Psychology of Change

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This interview is a slightly modified transcript from the second Psyche Talk, hosted at the Department of Communication and Psychology at Aalborg University, February 15, 2024. Psyche Talks are hosted as biannual events, where prominent psychological researchers are invited to discuss fundamental questions about the nature and subject matter of psychology through an interview-based format. The focus of this interview is on how people make sense of change on the personal, social and environmental level and the role of symbolic resources in making meaning of and transitioning through rupturing changes. In this interview, Professor of Sociocultural Psychology, Tania Zittoun, is interviewed by Associate Professor of Sociocultural Psychology, Sarah Awad.

S (Sarah Awad): Welcome Tania, and welcome everyone! Thank you for joining us today, those joining us physically here, and those joining us online. Maybe I will start by introducing who Tania Zittoun is. Professor Tania Zittoun is known for her work on development and transitions in the lifecourse. Her theoretical work draws on semiotic cultural psychology, psychoanalysis and the social sciences and addresses imagination and arts in human development. She has contributed to our knowledge about how humans transition through life rupturing events and how they use different symbolic resources in this process - which will be the focus of the talk today. Her work also covers the areas of mobility, aging, and thinking. Her books include *The Pleasure of thinking* (Zittoun, 2023), *Imagination in Human and Cultural development* (Zittoun & Gillespie, 2016), and *Human development in the life course: Melodies of living* (Zittoun et al., 2013).

It is a pleasure hosting you, Tania. I could start by saying the outline for this interview: I would like to start by talking more generally about your work and your ideas more broadly in relation to psychology and what is psychological science. Then we discuss more specifically your work in relation to the idea of ruptures and the experience of change. So, I give the word to you now, and start by asking you about what is psychological science for you and what kind of questions drive your interest in psychology?

T (Tania Zittoun): First of all, thank you very much for inviting me in for this talk and thank you (audience) for being here and the Department (of Communication and Psychology at Aalborg University) for the invitation. It has been a long time since I was in Aalborg last and it's the first time I see the University as it is now, and it is nice to see the development. Nice to see you! Now – what psychology is as a science to me? Well, psychology is the science of the psyche of course, and the human mind, but I'm a development psychologist and I come from learning and developmental psychology, so I'm interested in how people learn and develop and become who they are in a complex social world in which they live, and the many ways by which they can become. So, I have a developmental view in psychology, and I think psychology should understand humans in a changing world in complex ways.

S: It is our goal through those *Psyche* Talks to invite different perspectives on how psychology researchers approach what is important or what is the core of what needs to be investigated in relation to psychological sciences. In your article, *A sociocultural psychology of the life course to study human development* (Zittoun, 2022), you quote Psychologist Lev Vygotsky to reflect on the idea that psychology is a science of the person, rather than a science of behaviour or a science of mental phenomena. If you could just elaborate on what does that mean to have the person as the focus rather than behaviour for example, or the mental?

T: To respond, it is interesting to see the context in which Vygotsky was writing this sentence. When proposing to define psychology as a science of the person as a whole, he was responding to debates in the psychology of his time. And at that time, you had a very

behavioural psychology, you had psychologists trying to understand very small phenomena, and you also had very idealist psychologists trying to understand just ideas. But Vygotsky came from the arts; he was interested in literature and theatre, and he was living in a society changing a lot through the Revolution. He saw children in need, he saw people who needed education, he saw people with difficulties, and I think he was trying to understand all those people and their trajectories, and the potential they had to learn and develop. And so, to understand humans as people who are not just producing responses to specific stimuli, but people who, you know, understand their complex world, who can experience the arts and theatre, and who can change the world. So, he tried to understand children's development in different conditions, and how, good condition, with the right education and schooling, could create possibilities for people. He tried to understand the more complex ways of human development and creation that produce ideas such as those of Dostoevsky or Shakespeare.

I think nowadays psychology as you may know is a very diverse field with all kinds of tendencies. And some fields of psychology look at very technical aspects of cognition, and some domains look at very biological science of the mind, and some parts look a lot at the difficulties humans have. But then we may miss the centre of all of that - which is the person that has difficulties or the person who thinks or the person who interacts with others. And I find it useful to draw on Vygotsky to say you need to look at persons, who have unique trajectories in the world and have very complex experiences, who do not live only in one society, but might be moving across societies and across domains and have very unique experiences. So, we need to find a psychology that explains all of that at once, and that also means perhaps drawing on different fields of psychology just so that we can account for what makes everyone of us very unique. Of course we have some common ways of functioning, but we are all very unique in the way we apprehend the world.

S: Your perspective goes in line with some of the ideas expressed in the first *Psyche* talk (Sköld & Brinkmann, 2023), so to continue the dialogue from the previous talk, I would like to hear your perspective on Svend Brinkmann's argument that the psychological science is a normative science. In the sense that, to speak of a phenomenon as a

psychological phenomenon, it has to presuppose or imply normativity -whether functional, aesthetic, political, instrumental or some other kinds of normativity. What is your perspective on this?

T: Well, it concerns what I'm doing. I am a developmental psychologist and I work in an institute of psychology and education. And educational sciences have some idea of how we should develop and what we should learn, and it ignores some other parts of how people might learn and might develop. And developmental psychology most of the time has an idea of where we should develop to, and what options are better than others, you know? You should know more, or you should know better, or you should know in more complex ways. So, there is always a norm of what is the right way of doing things. And I think as a developmental psychologist we have to question *what's the "more" we are looking for?* I don't think we can do absolutely without it, but we need to seriously question whether it is just a matter of doing more things, or in more complicated ways? Is it better to learn to drive a car, is it better to learn to steal from a shop? Or is it more to do more complex things? Of course it is better to do more complex mathematics, but you know, some complex mathematics your computer can do, so is it better to do more complex planning? I could plan to rob a bank, actually that is more complex than robbing a shop. *So, what is the more?* If you look at developmental psychology, there are many models of staircases, suggesting that development means to move from this stage to that stage. There are many implicit norms in there, so what we try to do is to say: okay, if we assume that we are living in time, and that we change every day at our every breath, then of course we change all the time. So, are some of those changes "better" than others, and what should be the criteria? And I think it is very difficult to fix external criteria. I remember Karsten Hundeide (2005) who was a cultural psychologist. He was interested in all kinds of pathways of life, and he said you can learn to be a good student in engineering, but if you look at the paths of life, you can also become a very good gang member, because that also requires more expertise, more planning, higher thinking, better coordination with others, and more social skills. So, is that okay? My response to this is that I am not a moral judge, I cannot judge in terms of morality and in terms of social norms, but as a developmental psychologist I am thinking; *what is the model behind my thinking?* And if we look at the sort of metatheoretical models, development requires a

lot of general understanding of what development is, and in dynamic system terms, you have systems which can be more or less functioning and running, and sometimes they have disruption and they have to get reorganized in more complex ways or more simple ways. In some ways, almost every reorganization is a form of development, but you have sometimes a disruption to the system that breaks down the system – it just can't adjust anymore. I think it is a bit the same for humans: there are some kinds of ruptures and changes that bring us to different ways of organizing ourselves, but there are some changes that bring us where we cannot progress anymore at all. So, if you become a gangster, you are in a jail, you may start to have a lot of psychic issues and be locked there in a long term; then you might have less opportunities to change again. So, in some way there are some types of changes that seem to restrain further changes, both because of the societal constrains and psychological constrains: these changes, I would say, question the limits of development. I am not sure that is fully a response about normativity?

