



Gabriele Rosenthal  
**Interpretive Social Research**  
An Introduction



Universitätsverlag Göttingen



Gabriele Rosenthal  
Interpretive Social Research

This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/).



Published in 2018 by Göttingen University Press

---

Gabriele Rosenthal

# Interpretive Social Research

An Introduction



Göttingen University Press  
2018

## Bibliographische Information der Deutschen Nationalbibliothek

Die Deutsche Nationalbibliothek verzeichnet diese Publikation in der Deutschen Nationalbibliographie; detaillierte bibliographische Daten sind im Internet über <http://dnb.dnb.de> abrufbar.

First German edition of this book published by Juventa in 2005 as:  
Gabriele Rosenthal: Interpretative Sozialforschung. Eine Einführung.  
This translation is based on the 5th updated and enlarged German edition, Beltz Juventa, 2015.

This work is protected by German Intellectual Property Right Law.  
It is also available as an Open Access version through the publisher's homepage and the Göttingen University Catalogue (GUK) (<http://www.sub.uni-goettingen.de>).  
The license terms of the online version apply.

Translated by Ruth Schubert

Set and layout: Steffen Herrmann  
Cover design: Jutta Pabst  
Cover picture: shutterstock 392321632  
Arthimedes: Large and diverse group of people seen from above gathered together in the shape of a magnifying glass icon

© 2018 Göttingen University Press  
<http://univerlag.uni-goettingen.de>  
ISBN: 978-3-86395-374-4  
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.17875/gup2018-1103>

# Contents

<b>Preface</b> .....	9
<b>Introduction</b> .....	11
<b>1 Qualitative and interpretive social research</b> .....	13
1.1 What is qualitative social research? .....	13
1.2 What can interpretive social research achieve? .....	18
1.3 The historical beginnings of interpretive social research .....	25
<b>2 Basic assumptions and principles of interpretive social research</b> .....	35
2.1 The interpreted social world .....	35
2.2 The principle of communication .....	39
2.3 Empirical example: changing framings in the context of a family interview .....	41
2.4 On the principle of openness in the research process and in interviews ...	43
1. Openness for modifications to the research plan .....	43
2. Empirical example: discovering the significance of historical generations .....	45
3. Openness in the data-collecting situation .....	47
2.5 On the principle of openness in interpretive text analyses .....	49
1. The principle of reconstruction .....	50
2. The principle of an abductive approach .....	52
3. Empirical example: on reconstructing the function of the “disruptive son-in-law” .....	55
4. The principle of sequentiality .....	63
5. Theoretical generalization and development of types on the basis of an individual case .....	65
6. Empirical example: developing different types on the basis of a case reconstruction .....	68

<b>3</b>	<b>Research process and research design</b> .....	75
3.1	Theoretical sampling and theoretical saturation .....	76
3.2	The research process in a study based on interviews .....	79
	1. Making the first contact with possible interviewees and arranging an interview .....	79
	2. Memos and global analyses .....	81
	3. First and second theoretical samples .....	83
	4. Minimal and maximal contrastive comparison of cases .....	85
	5. Presentation of the results: intersubjective verifiability and anonymization of the data .....	87
<b>4</b>	<b>Ethnographical field research – Participant observation – Video analysis</b> .....	89
4.1	From the historical beginnings of field research to present-day ethnography .....	89
4.2	Participation in the field .....	93
4.3	Empirical example: Physical and emotional challenges for the participant observer .....	95
4.4	Recording observations and sequential analysis .....	97
	1. Field notes or observation memos .....	97
	2. Sequential analysis of observation memos .....	101
4.5	Analyzing video films <i>by Nicole Witte &amp; Gabriele Rosenthal</i> .....	108
<b>5</b>	<b>From open guided interview to narrative interview</b> .....	123
5.1	Introduction .....	123
5.2	On wrestling with an open method oriented towards the interviewee .....	124
5.3	Different variants of a semi-standardized method .....	128
5.4	Narrative interviews .....	133
	1. On the basic idea of the narrative interview .....	133
	2. On the advantages of long narrations .....	135
	3. On the technique of conducting narrative interviews .....	139
5.5	On the necessity of asking in-depth questions .....	148
	1. Processes of understanding in the interview situation .....	148
	2. Empirical example: what is the significance of the mother's death for different research questions? .....	150



---

<b>6</b>	<b>Biographical research and case reconstruction</b> .....	155
6.1	Biographical research and its theoretical basis .....	155
6.2	Biographical case reconstruction .....	166
	1. Experienced life history and narrated life story .....	166
	2. Sequential analysis of biographical data .....	168
	3. Text and thematic field analysis .....	175
	4. Reconstruction of the experienced life history and sequential microanalyses .....	181
	5. Comparing narrated life story and experienced life history and construction of types .....	185
6.3	Case reconstructions on a different case level .....	186
<b>7</b>	<b>Content analysis – Coding in grounded theory – Discourse analysis</b> .....	191
7.1	Introduction .....	191
7.2	How qualitative can a content analysis be? .....	192
7.3	Empirical example: on the deciphering of antisemitic statements .....	196
7.4	Coding in grounded theory .....	202
7.5	Discourse analysis <i>by Anna Ransiek, Gabriele Rosenthal &amp; Bettina Völter</i> .....	205
	<b>References</b> .....	215
	<b>Subject index</b> .....	243
	<b>Index of text boxes and tables</b> .....	247



## Preface

This book on qualitative methods is based on the revised and updated fifth German edition of “Interpretative Sozialforschung” which was published in 2015 by Beltz/Juventa. The first edition in German was published in 2005 and the text has been revised several times since then. It was developed over a period of several years in close connection with a course entitled “Introduction to qualitative social research” which I taught at the Center of Methods in Social Sciences at the Georg-August University of Göttingen. Over the years I added new chapters to both the course and the book. This course was originally connected with another, entitled “Introduction to quantitative social research”, which was taught by my colleague, Steffen Kühnel. He helped me to see that the gap between *quantitative* and *interpretive* methods (not qualitative methods in general) is easier to bridge than I thought, both in methodological reflections and in the practical business of conducting empirical research. The decisive point is mutual recognition of different research logics, different quality criteria, and, above all, the fundamentally different requirements for making *numerical* or *theoretical* generalizations.

The critical questions and comments of my students, both in the above-mentioned course and in other courses on methods at the University of Göttingen, as well as the reactions of participants at international workshops I have held, often enough in English, have constantly motivated me to revise my text in line with the

principle “to present complex ideas as clearly and simply as possible”. For many years now, I have been conducting research in countries in the Global South (see Rosenthal 2016a; Rosenthal/Bogner 2017a), and have of necessity adapted my own methodological approach; for instance, I have used different data collecting methods depending on the nature of the field, ease of access to the field, or the chances of gaining knowledge in various research contexts. I have increasingly employed a combination of different methods (Rosenthal 2016b), including methods that are not discussed in this book, such as group discussions. I would therefore like to emphasize that although different methods for collecting and analyzing data are distinguished in this book, I do not intend to suggest that it is necessary to choose just one method in any given research process.

Over the years, many colleagues have commented on different chapters. I am extremely grateful for all their critical suggestions. I would also like to thank all the students whose research I have supervised, and who have constantly confronted me with a dilemma that can be expressed in the form of two questions: To what extent are “recipe instructions” helpful? And when do such prescriptions stand in the way of scientific creativity and sensitive handling of the special features of a particular case? From participating in the work of my colleagues, especially in the joint interpretation of their empirical data, not only have I gained insights into very different social settings or lifeworlds, but I have also learned more in respect of methodology than I am probably aware of. My thanks also go to all those who have helped me with the production of this English edition, in particular by updating the anglophone literature and seeking out English translations of the classic texts cited: Friederike von Ass, Ebru Eldem, Tim Flügge, Sabrina Krohm and Simon Volpers. I am grateful to Ruth Schubert for her painstaking translation. And I thank Artur Bogner for many things, especially for years of intellectual and academic debate, with many controversial, but always constructive, discussions, and for the way he has supported and encouraged me to carry out field studies in rural Africa.

Berlin, March 2018  
Gabriele Rosenthal

## Introduction

The reader may wonder why another book on qualitative methods? The number of publications in this field has grown enormously in the past thirty years, and there are many edited volumes and monographs in English which give a good overview of the different qualitative methods and approaches established in the German-speaking countries and their epistemological bases. My aim therefore was not to write another overview of the different methods and traditions, but to present methods of data collection and analysis that are based on the principles of the interpretive paradigm (see chapter 2) and which follow a logic of generating hypotheses and grounded theories.<sup>1</sup> In this book, I discuss the practical application of these methods when carrying out empirical studies, illustrated by concrete examples from my own experience of interpretive social research and many years of teaching these methods and supervising empirical research projects. In particular, I discuss typical problems and difficulties which may arise, depending on the research topic and the persons involved (both the researchers and the individuals who are the object of the research). In addition to describing different methods that can be used for collecting and analyzing data,

---

<sup>1</sup> Glaser and Strauss (1967) distinguish between grounded theories that are related to a particular subject area, such as patient care, and formal theories based on them which are characterized by a high degree of generalization.

my aim is to provide a kind of “open guideline” for empirical research. In doing so, I find myself in the dilemma that while we need a set of rules and tools for our research, these make us less able to respond flexibly to concrete research situations, and less prepared to modify our tools and ways of proceeding where necessary. While a particular “recipe” (like gaining access to the field by placing an advert in a daily newspaper, or collecting data by using narrative interviews) may be extremely effective in one study, in a different context it may turn out to be counterproductive. I hope that I shall succeed in demonstrating that we need to develop the confidence to use certain instruments flexibly and creatively, without feeling bound by a fixed set of rules, in order to be able to react sensitively to the special features of the social settings or lifeworlds that we set out to study.

I am a sociologist and my account of the history of interpretive social research with its basic theoretical assumptions and methods is based on developments within this discipline. However, the methods for data collection and analysis in the study of social phenomena which I describe are not restricted to sociology only. The rules relating to the principle of openness in data collection (see chapter 2.4), i.e. the rules for a well-conducted open interview or participant observation, are the same for a sociologist as for an anthropologist, a psychologist, an educationalist or a social historian. Likewise, the principles of sequential and reconstructive text analysis – whether the text is an interview transcript, a video recording or an observation memo – are not tied to any particular discipline. With a case-reconstruction method, as against a hypothesis-oriented and content analysis method, the different disciplines follow different paths only after completing the case reconstruction, i.e. when it comes to formulating theories and making theoretical generalizations.

