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The Subjective Experience of "Nature": Methodological Reflections

Jean-Michel Le Bot*

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It is not particularly easy to get modern city-dwellers to talk about their knowledge and experience of the species and habitats [1] present in their environment (whether urban, suburban or rural [2]). When asked about this in the parks and public gardens of three large cities in the West of France, many of those interviewed had little to say (even though the extent of the responses differed from person to person) [3]. That they were present in these spaces and that we were able to question them there was, in most cases, due to the fact that they enjoyed being there in contact with what they spontaneously referred to as "nature". However, their pleasant experience of this "nature" seemed to take the form of something self-evident which it was difficult for them to express. This is in some ways similar to what is observed in the field of pain. Indeed, as a subjective biological experience, pain also seems to be difficult to express. Sometimes all that people suffering from chronic pain are able to say is "it hurts". However, the patient's description of the pain that he or she feels is a very important piece of diagnostic information for carers. It is this observation that has led one clinical practitioner amongst our colleagues to work together with a doctor specializing in the evalu-

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[1] The concept of habitat here is understood in the ecological sense (see for instance the EUNIS habitat types classification: http://eunis.eea.europa.eu/ [accessed 27 Jun 2018]).

[2] For a definition of these concepts, see Clergeau 2007. In most cities, the exact boundary between the urban, the suburban and the rural (or peri-urban) is clearly difficult to define.

[3] This article is based primarily on the results of semi-directed interviews performed as part of a research project funded by the PIRVE (call for proposals 2008: "What is the place of wooded areas in city development?") and the ANR (call for proposals 2008, Sustainable Cities: "Trame verte urbaine, Assessment of urban green spaces and development of a reference document: combining aesthetics and ecology within a new urban infrastructure" – see Clergeau and Blanc 2013.)

ation of pain treatment in order to examine how patients suffering from pain not only succeed in expressing their pain but also work to take control of it, enter into a relation with it and tolerate it (Guyard and Cahagne 2006). It might seem surprising to want to compare individuals' relations with "nature" with the experience of pain because the former, according to the interviewees themselves, is mostly pleasant whereas the latter, by definition, is particularly unpleasant. However, it seems to us that there are a number of methodological and phenomenological lessons that can be drawn from this comparison. This is firstly because both cases relate to the subjective experience of something biological (situated within us in the case of pain or outside of us in the case of species and habitats). Secondly, though, this is because both cases relate to an experience that is difficult to express while the methods most commonly employed in sociological studies (interviews, *focus groups*, questionnaires) are based on the need for verbalization. It therefore seemed to us that an examination of the ways in which patients construct their relation with pain might be of use to sociologists, ethnologists and anthropologists who are interested in the way in which humans construct their relations with species and habitats or, more broadly, human or non-human living entities (Descola 2013).

Just as our colleagues have investigated the "common" experience of pain compared to the expert knowledge of it assembled by doctors, we are interested here in the "common" experience that non-specialists might have of their environment. Our standpoint is therefore different from that of the sociology of science which is more interested in the definition of habitat and species by biologists and ecologists. Instead, the starting point for the ideas developed here took the form of semi-directed interviews conducted among users of public parks and gardens in Angers, Nantes and Rennes [4]. However, the present article also draws on material relating to other surveys that we have performed in the past (Le Bot and Sauvage 2011; Le Bot 2007) and we have extended the scope of the included data to other sociological reports and even works of literature. The types of environment covered by our survey consisted of habitats (urban parks and gardens) which distinguish themselves from the adjoining built areas by the massive presence of vegetation. They were nonetheless "Regularly or recently cultivated agricultural, horticultural and domestic habitats" as defined by the European Nature Information System (EUNIS) habitat classification (code I, 2007). We will therefore designate them as "seemingly natural spaces" [5] (SNS below). Without wishing to enter into any extensive discussion on this point, it should, however, be noted that the persons interviewed spontaneously spoke in terms

[4]These interviews were conducted and transcribed by Françoise Philip during a postdoctoral fellowship. We should like to thank her very much for her work.

