcher.

The passage from the field to the text which comes about through language, therefore represents a process of *construction*. The field, in this sense, is not a self-sufficient entity existing outside its participants: in fact anthropological work involves a symbolic process of sense construction in a domain of discursive interaction and negotiation of points of view between the anthropologist and the subjects under study. In this sense, anthropological knowledge is the result of a dialogic process, of a symbolic work comprising two or more voices. As Kilani (2004) writes: *« Au temps de terrain succède le temps de l'écriture, la finalité du travail de l'anthropologue étant en effet de fournir un texte élaboré à travers le quel il communique à un lecteur potentiel, généralement un collègue (mais pas seulement) son expérience de la connaissance des membres de la société dans la quelle il a vécu »* (p. 45)[11]. And : *« Le texte plutôt que la culture devient ainsi l'objet de connaissance. C'est*

[10] F. de Saussure considered the written to be the transcription of the oral: the researcher therefore collects an oral literature consisting of myths, folk tales, proverbs, which make up the material and the data he will use later.

[11] "The time of field work is followed by the time of writing, since the aim of anthropological work is in fact that of elaborating a text that communicates his experience of the knowledge of members of the society in which he has lived to the potential reader, usually (but not only) a colleague".

pourquoi en anthropologie on utilise de plus en plus l'analogie de la « culture comme texte » (Geertz, 1973) » (p. 57)[12].

The construction of the anthropological text starts, as we have said, on the field, and to shape the knowledge one uses descriptive commentaries, metaphors, and models. The field in this sense is a version of the social reality inseparable from its textual representation. It is therefore possible to translate the term ethnography as "*writing culture*" (Atkinson, 1992). The ethnographer's role is therefore one of deciphering (*constructing a reading of*) (Geertz, 1983).

"Ethnographic notes are the first formalization of the meeting between two cultures, one studying and the other being studied: the researcher must be aware of this, and this awareness must orient his way of taking notes and of organizing the material observed" (Corbetta, 1999, p. 386). We see in Lofland and Lofland, 1995: "the daily report is, in the full, real sense, the "data", and this means that the data is not made up of the researcher's memories […]. It consists of what has been recorded every day" (pp. 67 e 89). The writing of notes springs from the interaction between observer and observed reality, the recording of which must take place as soon as possible so as not to risk a "loss" of information. The so-called "*pratique de l'agenda*" represents the intermediate level of writing that is a prelude to the passage from a private use of the text to a public one (Achard, 1994). To these written notes will be added other parts which will make up the finished ethnographic report.

The drafting of a report is done in several stages: the first is the description; the next stage that of classifying recurrences and similarities, and lastly one goes on to identify the aspects of the typology, i.e. to the construction of a conceptual structure of classification that will enable the characteristics that distinguish the types from each other to be identified. Finally there is the identification of what Spradley (1980, p. 140) calls the cultural issues cutting across the society under study, the general lines, the principles that make sense of everything. An interesting aspect that enriches the researcher's interpretations comes from the interpretations of the subjects being studied, which may emerge from phrases overheard and informal conversations. Hammersley and Atkinson (1983, p. 126) write: "reports produced by the people being studied must be treated in the same way as those produced by the researcher".

The report is therefore made up of a detailed description of facts, places and people, but also of impressions and reactions and of a theoretical reflection and *interpretation* by the researcher about these events. Even the most objective of descriptions cannot avoid reflecting the specific cultural bias of the person describing (Geertz, 1973). The researcher's interpretation generally consists of two parts: theoretical reflections and emotional reactions. The first is directly tied to the primary aim of the observation and represents an initial reflective effort aimed at accumulating material and ideas – which, if not immediately set down, would be largely lost - and these will be amalgamated into the final report.

"But also the second component, that of the researcher's feelings, must not be neglected. Participant observation requires an involvement on the part of the researcher that goes beyond mere intellectual effort: in fact, we know that emotional participation is one of the means through which understanding comes about. The explanation and recording of one's own feelings therefore represents not only a form of self-analysis for control of oneself during field work, but is also a useful documentation for the later reconstruction of the dynamics emerging between observer and observed, through a critical re-reading of the data collected, also to identify possible distortions created by the researcher's emotions" (Corbetta, 1999, p. 386-387).