S: In a way it is. It situates your approach to development within societal and moral normativity. Maybe it also tells us more about how you see development as beyond certain static stages of growth, which relates to my second question.

You define your approach to development as a Sociocultural psychological one emphasizing the role of thinking and affect in development and looking at development as an ongoing process of change, from conception to death (Zittoun, 2022). What distinguishes this approach from other approaches of development?

T: As a sociocultural psychologist, I would look at how people adjust to a changing world, and at the different ways in which they do so. This could be in the usual places we investigate in educational psychology, such as in the institutions or the workplace, but there are also many other places in which we do learn and develop. I was very early on interested in those places, but there are no mentions in psychology textbooks of what we learn in everyday life, of what we learn when we watch a movie, when we play games in the courtyard, and so on all these places in which interesting things happened.

S: So how can a sociocultural approach to developmental psychology help us look at those spaces of learning?

T: So, one thing is that it invites us to look at the diversity of spaces where learning and developing happens. A second aspect is to look at not only the person per se, but the person's conduct as enabled by the social world in which they live. The world fixes the frames in which we live and, you know, teach you what to learn. But what we do from that, it is in the way we appropriate and internalize what the world gives us, that we can find unique ways of acting. But not only that – you can also change the world. Perhaps a sociocultural lens is different from sociology on one side and different from other approaches in psychology in that it does not only show how we are shaped or guided or taught by society, but also how we can take from it and change it.

S: Yes, and I think we will also get into that aspect later, when talking about change and the idea that we are changed by the environment, but also how we are agents who could change the environment. In your writings, you highlight the role of thinking, as well as affect in development. This is especially clear in your recent book *The Pleasure of Thinking* (Zittoun, 2023), where you bring those two together, looking at thinking as a pleasurable activity and practice. Thinking is normally connected with certain learning goals, and sometimes also connected with displeasures such as overthinking. I can personally relate to the pleasure and luxury sometimes of not having to think about anything. There are even many tools nowadays, apps, and meditation practices that help us 'stop' thinking. But you argue for, can I say the opposite, that no, there is actually a pleasure in thinking?

T: Yes, so it depends on what you mean by thinking and how broad we consider thinking is. If we follow people like William James or Sigmund Freud, and many others, they all consider that we think all the time. I mean, consciousness is flowing all the time - "*it thinks like it rains",* says James (1893). So, it just happens all the time, can we ever stop it? I don't think we can stop it; it is probably an illusion; we can change the modalities of thinking, but it does not stop. So, thinking in the very broad sense, involves many forms of experiences. There is thinking as reasoning, as when we try to understand something

and, what works, and what can work better. There is thinking as sense-making, where we can try to understand what we do and what is good and bad, and big ideas. And there is also all the kind of thinking we have when we daydream, and that is not organized: thinking and ideas just go through our mind in a more or less free way when we daydream, or "build castles in Spain", or when we dream at night, or when we are fantasizing. So, we have all kinds of modalities of thinking. Some of them are unpleasant, and then the question is if they are unpleasant because of what we think about, or if they are unpleasant per se? Or is it the experience e of thinking that is unpleasant?

The thing is, that I realized that more often than we know, we do enjoy thinking. You know, that is why we study; it is also what happens when we play, we look at things we find interesting. It is because we enjoy thinking that we raise questions we want to answer to, it is why we debate with friends, and why we do all those things - because it is enjoyable. But psychology does not consider the pleasure of thinking; and as I started to look into it, I realised it plays a very important role in the way we live our everyday life and when we make some choices. The pleasure of thinking plays a role in daily activities as well, whether it is when you try a new receipt, or you need a new bookshelf, or when you need to find out how this or what works – actually it accompanies a lot of our daily activities. So, I wanted us to understand more about that, because I think psychology looks a lot at unpleasant thinking: the thinking we have when we are sad, or when we have to go to the psychologist, or when we want to forget everything. I thought maybe we should understand more about what happens when we have pleasure in thinking. And if we can understand better the pleasure of thinking, we can understand better thinking as a whole, and understand maybe also how we can avoid some of the unpleasure of thinking.

Let me come back to the tools that are directed towards the idea of "stopping" to think, or of regulating thinking. Well, they do different things. Some accompany, or guide, some form of daydreaming, which is okay because it just orients a stream of thinking forward. I think fiction does that. But other things give us a very short-term satisfaction, where one is very happy that something cool is happening, or you know, you get some points in something. Does that stop thinking? I don't think so; the little techniques of meditation I know admit that for some extent you have to let your mind go free and let just the thinking

go through until it sort of stops. It does not really stop; what you do is letting the flow of thinking happen, and then eventually focus your attention on different aspects of it, or different perception or different kind of things that you would do otherwise. But you do not stop thinking, I think.

S: No, probably not. Speaking about the different modalities or types of thinking, my next question is about one specific type of thinking that you write about, that of reflective thinking or sense-making. Reflective thinking could bring us new ways of seeing ourselves, people around us, and the society at large and could affect how we position ourselves from different political issues. What is your perspective on the implications of thinking or in other words, are their responsibilities that come with reflective thinking?