[5]See, for instance, Carr 1999; Niemann 2000, p. 70; Wrobel 2002, p. 196. In the original French version of this article we used the locution "espaces à caractère naturel" (Clergeau 2007).

of "nature" when referring to these spaces due, in particular, to the high level of vegetation which contrasts with the surrounding built environment. The term "nature" was also the one that most easily permitted the establishment of a contact during the conduct of these interviews (more precise terms such as "biodiversity", "species", "habitat" are not sufficiently well known and were not necessarily meaningful for the interviewed persons). The fact that we speak of the subjective experience of "nature" in the title of this article consequently reflects the utterances of the persons interviewed during the survey. From a theoretical perspective, our point of reference is the same as that used by the authors of the above-mentioned article on the experience of pain: it is the theory of mediation, or clinical anthropology, which, based on clinical experience, attempts to identify the various rational principles through which humans construct their relations with the world (Gagnepain 1990; Gagnepain 1991; Le Bot 2010; Le Bot 2013; Le Bot 2014). Starting from a differential approach to pathologies, it has been able to subdivide human reason into four "planes" of mediation, namely grammatical abstraction (sign model), technical artifice (tool model), ethnic absence (person model) and ethical abstinence (norm model). Following the four main sections of the article on pain, albeit in a slightly different order, we shall therefore examine in turn how the park and garden environment is conceptualized, fabricated, personalized and incorporated, as well as appreciated by its users for the pleasure it gives them.

1 Perception and conceptualization

The interview technique, in widespread use in sociology as well as in the medical field, albeit with different ends in mind in the case of medical interviews, collects people's utterances about what they think, do, feel, experience etc. (Beaud, Cahagne, and Guyard 2008). However, as soon as we speak about something – whether it be pain or the different elements of an environment – that thing is necessarily shaped by language. To understand what is said, it is therefore necessary to pay attention to the properties of language. Since there are many aspects of linguistic determinism and we do not intend to consider them all here, we shall consider only, and by way of example, the question of semantic differentiation. With reference to pain, one patient suffering from migraine described a pain which first of all "squeezed everywhere" and then "banged on one side only" (Guyard and Cahagne 2006, p. 16). She therefore used different words or expressions to distinguish between two pains which themselves were experienced differently and in different locations. The same approach can be found when we turn to the description of habitats and species. It is true that the ecological, zoological and botanical vocabulary of the city dwellers we interviewed was generally very lim-

ited [6]. Indeed, they distinguished far fewer taxa than a professional naturalist or informed amateur would have done, and nowhere near as many as the Hanunóo (Conklin 2007), Breton fishermen (Berr 1973; Le Berre and Le Dû 2009) or the informants of the many other peoples referred to by Lévi-Strauss (1966) were able to do. Our surveys therefore confirm what N. Blanc said about the low level of knowledge of the plant or animal realms possessed by most city dwellers born in urban environments and the paucity of their vocabulary in this domain (Blanc 2000, p. 115). However, they nonetheless make a number of distinctions that are attested to by the observed lexical differences. When asked to give the names of various taxa very common in the area in which the survey was held after seeing the corresponding color pictures, they were able to develop hypotheses based on a range of perceptual cues:

> [Picture of an oak tree with acorns] "It's a walnut. – No, no, it's an oak. – Yes, it's an oak, I didn't look carefully enough" (M, 16 years). "Acorns, but I don't know what the tree is" (F, 23 year).
>
> [Picture of a yew] "It looks like a pine, you'd think it was a conifer" (M, 22 years).
>
> [Picture of an elderberry] "Are they blueberries, something like that? They're red..." (M, 16 years). "My mother makes jam with those, are they morels? Oh yes, elderberries?" (F, 42 years).

Even though these people did not give the "right" name, they made a lot of distinctions and did not answer at random. Although in the last of the statements cited above there was a clear acknowledgment of the utility of the item (used to make jam), there was also perhaps a phonological derivation effect (in French, the words used were "morille/myrtille", corresponding to morel mushrooms/blueberries), since elderberries (french "sureau") were frequently referred to as blueberries (french "myrtilles"). Furthermore, when the respondents produced the term "bruyère" (heather) when asked to name ferns ("fougère"), it is very possible either that a phonological derivation (bruyère/fougère) occurred or that the interviews identified the shared semantic field (heathland plants). This identification of a common semantic field was also found when horse chestnut trees were referred to as sweet chestnuts, doves were called pigeons, and cyclamens were dubbed peonies or crocuses. Thus, in all these cases, although the interviewees did not give the "right" name, their answers were not without semantic relevance. However, the most important point to note is that the respondents made use of the polysemy of words (the absence of a bijective correspondence between words and things) when attempting to name what they had