The anthropologist's work therefore consists of writing and describing scenes of everyday life, typical cultural situations, and of producing reports of actions and happenings so as to make a culture intelligible for far-off readers. This is a culturally and historically determined

[12]" The text rather than the culture therefore becomes the object of knowledge. This is why in anthropology there is increasing use of the analogy of culture as text (Geertz, 1973)". Consistently with the perspectives broached by Paul Ricoeur (1986), therefore, it is the whole culture that is to be considered, according to C. Geerz, as a text, constructed through representations.

mode of representation, which uses narrative conventions and which follows the style of novels. From the notebook notes, in short, one goes on to a socialization of the research work[13].

As far as the writing style in reports on research carried out with participant observation is concerned, the writing is generally reflective and narrative. It is *reflective* in the sense that the researcher is part of the world that is being studied and therefore cannot make notes that are neutral and impersonal. The writing style will be tied to the researcher's personality and culture, unlike the sample study, typical for instance of quantitative research. The reason the report is reflective lies in the *time* in which it is written: the ethnographic report in fact is not drafted at the end as a final separate phase from the research activity, after the collection and analysis of the data, as happens again in quantitative research. It is instead a form of writing that develops in the course of the observation itself, through the writing of notes and personal comments by the researcher. "Hence the researcher's involvement also in the writing, with emotions and personal reactions that become a vivid part of the story" (Corbetta, 1999, p. 393)[14]. The final product derives in part from the union of these texts. In the conclusive research report there is often an autobiographical appendix in which the researcher recounts his own personal work history, how the research originated, the identification of the specific case to be studied, the access and acceptance by the group, the cultural mediators, the informers, the development of the theoretical reflections, the shifts in perspective, his own emotional reactions, and the difficulties encountered. The readers are above all other members of the scientific community so the report plays a role that is not only informative but also methodological.

The style must also be *narrative,* close to the literary style of the short story of journalistic report, and as such far removed from the conceptual abstraction of theoretical elaboration and from the numerical abstraction of quantitative research. It is a concrete, direct way of writing, full of detailed description, chronicles of events with a wealth of detail and passages quoted directly in the words of the protagonists.

"The purpose is to convey to the reader as much as possible of his own experience as an observer, offering the opportunity for an imaginative interpretation of the culture examined, by means of a report full of feeling and colour, that can communicate the wealth of detail and the vitality of the world observed" (Corbetta, 1999, p. 394). So we find that Malinowski's style is very similar to that of Conrad's novels, or that accounts of the English urban situation of the late 19th century like those of Booth and Rowntree resemble Dickens's tales. It is therefore a way of writing that is a little like "telling a story" (Van Maanee, 1988).

While on the one hand the narrative style sees the report as story-telling, on the other, the reflective style ensures that it also aims to enunciate a theory:

"It should not be forgotten that the final aim of social research – and therefore also of participant observation – is the elaboration of some kind of generalization and theorization. It follows that it is necessary at least in the final stage of the research report, for the level of analysis to rise above the contingent and the particular to achieve the identification of cultural typologies and issues, and more in general, the formulation of theoretical elaborations" (Corbetta, 1999, p. 394).

The technique of participant observation is the subject of extensive debate in the social sciences. Responding to those who object that it poses problems, including the subjectivity of the observation process, the uniqueness of the case studied and the unrepeatability of the research process adopted, Corbetta (1999, p.402) argues that these characteristics can be treated as a resource. It is only through personal involvement that one can achieve understanding, and authentic knowledge comes only from direct experience. One is now curious to find out who undertakes such a knowledge-gaining process, who is the professional anthropologist or ethnographer that, armed with a pen, notebook and in some

[13] Some have talked about two extremes: on the one hand, scientific writing or "écriture savante", on the other subjective writing, or "écriture subjective" (Balandier, 1994, p. 28).