T: It depends how you define reflexivity. We need now and then to make sense of what happens to us, I think, because we need to understand why this event happened and how it is connected to previous events, and where we go next from that. But thinking as sense meaning can be understood in a more reflexive way; I quite like what Hannah Arendt (1979) says about that. Hannah Arendt is a philosopher you may know of who wrote a very nice book about *The Life of the Mind,* in which she reflects on what thinking is. She considers sense making as very important because it is about how we interpret our daily experiences and reflect on bigger moral questions, and how we reflect upon our actions. And she says that sense-making is a sort of inner dialogue, that happens when we are alone. When I meet my friends, then I am one person, because I talk to another person and have a dialogue with them. But when I go back to my house, then I am alone with myself, so I become a "two-in-one", because I have a dialogue with myself. It is the moment during which I re-examine what has happened when I was with other people; and when I examine what I have been doing with others, then I should do so in such a way, that I am still friend with myself. So, I should not do things, which would bring me, in the inner dialogue of the "two-in-one", make me too angry with myself, or to think that I do intolerable things. And actually, she was developing this reflection of what it means to be making sense of your action, because she was thinking about the consequences of *not* doing it. You may know that she wrote *The Banality of Evil* (Arendt, 1977) as she observed the Nuremberg trials of Adolf Eichmann, one of the officers who organized the

extermination of the Jews. Her analysis was that he was not an "evil" person in himself, but that what was the "banality of evil" was the fact that he was not thinking. He was of course planning and organizing, but he was not *thinking*; he was never considering the implications of his action, their meaning, their consequences, or how one can live with that. He was just doing those things as a sort of "that's just my job", without questioning orders. So, she says, not thinking can bring you to do things in an automatic way, not knowing why, not understanding their consequences, and not positioning yourself towards them. This is why, for Arendt, sense-making as thinking is so important. It is a basic responsibility we have in life when examining what we do and why we do it, and the consequences of that.

So, in that sense, maybe that answers your question, I think: if we understand thinking as reflective sense-making à la Arendt, then yes, it engages our responsibility. It is a basis from where we can examine what we do and why we do it. We cannot do it every second, otherwise we would not be moving anymore, you know? Like I cannot think before drinking every glass of water about where and how this glass has been produced, you would be paralyzed, but still, there are some actions where we can consider those things really.

S: Yes. Would you then argue that reflective thinking to some aspects of life is a social responsibility?

T: Yes…

S: Maybe another modality of thinking we can discuss in relation to social responsibility is scientific thinking and psychological research. Your research tackles the Psychology of change- which is the focus of the next part of our interview. You argue that we are changed by our environment, but we also transform our environment (Zittoun, 2022). Does psychology have a role in facilitating this transformation? And if so, can we say that psychological science is political in a sense? As in, it does not only describe and help us understand the world as it is but also dispositions us to act differently as Kenneth Gergen (1973) would argue in *Social Psychology as History*. Is psychological research

able to -or have a responsibility to- develop for example human solidarity or reduce suffering?

T: First of all, I think this kind of reflection that you have been mentioning, Svend Brinkmann's and others, is important. We became very aware that the knowledge we produce and the concepts we create as psychologists have an impact and do change the world. The way you define intelligence or the way you define normality, or the way you define a problem, has an impact once it is produced and becomes a concept available to others, and when people start to use them on themselves and others. So, I think this is very acquired, and that means that, as a psychologist producing science on other people's lives, you should very much be aware of what is the social impact of this kind of knowledge we produce. That is one kind of awareness, and it is connected to another one, which is when we write about people we interview or we work with. We should reflect on the fact that it might have of direct impact on the people whom we have written about. And so, I think with time, the awareness of those kind of things have changed in psychology and social sciences, and people have all kind of positions nowadays. For me, I have had different positions across time and also in my different type of practices. So, there are some aspects of my thinking, where I'm just trying to think about what is the implications of - for example if I work on the pleasure of thinking, what are the implication there? Do I say everyone should be happy all the time? No, I do not say everyone should be happy all the time. If I write something about people I have been interviewing, should I show them what I write about them, should I discuss that with them before I go forward? That has sort of become a normal practice more and more, in psychology and social science, to discuss that with people, because that might already change just then.

But then, in my responsibility as a researcher, I think about different scales of change. And so, for example some type of knowledge we produce, are concepts, which are not super abstract but a little bit concrete as well – "mid-range concepts". So, first, for example, and maybe we talk more about that later, but when I worked on transitions and what can facilitate transitions, not only are these concepts for theory, but I also do a lot of work with counsellors, pedagogues, and social workers. And I try to see how these can

be useful in their work: Can they do a change in their work using this kind of concept? I mean "use" in a very pragmatic sense: would they see things with those concepts that they would not notice otherwise? And I think that is one of the things we can do, in a practical and modest way, because I think we also have to be realistic in what we can do. Second, I currently work at a very regional scale level, and I wrote about aging in a region in which I live, on how older people live their lives, and how other people can change their living conditions. And because we observe that as social scientists, we see things that work and things that do not work. So, my way of doing research now is by bringing people that are concerned with the problem I am working with - politicians, social workers, old people - and by creating conditions in which they can talk to each other about things we have identified as problematic. I try to help them understand together, not what we think is the solution, but what solution they can find and properly identify. And that is a way to see my responsibility as a social scientist, very locally. I do not think as a psychologist, I can change things in a big scale, but I think as social scientists we have to figure out at which level we may have an impact. And be aware of that and decide to use it more specifically or not. In my last example I use it very specifically.

S: Makes good sense. Maybe this brings us to change, which is the main topic of the interview. Your work has influenced many – including myself – in relation to how we understand the experience of change. Your work addresses not only major life changing events and events of loss, but also the transitioning through everyday changes and changes that might be perceived as positive changes. Change is inevitable in an ever-changing environment around us, we experience it individually (ex. changing cities, work, relationships) and collectively (ex. social, political, and environment changes). You focus especially on experiences of change that make a 'rupture' in our life trajectory. Could you elaborate a bit on what is a rupture in a life trajectory?

T: Okay, so as developmental psychologists we want to see where people learn new things. And in some way, it happens all the time. But you can see it happening when people have to change a little bit more than usually, and when it becomes visible that they have to learn or do something new. I come from a very Piagetian tradition, I am from Neuchâtel in Switzerland, where Jean Piaget was born. So, he was interested in how

children establish new ways of understanding and acting, which he called "schemes". He said that children develop new ways of understanding when they try to do something and the world resists (Piaget, 1952). And that is how I think of disruption: I want to take up this glass, but I cannot take this glass. Or I want to do something, and it does not work. He called that a "conflict" actually, and he said when there is a conflict, something that resists an action, then you have to find a new action, a more efficient one, or a more adjusted one, or sometimes a more complex one. He observed that moments of disruptions generate, or rather, bring to the emergence of a new conduct or a new skill or a new behaviour. Now, where I come from it is a mixture of social and cognitive psychology, I worked with Anne-Nelly Perret-Clermont, who was trying to see what happened when you put two children together, and they have to interact to solve the same problem together (e.g., Perret-Clermont, 1993). And that was the idea of the "sociocognitive conflict" (Perret-Clermont, 2020). You disagree with someone socially, and then you have to find a resolution, cognitively. So basically, what all this kind of tradition comes from is: something happens, there is a resistance from another person or from the world, and then you have to quickly find a form of change to respond to the problem. And in fact, this is what happens all the time when we are in front of new situations; something resists a bit to what we think we can do, and then we have to adjust somehow.