[6] However, it does vary depending on a number of factors including, unsurprisingly, the rural or urban origin of the interviewee and academic level (Le Bot and Sauvage 2011).

distinguished at the perceptual level. This naming involved a process of synonymy: "pine" and "confer" are not "yew" but they can act as quasi-synonyms in the right situation. The search for precision and a suitable designation for the item to be named then proceeded via a series of reformulations: "They look like redcurrants but they're not" (M, 22 years). The search for precision may also make use of periphrasis. For example, one interviewee recognized the picture of a dove but called it "a land gull" (F, 74 years). In the absence of any other lexeme, this expression acted here as a synonym of "dove". Another person was unable to give the name "cherry laurel" but nevertheless responded "it's what you find in garden hedges" (F, 71 years). Another recognized the picture of dandelions but said "They're marigolds. It's a wild plant but I can't remember the name" (F, 48 years). In a survey conducted by other sociologists, the interviewed walkers, without recognizing *Prunus serotina* as such, designated it using periphrases such as "the tree that's everywhere" or "the tree you find everywhere" (Dalla Bernardina 2010, p. 84 ; Javelle, Kalaora, and Decoq 2006). If I might be permitted to recount my own experience, I long used a similar periphrasis ("the odd plant near the level crossing") to refer to Japanese knotweed (*Reynoutria japonica*). These few examples suffice to show that the paucity of the available vocabulary does not mean that everything is indistinct. It is possible to perceive and identify differences between taxa even in the absence of the lexemes that would permit an extremely precise designation and this perception may sometimes lead the speaker to search for more appropriate designations: "Number 4, I'd say it's a tree fern. I recognize it but I don't know the name" (F, 33 years), "We know these trees because we see them, but we don't know what they are" (F, 25 years). The paucity of the vocabulary does therefore not necessarily mean that perception of or attention paid to the living environment are equally impoverished [7]. Guyard and Cahagne (2006, p. 16) observed the same phenomenon in connection with pain: verbal reasoning makes it possible to produce hypothetical names for the perceived feelings of pain. However, these hypotheses in turn make it possible to choose between various possible formulations, guide the search for the most appropriate formulations and lead individuals to enrich these. What therefore emerges is a dialectical relation between (non-verbal) perceptual distinctions and the more or less precise designation of these distinctions. As in the case of pain, this teaches us a methodological lesson: even if it is unclear what survey technique would make it possible to record perceptions directly without the need for naming, the restricted capacity to produce names should not be considered an obstacle. Instead, it is important to encourage the dialectical process of stating

[7] A clinical argument can be called on in support of this observation: aphasic patients with impaired grammatical capabilities who are no longer able to name objects are no less capable of distinguishing between them at the perceptual level. They sometimes say themselves that they know what the thing is but cannot give its name (Laplane 2000; Brackelaire et al. 2006).

precisely what is perceived, without necessarily expecting the resulting descriptions to correspond precisely to the expert designations.

2 Equipment and the technical control level

Our colleagues, who are accustomed to the clinical experience of pain, have also emphasized the range of techniques, from personal habits through to the use of medication, with which patients attempt to manage their pain (Guyard and Cahagne 2006, pp. 18-19). This "technical" dimension is also found in the relation between individuals and the environment. In this regard, it is once again necessary to point out that the areas that were the object of our surveys were not wild, uncontrolled areas but spaces designed by and for humans. These habitats have been constructed over time though the deployment of various agricultural or horticultural techniques. Admittedly, as a result of greenspace differenciated management by the municipal parks and gardens department, the plant life in certain selected areas is now allowed to develop in a more spontaneous manner than in the past (Menozzi 2007). However, this (relative) spontaneity can only be designated as such by comparison with other far more interventionist approaches in other areas or by comparison with the built environment. In all cases, these are examples of "composed" or "recomposed nature", as described by Mathevet (2004), which can be analyzed, at the technical level, in terms of an alternation of built spaces and green spaces, themselves distinguished by the application of different management practices. Many of the persons interviewed stressed this alternation: "There's a risk that the city of Rennes might turn into a park. There has to be a difference: a part that's park and a part that's city" (M, 16 years). In this "recomposed nature", users generally allow themselves to be guided by the technical installations provided by the managers – pathways, play areas, picnic tables, benches – and often want there to be more of them. Of course, they also bring their own technical equipment. Admittedly, this is often very simple: clothes, shoes, bike [8], etc. However, it has an influence on the way walkers may perceive their environment: it plays the role of (technical) *mediator* between them and the environment. Thus, one of the persons interviewed criticized the material previously used for the paths of a park in Rennes: "They'd put down stones on the paths and that hurt your feet when you walked. But now it's