[14] On the role of subjectivity in writing a research report, look no further than Michel Leiris's work entitled "*L'Afrique fantome*".

cases a tape-recorder, wants to know another culture. What will he find? Corbetta underlines the difficulty of this profession, and that the researchers are often little more than twenty-year-olds studying for a PhD and preparing to write their theses, with an abundance of time and enthusiasm, with no family ties or other responsibilities, (cfr. also Madge, 1962). But it is also a lonely form of research: everything depends on the researcher's eyes and personal ability to see and understand, with no pre-established itineraries or statistical procedures: hence there is "a possible sense of loneliness and disorientation, which can also lead to losing one's way" (Corbetta, 1999, p. 403). Not a few psychological resources need to be invested in this kind of research: the researcher may encounter difficult situations and have to re-evaluate his own emotions and interpersonal relations. The researcher's subjectivity, the tool and filter of knowledge, his sensitivity and capacity for empathy, writes Corbetta, guide the process of gaining knowledge, as does his cultural origin. It is always a matter of one culture getting to know another: faced with the same object of study, an Indian and a Norwegian researcher would give totally different descriptions

2.2 Writing in the sociological domain: autobiographies, biographies and life stories

Also in biographies or autobiographies the style is literary; in fact the Spanish philosopher Maria Zambrano talks about "Confessions as a literary genre" (1943), considering the confession as a continuous escape from and recovery of the self, a quest carried out through memories.

While in literature reference is made to the famous autobiographies of St. Augustine, Alfieri, Cellini, Vico, Rousseau and Joyce, in sociology the story of one's life or a self-confession are used as tools for the collection of information. The documentary material is then analysed in order to reconstruct social dynamics and relationships.

Biographies are therefore personal documents that make available individuals' testimony on life. The analysis of such written material serves to identify the subjective aspects of social processes. The goal connected to the use and editing of this material in sociological research is consistent with the study of the individual's roles, social actions and processes of dialectic interaction with the group or the society. In this study the individual is positioned in the background of his social environment, which is examined starting from the person. Cavallaro states: "The life story can therefore be considered a totality whose structure, composed of the social and cultural rules (including language) of the individual and the group, is broken down into the single social actions narrated" (quoted in Macioti, 1995, p. 58).

Through the biographies collected, it is therefore possible to follow the process of development of the subject's life in the various social situations, and at the same time to have a representation of these environments, groups and institutions.

However, there are various ways of viewing biographies. One of these is to see them as "récits de vie". The expression "récit de vie", *life story*, was introduced in France a few decades ago (Bertaux, 1976), replacing the phrase used up to then, "historie de vie", the literal translation of the American *life history*. The idea of the life history, according to some sociologists (cfr. Bertaux, 1997), has some drawbacks: first of all, the fact that the experience lived through by the person cannot be distinguished from the story of this experience that the person tells the researcher, who has asked him to tell it at a particular moment in his existence.

The difference between *récit* and *histoire* is an essential distinction, which saw two opposing factions in France: on one side the *réalistes* and on the other the *antiréalistes.* The first say that the story is a description of the story actually experienced, while the second maintain that the relation between the story and the history is very uncertain and that there is no sense in talking about a history actually experienced.

Bertaux (1997) defines the *récit de vie* as the result of a particular form of interview, the so-called "narrative" interview, during which a researcher asks a person who will be the interview "subject" to tell all or part of what he has experienced. The use of the narrative interview is also found in psychology (Paolicchi, 2002) and refers to the approach which uses

narration as a mode of giving an account, starting from the importance attributed to understanding meanings in the context of communicative interaction and to what has been called "the narrated self" (Bruner, 1990).
The aim, as we have said, is to study a particular fragment of the social and historical reality, highlighting the form of social relationships, the mechanisms, processes and rationales of the action that characterizes them. This is, moreover, a technique used in sociology, having developed above all in the last two decades (Heinritz & Rammstedt, 1991), and it is widely debated. Is it right to talk about *récit de vie*? How important is it for the whole life to be recounted? Can we trust what the subject tells us? Isn't it a subjective reconstruction of the things experienced? How can these tales be analysed? How can generalizable conclusions be reached? How can the intimistic, literary and ethical qualities of a story of personal life be organized in the style and the re-elaboration of social science research?
The function of *récits de vie* in social research can be identified on three levels: firstly, explorative, then analytical (since it is through the re-transcribing, listening and analysis of what is narrated that the researcher starts to make hypotheses about the society), and lastly, an expressive function, through communication. According to Bertaux (1997) it is to the latter function that we can attribute most of the hesitation concerning their use and publication in the scientific domain. The use of life narratives, underlines Bertaux, is however not exclusive and can be accompanied by other sources, including statistics.
To do research into "fragments of social and historical reality", in Bertaux's words, about which not much is known *a priori*, it is necessary to use observation techniques that are not aimed at testing hypotheses but at constructing them. The researcher therefore presents himself in the field aware of his own ignorance.
Récits de vie are not always complete autobiographical narrations: Bertaux goes so far as to conclude that "[…] il y a du récit de vie des lors qu'un sujet raconte à une autre personne, chercheur ou pas, un épisode quelconque de son expérience vécu »[15] (1997, p. 32). The verb "tells" therefore refers to the subject's discursive production, which takes the form of a narrative.
The contribution of narratives of life along a diachronic dimension enables the rationale of the action to be considered in a historical process, in view of the reproduction and transformation dynamics. Such narratives unfold in an ethno-sociological perspective aimed at studying cultures from the particular to the general, through the study of social relations, recurrent processes, rationales of action, within a single society in which the social worlds each develop their own subculture (Laplantine, 1996).