And so, as I started to work quite early with different psychologists from different orientations, I realized that in most fields of psychology it is actually what we are looking at: if we do an experiment, we create a situation where something unusual happens and people have to find a new answer, and then we look at this response. Or when people look at social phenomena such as groups in conflicts, and the dynamics that are generated; or if you look at social representations, which emerge as response to something unfamiliar. So, basically, the core issue is that there is something that disrupts or questions the *taken for granted* or the normal way of solving things. And I think the idea of ruptures and transitions was basically that. You do not need to create an experimental situation, there are enough disruptions in everyday life. And if you want to understand change, then you have to look at what happens when things change a little bit more than usual. People perceive something that questions what they have taken for granted, and start thinking

"what do I do now?" I started looking at this process during my PhD, where I was trying to find a "normal" situation of disruption, and I looked at young adults becoming parents for the first time. And that is a disruption, you know, they have to change a lot of things and produce a lot of new understandings. I was looking at the rupture of becoming a parent, and how people adjust to that; I looked specifically at how people choose first names for their children, because I could look at how they make sense of the situation through their stories of child naming. So, the issue is, you have a disruption, and this generates new conduct. This became almost a method to look at development, to look at enhanced change, if you want. And that is how we looked at the change that happen after disruptions, and we called it a transition until a new balance is found, until a regularity is found again.

A transition is what is triggered by the rupture, and it designates the ways in which we find new ways to do things. I worked a lot on young people, as they start a new school, enter the job market, or change homes. Basically, there are three processes, that are very often separated in psychology, but usually happen together at the same time in transitions. First there is the *learning of new things,* learning how to act in these new circumstances, learning technical things or learning the language if you move place. Second, there are *identity transformations,* how to define yourself as a university student when you have been a high school student before, or how to start to behave as an employee somewhere. Third, there is *sense making*: how is that connected to who I was? Where does that lead me to? What can I imagine from there on? What do I do with the affects and the emotions connected to that change?

S: Yes, there are a variety of examples of ruptures you mention: becoming a parent for example, to some people that is a planned event, and to some people it could be also a happy event and something they are waiting for. There are also ruptures in relation to the sudden loss of a loved one. The different examples of ruptures you investigate cover a variety of positive and negative events, as well as planned and sudden ones. And I remember also in your *Melodies of Living* book (Zittoun et al., 2013), you tackle how transition could differ in those different events and how for example deciding on a change or knowing that a change can facilitate a smoother transitioning than in the case of sudden

events. So, my question is, who then decides what is a rupture? Is it always a subjective experience, because the same change could be seen by one person as a rupture, and by the other person as not necessarily disrupting their life or identity?

T: Yes, that is a good question. Rupture has a lot of connotations in English and French and many other languages, and it is often understood, especially in a sociopsychological sense, in a sort of more dramatic existential disruption. But you have seen from what I describe, it is more about experiencing that some forms of acting or thinking do not work anymore and need a little bit of adjustment. Of course, they can be more or less dramatic, but then there are differences on what causes them. And it can be an event that you have chosen to cause like "I want to move house" or "I want to have a child", or that just happened to you, caused by an external event on which you have no control, like suddenly you have an illness, or you had a car accident. It can also be a rupture that happens to a group of people at the same time, like your town is bombed or there is a strike. So, the causes can be very diverse and have different levels of generality. But the point is, from a methodological perspective, does the person perceive the event as a rupture? The way we see people experience ruptures is very diverse as well. It also depends on the type of data you work with as a psychologist; it might be interviews; it might be having people write about things. But there are very different ways in which ruptures are manifested.

One line of work we have been doing, is working on diaries people were writing during long periods. We worked on war diaries, diaries that people wrote during Second World War. We now also work on online diaries people write for more than twenty years on public webpages. It is done under a pseudonym, but it is public. We use that because we want to see whether what we call crisis or societal crisis are experienced as ruptures by people. And actually, it varies a lot. So, you have an event that everyone considers as a crisis, like 9/11 or the COVID-19 pandemic. But actually, what we think from the outside is a crisis, is not necessarily a rupture in people's lives. And how it is manifested really depends on the life conditions of someone. So, when we worked on the War diaries for example, okay war happens, it was in England, what happens in England? You would think that the day of the war declaration, people experienced it as a rupture. Not necessarily, what happens is that they go to the shop three weeks later and there is no

potatoes anymore in the shop and they think "I cannot do my dinner!" So *that* is when the rupture is experienced. So, the question of psychology is to try to understand the person as a whole. How are happenings perceived from their perspective? And where is the disruption? And what do they do from there? And it is not always where we expect.

S: No, so it is how the person perceived it, and how they express it, whether as they recall events in an interview or how they express it a diary throughout time.

T: In some cases, people really say "oh, I noticed that this doesn't happen anymore" or when they think "damn, I cannot do my dinner" or "what do I do now?" They can express the fact that it is new or troubling. But sometimes, and especially I think in interviews, we can hear it if you have been clinically trained, but in diaries it is very clear; when people live a rupture, they are a bit lost, and they write very differently. So, someone may usually write in their diary "today everything was fine and today I met Jaan and later that day I met Sarah." But when some big thing happens in their lives, suddenly they write lines and lines that say, "I didn't know what happened and I don't know what to do" and "this one person told me this, and this other person told me that" and "I should try and see and ask someone for help", and things become really messy, because their thinking is not organized. And they become hyper dialogical because they try to find a way to handle new situations. And so, they are very exploratory and stressed sometimes, but the way people express themselves is very different. And you probably know that from yourself or from your friends, I mean, when something terrible or disrupting happens, you do not recognize them. You say, "you are not yourself anymore." So, the way we try to make sense shows that we are like the gear change when you cannot fix the gears yet, so there is a bit of noise happening from that.

S: Yes, and in looking at how people make sense of those disruptions, are we able to identify some ways of transitioning as more adaptive or healthier than others?

T: Well, if we work with the idea that to find a new balance, people need to learn new skills to solve the problem, make sense of the situation, and define possible ways of acting, then once they do, they start to stabilize, and for me there is a sort of wellbeing as

soon as the new balance is found. But, as a developmental psychologist and not a clinical psychologist, I am not trying to help people find solutions, but I am trying to see what works for them, and what they find to support that process of changing. And that is why I started to be interested in a lot of things that might become resources for people, and that might facilitate this process. So, you have of course the expected resources. You have the institutions, if you want to learn a trade and you want to enter the job market, you go into a program that helps your transition to the job market. If that works, then the institution and the program become resources for you. Or if you have problems solving an issue, you go to see a psychologist or a counsellor, and if it works for you, that person becomes a professional resource for you. But very often we just go and talk to our friends, and maybe just talking to our friends helps us to make sense of things. But then, I started to be interested in other things that people do that is especially useful in the experience of change, that is listening to music, watching a movie, or singing a song that makes people feel better. And so, I was really curious to know, how can fiction help us to do that work of transition? And so, I did a lot of my work on why we feel some music change our life, or "that song saved my life during that period" or "thanks to this movie I understood myself better" or "suddenly through that novel I read I understood what happened to me and I could act better." So, I tried to understand these kinds of things that might become resources when people experience transitions and help them to facilitate the process of restabilizing a new order of things.