[8] M. Mauss has emphasized the extent to which wearing shoes modifies the position of the feet while walking and consequently the human gait as well (Mauss 1979, p. 102). However, wearing shoes also modifies contact with the ground and consequently the feelings experienced when putting one's feet down. This was what one young woman, who came to the park to relax, told us: "I always come in flip-flops so I can walk barefoot. I feel the grass. I like the feeling; it tickles" (F, 19 years).

better, they've put down sand" (M, 45 years). The condition of these paths may encourage or discourage the presence of pushchairs and the absence of appropriate provisions may completely exclude wheelchair users. At the same time, the speed at which horse riders or cross-country cyclists travel means that they do not see what walkers see (Javelle, Kalaora, and Decoq 2006; Dalla Bernardina 2010, p. 84). This phenomenon resembles what S. Chanvallon said about diving flippers. Although they clearly make it easier for people to move around in the underwater environment, the "modification to the mode of propulsion" they bring about also results in "new perceptions" (Chanvallon 2009, p. 120). The technical equipment therefore not only influence the sensations felt in contact with the environment but also our knowledge of this environment. It should also be added that the technical equipment does not just modify the sensations or contact that walkers may have with the environment. Just like patients experiencing pain who are able to engineer their own medication, walkers can engineer their environment and act on it in their own ways to gain a certain level of control. The environment thus becomes a reserve of food or materials while all types of artifice are used to modify it (Dalla Bernardina 2010, p. 85). And it is this reference to a technical utilization of the environment that may make it possible to designate a given taxon: "I don't know its name but my father called them firecrackers. You take off the small flower, squeeze it between your thumbs and it goes bang" (M, 41 years, talking about a foxglove).

3 Personification and reminiscences

In their observations of the experience of pain, Guyard and Cahagne also showed how pain initially seems to be foreign to patients who feel themselves to be "invaded", "modified" and sometimes even "dominated" by it. They then need to reconstruct a story which encompasses this "strange, rapacious figure which gives them no respite and incessantly torments them" (Guyard and Cahagne 2006, p. 16). In this story, the patients are first of all the "victims" of the pain. However, they also "fight" it, enjoy "victories" and suffer "defeats" which might oblige them to "compromise", to agree on a sort of contract. That is to say that the experience of pain is almost always accompanied by a personification of it as an enemy that one can attempt to hold in check even if it is impossible to vanquish it. This type of personification also occurs very frequently in relation to the environment even without it being necessary to evoke any type of "savage mind" (Lévi-Strauss 1966) or any particular ontology whether "animistic" or "totemistic" (Descola 2013). To personify certain non-human beings seems to us to be part of a very commonplace experience, including in western urban societies in which a naturalistic ontology nevertheless predominates (ibid.). S. Dalla

Bernardina thus refers to a study that shows how "voles are thought of as ingenious tacticians" or how *Ulva armoricana* algae are perceived as a presence that is waiting for its time to come (Dalla Bernardina 2010, p. 67). In a similar vein, we can cite the words used by this female respondent to our survey when talking about pollution: "It's everywhere. It moves around. It's even in the countryside" (F, 60 years). Invasive species are declared "public enemies" and are themselves personified (as in a brochure published by the Institut Klorane on the subject of invasive exotic plants [9]). The vocabulary used by ecologists itself undoubtedly helps maintain and even promote this personification of an active "nature" that sometimes avenges itself. In the early 20th century, P. Sébillot reported that the inhabitants of Tréguier, in the north of Brittany, believed that the sea would punish those who dared to dirty it (ibid., p. 72). More than a century later, a lecturer at the Paris Institute of Political Studies writing about the accident at the Fukushima nuclear power station said that "the first visual impact is the irruption of a violent nature that is perhaps avenging itself" (*Libération*, 1st April 2011). However, the great difference between this and the experience of pain, in which the latter appears first and foremost as an enemy that persecutes its victim, is that in the experience that our interviewed city-dwellers have of SNS, these or certain of their components are more often represented as friends rather than as enemies: "I like trees a lot [...]. That might be due to my background. [...] I was born in the Ardennes forest. I'm particularly fond of woodland areas. Some people need the sea to feel at ease, other people need the mountains, for me the forest is where I feel at ease. I feel happy among the trees" (M, 57 years). Another man evoked "a need that we have as living beings. We can't detach ourselves from the living environment around us, from the Earth that feeds us". He went on to speak of "the presence of the water and the trees. I try to benefit from them as much as possible. When you take the time to stay among them and savor them, there are other things that appear: little secrets, other, deeper levels of communicating with nature and the location may reveal themselves. [...] I've loved nature ever since I was small" (M, 36 years). Without exhibiting the same intense level of attachment, many people visit parks to "get close to nature" (F, 23 years). Another woman told us: "I like greenery, silence, peace and quiet. I can't give any other explanation. I love nature. I feel well when I'm in nature. It recharges my batteries. It makes me think of more positive things" (F, 65 years). This experienced presence of what the interviewees themselves call "nature" is a reason to relativise the "great divide" which is often considered to be one of the characteristics of western culture (Descola 2013). In spite of this "great di-