3. The report in clinical psychology

We have recalled that writing which allows reflection on one's own actions is a characteristic of the human being (Harrè & Secord, 1972).
"Giving an account" of what has happened is a practice also used in clinical psychology, where the report is a fundamental tool of professional procedure.
Reporting in the domain of psycholanalysis dates back to the birth and growth of psychoanalysis, therefore to Freud, whose outstanding ability to tell clinical histories won him the Goethe Prize in 1930.
Right from the beginning the usefulness attributed to writing *in the clinical domain* was linked to communicating to the scientific community and transmitting knowledge. By making connections in the account, one should in fact produce knowledge (Merendino, 1984).
On this point some authors have underlined the function of the report as a means of *communicating one's own praxis to the scientific community* (Semi, 1985), hypothetically attributing to it the characteristics of a "historical document" (Sarno, 1990). On the vexed question of the objectivity and generalizability of what is recounted, Lancia (1990) and Lo

[15] "We can talk about life narratives when a subject tells another person, whether or not it be a researcher, any episode of his experience".

Verso (1991) stress the scientific nature of the qualitative model compared to the experimental one which tries to explain what happened so as to enable the reader to repeat the experiment, and therefore to communicate a technique. These authors, on the other hand, urge us to use the report as a means of debate among colleagues, by analysing the setting-up process and the symbolic dimension of the demand and interpreting the unconscious *affective* symbolizations.
The clinical report differs considerably from the *experimental* report.
The report is also useful for the person who writes it. Through the report it is possible to connect one's praxis to the different theoretical models used by the clinical psychologist and establish connections between them, thus making clear which models guided the intervention itself. Every report is in fact closely connected to the interpretative model adopted and to the awareness that the field of observation is influenced by the observer, in a diachronic and synchronic sense, as Carli (1987) recalls. From this angle the report cannot be merely an account of the event in itself, but the "representation of an emotional state" (Carli, 1987) concerning the account, the making of which triggers a process of reflection and interpretation of the emotional state. It therefore enables one to link theory and praxis, and to reinterpret the account and the material provided by the patient, according to *"meta"* categories.
The report in this sense is not seen as a *"diary of experiences"* on an emotionally dense event on the therapist's part. The emotions are not conceived as reactions to facts, unthought, but they construct meanings and organize the relationships within a culture (Carli, Paniccia, 2005).
Neither is the report seen as a *diagnosis* of the symptoms presented by the patient or a description of his *individual* characteristics.
Relationship and context enable one to make sense of a transformational process. The relationship is between the patient and therapist in a context/setting with the rules of the game and goals established with the client, whose demand, in its formulation and symbolic features, is subject to analysis (Carli, 1987); but it is also relationships in organizational contexts with psychosociological models that substantiate the techniques and the theory of intervention technique (Di Ninni, 1989).
We hypothesize a connection between the relationships existing between psychologist and client (whether it be an individual, group or organization) and the relationship between the psychologist and the scientific community. What has been said about the therapist-client relationship would therefore apply also to *the relationship between the scientific community and the psychologist*. If the focus is on theoretical loyalties and not on the exploration of otherness and of the possibilities for change and transformation of the theory itself based on experience, there is the risk of getting stuck in a cozy sense of belonging and being defined, which does not enrich the psychologist but confirms his professional status in the eyes of the scientific community (Carli, 1987).
On the one hand therefore a therapeutic relationship anchored to what Bion – as Carli (1987) recalls – called "rigid movement", characterized by repetitive interpretations which cannot be tested, in which the report itself is a description of events that cannot be challenged by experience but implicit in the theory used. We could call this kind of report "assertive", according to the category used by some psychologists who carried out research into reports in the 1990s (Gandini, Gheduzzi, Montixi, & Ruggiu, 1990; Sesto, 1993), as opposed to the "investigative-exploratory" report. On the other hand, there are entrenched mentalities of professional loyalty – compared to a polymorphous variety of theories and praxis at times in conflict among themselves – which have the advantage of guaranteeing scientificness due to their being presented as "schools" characterized, as C. Sesto pointed out in the research she began in the late '80s, by strongly defensive dimensions of collusive membership and certainly by war waged on the enemy "otherness".
This kind of relationship both with the client and with the scientific community entails the elimination of the dimensions of thought and innovation that lead to change; similarly, product definition and the possibility of testing seem greatly reduced.