# **1 Qualitative and interpretive social research**

## **1.1 What is qualitative social research?**

Any clear and unambiguous answer to the question as to what we understand by qualitative social research would inevitably fail to do justice to the great diversity of qualitative methods. In contrast to quantitative methods, there is no uniform understanding of how to proceed in a qualitative study, or uniform methodological assumptions. The term qualitative methods can be applied to many very different basic theories of social reality and concrete methods used in the collection and analysis of data. Nevertheless, we can distinguish between those which follow the logic of quantitative methods in their rules and criteria and make generalizations in a numerical sense (i.e. from numerous cases to more numerous cases), and those clearly qualitative methods where interpretations and generalizations are not based on the frequency of occurrence of certain social phenomena but on a logic of generalizing from an individual case, whether this case is a personal biography, an organization or a particular milieu or social setting; this includes making microscopic and thick descriptions (see Geertz 1973) of the phenomena in which we are interested, likewise with the aim of generalizing from an individual case. The logic of generalization and discovery, and of testing hypotheses formed in the course of the research, on

the basis of an individual case is bound up with rules and quality criteria that are different from those applied in quantitative research, which seeks to test hypotheses that have been formulated *beforehand*, and to standardize the methodological instruments used. Qualitative social research in the strict sense follows a logic of discovery, i.e. hypotheses are generated in the course of the research process, leading to grounded theories, and any hypotheses existing at the beginning of the study must be ignored. This requires instruments that are open and not standardized: when conducting an individual interview or group discussion, or in an observation situation, the relevances and special needs of the persons being interviewed or observed must be taken into account, and these persons must be allowed as much freedom as possible to arrange the situation as they wish.

Thus, qualitative studies are of different kinds, depending on whether interpretations are based on the frequency with which social phenomena occur together or on the reconstruction of causal connections in each concrete case, whether they follow a logic of testing or a logic of discovering hypotheses, and how open the instruments for collecting and analyzing data are.

#### **Criteria for distinguishing different kinds of qualitative studies**

- Interpretation based on the frequency with which social phenomena occur together or on the reconstruction of causal connections in the concrete case
- Logic of testing or logic of discovering hypotheses and theories
- Degree of openness of the instruments for collecting and analyzing data

In the current research landscape, it is evident that a large number of qualitative studies oscillate between these poles. The authors of such studies want to benefit from certain advantages of qualitative analyses, while on the other hand following the principles of quantitative social research. Because of this multiplicity and marked differences, the proponents of a consistently interpretive or reconstructive research logic in the tradition of a 'Verstehende Sociology' (such as symbolic interactionism, the phenomenological sociology of knowledge or ethnomethodology) prefer labels other than that of *qualitative methods* to indicate their position and to distinguish their method from other methods. Thus, some speak of *communicative* (Fritz Schütze) or *reconstructive social research* (Ralf Bohnsack), others of *sociological hermeneutics* or *hermeneutic sociology of knowledge* (Hans-Georg Soeffner 1989; Ronald Hitzler & Anne Honer 1997a; Jo Reichertz & Norbert Schröer 1994), and yet others of *interpretive social research*, a term which brings together different schools of thought (Schröer 1994). This label can be applied to *grounded theory* in the tradition of Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss (1967), Ulrich Oevermann's *objective hermeneutics*, *ethnomethodological* approaches in the tradition of Harold Garfinkel (1967, 1986) and Aaron Cicourel (1964), and *ethnomethodological conversation analysis* (Harvey Sacks 1992; Jörg Bergmann 1994, 2004). The label "interpretive social research or



interpretive methods”, which I will use here, goes back to the distinction introduced by Thomas Wilson (1970) between normative and interpretive paradigms. Wilson argues that proponents of the normative paradigm conceive of human beings as organisms that react to a shared system of symbols, while in the interpretive paradigm they are understood as acting and discerning organisms. Humans do not encounter the world and react to it; rather, they continuously create social reality by interacting with other humans. Thus, meanings are created sequentially in interactive processes, and are constantly changing. This understanding of the historico-social construction of realities (see Berger/Luckmann 1966; Soeffner 1989) and the resulting methodological implications will be discussed in detail in chapter 2.<sup>2</sup>

In contrast to quantitative methods, these very different schools of thought within qualitative social research have in common that, to differing degrees, the researcher uses so-called open methods in their approach to social reality. Unlike a questionnaire, a standardized observation or a sociological experiment, with these methods the interviewees or the persons being observed are allowed to arrange the situation and the communicative processes in the way that suits them best (see Hopf 1979: 14). These methods include various forms of open interviews, field research consisting mainly of participant observation, audio or video recordings of everyday situations, group discussions or family interviews. The aim of all these methods is to be able to describe the world from the perspectives of the actors in everyday contexts, not from the perspective of the researcher,<sup>3</sup> and to study complex social actions and practices in everyday situations. By using these methods of data collection and analysis, it is possible to find out how people interpret their world and how they create this world interactively. The researcher is interested not only in the perspectives and stocks of knowledge of which the actors are consciously aware, but also in analyzing their implicit knowledge and the interactive creation of meanings of which they are unaware.

I will discuss the principle of openness in the collection and analysis of data in chapters 2.4 and 2.5. Suffice to say here that it means beginning an empirical study with a very broad research question and with no preconceived hypotheses.<sup>4</sup> All that is needed is a vague interest in a certain social phenomenon or a certain milieu. However, right from the beginning this vague interest shapes the way the researcher views the phenomena to be studied and thus the choice of methodological approach, or, as Anselm Strauss and Juliet Corbin (1990: 37f.) have put it, the broad, open question at the beginning of a study “indicates what the research is to be focused on and what the researcher wants to know about this object”. For example, if we are interested

---

<sup>2</sup> Here lies the main difference between the various methods of social research, and not in the distinction between qualitative and quantitative methods as such (see Bohnsack 1991; Soeffner 1989).

<sup>3</sup> On commonalities and differences between the everyday world and the academic world, see Alfred Schütz (1945, 1962).

<sup>4</sup> If the research team discusses hypotheses at this stage, this is only for the purpose of discovering their own everyday or academic preconceptions and developing a reflective and critical attitude to them.

in the social phenomenon of “old age”, there are different possible ways of looking at this phenomenon. If we want to know how elderly people experience the process of growing old and being old, we will choose an open interview, or perhaps a group discussion, as the most appropriate method for collecting data. This will enable the interviewees to tell us what they have experienced according to their own relevances and their own perspectives. In a group discussion<sup>5</sup> we would be able to see how elderly people interact with each other, and to observe which statements meet with general agreement and are expanded on by the other participants, and which are sidelined in the discussion. A family interview would tell us something about the structure of interactions between generations in the family.<sup>6</sup> However, if we are more interested in everyday interactive processes between elderly people, or between old and young people, for instance if we want to find out how young people behave towards older people in different situations, we will probably prefer to carry out participant observation or to make video recordings of “natural” everyday situations.<sup>7</sup> We would also probably choose participant observation or video recordings if we were interested in the social reality of an old people’s home, for example. Thus, interviews are the method of choice if we are interested in reconstructing the perspective of old people, their experience, their knowledge and their actions, and in biographical interviews we can learn how these perspectives developed and how the person has experienced the process of growing old. Participant observation or analyses of video recordings are better for reconstructing the everyday life of old people in interactive situations. And if we want to study how the phenomenon of old age is treated in the public discourse, or in discourses in the different media, or in the medical discourse, or in the discourse in certain social institutions, we can choose to make a discourse analysis of relevant texts. Discourse analysis examines how “old age” emerges as a social phenomenon, in the ways how and by whom it is talked about (see chapter 7.5).

However, these methods cannot be clearly separated from each other: they intertwine and overlap. In field research involving participant observation, short interviews can be conducted in order to find out more about the perspectives and self-perception of the actors. Interviews are frequently conducted in the everyday context of the interviewees, and it is advisable for the interviewer to make field notes recording how the first contact came about, what kind of relationships have developed, and any special features of their lifeworld. When analyzing interviews, we reconstruct the history of the interviewees’ interactions, and also analyze the processes of their interaction with the interviewers, and, where appropriate, with other persons participating in the interview, such as spouses, friends or children. A consistently sociological analysis of interviews also requires that the subjective perspectives and

<sup>5</sup> In Germany, the method of the group discussion has been developed mainly by Ralf Bohnsack. He has published useful recommendations both for collecting and for analyzing data (Bohnsack 2003, 2004). On the history of this method, see Bohnsack 1997.

<sup>6</sup> On analyzing conversations in families, see the study by Angela Keppler (1994).

<sup>7</sup> On the method of sequential video analysis, see chapter 4.5 and Witte/Rosenthal (2007). On the analysis of so-called ‘natural’ data, see the articles in Schröder (1994).

stocks of knowledge of the interviewees should be considered as embedded in the discourses in which they were created or in which they have been modified.

In this book I will focus mainly on participant observation (chapter 4), open interviews (chapter 5) and biographical case reconstructions (chapter 6.2). I will discuss field research based on participant observation and open forms of interview, especially narrative interviews (chapter 5.4). Out of all the different methods of analysis, I will concentrate on sequential and reconstructive methods (chapters 2.5 and 6.2) with which all kinds of data can be analyzed, whether observation memos, audio or video recordings of everyday situations, transcripts of interviews, or texts reflecting different discourses.

In order to highlight the advantages of interpretive methods in contrast to other qualitative methods, and to give an idea of the wide range of different methods used by scholars, I will also discuss methods which are not sequential and reconstructive (chapters 7.1 to 7.4). By this, I mean mainly the different methods used in qualitative content analysis, which, as I see it, include the method of coding in grounded theory. In contrast to sequential and reconstructive methods, these methods structure the text material with the aid of general categories. This means that with the aid of categories, the text is divided up and reorganized according to criteria set up by the researchers. In a reconstructive and sequential method, on the other hand, the interpretation of the text is based essentially on its own temporal structure or sequential gestalt. The analysis examines the way the text is structured, and every sequence is considered in its embedment in the overall gestalt of the text. This makes it possible to uncover not only the *manifest* content of the text, as in most content analysis approaches, but also its *latent* content, the meaning that is hidden "between the lines". Only with interpretive methods is it possible to infer deeper, and at first hidden, layers of meaning from the surface of the text in a manner that is methodologically controlled and intersubjectively testable (see Hitzler / Honer 1997b: 23).