[9] https://www.doc-developpement-durable.org/file/programmes-de-sensibilisations/environnement-ecologie/plantes-invasives/Guide_plantes_exotiques_envahissantes.pdf [accessed 27 Jun 2018].

vide", which is the result, in the western world, of a whole body of sophisticated thought from the ancient Greeks onwards, we can observe many examples, in the heart of that same western world and in different eras, of a very different relationship with the "existings" that form our environment. Our hypothesis is that there is nothing here that is specific to a "savage" or primitive mind but that it is instead due to the fact that, because of their human nature, people have a tendency to personify non-humans (Le Bot 2010; Le Bot 2013). It is therefore necessary to pay attention to the way in which the person, or Self, of the interviewees, which is not reducible to language effects [10], enter into relation with these non-human others. However, the interviews also show that the experience of a relationship of friendship with "nature" is very frequently associated with early contact with it and that the other, here, may form a part of the Self. In effect, many of the people interviewed in these parks and gardens were attempting to rediscover a rural environment that they had known in their childhoods and which, however remote in time that might have been, they still carried within them: "In my childhood, I grew up next to a pond and there was nature all around. And this reminds me of it, all this reminds me of my childhood" (F, 65 years). If it is true that the child is a dimension of the person (Quentel 1993), if it is true that the habitus is an "*embodied history*, internalized as a second *nature*" which "gives disproportionate weight to early experience" (Bourdieu 1990, pp. 54-56), and if it is also true that "the world internalized in primary socialization is so much more firmly entrenched in consciousness than worlds internalized in secondary socializations" (Berger and Luckmann 1991, p. 78), then it is not surprising that these positive or negative childhood experiences of the environment, whether more or less urban or rural in nature, determine the relationship that individuals have with this same environment once they have become adults. What is more, these experiences of the environment during childhood, just like the experiences of the social world of childhood, are still within us even if we believe that we have forgotten them. Everyone carries within himself/herself landscapes, skies, smells and sounds that may reappear in the form of reminiscences. It is also this that makes it possible to go "in search of lost time" (Proust). Indeed, for this to be possible, for time to be "regained", it must still be present within us. The experiences of reminiscences that literature (from Chateaubriand to Proust) has made famous presuppose a memory which, as clinical neuropsychology has shown, is erased in certain amnesias: lost time is then definitively lost and can no longer be "regained" [11]. O. Sacks has provided a gripping description of this type of amnesia and its consequences for social life in an account of a patient suffering from Korsakoff's syndrome ("The Lost Mariner", Sacks 1995). In con-

[10]For more information on this question, see also Bloch (2009).

[11]Patients suffering from episodic memory disorders definitively lose a part of their past.