On the issue of *testing*, a question posed in the document "Three arguments and six queries for clinical psychology" produced by the Circolo del Cedro is: "What criteria and tools can enable the clinical psychology intervention to be evaluated? The assessment function implies reference to the processes of designing and carrying out the intervention: so first of all, to how in a specific context the analysis of the demand led to the drawing up of a specific professional contract, the identification of the goals and methods or the strategies used within the relationship. The greatest tool for this kind of assessment is the report" (1991, p. 257).

Assessment therefore enables one to think of the professional product, inform others of it and construct an identity based on the *social utility of the profession.* Linking it to the issue of testing, Carli and Paniccia have reconsidered the use of the report in the domain of clinical psychology in contexts of the lecture, the exam in clinical psychology and testing by means of the state examination (Carli & Paniccia, 2005).

Though it is presented as the fundamental tool in professional practice, the report has not always been an issue of debate and reflection in clinical psychology. In her research, C. Sesto (1993) found that conceptualization was lacking, the term 'report' was absent from analytic indexes, it was not always used in such a way as to contribute to the thinking of the articles, and definitions deriving from the interviews were vague and abstract. In general, in the literature, there is clearly difficulty in making a professional practice public, to "account for" the production of knowledge, to express the goals of the process and to reflect on the report as a tool. There is in fact an almost total lack of European literature on the subject.

The hypothesis is therefore that the report is a tool of intervention, but without a theory of the technique underlying its use. It can be read as an "acting out" without the "thinking about" that permits its use and development.

Being a *tool of clinical psychology practice,* everything changes according to use since the tool is not outside the relationship that orients it. In a note on the tools characterizing the interventions of psychosociologists, Di Ninni (1989), referring to Freud's 1911 idea about "The use of the interpretation of dreams in psychoanalysis", recalls that Freud did not intend to discuss the way dreams are to be interpreted, but rather what use to make of the art of interpreting dreams, reminding all analysts of the following question: what is the goal pursued and the motivation sustaining them in doing what they do? It is this constant reference to the profession that makes the use of the tool not a practice complete unto itself, the central or only element of the analysis. The tool, in fact, does not guarantee in itself any professionality beyond the motivations and purposes of whoever adopts it. The risk otherwise is that of a report characterized by marked technicality and by the "expert's" imagination (Carli, Paniccia & Lancia, 1988), split from the goals of the intervention. The method that orients the use of a tool is linked to the theories and criteria of clinical practice. "Within the perspective proposed, defining a tool is the same as declaring its use on the basis of an intervention technique based on a theory of the technique itself […]. Returning to the question we posed ourselves, is it still possible to talk about "tools" typical of the profession of clinical psychologist? Is it still possible to talk about managing the relationship of commissioning, interviews, work meetings, groups, seminars, research, reports or analysis documents like so many tools in interventions in organizations, as the psychosociology tradition has got us used to thinking? The answer is obviously yes and no at the same time" (Di Ninni, p. 310 e 314). It is 'no' if we think of tools as the *means of controlling* the variables involved, 'yes' if we think of the category of *tool as fundamental to the knowledge* of those same variables. In other words, if one thinks of tools as tools of *thought*, and not as means of acting out control fantasies.