S: And you refer to those as symbolic resources, right?

T: I refer to those as symbolic resources, yes, and looking at how people usually find - well most people find for themselves the right resources that work for them. It might be doing sports or other things. So, the connection to clinical work is that in clinical work there are a lot of techniques to facilitate resources in some ways or to reduce the anxiety connected to the ruptures. But in some cases, it might be useful to support those things that people can do by themselves. When it goes well, they already do it alone, they find the right books and things, but if they have difficulties, it might also be about just supporting those things that people do anyway, and seeing in what ways we can support them. So, it is also about changing a little bit the outlook on that.

S: In talking about transitions and whether people can use resources to help them transition through a certain change or have someone help them: it presupposes that a change has happened and now the person is transitioning and adapting through that change. There is a general discourse in society that change is inevitable; change happens all the time, and if you are flexible and mobile enough, if you are 'the good employee,' or 'the good student,' then you can be always adapting to change. My question then is: is adapting to or accepting change always part of transitioning? Or is another way of making meaning of change is by working against the change and resisting it? When we say "*this is not a change I want to accept, and I am not planning to transition through it. I'll try to change the change*". If I have the agency to do that -not in case of a war for example, but in other aspects of life, such as a new job- where I can say "*no that is not something that is necessarily good for my wellbeing?*" and maybe I would refuse the change altogether and go back to some earlier state. Would that also be a way of transitioning through change?

T: I just noticed that you use the term transitioning, which I never used.

S: No? What would you use?

T: I don't know, but I wouldn't use the word transitioning.

S: What about adapting?

T: Maybe, but that is such a separate enterprise – now the question of change. You mention something else about the imposition of forced change or saying change is for your own good. Now, we can use the same concept in different ways, and there is this sort of common-sense orientation of using some concepts, and when I have used them so far, I try to use them in a more conceptual or analytical sense, so of course there can be a bit of trouble in that. Now can we resist change? What I am trying to say as a developmental psychologist is that we live in time, and it changes all the time. The processes are going on all the time.

Suppose a disruption happens in daily life. How much we want to change in relation to that is of course a complicated question. Now, psychologically, I think, we are always giving attention to both changing and remaining the same person. Psychologist Erik Erikson (1959) used to write that we have a basic need of integrity and continuity. We need to feel like we are the same person through experiences. The integrity means that even though we are brought to different types of experiences, there are some that we do not want to do, because we feel that we would not be ourselves anymore if we did them. If I become that kind of employee, then that is not me anymore, I am not happy to do that. So, there is a sort of limit to what we can feel is still us. Time happens and we go along with it, but how much we want to be actively transforming some form of being or some type of competence, some aspect of identity, of course can vary: and in some situations, we can resist. There is a very nice paper by Pernille Hviid (2015) on little children who tried to resist some changes that were imposed on them, because they felt they would lose too much of their identity and of their family story, if they were to accept the changes that the school proposed. One child in particular remained consistent, did not learn, did not want to become what the school encouraged him to become, because that would mean rejecting his family's values. The question is of course, what were the consequences in terms of his schooling, if we consider this as resistance to change.

S: So, it could be good for their well-being, but not necessarily sustainable for their schooling.

T: I think the question is, when we talk about the resistance to change, what are we resisting and what type of disruptions are we talking about? Because as we have talked about, there are disruptions that are imposed on us, and there are some that we choose ourselves. Then there are some where we want to use it as an occasion for development, and others that we want to reject for different kinds of reasons. So of course, there is all that kind of latitude in there.

S: Do you think ruptures always produce some form of development or growth? Even in traumatic changes some would refer to a *post-traumatic growth* in clinical settings.

T: The way I try to present the rupture-transition process is more as an analytical entry: if you want to look at where change happens, you can look there. But there can also be learning and change without rupture; I think that happens all the time. The thing is, though, and that is where we perhaps are getting close to trauma, there are some disruptions, where the events are of such an intensity or valence or degree of disruption, that it is very hard to cope with them. And perhaps one thing that I did not mention so far is, that we should consider that our lives are made of many domains. We are not just students, or just family members, we are many things at the same time. We have all these spheres of experiences; we study, and then we work, and we have hobbies, and we have families. So, a disruption might just happen in only one sphere of experience, where you still live in the same place, have the same friends, but just change schools. Then you still have all these other things that remain the same. But it might also happen in all the spheres at the same time. So usually, when it just affects one sphere of experience, we can use the other domains to support what happens in that domain, because that gives us continuity. You still have the same friends, parents and so on. But when many things are questioned at the same time, then that may be difficult to cope with. For example, there is the case of forced migration; I lose my house, I lose my friends, I lose my schools, I lose my language, I lose everything. Now here I used the term cope, but what I mean is, when a disruption affects all aspects of life at the same time, it is difficult to draw on something to adjust to that change, and it is more difficult to find resources, because the resources as well are very disturbed. So, there it is much more complicated to deal with, on one side. And then on the other side, those things might also have a very intense affective load; if the changes are too heavily emotionally, or if we do not yet have the capacity to deal with them, then we cannot make sense of them – this is a traumatic event. And if we cannot make sense of them, then we cannot build on the other things around them. But then, if, with time, we can make sense of them, we can decompose the pain of that, and then of course there can be development and growth again.

S: Sense making is a key process in your work. You emphasize how we are meaning-making beings (Zittoun et al. 2013) and that "*the mind renders the world meaningful, and this is made through signs*" (Zittoun, 2023). Is it always that we are in pursuit after meaning following a rupture? Are there ruptures that just leaves us hopeless, meaningless,

losing faith in humanity? Can we say that we do not always succeed in constructing a meaning or at least a meaningful meaning after a rupture? Sometimes we lose the will to pursuit after meaning - depression for example, could be seen as a state of loss of meaning. You touch upon this in your later work tackling the state of vulnerability (Zittoun, Gillespie, & Marcos, 2023) and ruptures that are accompanied by emotional disengagement. Would you elaborate more on the vulnerability that arises when a person does not have the resources to deal with the rupture?