## 1.2 What can interpretive social research achieve?

### Investigating unknown and new phenomena

When the question arises what qualitative social research, or, in a narrower sense, interpretive social research, can achieve, as against using quantitative methods, there is usually agreement that it can investigate phenomena that were hitherto unknown, or lifeworlds that have been very little studied. If we know nothing about the social actuality we want to study, or if there are no existing theoretical concepts in respect of this particular social phenomenon, then it is difficult to plan a quantitative research design. A quantitative method requires existing theoretical concepts, and hypotheses deduced from them, in order to be able to develop standardized instruments, such as an appropriate questionnaire or observation system. We cannot prepare an appropriate list of questions if we are not familiar with the lifeworld to be studied, and especially its linguistic particularities. If we, nevertheless, decide to carry out a quantitative study, this will require a qualitative preliminary or pilot study. For instance, open interviews can be of help in deciding how to word a questionnaire. For this reason, qualitative methods are used as a preliminary to quantitative studies. However, the proponents of qualitative, and especially interpretive, social research, do not believe its role should be reduced to this. And with some research objects, it makes more sense to work the other way round, i.e. to start with a quantitative survey and follow this up with a qualitative study. Quantitative social research enables us to draw attention to certain phenomena that occur frequently, increasing trends, or rare phenomena, which, however, it cannot say anything more about. Using interpretive methods, we can then examine these phenomena and reconstruct causal connections and latent meanings in the concrete individual case.

### Understanding subjective meaning and reconstructing latent meaning

From what I have said it should be clear that interpretive social research seeks to understand subjective meaning and reconstruct latent meaning, and the implicit knowledge of the actors in their social world. The term subjective meaning does not refer to a completely private mental processes; rather, the actors ascribe meanings to their actions, and to their social reality, that are based on the collective stocks of knowledge acquired in the course of their socialization. In addition to reconstructing these conscious stocks of knowledge which are formed and constantly modified in the course of socialization, and the consciously intended meaning of an action (or a speech act), interpreting a text means reconstructing its overall social meaning. The text may be a sequence from an interview, a newspaper article, a video recording of an everyday situation, or an observation memo. The word *text* is used in a very broad sense to refer to all expressive configurations produced during a social interaction which have been recorded in some way or other. The text to be interpreted is an independent reality that exists apart from the intentions of those who produced it. Paul

Ricœur (1971: 534), whose work significantly influenced the methodology known as objective hermeneutics, describes the independent reality of the text as follows:

“But the text’s career escapes the finite horizon lived by its author. What the text says now matters more than what the author meant to say, and every exegesis unfolds its procedures within the circumference of a meaning that has broken its moorings to the psychology of its author.”

According to Ricœur (1971: 546), the “‘objectivity’ of the text”, which is what allows us to explain it, results firstly from “fixation of the meaning”, and then from making a distinction between the intended and the latent meaning, uncovering the unintended, or, as he puts it, “non-ostensive references”, and the “universal range of its addressees”.

When we speak of the latent or objective meaning of a text (see Oevermann et al. 1979), we are not referring necessarily to things of which the speaker or writer is not conscious due to their mental defense mechanisms. Rather, due to our implicit knowledge or due to knowledge that is repressed in social reality, due to the ideologies and myths (in the sense of a social unconscious) circulated in different historical phases and social contexts, or due to the pressure to act in the situation of acting and speaking, we always produce more meaning than we are aware of at the moment of acting or speaking (see Oevermann et al. 1979: 384ff.). As Michael Polanyi (1967) has shown in his analysis of implicit knowledge, we always know more than we can put into words:

“Take an example. We know a person’s face, and can recognize it among a thousand, indeed among a million. Yet we usually cannot tell how we recognize a face we know. So most of this knowledge cannot be put into words.” (Polanyi 1967: 4)

However, although interpretive social research, with its own methods of text production and interpretation, is particularly suitable for reconstructing latent meanings, it is subject to certain limitations. The difference between consciously intended and objective meaning also applies to the actions and knowledge of the researcher. While convergence between the two levels is theoretically possible – not at the time of acting but at the time of reflecting on the past action – researchers are subject to the same conditions that create this difference. Thus, implicit knowledge plays a role in the actions of the researchers, and can never be fully revealed or reflected on. They, too, habitually apply their knowledge without being aware that they are doing so, and reflecting on it requires making a considerable effort; often, they become aware of what they are doing only when it causes an irritation in the interaction. For example, it was during an interview with a blind woman that I first realized the extent to which I rely on eye contact and not acoustic signals to indicate that I am listening. Or, when I began to conduct family interviews in the context of a research project

on three-generation families (see Rosenthal 2010a), I was aware of using techniques I had learned during my training and practice in parental counseling, and which I found easy to apply, but I found it difficult at first to explain to my colleagues in the project exactly how I proceeded in these interviews. Even before transcriptions of the tape recordings of the interviews were available, which clearly revealed these techniques, my colleagues who had been present at the interviews told me they had observed how I repeatedly invited different family members to say what they thought about what someone else had said. I had learned such techniques long ago, consciously and painstakingly, but in the meantime they had become unconscious routine. In interpretive social research, we can justifiably claim that, with our video and audio recordings and our very detailed systems of notation, we can analyze much of our routine behavior as researchers, and the effects of this behavior on our interactions with interviewees or the people we are observing. Nevertheless, any attempt to completely reveal all our implicit and habitual knowledge would not only be very difficult, but would also prevent us from bringing empirical projects to a conclusion. In the interpretation of texts, as in everyday life, certain meanings are not obvious to us because of our socialization in a certain social and historical context, the collective discourses and the social unconscious by which we are influenced. Thus, in the present of the historical situation, meanings are hidden from us which can be revealed only at a later time on the basis of our growing stock of social knowledge (see Ritsert 1972: 41f.). For example, just as citizens of the former two German states can ascribe new meanings to things they experienced before the social events of 1989 on the basis of knowledge they have acquired since those events, interpretive analyses in the social sciences can also reinterpret situations, or discover new readings of them.

However, our scholarly interpretations – but not our actions during an interview or participant observation – differ from everyday interpretations in that they are relatively free of pressures to act. As interpreters of a text, we do not have to react to what someone says, and we do not have to continue speaking or writing immediately after formulating a thought. We can pause, and spend as long as we like thinking about the possible meanings of the text, or spend time discussing it with colleagues.

### **Describing social actions and social milieus**

Unlike quantitative methods, which are aimed at producing results which are ‘representative’ in a *numerical* sense of term, qualitative studies focus on making a detailed examination of small areas of the everyday world. Especially the study of foreign or “foreignized” lifeworlds begins with microscopically detailed descriptions, comparable to the methods used in anthropology to describe foreign cultures, or in analyses of lifeworlds or milieus with a socio-ethnographical and phenomenological orientation. In social anthropology (see Stefan Hirschauer and Klaus Amann 1997; Hirschauer 1994) or lifeworld anthropology, as practiced in Germany for instance by Ronald Hitzler, Anne Honer or Hubert Knoblauch, the researcher treats a lifeworld with which he or she may be more or less familiar as if it were foreign and strange, “as

if these were ‘exotic’ customs, habits and worldviews” (Hitzler/Honer 1997b: 13), which he or she first needs to describe in detail. As Anne Honer (1994: 87) has put it, a sociological study does “*not* consist mainly of *explaining* phenomena, but of describing natural ‘settings’, and reflecting on one’s own existing everyday understanding, in order to be able to *understand* everyday ‘explanations’ and everyday actions.”<sup>8</sup> This does not mean that such descriptions dispense with theories altogether (see Hopf 1979: 17), or that the research is not aimed at generating theories on the basis of the detailed description. Clifford Geertz (1973: 20) says of the anthropologist that “he observes, he records, he analyzes”, and declares that an ethnographic description is always at the same time an interpretation. This is true of all descriptions in the social or cultural sciences. Geertz (1973: 21) also argues that the anthropologist aims at making broader interpretations, for instance in the context of a whole society, but “that the anthropologist characteristically approaches such broader interpretations and more abstract analyses from the direction of exceedingly extended acquaintances with extremely small matters”. In this sense, to borrow Geertz’s terms and words, the ‘thick’ description of an individual case serves “to draw large conclusions from small, but very densely textured facts; to support broad assertions about the role of culture in the construction of collective life by engaging them exactly with complex specifics” (ibid.: 28).

### **Reconstructing the complexity of patterns of action on the basis of an individual case**

In an interpretive method, by focusing on a small part of the everyday world or an individual case, it is possible to reveal causal connections following the detailed description of a concrete case. In contrast to quantitative methods, in which many cases are examined in order to infer numerical connections between variables, or to show statistical evidence of connections, on the basis of how frequently single variables occur together, interpretive methods aim at showing the exact nature of the causal connection between certain phenomena. “Every scene involves the interaction of all relevant variables and conditions in a central place ... and we need to reconstruct it successively in all its complexity” (Overmann et al. 1975: 14). This does not mean following a model of linear causal connections or simple cause and effect relations borrowed from classical physics, but trying to reconstruct the complex interdependencies between the different components. Sequential analysis (see chapter 2.5.4) attempts to reconstruct the processes which give rise to social or collective phenomena, while quantitative studies can only show the results of such processes (Köckeis-Stangl 1980: 353).

If I observe that right-wing adolescents have a high potential for violence, or if this is suggested by the results of a quantitative study, an interpretive study can then address the following questions:

---

<sup>8</sup> All translations of German citations are by the translator of this book, Ruth Schubert.

- Is there a causal connection between violence and right-wing orientation in this concrete case?
- What is the nature of this causal connection?
- Can different kinds of causal connection be reconstructed in different cases?

An empirical reconstruction of individual cases may then show that while there is a causal connection between right-wing orientation and potential for violence in one case, this may not be so in another case. We may also be able to identify very different courses of development and patterns of interrelationship. Thus, there may be a connection between two or more phenomena which occur together in some cases but not in others, and where there is a connection it can be a different kind of connection in different cases.