It is therefore possible to identify two possible ways of viewing a clinical interview or an psychosociological intervention, from the moment it is set up (Carli, 1987; Carli & Paniccia, 2005):

- on the one hand, according to a *dimension of diagnosis of conformism*, in which there is no interest in setting up a relationship, agreeing on the goals, but rather in "correcting" a form of behaviour, using the idea of model/departure from model. An interview viewed in this way does not need information; at the most it might benefit from an empathic relationship in which what will be important is the relationship of dependency, the giving of advice, setting tasks,

emphasising the dimension of trust. The relationship is promptly liquidated, to avoid possible feedback. One may even go so far, in this approach, to invent a relationship, aware of the fact that the setting only concerns whoever has strong self-refential power with no competences. Think of the book by Dumont and Corsini (2000), where the same clinical case is analysed using different psychotherapeutic approaches. Also in some reports of invented situations it is clear that the interest is that of applying a technique; in a process in which the relationship is irrelevant, the results are frustrated since the outcome of the process is given by the diagnosis, by prescriptions and advice.

- on the other hand, according to a *dimension of development*. The relationship is viewed as not given, focussing on the setting-up process, on shared goals, in an attitude of development with an interest not in the symptomatic but in understanding what happens in the relationship, thus constructing conditions for intervention in the context, with roles and goals. The interview is thought of as an event with a transformational goal; through the report one can inform staff of a process, interpreting it and organizing it using knowledge-based categories, in which the project becomes a workshop and the report becomes the categorical reorganization of an experience.

These two ways of viewing the product of the clinical psychology profession are connected to two ways of considering the report. *The report in fact reflects the theory of change* assumed by its writer and its structure is moulded by such a theory (Carli, 1987, p. 305).

In the first case the report will be used as a *description*, in a demonstrative perspective, of events that have happened or of emotions experienced. In the second case the report acts as a *tool of reflection* concerning the symbolism of the demand, the mode of analysis and the project of change. The goal in this second case is the *exploration* of a new sense with which to construct interpretations to be tested within the relationship, and the report represents a reflection on how the intervention develops and on the goals pursued. In this sense, considering the uselessness of an a-temporal and a-historical approach, the report can serve to formulate hypotheses in the construction of a relationship, to express its goals and to make assessment possible with reference to an interlocutor. It can be a useful tool for interpreting a journey en route. With the report therefore one can consider the rationale of the intervention from the point of view of process, without focussing exclusively on outcomes, making sense of the duration of the transformational process and of its particular modes typical of the relationship. One can then pass from the mythical aspect to the historical dimension, reducing the emotional polysemy typical of the relationship and encouraging thought.

A particular model of reporting in the clinical domain is that of using *narration* as a means of reporting, though with different purposes. The “narratological” paradigm in fact introduces the idea of the patient’s multiple stories, through which he recounts himself. The network of meanings constructed between therapist and patient makes it possible to transform the meanings themselves into a narrative structure conveying new perspectives. Along with logical-scientific thinking there is thought to be narrative thinking which is implemented above all in the account and leaves room for the interlocutor’s interpretations, allowing for a new construction of the narrative of (Angus & McLeod, 2004; Bruner, 1990; Montesarchio, 2002; Hermans, 2001; Salvatore, 2004). On this point, Spence (1982) makes a fundamental distinction between the narrative truth constructed in analytic work and the historical truth which adheres to the events that happened. On this, Corrao (1991) states: “Clinical reports, interpretations in a session, explicative or hermeneutic theories of the analytical field, all belong to the category of narratological or narrative groups of transformation” (p. 52). Smorti (1994) underlines that narrative thought would allow the interpretation of a reality resulting from a set of narrative constructions.

In the clinical psychology context, Montesarchio underlines the relational dimension and the involvement of the psychologist in the narration inside the setting, identifying three kinds of narration dealt with by the psychologist: the client’s narration, or the text of his emotional and cognitive experiences, the world of fantasies, dreams and representations; the psychologist’s narration, rethinking the material provided by the patient and creating connections based on his own professional praxis and theoretical models; lastly, the shared narration, which gives

meaning to the plot of the relational text regarding the goals of the intervention, opening up the possibility for change (Montesarchio, 2002). The report appears in this sense to be an opportunity to reflect and to construct thought and make sense of the relationship.