T: Actually, we wrote this paper on the vulnerability based on the diary studies (Zittoun et al., 2023) and I must say, the same way that earlier I said Vygotsky wrote this because he was responding to certain events, we were writing this paper because we were supported by our grant studying the vulnerability in the life course. So, we were working on those diaries of people writing for twenty years, and we were looking at how people experience different ruptures in these diaries. And we knew from our previous studies that normally when people experience those ruptures, you'd see after some time people coming back to normality. But we also had diaries there of people that had gone through a lot of difficulties; trying to kill themselves when they were young or entering the job market during a big economic crisis or being unemployed most of their lives and becoming alcoholics. So, we had people who obviously had lived repeated ruptures and never really found a balance that seemed to be satisfactory to them. In those cases, there was accumulation of ruptures, where one could say that there is maybe a vulnerability. And that is the definition from the sociologists we are working with, saying, *a vulnerabilizing event is an event which we do not have the resources to deal with* (Spini, Bernardi, Oris, 2017). And here there were accumulated events people did not have enough resources to deal with. And then, one of the aspects is the difficulty of making sense, in the end.

But then that depends on what we mean by making sense. There are all kinds of ways to describe that, like "differences that make a difference" to define signs (Neuman, 2014), but in the way I am using it, it is being able to step enough out of an experience, so as to be able to connect that experience to a previous experiences, or to connect it to a future one, or perhaps to an alternative thing. So, it is about connecting things to other things.

We have different ways to do that, and more complex ways, and in some cases, we are missing that ability. Either we are missing the capacity or the resources to do it, or the emotional load makes it difficult to do. And yes, I agree, depression can be lack of meaning. The experience of absurdity and emptiness of life is something quite documented, I think.

S: Yes, quite a strong experience. We very briefly mentioned trauma, and I am wondering if you see it on a spectrum in relation to ruptures and if it is a matter of the magnitude of the change. Do you distinguish in your work between ruptures and traumatic events? if yes how so?

T: Well, a big rupture can be very benign. It does not need to be very heavy, it can just be about whatever, really, like changing buildings. I think my understanding of trauma comes from clinical work and from psychoanalytical work, is precisely that it is related events that have such a magnitude and intensity that either we do not have the capacity to contain and handle them, or they occur to a person before they have the capacity to deal with them, like childhood trauma for example. So those events happen because they are not made sense of, nor cannot be linked to other things. They become very rough in the memory as such, and with much intensity. What normally tends to happen is that we try not to approach those things anymore, which means that there is a whole bunch of experiences that becomes unavailable in connection to that. So, in the work I have done on ruptures and transitions, I have never been confronted with traumatic events, because it is not the sort of thing we were looking for.

S: Yes, I think you explain well how the interest, or the focus, is on those kinds of changes that are not necessarily traumatic and as you said, sometimes they are very banal events, but a person could experience them as rupturing to their everyday life.

T: Gail Womersley (Theisen-Womersley, 2021), a few years back, actually did a study as she was working as a psychologist with *Médecins Sans Frontières* (Doctor's Without Borders) in refugee camps in different places. She studied longitudinally people that had experienced trauma, and using this kind of model, she could show how some events that

you never expected, like talking to friends, or finding a community, or finding an object that help you feel a bit more home or help you to remember your place, or little things like that, were progressively doing the work of becoming resources even in case of intense trauma- and in such a way that very slowly sensemaking could be done. She could, using this kind of model, show how some form of sensemaking could be done, moving progressively out of that trauma, enabling the identity transformation, and learning of what was happening.

S: Refugee and forced migration experiences could be seen as one example of social and political changes that cause different ruptures to different people. I would like to hear your thoughts about the way in which individual, social, and environmental changes are interrelated? I am thinking here of how certain socioeconomic changes such as an economic crisis, could lead to individual level changes leading to loss of identity or even suicide -This is something that sociologist David Émile Durkheim have investigated. Also, environmental changes leading to individual experiences of grief and anxiety. The other way around as well, how individual experiences when brought in solidarity to the public realm can lead to social movements such as that of #metoo. How do you see this interrelatedness?

T: As a social and cultural psychologist that is the sort of interplay we want to look at, because it is about how people change in a changing world and how individual actions can change the world, and the other way around. The way I have been more and more apprehending that, is by distinguishing different scales of change. That's why we use this distinction between sociogenesis, ontogenesis, and micro-genesis. Are you familiar with that? Let me illustrate this with the example of the project I'm working on ageing in my region. First, let's take how things changes at the social level, such as social discourses, or institutions: there, we observed the creation of a new program and new housing policies for the ageing population: this is the sociogenetic level. Then, we look at how these policies are actually manifested in everyday life, in institutions, in offices, in desk offices where older persons ask for something, or in a specific a specific building in which they live: we look at how these manifests in all these micro-interactions, that is, at a micro-genetic level. Finally, at an ontogenetic level, we examine how all these changing living

conditions affect people's life trajectories. Overall, we use a dialogical approach, where we try to see how people respond to different types of discourses and occurrences, how a person responds to a friend or how people respond to what the state says or how that person can talk to a friend or how people can respond, or they resist to an injunction from the state. So, we can look at all these ways those different things interact, and we tried to account for that and for how those things manifest in different ways at different levels and how they are very often negotiated in different places. In another study, we examined how people can get the Swiss citizenship (Di Donato et al., 2020; Zittoun, 2017). I do not know how it is in Denmark, but in Switzerland it is very difficult to get a Swiss citizenship if you're a foreigner.

S: Sounds similar to the process in Denmark!

T: It is very difficult, especially if you come as a refugee. Almost impossible. But okay, it is a state law, with a history (sociogenesis); then the actualisation of these laws is negotiated by the persons, the offices, with piles of papers; they put stickers on them, and these stickers are read by another person, who puts another sticker on them – and this leads to a decision (microgenesis). And that can change the trajectory of life of a person who lives in the country for many years and thinks they deserve the citizenship (ontogenesis). So, if you want to understand how those different levels of change or transformation affect each other, you have to look at the micro-mechanics, the small dynamics by which those levels are interrelated. Of course, things just don't go from top to down: it is a more complicated processes, in which people can also resist and change and transform. To go back to the question of resistance: people can resist by reacting or or finding other ways. For example, you have a lot of older people that do not respond at all to what the policymakers want them to do: they don't go in the type of housing that is promoted and promised to them as offering them a wonderful future – they don't want that. They get organized differently, they create cooperatives housing, and do a lot of other things. So, in some way they create the kind of sociality at their level, which might then help a more political person to reflect on what they are proposing and bring them to realise that their solution supported by the new policy is not the only answer. So, we try to look at all those dynamic levels.

S: Yes. And in trying to look at those, maybe we could speak more concretely in relation to methods: How is it possible to investigate this methodologically? Does it require us to go from an ideographic focus to a wider population focus, and what would that mean for the methods used? How can we account for the unique as well as the common in development through ruptures? In your recent study (Zittoun et al., 2023) you combine qualitative and quantitative methods to look at big diary data. However, you argue that instead of studying a group of persons experiencing the same type of rupture (becoming a parent, starting school…), it is more relevant to focus on one given person moving through a series of ruptures (Zittoun, 2022). Why?