I can illustrate this with the results of a biographical case reconstruction carried out by Michaela Köttig (2004). It is the case of a girl from the radical right-wing scene, who glorifies death in battle, and identifies herself with violent acts against people who have been declared as enemies by her group. The case reconstruction shows that there is a connection here with the violence she experienced at home as a child and her resulting closeness to her grandfather. Her grandfather glorified death in the Second World War and passed this attitude on to his granddaughter. We can say that her grandfather's worldview and the fact that he passed his ideas on to her are biographically relevant for this girl, because it opened up the way for her to use the right-wing scene to act out the violence she had suffered herself. In general terms, the reconstruction of this case shows that turning to the radical right-wing scene and accepting the violence practiced by its members are conditioned by biographical experiences, such as experiences of violence, the presence of a prominent right-wing milieu among the local adolescents, and closeness to the grandfather. In this case, there were thus several interrelated components which made the girl feel attracted to the right-wing group and decide to become a member of it. It is not possible to conclude from this analysis, for instance, that "experiencing violence in childhood leads to a right-wing orientation". But it is possible to make a generalizing assumption, based on the analysis of this individual case, that there is a type of constellation in the family history and the personal biography that creates favorable conditions for being attracted to a right-wing group of adolescents and deciding to become a member of it, a constellation which involves the following interrelated components: "violent behavior of parents towards their children", "a grandfather who supports an essential part of the radical right-wing worldview and serves as a replacement parental identification figure", and "a dominant radical right-wing milieu among the local adolescents". In biographical research (see chapter 6), the important thing is to reconstruct the life history which has led to this orientation. Bettina Dausien (1999: 228) aptly comments that biographical research is a "historico-reconstructive approach" rather like tales of the type "how it came about that".



### Testing hypotheses and theories on the basis of an individual case

As I will discuss later, and illustrate with an example (chapters 2.5.2 and 2.5.3), we should not approach the text with preconceived hypotheses. Instead, the text itself can be used to formulate hypotheses during the sequential analysis, and their plausibility can be tested in the light of how the text continues. The hypothesis that this particular biographical constellation led to a right-wing orientation, may be tested on the basis of the individual case, and not according to the numerical logic of looking to see whether a similar effect can be observed in another case with the same components. It is quite possible that in a different case with the same components these may be interrelated in a different way. A component such as a grandfather who glorifies National Socialism can be of functional significance in one case, while in another case it is irrelevant to the case structure. We owe to the proponents of gestalt theory the insight that two phenomena may have a different “gestalt”, even if many of their parts are the same. A gestalt is a unified whole which is not the “and-sum” of a number of independent elements, but which results from the *configuration* of these parts in their relation to each other (see Wertheimer 1938a, 1928). If we assume that biographies, like other social units (such as a family, a community or an institution), have a gestalt-like quality (see Rosenthal 1995), this means that we cannot determine on the basis of their parts which social cases have the same structure, or belong to the same type, but only on the basis of the configuration of these parts and their functional significance for the whole. In this structuralist approach, which borrows from gestalt theory, developing types means reconstructing the gestalt of the social case<sup>9</sup> and the rules according to which it has been generated, and not considering the sum of its characteristic features as in a descriptive approach.

### Generating empirically grounded hypotheses and theories

The idea that hypotheses and theories should be generated from the empirical material was introduced into the discussion mainly by Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss with their conception of “grounded theory”, meaning empirically grounded theory. These two sociologists, from the tradition of the Chicago School and symbolic interactionism, argue that any theory must be developed on the basis of empirical insights and findings. Glaser and Strauss (1967: 79) distinguish between substantive and formal theories. While substantive theories are related to the study of concrete phenomena in their natural context, formal theories are developed from a comparison of different substantive theories. Glaser and Strauss place their main focus not on the testing of theories, but on generating theory, which for them represents scientific progress. “This is because an outdated or unsuitable theory can only be overcome by an alternative theory developed or generated on the basis of the same object, and not by falsification” (Bohnsack 2003: 28). However, this does not mean that no im-

---

<sup>9</sup> Essentially the same argument has been formulated by Norbert Elias and John Scotson (1965: 8ff.).

**What can interpretive social research do?**

- Investigate unknown and new phenomena
- Understand subjective meaning
- Reconstruct latent meaning
- Reconstruct the complexity of action patterns on the basis of an individual case
- Describe social actions and social milieus
- Generate empirically grounded hypotheses and theories

**What can interpretive and qualitative social research not do?**

- Make statements about the distribution and numerical representativeness of its results
- Make numerical generalizations, i.e. generalizations based on frequencies

portance is attached to the testing of hypotheses and theories. The important point is that hypotheses and theories are generated and tested simultaneously (Hermanns 1992: 114). Following the abductive method of Charles S. Peirce (see chapter 2.5.2), hypotheses are formulated on the basis of the empirical material, tested, verified, rejected or expanded.

What can interpretive social research not do that can be done using quantitative methods? It cannot make:

- statements about the distribution and numerical representativeness of its results
- numerical generalizations, i.e. generalizations based on frequencies

Qualitative studies – whether in the narrow or the broad sense – are not statistically representative. This means that they cannot make statements about how frequently a certain phenomenon, for instance “readiness to use violence”, occurs in a certain population, such as all right-wing adolescents living in Germany. And qualitative studies cannot infer from the frequency of their occurrence which phenomena are socially relevant. However, it is important to realize that the degree of influence of a phenomenon on social reality does not depend on the frequency with which it occurs. Phenomena which occur only rarely can have deep effects on social and “historical” reality and exercise power over it. But while quantitative social research can make statements about the distribution of certain phenomena, interpretive research seeks to reconstruct their constitution and influence in concrete contexts. Harry Hermanns (1992: 116) speaks here of theoretical representativeness, since “according to their own goal, qualitative studies (are) representative of the spectrum of empirically grounded theoretical concepts with which the empirical data can be adequately expressed”.

### 1.3 The historical beginnings of interpretive social research

*Preliminary remark: Before discussing in detail the methodological assumptions and principles of contemporary interpretive social research, I will give a brief historical outline of those traditions which had most influence on this kind of research and its methods. I will also briefly present some of the founders of classical sociological theories to which I will often make reference in this book.*

The rise of interpretive social research began in Germany in the 1970s, initiated mainly by the “Bielefeld Sociologists’ Working Group” led by Joachim Matthes at the University of Bielefeld. Among the scholars in this group who are still active today are Fritz Schütze, who gained an international reputation for his development of the narrative interview and his biographical analyses, and Ralf Bohnsack, who contributed significantly to the development of the method of group discussion and the documentary method of interpretation after Karl Mannheim. A return to the tradition of an interpretive sociology was promoted by the work of Thomas Luckmann in phenomenology and the sociology of knowledge; after studying under Alfred Schütz (among others) and a period spent teaching in the US, he held a chair in Germany as from 1965. He taught some of the scholars who are working today in the fields of lifeworld anthropology and ethnomethodological conversation analysis. Around the same time, in the mid-1970s, Ulrich Oevermann introduced the method of objective hermeneutics into the discussion, in the context of a research project entitled “Home and School”.<sup>10</sup>

These concepts were linked, on the one hand, to the conception of an “interpretive sociology” which grew up in Germany at the beginning of the 20th century, and, on the other hand, to the empirical qualitative research that was being developed at the same time in the context of the “Chicago School” in the US. By contrast, the debate on methodology that was carried on in Germany in the 1950s and 1960s was theoretically important, but had little direct influence on the *methods* and practice of interpretive social research today. After the end of the “Third Reich”, during which many proponents of an interpretive social science had been persecuted as Jews and forced to flee from continental Europe,<sup>11</sup> research in sociology and psychology in Germany was mainly based on quantitative methods borrowed from the natural sciences. But there were exceptions, such as the work by Heinrich Popitz, Hans Paul Bahrdt and others in the field of industrial sociology on the “Social image of the worker” (see Popitz et al. 1957), and especially the empirical studies carried out at the

<sup>10</sup> See Oevermann et al. (1975, 1979, 1987); on the history of the development of objective hermeneutics, see Reichertz (1986).

<sup>11</sup> These included Alfred Schütz, Aron Gurwitsch, Karl Mannheim, Norbert Elias, most of the proponents of gestalt theory, such as Kurt Lewin, Max Wertheimer, Wolfgang Köhler and Kurt Koffka, and most of the members of the “Frankfurt School”, including Theodor W. Adorno, Max Horkheimer and Erich Fromm.

Frankfurt Institute of Social Research<sup>12</sup>, which had re-opened in Frankfurt in 1951, on attitudes to National Socialism. There were also more general studies, as expressed by Friedrich Pollock in the 1955 research report on “Opinions, attitudes and behavior of people in the Federal Republic of Germany in respect of important social and political issues” (Pollock 1955: 3). In the 1960s the “positivism dispute”<sup>13</sup> broke out in the context of the Frankfurt School under the influence of Theodor W. Adorno (1903–1969), who had returned from exile. However, these discussions did not lead to interpretive methods being developed, let alone established, in Germany. Adorno and other members of the Frankfurt School were interested in the methodological discussion on the incompatibility of a critical theory of society with the “positivist” research practice of their adversaries; but apart from the method of group discussions (see Pollock 1955; Mangold 1960),<sup>14</sup> they did not design or implement any practical research methods corresponding to their methodological postulates (see Hoffmann-Riem 1980: 341).

Much more important for the subsequent development of qualitative research methods in sociology were two older traditions: the Chicago School in the US, and interpretive sociology in Germany and Austria, both of which emerged around the same time at the beginning of the 20th century. These two traditions had a mutual influence on each other because many American social scientists came to study in Germany for long periods in the early part of the 20th century, and many of German-speaking scholars emigrated to the US from Nazi Germany and Austria in the 1930s. The first department of sociology was founded in 1892, in Chicago, by Albion Small, who had been taught by Georg Simmel in Germany, and who was particularly interested in community studies. The Chicago School was not restricted to the department of sociology, but was characterized by interdisciplinary cooperation between philosophy, sociology and psychology, and especially by an interest in the practical application of its results in the fields of social work and town planning. While social research in Germany was mainly based on nomological and quantitative methods during this historical phase, and developed in a similar way in France through the work of Émile Durkheim (1858–1917) and his students, qualitative

<sup>12</sup> The Institute was founded in Frankfurt in 1923 and almost all its members were forced to flee from Nazi Germany and move to the US. It was re-opened in 1951 by Max Horkheimer, Friedrich Pollock and Theodor W. Adorno. The name “Frankfurt School” is used to refer to this group of social scientists.