trast, in other cases, which do not correspond to amnesias but can be provoked by a stimulation of a precise area of the cortex, patients experience extended "Proust-like" reminiscence. In one such case, the reminiscences provoked by an epileptic fit allowed an elderly woman to rediscover the happy times of her childhood and a renewed serenity ("Reminiscences", *ibid.*). Such cases both explain and justify the concept of "embodied history" used by Bourdieu to define the habitus. Indeed, the neuropsychology of amnesias and reminiscences shows that this "embodiment" of each individual's history does take place, while also providing information about its neurological determinants [12]. Our hypothesis therefore is that certain affinities with landscapes, habitats or species can be explained by this presence in us of an entire environment inherited from our primary socialization and that this may be manifested through experiences of reminiscence. Literature provides us with many examples. There is, of course, the famous "episode of the madeleine" in Marcel Proust's *Search of Lost Time*. But there is also the "romanticism" of Chateaubriand which owes much to the writer's childhood affinity with the countryside of Brittany, that "the song of a *thrush* perched on the topmost branch of a silver birch" allows him to remember many years later [13]. And the "Frontenac Mystery", in Mauriac's novel, is in part the result of the same type of affinity between the Frontenacs and their land with, as life and the seasons move on, the smell of mignonette coming from the flowering vines, the oaks, the streams with their crayfish, the rains brought by storms, the wasps attracted in the summer by the fruit bowls laden with peaches, the murmuring of the westerly winds among the pines… In anthropology, it is well known that the attachment to a territory, to a "homeland", is essential in the definition of an ethnic group (see for instance Simon 1979). Breton-ness, for instance, "is inconceivable […] without reference and intense attachment to this part of the world known as Brittany" (*ibid.*). However, Simon adds that "it is not enough to talk about a territory. It is important to understand that there is much more than that: a sky, a light, a climate, landscapes that have been profoundly influenced by man" (*ibid.*). And he also refers to the evidence of "the attachment of the working classes to their place of origin in the many songs sung by the conscripts" of the 19th century, evidence which – it goes without saying – can be found not only among Bretons with regard to Brittany but potentially among all other human beings with regard to their region of origin. It seems to us that we are in the presence here of a "rooting of identity" in the *genius loci* which is for Descola a characteristic of the totemistic ontology (Descola 2013).

[12] See also the works on brain plasticity and mental and synaptic traces (Ansermet and Magistretti 2004).

[13] *Mémoires d'outre-tombe*, book II, chap. 9 (Kline's translation: http://www.poetryintranslation.com/PITBR/Chateaubriand/ChateaubriandMemoirsBookII.htm [accessed 27 Jun 2018]).

4 Evaluating pleasure and avoiding displeasure

Unlike the experience of pain which consists of suffering and displeasure, the experience of nature, as our interviewees described it, is usually pleasant. In both cases, however, we are dealing with affects and it is again important to be attentive to what is said in this regard during an interview. Even if they do not necessarily say so quite as directly, visits to SNS are motivated first and foremost by the pleasure that users experience there. However, like suffering, pleasure can be evaluated. It has different degrees: some pleasures are more intense than others. Thus to examine people's relations with the habitats and species present in the environment is also to examine the pleasure they procure and how they measure this pleasure. Time spent in SNS therefore appears to be a sought-after good which is attributed a greater or lesser level of importance and obtained at the cost of certain efforts or precautions undertaken precisely in order to avoid the risk of this pleasure being spoiled. An analysis of the interviews confirms first of all that the pleasure of visiting SNS is associated with a certain cost in terms of physical effort or traveling time. While our interviewees did not express this cost in economic terms, in particular because the places where we conducted our surveys were freely accessible public spaces, they were sensitive to the issue of proximity which facilitates access by reducing traveling times. Thus, when asked why they preferred one of the parks in Rennes, two high school students replied "it's just because the Thabor [another park] is a long way from where we live and we go on foot. And when it's hot, we get lazy and stay here". When the opportunity for pleasure arises, people grab it. They "take advantage" of the good weather (F, 25 years) or the presence of a park near where they live or work: "This park is so relaxing. I'm lucky to work near a park like this. It's a piece of luck and I take advantage of. To tell the truth, I find it difficult to understand why my workmates don't do the same" (F, 33 years). They enjoy the spectacle: "The trees are superb at the moment. [...] They're magnificent, full of flowers. [...] At the moment everything's growing and looking lovely. And the weather's nice" (F, 60 years). This pleasure also consists in getting rid of anxiety or "stress", in "clearing your head", "chilling out", "getting some fresh air", "relaxing". After that, you "work better", "sleep better" and you are "more at ease". These expressions were frequently encountered in our interviews. Going to SNS seems to make it possible to release a tension that is felt to be something unpleasant: the experience of pleasure and well-being thus seems to correspond to its Freudian definition as a release of tension (Freud 1962). However, beyond this sensation of feeling better or of immediate pleasure, the sought-after good can also take the form of one's health: "I walk for twenty minutes or half an hour. That's what's recommended for your health" (F, 33 years), "I just do the small circular walk. It's just to stay in shape" (F, 23 years). A few precautions, which may be more or less