T: Because I am a developmental psychologist!

S: Yes. It makes sense then!

T: No, I know I said that because I felt sometimes, if I interview fifty people about the transition to university, but it is fifty different universities and different life stories, I will learn something about entering university, but I will not understand much about why each person made the choices they did. So, it is not that I only study one person at a time, always. But I think, if I want to understand the complexities of processes by which people handle the complex changes they are exposed to, or how they deal with the type of environments in which they are, then I need to understand this one case very well. And then there are different ways to do so. One way is to look at this one case and situate it among many others; another one is to look at this one case and understanding well the system in which it is placed. You mentioned my work, and I can say something about the two studies I am doing right now. There is the one on diaries (Zittoun et al., 2023), where we have hundreds of diaries and each diary is twenty years, and so there is millions of words. And again, if you want to do a qualitative analysis you would just get crazy: people write so much! So, when you study something like this, that is really big data. Reading and qualitatively analysing the diaries written by a person for twenty years would take you months and months, and trying to find regularities is almost impossible; then imagine that you have hundreds of them! So, in order to analyse we use the advantage offered by

machine learning techniques. So, once we have good theoretical questions, we can navigate through the data using different types of new technologies. We can for example see how the same person over a long period of time speaks differently about the same topic, and then find indications of ruptures of the same event across the data. And then we can look qualitatively more closely, and so we can understand how one person reacts in a different context, because we have this big data, and we can locate them on different things. So, in that case it is very useful to see how one person does something on the background of other things, for example.

The other study I am doing on aging is about a specific region (Gfeller & Zittoun, 2023), so of course we don't just study one person only. Here we need a very complex understanding of all the changes that I was mentioning - the policy changes, the institutional changes, the new buildings being built, and what happens in every building, what happens on a daily basis in every village. And then we focus on the lives of some people, and we can understand them because we understand the whole system. So, because I am a developmental psychologist, and I want to understand why people make choices facing the changes they experience, then I need some background to understand them, but I also need to focus on the person as well.

S: Yes, some background of the life trajectory and the experiences the person has been through are certainly helpful. Nearing my last question in relation to ruptures, you mentioned earlier when we talked about psychology and change, how you are also concerned with how your research could be applied or used by practitioners or those involved, whether it be politicians or social workers or therapists. So, my question is how do you think your work could be used and adapted for a therapeutic setting?

T: For therapeutic settings? I would let the therapists to find out.

S: So, it is on them, then.

T: No, but I think there are different things. One thing, and I mentioned this a little bit, is about how some of those concepts I propose, for example rupture and transitions and the

different dimensions, can be useful to see and for analysing certain circumstances. So, when I worked with counsellors or people working with kids with learning difficulties, I found that their training brought them just to focus on the learning difficulty. Then I question if they have considered the identity implications, or consider the resources those people have besides the fact that they are not good in math, you know? And this we have documented; there are a lot of stories of people who are diagnosed as dyslexic and have 12 years of school failure, and next to school they are brilliant musicians; they direct an orchestra, they run bands, and they are super good musicians. So, something is happening in that circle and domain of life, that is sort of not transferred (e.g., to school) or not connected to the other domains for all kinds of reasons. So, seeing those things, I think, is perhaps facilitated by the type of concepts I propose. And then, the other thing is the type of phenomena that we can look at. As I said, I am trying to look at things that are very often not looked at, for example what we can learn from fiction and the importance of pleasure in thinking. There might be an invitation to look at other things than the technical aspects we have been trained to see, and that are usually emphasized in education and the workplace, and perhaps looking at these other things might give a sideway into producing and supporting change.

S: Yes, this could open up new ways of understanding those challenges. That was my last question in relation to ruptures and your work on that. And then we now have around 15 minutes left, and I want this last part to be more about you and your own academic trajectory. Would you like to share a bit about your own academic trajectory and whether you perhaps experienced ruptures?

T: In my career trajectory? Umm, well it depends on how far you want me to go!

S: Totally up to how much you want to share!

T: No, well, I do not think I had major ruptures in my academic trajectory. There were of course a certain number of disruptions. That is how you can learn and develop new ideas and have new curiosities; that something is not what you would expect, or something raises a new question. And so, of course, some of the disruptions were probably the ones

any student in the social sciences has. You start to read social scientists and then you realize that the world is not what you think it is, it is constructed, and if you change theory, the world looks different! So, of course there is this kind of existential vertigo coming from theory, which is a normal disruption if you enter the field of academia. But then I think, quite luckily, it stopped, because I studied and started raising some questions, which led me to other enquiries, and I was also very lucky to be surrounded by people who let me pursue my curiosities and interests. So, it is less ruptures that guided my trajectory and more the pleasure of thinking that guided my trajectory, probably.

S: Yes, and in relation to your pleasure in academic thinking, in an earlier discussion today you mentioned the idea that reading someone's academic writing sometimes gives you an impression of how much pleasure they had with their own thinking, and it reflects on how you read it, and how they write the text. I have always experienced your writing style as uniquely accessible and clear without losing its complex meaning. You use clear example to apply complex theoretical ideas and encourage the reader to reflect on their own everyday practices and what different meanings they could bring to understanding oneself and others differently. Like in your book *The pleasure of thinking*, you use one situation of meeting a cat in the street and from that you explain the unconscious, metathinking, and symbols! This is very important for the dissemination of scientific knowledge and for supporting students 'into' academia. And I have to say this is not the common academic jargon way of writing. How has your writing style developed over time? And do you have any specific pedagogical thoughts in relation to your writing style?

T: Well, thank you for the comment, because it's very kind of you to say, and I am happy to hear the impression that the writing gives you. But perhaps, yes, you could say there was an academic rupture about my writing style. Because when I started to write as a young academic in French, I had read all these very complicated French authors, you know, Foucault, Lévi-Strauss and the translation of Freud in French; and you know those intellectuals they write in a very complicated way. So, when I started to write in French, I wrote in a really complicated French; complicated sentences and complicated words, because I thought if you want to write complicated things it needs to be complicated, no?

But when I went to England, I had a very poor English, and I had to write in English. And then I realized, I needed to say and write about the same kind of ideas but using very simple words. And then I realized that maybe even the most complicated ideas can be turned into more simple ways. First, the ideas have to be clear, because if they get clear, they might be easier to express, and when you have a clear idea, you can actually express it in very simple words. And actually, it was a good lesson in modesty and writing to have to express complex ideas with a very limited vocabulary. And then with time my vocabulary got a bit better, but I had realized that actually it is very possible to explain in simple ways something complex if you understand it well, and if you have a clear idea of what you want to say. And now my French is simpler to understand as well.