<sup>13</sup> This term was used by Theodor W. Adorno to refer to the controversy triggered by the presentations of Karl R. Popper and Adorno himself at the meeting of the German Sociological Association held in Tübingen in 1961. Jürgen Habermas and Hans Albert were mainly responsible for the subsequent continuation of the controversy. Roughly speaking, in this controversy the supporters of a nomological and supposedly impartial study of empirical “facts” were opposed to the advocates of a “critical” theory of society grounded in a philosophy of history which questioned the existing social order. While the former favored micro-theoretical models of the activity of individuals, the Frankfurt School was more interested in macro-theoretical concepts of society and societal evolution.

<sup>14</sup> On the development of the concept of group discussion in the 1950s, see Ralf Bohnsack (2003: 105ff.).

empirical research became established at the University of Chicago. It was used to analyze social problems in the city of Chicago, and the results were intended to be of use in solving these problems. This practical orientation, and the resulting preference for qualitative case studies, must be seen in the light of the fact that in the US, because of the speed of industrialization and the rapid growth of American towns, sociology, and the social sciences in general, were concerned with practical social issues from the beginning. The pragmatic and utilitarian attitudes predominant in everyday life in the US also corresponded to the philosophical pragmatism that was so important for the social sciences in America (see Mikl-Horke 1997: 174).

In contrast to the empiricism of the Chicago School, German sociology, which was dominated at that time by Max Weber and Georg Simmel, was more interested in theoretical and macro-sociological issues. Nevertheless, the works of Weber and Simmel provide a useful methodological basis for interpretive methods. Georg Simmel (1858–1918), who can be described as an outsider in the academic community of that time,<sup>15</sup> developed a conception of society as an entity generated by the “interaction” of individuals. In his 1908 essay entitled “The problem of sociology”, he formulates this as follows:

“I start then from the broadest conception of society, the conception which so far as possible disregards the conflicts about definitions; that is, I think of society as existing wherever several individuals are in reciprocal relationship. This reciprocity arises always from specific impulses, or by virtue of specific purposes. ... Any collection of human beings what so ever becomes ‚society‘, not by virtue of the fact that in each of the number there is a life-content which actuates the individual as such, but only when the vitality of these contents attains the form of reciprocal influencing. Only when an influence is exerted, whether immediately or through a third party, from one upon another, has a society come into existence in place of a mere spatial juxtaposition, or temporal contemporaneousness or succession of individuals.” (Simmel 2008: 472, 474)

In this conception, society is understood, not as a static and preformed entity, but as a product that is constantly recreated through interactive processes. Simmel thus provides an important theoretical basis for micro-sociological and sequentially-reconstructive methods of interpretive social research (see Bude 1988; Hettlage 1991).

---

<sup>15</sup> Georg Simmel’s parents converted from Judaism to Christianity. The antisemitism predominant in Germany at that time, which defined people as Jews because of their descent, regardless of how they defined themselves, was an obstacle to Simmel’s career; his unsuccessful application for a chair of philosophy in Heidelberg in 1908 must be seen in this context (see Nedelmann 2002: 129).

Max Weber's (1864–1920) idea of an “interpretive sociology” (1913, 2013a)<sup>16</sup> and the critical discussion of Weber's analyses by the Viennese sociologist Alfred Schütz (1899–1959)<sup>17</sup> are still important today for the methodology of an interpretive approach. For Weber, the task of the researcher is first to understand the actor's subjective meaning, his intention, and then to explain this action and its consequences in its interdependence with the actions of other people. His definition of sociology has become famous:

“Sociology ... is a science concerning itself with the interpretative understanding of social action and thereby with a causal explanation of its course and consequences. We shall speak of ‘action’ insofar as the acting individual attaches a subjective meaning to his behavior – be it overt or covert, omission or acquiescence. Action is ‘social’ insofar as its subjective meaning takes account of the behavior of others and is thereby oriented in its course.” (2013b: 4)

For researchers, this program for an interpretive sociology and interpretive social science in general<sup>18</sup> means that we need instruments for the collection and analysis of data which will allow us to examine both the perceptions and definition processes of everyday actors, and the constitution of social reality – in the sense proposed by Georg Simmel and Alfred Schütz – in the interactive processes of social action.

In his monograph entitled “The Phenomenology of the Social World” ([1932] 1967), Schütz sets out to solve the problem, left unsolved by Weber, of the constitution of social meaning and intersubjectivity (i.e. the convergence of self-understanding and understanding others). His criticism of Weber was that “he breaks off his analysis of the social world when he arrives at what he assumes to be the basic and irreducible elements of social phenomena” (Schütz 1967: 7). In contrast to Weber,

<sup>16</sup> Weber first formulated the conception of an interpretive sociology in his 1913 essay entitled “On some categories of an Interpretative Sociology”. Better known is the version published later in the first chapter (“Basic Sociological Terms”) of his book “Economy and Society”, which was published posthumously ([1921] 2013a).

<sup>17</sup> Alfred Schütz worked for a bank in Vienna, after completing his studies in law and political science and qualifying as a finance lawyer. Following the annexation of Austria to the “Third Reich”, Schütz, who was of Jewish descent and had started preparing his emigration in 1937, did not return to Vienna after a business trip to Paris. He sent for his wife and son to join him, and the family emigrated to New York in 1939. At first he worked in a bank, but from 1943 onwards he regularly accepted temporary teaching appointments at the New School for Social Research, and became professor of sociology and social psychology there in 1952.

<sup>18</sup> Weber's conception of sociology, and of the relationship between quantitative and qualitative social research, is based on his concept of the “sciences of concrete reality”, which he saw as an alternative to the concept of nomological science (Gesetzeswissenschaften). By defining sociology as a science of concrete reality (Wirklichkeitswissenschaft), Weber expresses the idea that to study the reality of social life we have to study this reality in its “historical”, individual and concrete particularity, although for practical reasons this can only ever be done in a selective form and from selective points of view (see Weber 1973: 170–176; Rossi 1987: 20–62).

Schütz shows the essential differences between action as an on-going process and action as a completed process, between the meaning of my own action and the meaning of other people's actions, between the meaning of my own experiences and the meaning of the experiences of others, between my self-understanding and my understanding of other people, the manner in which meaning is constituted for the actor, for the actor's partner in the interaction and for outside observers. What the observer perceives has a meaning but – according to Schütz – this meaning is not necessarily identical with the meaning intended by the actors. The meanings perceived by observers “are mere ‘indications’ (*Anzeichen*) of the intended meaning of the actor or the producer of the object in question” (ibid.: 30). Understanding others is made possible by comparing the particularities of the present situation with abstract types formed by past experiences and adopted in the process of socialization.

Another important theoretical contribution to analyzing the interactive constitution of social reality can be found in the studies of the social genesis of the self by George Herbert Mead (1863–1931), a member of the Chicago School.<sup>19</sup> Mead is one of those who studied in Europe and Germany. He spent three years in Europe, from 1888–1891, with Wilhelm Wundt (Leipzig) as one of his teachers. Under the supervision of Wilhelm Dilthey (Berlin), he began to write a “critique of the empiricist concept of space”, which was intended to become a doctoral thesis. However, he abandoned this project and instead took up a post as lecturer in psychology under John Dewey at the University of Michigan. Three years later he followed Dewey to the University of Chicago. Important for the methodological discussion is that for Mead, in contrast to Max Weber, meaning is not a category that exists within the mind of an individual and is not tied to the intentions of the actor, but is created interactively through the way other people react to the activity of the subject: “The meaning of a gesture by one organism ... is found in the response of another organism to what would be the completion of the act of the first organism which that gesture initiates and indicates” (1934: 146). According to Mead, meaning is created in the first place socially, i.e. from or in interactions between several persons, and becomes “a pattern of expectations or meaning that shapes individual actions only secondarily” (Bohnsack 2003: 87). Thus, in his analyses Mead concludes that society precedes the identity of the individual. For the organism to develop a self, it must be socialized into a symbolic world that has always been shared with others. It takes part in this world through the process of interaction, in the constantly “emerging” social reality which, for Mead, continuously produces things that are new and unexpected.

In the same historical phase, another theory of society was developed by Émile Durkheim (1858–1917) in France, in the tradition of Auguste Comte (1798–1857). In this conception, society exists outside individuals, and forces them to do what it wants through its norms. A central role is played here by the collective consciousness, which to the individual appears to be an external force that shapes his actions.

---

<sup>19</sup> On the work of G. H. Mead, see in particular Hans Joas (1985).

Durkheim speaks in this connection of social facts which have a reality *sui generis* (of their own kind). Mead and other US-American social scientists of that time emphasized the active production of social reality and of social change (due to the emergent character of social actions) by the members of society, while for Auguste Comte, who proposed the use of the term “sociology”, the historical context in France and consternation over the “chaos” produced by the French Revolution, led to the idea that sociology could contribute to the maintenance of the existing social order. Sociology was understood by Comte, and later to some extent by Durkheim, as a “religion of reason”, which could replace both traditional religion and the ideology of the French Revolution.<sup>20</sup> The aim of sociology should be to study the sociological laws governing the social order and to find ways of maintaining it.

Durkheim’s concept of society and his concept of social facts can be found in his book “The rules of sociological method”, which was published in 1895 and has been reprinted many times since then in various languages. Together with his famous study of the laws governing suicide, this book had a decisive influence on quantitative social research. Let us consider what Durkheim says about sociological facts:

“A social fact is every way of acting, fixed or not, capable of exercising on the individual an external constraint; or again, every way of acting which is general throughout a given society, while at the same time existing in its own right independent of its individual manifestations.” (1964: 13)

From this he concludes that in sociology and empirical social research, social facts should be treated as things, for he goes on: “We must, therefore, consider social phenomena in themselves as distinct from the consciously formed representations of them in the mind; we must study them objectively as external things” (ibid.: 28). In his conception of society, Durkheim fails to take into account the active part played by the members of society, the meanings they intend their social actions to have (see Hauck 1991: 469). We cannot blindly assume that social norms are unambiguous. Rather, in each context they must be interpreted, applied through action, and agreed on in interactions with others. And contexts can always be interpreted differently (see chapter 2.2), so that it is usually not or not entirely clear *which* norms are applicable in a concrete situation.