significant depending on the case in question, ensure that pleasure does not turn into displeasure, that something good does not become something bad. Thus one elderly woman (71 years), who was suffering from a pain in her hip, had decided to come less frequently to the park by foot, a walk of 20 minutes from her home, during the periods when she wanted to enjoy a stroll in the park. It is a question of not overdoing things: for walking to remain a pleasure, it is important not to do too much of it at once. Other precautions relate more to avoidance. Some people, who are looking for peace and quiet, avoid places where the sound of traffic is too pervasive or where there are too many people, or the days or times when the park is crowded. In effect, there is a danger that crowds or noise might spoil the pleasure: "up there, there's an area that's absolutely full of motor scooters and that spoils what I enjoy here: the silence" (M, 57 years). Other people (or sometimes the same people) avoid spots that are too isolated and represent a source of anxiety: "You'd have to ask them why they don't come. I think that in part it might be the fear of being alone. That worries people. The fear that you might be attacked" (F, 33 years). People also attempt to avoid pollution, such as this woman who was collecting dandelions to use in a salad but who was careful not to gather them from the roadside because "there's too much pollution" (F, 60 years). Variety and contrast also contribute to the experience of pleasure. People walk "where the mood takes them" and along "the paths that appear on the way": "it's pleasant, it's not the same thing all the time" (F, 45 years). This dimension of affects and pleasure is simply the dimension of the emotions which, as our interviews revealed, are mostly pleasant and which the various precautions that are taken attempt to preserve in this state. However, that amounts to saying that, in the absence of precautions or in certain circumstances that are difficult to control, these positive emotions could change into negative emotions that are synonymous with displeasure. In this regard, we can also point to certain observations made by F. Terrasson (1997) who considered the negative emotions ("the fear of nature") to be the cause of destructive behaviors and indeed, many frequent and easily observable behaviors would seem to support this theory: people tread on a spider, kick the mushrooms or an ant hill, kill a snake. However, we believe that what is at stake here is less the negative or positive character of the emotions as such but the inability to control them and the impulses they trigger. This is because the pleasure experienced in SNS may lead to behaviors that are just as destructive as those caused by fear unless they are controlled. Although we did not observe any such examples in our surveys, S. Dalla Bernardina rightly refers to those moments when people, whether as hunters or fishers, allow their behavior to be dictated by the "principle of pleasure" when it triumphs over the "principle of reality" (Dalla Bernardina 2010, p. 71). In brief, what makes behavior destructive is not so much the emotion or impulse itself, whether positive or negative, but rather the lack of ethical control over it which, in turn, makes

it possible to justify and measure, with a certain critical distance, both pleasure and displeasure.

5 Conclusion

"Who can be in any doubt that the functioning of memory and self-awareness are phenomena that comprise a psychological dimension?" asks M. Bloch [14], who immediately adds that "when they deal with these issues, the social sciences cannot therefore act as if the cognitive sciences did not exist" (Bloch 2009). Similarly, can anyone doubt that feeling, perception and representation are phenomena which comprise a psychological dimension and, in the latter case at least, a linguistic dimension? When they turn their attention to the perception or representation of the environment, therefore, social anthropology and sociology cannot act as if psychology (and more specifically clinical neuropsychology) and linguistics did not exist. That is why, inspired by research into the experience of pain conducted within the framework of clinical anthropology, we wanted to show that the relation with the habitats and species that constitute the environments we refer to as SNS and, beyond this, the relation with the environment more generally, is just as complex as the relation with pain. The empirical material that we were able to use, taken from our own surveys or the works of other researchers in the fields of environmental sociology or anthropology, lend support to the hypothesis that the relation with the environment is "mediated" in ways similar to those observed in connection with the relation to pain by clinical practitioners. This constitutes an interesting methodological lesson that argues in favor of greater interdisciplinary collaboration in the field of environment-related research in the human and social sciences, between the field survey-oriented disciplines of social and cultural anthropology, on the one hand, and clinical anthropology on the other. It is not a question of attempting to find in what is said a confirmation of the researcher's hypotheses but instead of attending more precisely to what is said, done, experienced and felt – even when, once again, the experience seems almost impossible to express.

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[14] Autobiographical memory presupposes episodic memory, which has been clearly identified by clinical neuropsychology, which is not specific to humans and which makes the reminiscences we have discussed possible. It also permits semantic memory (Warrington 1975) which makes it possible to integrate it within a history.

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