And then the other thing is, I like to talk about ideas, and I like to talk about all of these ideas with colleagues, and also with students and with non-academics – and I realized that most people are probably like me or like others: We connect with ideas if we can relate them to daily experiences, even very abstract ideas. We need to go through metaphorical thinking, we need to connect them to experiences. So, I realised that perhaps it would facilitate the sharing of ideas to help people connect things with their own experiences. So, in some ways, I write a little bit like how I would talk to friends who would be happy to participate in a discussion. So, I have to imagine friendly readers, with whom I want to share some ideas.

S: That is a good practice, I think. Your ideas also remind me of Michael Billig (2013) and his critique of jargon filled academic writing: He would claim that if the writer is not able to explain complex ideas in a clear way, then he would doubt that the original thinker had the ideas clear in their head to start with.

T: I would tend to agree with that.

S: Speaking of ideas and how, as you said earlier, your trajectory was one idea leading to another. Are there any future ideas you're thinking of? If you have all the funding and the time in the world. Things you would like to explore that you haven't explored before?

T: I do not know yet because the thing is, it is an idea that links into another idea. So right now, we are finishing – Well, I don't know about finish, we never finish – but we are writing on the transformation of a region in connection to older persons, which has made me turn to a much more proactive way of working. We wanted to give something back to the region we studied. We worked with a theatre director, Nicolas Yazgi, who wrote theatre plays on the basis of our findings, and we invited people related to the questions of ageing in the region to watch these plays, and to discuss among themselves on the basis of the problems raised by them. So, we have started using the arts as a way to participate to social transformation, actually. And the diary studies are still going on.

But in relation to both those things, I think there are still many things for me to understand in terms of the developmental processes and the emergence of new forms of thinking. And actually, there is a line of work that started with the vulnerability paper and others (Zittoun et al., 2023). As psychologists, we do not know that much of about the modalities of thinking people develop through time. We know about scientific expertise, we know about professional expertise, we know about all these kinds of things, but we do not know what people learn from living. You know, we all live a certain amount of time, and older people live for a very long time - and they learn something from living, no?

S: Does that orient your focus more towards aging?

T: Right now, it is about aging. Because I think both the development in aging and in adult life are areas where not much is known, because psychology tends to study what is useful and economically efficient. So, in adult life, we mostly look at work and family, really; but there are a lot of other things that happen in people's lives than just work and family. This is especially true in ageing: in social sciences, ageing is still mainly understood in terms of decline and loss of skills; however, I do think that there is something very specific happening there in developmental terms. And if we can understand what happens in the modalities of thinking at the very end of life, then we might also revise what is central at the very beginning. Yes, so I try to look at that.

S: Yes, okay, and if we then have the time for one very last question, it would be that I would be interested to hear if you have certain books or certain authors that you think have inspired or influenced you throughout your academic trajectory?

T: One book?

S: No, no. Actually, we have time, so you can use it all, naming all the different books!

T: Books and persons?

S: Books, persons, or both.

T: Can I have ten minutes to think? No, the thing is, if you work as a researcher, when we think and work, of course we also have thinking partners. We have reading partners, and we have inspirations, and we have friends. Thinking is always represented as very lonely, but it is not so lonely, and so of course we have people around us. First there are people who inspire us, our professors, and mentors, and I have a long series of them, of course. And they taught me very different things, they taught me regarding domains, they taught me freedom, they taught me inspiration… You want names?

S: Sure.

T: I mean, I mentioned some of them already. I started in the domain of learning psychology, and this was with Anne-Nelly Perret-Clermont, who was my supervisor. She was a post-Piagetian scholar. And with time as I realized that this domain was not the only one that I wanted to study. I wanted to open my work to different cultural dimensions, and of course I worked for many years with Jaan Valsiner, who has been a big inspiration for my work, and supportive as well. And among them is also Gerard Duveen's work, who is less known, but he was also a social and developmental psychologist, also attentive to the cultural dimensions. And I think now, to also understand the depth of the dialogical position we have in the world, I am very inspired by Ivana Markova's position; she is a very ethical writer.

But on the other hand, what I was very lucky to realize over time is that you also need colleagues and friends to work with. And so, I was very lucky to meet a group of academic colleagues and friends with whom I started a critical dialogue, and although we do not always write together, we sometimes still do. There are a few people with whom I write a lot, like Alex Gillespie, for example. There is also this group of people with whom I know I share certain ideas, and over the years we have developed our ideas in parallel. It is important to know that with what you do, you are not alone in the world, and there are other people who share some of your ideas, and you meet with them now and then, and you keep developing those kinds of ideas. So that is also very important for me. So, although some aspects of what I describe now are my ideas, they have been discussed with many people and they have been changing around that, and very many people's ideas have been influencing my way of understanding things.

And then in terms of authors, the thing is, if you spend a lot of time with a difficult author, and you try to understand what he or she says, then that changes your thinking anyway. And that is why it is sometimes really good to read classical authors, because they are difficult to grasp. They very often have very complex views and understandings of things, and if you go through them, then your way of thinking is going to be changed even beyond what you know yourself. And years later you might think like "*damn, I am thinking like a Piagetian!*"

S: So it is worth the effort, after all, to try to understand.

T: It really is worth the effort because you also see how people write, how they make you get to an idea, how they make you perceive and understand a different worldmaking and worldview. And then of course, I already mentioned some of those authors. I mean, take Jean Piaget: you might like it or not, but reading Jean Piaget just changes your understanding of epistemology. And same with classics, like if you read Sigmund Freud, or you are doing pragmatics and you read John Dewey, that stuff changes the way you understand things – Well with Pierce then you understand nothing– but it changes something about the way you think. And then there are authors which you might find very

triggering because they have a very different way of looking at things, and then you might reject it, but that has still been a way to change your thinking. If you read Goffman's work for example: it is always a life-changing experience to read Goffman. But then you might question if that's enough to look at the world, and you might reposition yourself. But I would just say, all those texts are very important - I mean, reading books is really important. Do not just read papers. Read books, and I think then you'll find friends, and some of them will remain friends for a very long time. You know, you read Spinoza, he just remains a friend.

S: I think I have covered all the questions I had, except if you would like to add something, or if you think there is something that is significant in relation to your work that we did not cover?

T: No, thank you very much for those questions, it is always interesting and challenging to enter into this kind of dialogue. I think we have not spoken very much about imagination, but that is okay, we can *imagine* what this would be about!

S: We can imagine what we could have said.

T: And so, thank you very much for being there and listening and participating.

S: Thank you for coming and sharing with us your thoughts. Thanks again to all those attending.

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