By contrast, for Mead, and in the tradition of pragmatism or symbolic interactionism, society is not understood as an external thing separate from the individual. Here, as for Simmel, individual and society are not two separate units. The basic idea in the work of Mead and other interactionists is that “society” and “individual” are joined in a relationship of *mutual constitution*: “Society is to be understood in terms

---

<sup>20</sup> The teaching of religion was banned in French schools in 1905 and the government entrusted Émile Durkheim with forming a committee to develop a conception for teaching children ethics without religion. Durkheim was convinced that sociology could do this and succeeded in getting it introduced as a regular subject in schools.



of the individuals making it up, and individuals are to be understood in terms of the societies of which they are members” (Meltzer et al. 1975: 2).

About two academic generations after Mead, Anselm Strauss (1916–1996) and Erving Goffman (1922–1982) worked on Mead’s theory of identity and made it more open to empirical study.<sup>21</sup> In the 1960s, together with Barney Glaser, Strauss founded the concept of *grounded theory* in the tradition of the Chicago School (Glaser / Strauss 1967), which became internationally accepted and has had a great influence on qualitative social research. Later, together with Juliet Corbin (Strauss / Corbin 1990), he expanded this theory to include a method of coding which is strongly schematized and resembles the methods of content analysis. By contrast, Erving Goffman’s firmly empirical work, which consisted mainly of field studies, contains much less in the way of explicit methodological reflections or “recipe knowledge”.<sup>22</sup>

Peter L. Berger (born in 1929 in Vienna, settled in the United States in 1946) and Thomas Luckmann (born in 1927 in Slovenia, moved in 1965 to Germany, where he died in 2016) linked Mead’s conception of the social world internalized by the individual in the course of his socialization with a new reading of Émile Durkheim’s “social facts”, and with Alfred Schütz’s phenomenological sociology of knowledge. In their seminal book *“The Social Construction of Reality”* (1966), they argue that the rule that “sociological facts should be treated like things” does not contradict the rule that we need to recognize the meaning of social actions:

“Society does indeed possess objective facticity. And society is indeed built up by activity that expresses subjective meaning. ... It is precisely the dual character of society in terms of objective facticity *and* subjective meaning that makes its ‘reality *sui generis*’. ... The central question for sociological theory can then be put as follows: How is it possible that subjective meanings *become* objective facticities?” (Berger / Luckmann 1966: 30)

Let us return to the beginnings of interpretive social research in Chicago, and the first serious attempts to empirically apply the principle of reconstructing subjective perspectives and the interactive constitution of social reality, i.e. its active creation in day-to-day interactions, on the basis of an individual case. The empirical studies carried out here between 1920 and 1950 are still influential today. This form of social research was aimed at encouraging social reforms in view of the massive social problems in the city of Chicago, which was expanding at a rapid rate as different groups of immigrants arrived (Fischer-Rosenthal 1991: 115). In addition, this research was based on the philosophical theory of pragmatism, which was founded by the mathematician and philosopher Charles Sanders Peirce (1839–1914) and Peirce’s friend,

---

<sup>21</sup> In his monograph “Mirrors and Masks” (1959), Strauss discusses the influence of social organizations on the self and its embedment in historical contexts. Goffman, in his study entitled “Stigma” (1963), developed Mead’s theory of identity by distinguishing between personal and social identity.

<sup>22</sup> For a systematic overview of his methods, see Willems (1996, 2004).

the psychologist William James (1842–1910), and further developed by John Dewey (1859–1952) and George Herbert Mead<sup>23</sup>, both of whom taught in the Department of Philosophy at Chicago. Pragmatism argues that the search for the truth should be based on empirical research and that theorizing should always be related to social practice, from which it gains its significance. The truth of a statement is measured by how far its consequences can be verified in everyday practice:

*“True ideas are those that we can assimilate, validate, corroborate and verify. False ideas are those that we can not. ... The truth of an idea is not a stagnant property inherent in it. Truth happens to an idea. It becomes true, is made true by events. Its verity is in fact an event, a process: the process namely of its verifying itself, its verification. Its validity is the process of its validation.”* (James 1992: 100)

This concept of truth, and Peirce’s method of abduction, in which hypotheses are formed and tested on the basis of a concrete empirical actuality, will be discussed in detail later in this book (see chapter 2.5.2).

One of the first large-scale empirical studies carried out by the Chicago School was “The Polish Peasant in Europe and America” by William Isaac Thomas (1863–1947) and Florian Znaniecki (1882–1958). Thomas, who spent a year in Germany at the universities of Göttingen and Berlin in 1888/89, met Znaniecki in 1913 during a visit to Poland, and they began to collaborate on a joint research project. Shortly afterwards, before the beginning of the First World War, Znaniecki moved to Chicago and worked with Thomas on this study of Polish migrants, until he was appointed in 1920 to a chair in sociology at the University of Poznan (Poland) (see Fischer-Rosenthal 1991).<sup>24</sup> The five-volume work published between 1918 and 1920 is a study of the social problems of Polish immigrants in the US from their subjective point of view. In addition to an analysis of documents relating to the migration process (including collections of letters exchanged between Poland and the US), the work contains the autobiography of a Polish immigrant, written at the request of the authors. The authors declare that “life-records have a marked superiority over any other kinds of materials. We are safe in saying that personal life-records, as complete as possible, constitute the perfect type of sociological material” (Thomas/Znaniecki [1919] 1958: 1832f.). In their methodological arguments,<sup>25</sup> they claim that generalizations can be made on the basis of subjective data:

<sup>23</sup> Although Mead was a professor in the Faculty of Philosophy, he also had a significant influence on sociology. From 1900 to 1927 he delivered an annual course of lectures on social psychology, attendance at which was compulsory for sociology students. On the basis of his lecture notes, his classic work “Mind, Self and Society” was written and published posthumously in 1934.

<sup>24</sup> Under the professional and academic influence of Znaniecki, “a sociology based on the method of analyzing written autobiographies” grew up in Poland, and still flourishes there today (see Fischer-Rosenthal 1991: 118).

<sup>25</sup> Werner Fuchs (1984: 99f.) provides a detailed discussion of the methodological significance of this

“In analyzing the experiences and attitudes of an individual we always reach data and elementary facts which are not exclusively limited to this individual’s personality but can be treated as mere instances of more or less general classes of data or facts, and thus be used for the determination of laws of social becoming.” (1958, II: 1832)

In its methodology, this study became a model for the following generations of sociologists in Chicago.

Besides Thomas and Znaniecki, Robert E. Park (1864–1944) and Ernest W. Burgess (1886–1966), who worked closely together, also made an important contribution to the development of qualitative methods, not least by encouraging field research in the form of community studies and other case studies.<sup>26</sup> Park’s empirical method was clearly influenced by the fact that after gaining his B.A. he worked for twelve years as a reporter and editor in various US-American cities, including Chicago. During this time, he wrote scientific reports on socially marginalized groups on the basis of field visits and interviews. In 1898 he resumed his studies and after gaining an M.A. he went to Germany to work for a doctorate. Between 1899 and 1903 he studied in Berlin (where Simmel was one of his teachers), Strasbourg and Heidelberg, where he submitted his doctoral dissertation, written in German, on the topic “Crowd and public. A methodological and sociological study”. In 1913, at the invitation of W. I. Thomas, he joined the University of Chicago as a lecturer in sociology, and was appointed professor in 1923. He taught generations of students that they “should get out of the library”. His message was: “Get your feet wet” (see Lindner 1990). True to the tradition of pragmatism, he understood sociology as an empirical science which seeks to contribute to knowledge by discovering interconnections in the observable world. He consistently argued that sociology should begin by analyzing facts from the field, and not try to develop theories in isolation from the facts. Like Thomas and Znaniecki, he argued that the sociologist must “get inside the actor’s perspective”, and he encouraged students to carry out case studies – including biographical case studies – that would reveal the subjective perspectives of members of different milieus. Some important empirical studies of different social milieus in Chicago were produced in this context, including “The Homeless Man in Chicago” by Anderson (1923), and studies of the Jewish ghetto (Wirth 1928), gangs (Thrasher 1927) or slums (Zorbaugh 1929). Howard S. Becker shows how each of these studies was part of a mosaic, forming a big picture of Chicago and contributing to a theory of the city in the sense defined by Park (Becker 1970: 65f.):

---

work and the resulting methodological reflections by Herbert Blumer (1939).

<sup>26</sup> On the Chicago School, see Mikl-Horke (1997: 188ff.) and Schütze (1987); for a more detailed discussion, especially of Park, see Lindner (1990, 2000).

“Individual studies can be like pieces of mosaic and were so in Park’s days. . . . In so doing, they partially completed a mosaic of great complexity and detail, with the city itself the subject, a ‘case’ which could be used to test a great variety of theories and in which the interconnections of a host of seemingly unrelated phenomena could be seen, however imperfectly.” (ibid.: 66)

The classic case study of a juvenile delinquent, published in 1930 by Clifford Shaw, was also inspired by Thomas and Park. Shaw observed Stanley, as he calls him, for six years and got him to write a biographical report. In his analysis, Shaw not only discusses what leads to delinquency, but also shows the importance of the person’s “own story” in the diagnosis and treatment of delinquents. Another very important and famous case study in the context of the Chicago School is the community study “Street Corner Society” by William Foote Whyte (1943). I will discuss this ethnographic study, which focuses on an Italian street gang in a city in the east of the US, under the heading of participant observation (chapter 4.1).