Concluding comments

Calvino, in an analysis of subjectivity and objectivity, wrote that the avant-gardes of the early 1900s were all lost in a crushing magma of subjectivity, which seemed to engulf everything, while in the 1960s the opposite tendency established itself, raising objectivity to a mythical status. However, neither tendency had the confidence to guide the course of events, because it was thought that they went ahead by themselves; the most heroic effort could only be to try to get an idea of what they were like, to understand and accept this complex whole: "between knowing the world and changing it a hundred years ago there seemed to be a chasm, now all contact between the two terms seems to have been lost" (Calvino, 1980).

We think of the report in an "objective" light like a diagnosis, or in a "subjective" light like a diary of experiences.

What is the model of change that can be pursued in psychotherapy or in clinical psychology?

When the goal is the modification of behaviour, for instance to make a person stop smoking, the therapist can do what he likes, being outside a reality that considers a psyche and inside a reality of exerting pressure on the behaviour. Convincing somebody to behave differently is very close to the conformistic dimension. The reified goal of the therapist is to achieve normality, in the sense of reduction of symptoms, following a medical model in the psychotherapy domain. The diagnostic perspective does not take into account the emotional value of reality. On the other hand, also intrapsychic approaches based on the patient's characteristics leave the relationship out of the process of knowledge-gaining. In fact it is not enough for an event to be "emotional": it must have sense, shared goals and aims, it must foster an organizational competence, through an action oriented to development goals. The organizational dimension must be connected therefore to the emotional one; on the other hand, there can be no growth without an inner dimension.

The modification of behaviour is opposed to the possibility of exploring the emotional phenomena characterising the social relationship.

It is interesting to reconsider the writing practices typical of the so-called "human sciences", starting from the precondition of an anthropomorphic model of man, to find common ground related above all to questions and issues that are present in the reports written for the scientific community and for the transmission of knowledge, but also to find peculiarities and differences. It is interesting because as we have seen anthropology sets itself the task of reconsidering another culture and reporting it to others, with all the problems we have mentioned, linked for example to the researcher's emotions or to the need to collect precise data and information, where an oversight is not a resource to understand but a gap to fill.

Sociology has focussed on narratives of life as texts that report a society. The question of life stories, which has also been taken up by narrative psychotherapy, conceives narration as a co-constructed report. Clinical work, on the other hand, unlike the other approaches, is oriented towards intervention and transformation of reality. The paradigm of clinical psychology itself, founded on the individual-context relationship, entails a different use of the report compared to approaches taking an individualistic angle.

The overview of the literature in this article does not claim to be exhaustive, but to repropose ideas on the issue, starting from the connections and peculiarities of the different disciplines. They all have in common the same methodology, in its various aspects: i.e. making a report. In all the cases analysed, the accent is on the fact that writing is a reconstruction of sense, even when it takes the form of translation. What comes to mind is the figure of the scribe, who in traditional societies with high levels of illiteracy, handled the writing of letters, form filling and compilation of applications, a practice that usually took place in the main square for those who could not write. Tahar Ben Jelloun (1983), recalling and imagining this figure, writes that he could not help making the letters more beautiful, more meaningful, with more enthralling endings, according to the personal taste of the one carrying out the activity of writing, emotionally involved as he was in reconstructing the sense. But in that case perhaps in practice he was going beyond the agreed goal…and there was no way of checking what he had done.

If we consider clinical reports, therefore all the reports that are not part of the "experimental" area of psychology, it can be seen that there is a certain heterogeneity of conceptualization, that the little literature that there is on the question dates above all to the 1980s –'90s, and that the issue is at times

shifted into an a-contextual and a-historical perspective. In this scenario however one can find a tradition of reporting clinical cases as "meta" thought on the affective symbolizations of the relationship between psychologist and client, who makes a demand, and a reflection on the product of clinical psychology and on assessment (Circolo del Cedro, 1991; Carli & Paniccia, 2005).

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