## 2 Basic assumptions and principles of interpretive social research

*Preliminary remark: It is clear that the various approaches used in interpretive social research use different methodologies and methods. Here, the discussion is focused on what these approaches have in common.*

*First, they are all based on the assumption that people's actions result from their interpretations of social reality, and that they constantly recreate this reality interactively by following certain social rules. As has been discussed for instance by Christa Hoffmann-Riem (1980), this assumption leads to two important principles of interpretive social research. The principle of communication requires adherence to the rules of everyday communication, while the principle of openness means "that there should be no theoretical structuring of the object of research until this emerges through the research subjects" (ibid.: 346). This means that it is important to avoid generating data, or gathering data, on the basis of preconceived hypotheses.*

### 2.1 The interpreted social world

While natural scientists deal with an objective world which does not ascribe meaning to itself, or structure itself according to "subjective" relevances, social scientists investigate an interpreted world. This difference between the natural and the social

sciences, and its methodological implications, deeply interested Alfred Schütz, a proponent of phenomenological sociology. In “Common-sense and scientific interpretation of human action”, an article published in English in 1962, Schütz argues that the social scientist is faced by a world that has been structured and interpreted in accordance with the relevance structures of the people living in it:

“They have preselected and preinterpreted this world by a series of common-sense constructs of the reality of daily life and it is these thought objects which determine their behavior, define the goal of their action, the means available for attaining them – in brief, which help them to find their bearing within their natural and socio-cultural environment and to come to terms with it.”  
(Schütz 1962: 6)

Because of this difference between the social sciences and the natural sciences, Schütz concludes that scientific constructs are built on the constructs of commonsense, and thought objects in the social sciences must be compatible with those formed by people in their everyday lives. He speaks here of constructions of the first and second degree.

Consequently, as social scientists we need to find out how people themselves construct their everyday reality, how they experience their world, how they interpret this world, and what everyday methods of communication they use. Social reality is constituted by interactive processes which depend on how actors interpret a situation, and how they contribute to its interpretation. Such interpretations are not arbitrary, nor do they result from the psychological processes of each individual acting, as it were, “alone”. Rather, they are based on the collectively shared stock of knowledge that has been internalized during the process of socialization, knowledge which contains rules for action and interaction, rules which are subjectively interpreted and applied depending on the actor’s biographical situation in any concrete context. In other words, the individual refers in his interpretations, in his ascriptions of meaning, to the collective stock of knowledge which can be construed and applied in various ways depending on the biographical experiences of the actor, and which must be used creatively, reflectively, in each concrete situation.<sup>1</sup> Something unexpected and new will arise from every decision made by the actors and every act of mutual orientation. As Norbert Schröer (1994: 18) points out, “the subject is not excluded” in this structural approach from the sociology of knowledge, as proposed by Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann in the tradition of Alfred Schütz and the pragmatism of the Chicago School.

<sup>1</sup> The author combines this approach with that of “figurational sociology”, a research tradition based on the work of Norbert Elias, who shows how individuals “are intricately entwined with bigger social or collective processes and actualities. These bigger actualities include the public pictures and images of the individuals concerned and their we-groups – whether these are local or supralocal we-groups, or even transnational (like a lot of Christian churches, but also many other associations, organizations or movements)” (Rosenthal / Bogner 2017b: 10).

The concept of a “subjective definition of a situation” which interacts with more objective aspects of a situation was introduced into the methodological debate by William Isaac Thomas, the classic representative of the Chicago School, who has already been presented (ch. 1.3). “If men define situations as real, they are real in their consequences”: this assumption, as discussed by him and Dorothy Swaine Thomas (1928: 572), became one of the most important theorems of interpretive social research. However, this does not mean that the consequences of our actions can be anticipated on the basis of our definition of the situation. Let us imagine, for example, the following situation: I am sitting in a train, opposite a man. According to my definition, this train journey is a chance for me to read my newspaper in peace, and not a chance to talk to other people. I take the *Frankfurter Rundschau* out of my bag. The man sitting opposite me sees this as an opportunity to strike up a conversation. He asks me why I read this paper, and not the *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, which is much better. Thus, my *Frankfurter Rundschau* is defined by the man as an opportunity to strike up a conversation, and his definition is the “real consequence” of my definition.

However, the way a situation is defined is not arbitrary, and the actor cannot change the nature of the situation by his definition alone. As the Bielefeld Sociologists’ Working Group (Arbeitsgruppe Bielefelder Soziologen 1976: 98) writes: “Rather, his plan of action must take into account all the elements involved in the situation – such as material resources, presence of other actors, existence of power differences, expectations of other actors, normative restrictions on possible actions, etc. – if he does not want to run the risk of failing to achieve the goal of his action”. Thus, for example, I may define a talk with my boss about my request for leave at a time when there is a lot of work to be done as a friendly chat between colleagues in the same project, or more or less implicitly understand it as such, and I can behave in accordance with this definition, perhaps reminding him that he went on holiday recently and obviously had a good time. But my boss might interpret this behavior as presumptuous and arrogant, and he might feel so annoyed that he refuses my request. As my boss he probably has the power to impose his own definition.

The Thomas theorem has been critically discussed with regard to restrictions on the individual’s freedom of choice and the performance of the acting subject, for instance by Erving Goffman (1974), who expressed it in more structuralist terms with his concept of frame and framing. But while Goffman agreed that situations are defined by the social actors, he wrote: “Presumably, a ‘definition of the situation’ is almost always to be found, but those who are in the situation ordinarily do not create this definition, even though their society often can be said to do so; ordinarily, all they do is to assess correctly what the situation ought to be for them and then act accordingly” (Goffman 1974: 1f.). If we enter into interaction with someone, we thus first need to ask: “What is it that’s going on here?” (Goffman 1974: 8). When faced with this question, we refer to a system of rules which help us to answer it, and to choose and define an appropriate way of acting.

For example, if, on my train journey, I decide that I need to signalize to the man more clearly that I want to read my newspaper, I can ignore his attempts to make

me speak, keep looking down at the paper, avoid eye contact, and above all avoid making any paralinguistic noises like “mm” or “aha” which would indicate interest, or even just that I am listening to what he is saying. We usually do not consciously plan such actions, or little strategies, but carry them out more or less automatically. And – as Goffman (*ibid.*: 21) puts it – the actor is “likely to be unaware of such organized features as the framework has and unable to describe the framework with any completeness if asked, yet these handicaps are no bar to his easily and fully applying it” (Goffman 1974: 21). Thus, for instance, we know plenty of rules for ending conversations, but most of them are part of our implicit knowledge. They have become a matter of routine and we apply them without any explicit plan. However, if a crisis occurs in the interaction, then we ask ourselves explicitly, “What is it that’s going on here?” or “How does my definition of the situation differ from that of the other person?” If my boss angrily refuses my request for leave, after I had assumed he would share my enthusiasm for a holiday in eastern Turkey, I will need to reconsider my definition of the situation and my manner of behaving, and, against my wish, place the situation in the framework of speaking to a superior, rather than to a friend. Perhaps it is only this crisis that will make me aware that I had defined the situation as a friendly chat and behaved accordingly. Thus, we can generally assume that we discover “what the situation ought to be for us” – as Goffman puts it – during the interactive process. We can assume that the situation is defined or framed through our practices, and that not only is the situation determined by our definition, but conversely the interactive process determines how we define the situation.

As Goffman sees it, fixed frameworks are not simply renewed, but the social actors in the situation introduce modifications and elements that are new and unstable. There is no fixed situational definition; it changes during the interactive process in small, and sometimes dramatic, ways. Our attempts to coordinate our actions with the actions of the others can lead to modifications in our definition of the framework or situation. It is conceivable, for example, that the man in the train and I will manage to agree on a definition of the situation in which he lets me read my paper and I occasionally engage in conversation with him. It is also conceivable that the man might begin to talk about something which interests me as a sociologist, and that I then redefine the situation in completely new terms, namely as a kind of research interview. In this new framework I will apply rules very different from those for avoiding a conversation. I will make eye contact and encourage the man to continue by saying “mm” and “aha”, and I will prompt him with questions like “And what happened then?” As a sociologist who has not only conducted interviews for many years but also taught students how to conduct interviews, I am very familiar with these rules, and on my train journeys I have always found it easier to encourage people to talk than to prevent them from talking. I have sometimes found myself applying these rules automatically, even if I was not interested in triggering a long narration. In such cases I have to remind myself how to behave in order to stop the other person from beginning a conversation.



Goffman attempts to do justice to the interrelationship between what is given, and what is constantly created in an interactive process, by making a distinction between frame and framing: “While frames are defined as socially given meaningful structures which, as against factual (inter)action, are characterized by objectivity, autonomy and immunity” (Willems 1996: 444), framing is the performance<sup>2</sup> of these subjectively interpreted, and constantly altered, given structures in the interaction process.

However, the terms frame and framing do not quite do justice to this performative character, as pointed out by Hans-Georg Soeffner (1989: 151), since ‘frame’ is easily associated with the image of a picture frame, and thus with the idea that the picture exists independently of the frame. The metaphors of frame and framing also suggest something delimited and fixed, which is problematic for describing interactive processes which are not fixed, in contrast to interactions that have been preserved on tape or in transcripts: “The fixed frame is the product of fixing, but not the primary quality of the original interactive process, in which one out of various possible process structures was realized” (Soeffner 1989: 144). While we, as researchers, are in possession of a completed product in the form of an observation memo or recording, the actor sees and interprets differently the process in which he is involved. For him this process still has a horizon consisting of different possibilities, it is still open. As Soeffner points out, the purpose of sequential analysis (see chapter 2.5.4) is to reconstruct the process of choosing one out of several possible interpretations and actions.

While the term ‘definition of the situation’ has a strongly intentional and cognitive connotation, frame and framing are also associated with the dualist conception of a fixed frame, on the one hand, and its subjective and interactive application on the other. But it is not a question of terminology so much as whether the processual character of the reproduction and transformation of existing stocks of knowledge is taken into account in empirical analyses.

## 2.2 The principle of communication

The methodological consequence of these considerations is that we have to go about collecting and analyzing our data in such a way that these interactive processes of negotiating and creating framings and bringing about modifications become visible. As pointed out by Fritz Schütze and other members of the Bielefeld Sociologists’ Working Group, which was active in the 1970s, this requires that we use research methods which leave space for everyday processes of communication and negotia-

---

<sup>2</sup> In a critical discussion of the concept of frame, Hans-Georg Soeffner (1989: 151) associates with the term “performance” “neither playful chance nor carefully instrumentalized or instrumentalizable planning”, but “the routine interplay of purposeful interaction, on the one hand, and implicit knowledge of types of meaning and communicative forms of expression, gained through socialization and experience, on the other hand.”

tion of meaning. The methodological consequences of the associated principle of openness for the collection and analysis of data will be discussed later.

First, it must be remembered that in interpretive social research, apart from the analysis of existing documents, we enter into a communication process with everyday actors.<sup>3</sup> This means that we create the social reality of the situation together with the everyday actors, whether we are carrying out participant observation or conducting an interview. "Collecting data is a communicative process", writes Christa Hoffmann-Riem (1980: 347), following Fritz Schütze. Schütze (1978) speaks in this connection of "communicative social research" which tries to shape the communication process in accordance with the rules of everyday life, and give the everyday actors an opportunity to express their view of the world and their definition of the research situation. For they interpret not only their lifeworld, which we are interested in learning about, but also the research situation. They ascribe certain meanings to this situation, to the interviewer or the participant observer. And it must be taken into account that the situational definition can vary greatly from interviewee to interviewee, irrespective of the researcher's own declared, or implicit, definition of the situation and self-definition. While some interviewees may define the interview primarily within the research context, others may define it as a therapeutic measure, or just as a friendly chat, or in the context of mass media interviews. The way the interview goes depends on whether the interviewee sees me as a historian who wants to hear about important events in the local collective history, or as a psychologist who is interested in people's feelings. Interviewees who think, or even hope, that parts of the interview will be broadcast on the radio or published in a newspaper, will not present themselves in the same way they would if such publication was of no interest to them. How they talk about themselves and their everyday life, and what topics they thematize, depends on these framings and how they are modified in the data-collecting situation. If there is a change in the framing or a change in the situational definition during one or several successive interviews, we usually find clear indications of this in our analysis. I will illustrate this with the example of a family interview carried out by Michaela Köttig and myself in the year 2000. The family is from Kosovo (in the former Yugoslavia) and is allowed to stay in Germany because they have been granted a temporary suspension of deportation which is subject to regular review.

---

<sup>3</sup> The term everyday actor is used in reference to the theory of Alfred Schütz and his phenomenological study of everyday practices.

### 2.3 Empirical example: changing framings in the context of a family interview

The members of the Morina family,<sup>4</sup> as I will call them, at first associated this interview with their experience of hearings in Germany and their communication with German authorities. This means that their presentation, in the sense of what they presented and how, was initially determined by this framing. For instance, they repeatedly told us that they did not want to stay in Germany permanently. And circumstances that were of relevance in the asylum procedures, like the fact that the mother had symptoms often associated with a “post-traumatic stress disorder”, and that the daughter-in-law required urgent medical treatment in Germany for a kidney condition, were given more emphasis than the psychological consequences of traumatization for the other family members, or the way the family was suffering due to their present situation in Germany. This is because the family has to show evidence of traumatization and of the dangers they face in Kosovo in order to maintain their temporary suspension of deportation status in Germany. Thus, they are permanently in a situation in which their credibility is doubted. In the course of the interview (which was conducted according to the client-centered method of active listening), our repeated questions about their fears – and especially their fear of being sent back to Kosovo – led to a change in their perception of us. It became clear that they were unhappy because no one in Germany was interested in their distress and their deep fear of deportation, let alone their traumatic experiences.<sup>5</sup> The gradual change in the framing of this interview became clear at the point when the family began to tell us about their painful visits to the immigration office, where, in contrast to us, the staff showed no interest in their feelings and the suffering they had been through. The grown-up son of the family was responsible for dealing with official business because of his good knowledge of German, and because he had gained German citizenship following his marriage. He told us about his mother’s serious post-traumatic stress disorder, and their experiences at the immigration office. When I commented, “I suppose the important thing for you is to be able to stay together”, he said that the authorities did not see it that way, and told me of an interview with an immigration officer:

“But how can I explain to the man about this, these feelings? He doesn’t want to know, the officer doesn’t want to know things like that ... he’s completely indifferent. I asked him directly: ‘sorry to say this, but don’t you have any feelings or sympathy for such people’ ... but I saw that he just wanted to get

---

<sup>4</sup> For an analysis of this interview, see Rosenthal (2003).

<sup>5</sup> It is important to be aware here that the idea of deportation constantly reactivates in the present the feelings of terror and fear of violence experienced in the past.

the family deported. Then I couldn't bear it any longer, and I said: 'Leave my mother in peace, she needs to forget.'"

Researchers who follow the interpretive paradigm will not regard the change of framing that took place in the course of this interview as a disturbing factor that needs to be controlled because it might result in distortion of the data. And we cannot assume that one framing is better than another in respect of what the family says about their everyday reality outside the interview situation. It could be objected, for example, that because they associate the interview with an official hearing, the family will not describe their true reality but only show how they think they should present themselves at such a hearing. But here the question arises: what do we understand by reality? Is there a reality that exists independently of the perspective of the perceiver, or independently of its embedment in specific situational contexts? In interpretive social research, we assume that experiencing a concrete situation, or remembering it or narrating it, is not possible independent of the perspective or the situational definition of the perceiver. The processes of definition or framing are what make it possible for us to interact with each other. And every framing of an interview is a reference to other, similarly framed, situations or similar realities. In this case, it is the reality of the asylum procedure, which, like other refugees in Germany, this family has to endure, and which determines their behavior. And this present reality affects how they remember their traumatic experiences and their ability to talk about them. It is also the reality of an interview which can be framed as a situation in which the listeners react with empathy and in which it is possible to speak about painful memories. If we conduct our interviews in such a way that these framing processes can be rendered visible by the autonomous actions of the interviewees, there is a chance that we will be able to produce a text which will allow us to analyze the rules of interaction. Our interview with the Morina family shows how the family members have learned to present themselves to the official authorities, and, in addition, how the criteria for recognition as refugees in Germany influence the way they perceive themselves and make sense of their lives. But the interview also reveals differences between the way they present themselves to the authorities, and the way they tell their story to people who show an interest in their personal experiences, and especially in their personal suffering. It is also important to realize that the changes in their mode of presentation during the interview were perhaps connected with a hope that we might somehow be able to save them from the threat of deportation.

Analyzing these framing processes makes it possible to draw generalizations from a presentation beyond the interview situation. For example, if a woman presents herself in an interview by telling detailed stories of her achievements, and only makes brief mention of various failures in her life, because she wants to make a good impression on me as a social scientist, this impression management strategy gives me some clues as to how she is likely to behave in similar situations. James A. Holstein und Jaber F. Gubrium (1995: 30ff.) describe the example of grown-up daughters whose

mothers are suffering from dementia, and who are caring for them in their homes. They show how the interviewees present themselves in the course of a single interview from very different positions (such as wife or caring daughter), and "... each role tells the story of its own past attitudes, feelings, and behaviors" (ibid.: 32).

These framing processes are not made visible because we ask the interviewees about them directly, for to a large extent none of us is aware of them. Even if the answers to questions we can ask at the end of the interview (such as "How was this interview for you?") can give us important clues in respect of such framing processes, they do not contain all possible meanings. What we need is methods of interviewing and analyzing which allow the interviewees to use their own framings and framing rules, and thus enable us to uncover them in our analysis. This requires interview methods which do justice to the principle of openness.

## **2.4 On the principle of openness in the research process and in interviews**

In this section, I will discuss how to apply the principle of openness to the research process and in interview situations.

### **2.4.1 Openness for modifications to the research plan**

Being open to changes in our research plan means being prepared to:

- start with an open research question which can be modified
- form hypotheses during the research process
- develop theoretical samples during the research process

In contrast to a deductive approach, which starts from theoretical assumptions and a carefully designed research question, we begin with a question that is formulated in vague terms and can be modified as often as necessary in compliance with the logic of what turns up in the course of the empirical study. This means that instead of beginning the research process with a set of hypotheses, we try to bracket, or suspend, our academic assumptions or everyday prejudices. Christa Hoffmann-Riem (1980) speaks of proceeding without *hypothesis-led data generation*. On the contrary, our aim is to generate, test, modify and reject hypotheses on the basis of our empirical observations. It is not possible to define the sample clearly beforehand, because it is formed on the basis of assumptions that gradually crystallize as the research proceeds (see chapter 3.2). Therefore, collection and analysis of the data are not strictly separated phases, as underlined by Glaser and Strauss (1967). Rather, it is advisable to carry out first interviews or first observations, to analyze the texts produced from them (transcripts or memos), and then, on the basis of this analysis, to return to the

field with modified questions, new focuses, and possibly new data-collecting methods. These steps of the research process are likely to be repeated, and very probably more than once.

It is frequently argued that while the idea of suspending hypotheses at the beginning of the research process suggests an absence of preconditions, this is deceptive and, as Christel Hopf (1979: 27) argues, “gives a distorted picture of the real research process, which *nolens volens* is subject to perceptual expectations, culturally learned interpretations, and so on”. However, this fully justified argument is based on a misunderstanding of what is meant by suspending hypotheses. This may be due to remarks made by Glaser and Strauss (1967: 39f.), such as that hypotheses “emerge from the material”, which suggest that one only has to go into the field and make observations, or read the text without interrogating it, and the meaning would automatically present itself. But interpreting the material is not possible without asking questions and without previous knowledge which help in the forming of hypotheses. In an abductive approach to generating hypotheses, which takes the empirical data or the text of an interview or other source as the starting point, this previous knowledge, whether everyday or sociological knowledge, is used in a heuristic sense (see chapter 2.5.2). “Heuristic” means that these hypotheses are only one way among *other possible ways* of explaining the data. The data is not used to test *preconceived* hypotheses. Glaser and Strauss (1967: 39f.) express this as follows:

“It must be emphasized that these hypotheses have at first the status of suggested, not tested, relations among categories and their properties, though they are verified as much as possible in the course of research ... multiple hypotheses are pursued simultaneously. ... Generating hypotheses requires evidence enough only to establish a suggestion – not an excessive piling up of evidence to establish a proof, and the consequent hindering of the generation of new hypotheses.”

All empirical studies are driven by a particular interest, and by questions based on hypotheses, however vague or implicit these may be. A question at least implies that we find the matter worthy of investigation and of relevance to sociological debates. Putting hypotheses aside, or bracketing them, to use the phenomenological term, means planning data collection in a way that will admit new explanations. Open methods of data collection must be structured as openly as possible, and not according to our preconceptions. I will show how this can be achieved using the methods of participant observation and narrative interviews.

The principle of openness implies that the researcher must be willing to make new discoveries, to get involved in the empirical field, and to modify their previous knowledge: “Openness in the researcher is a willingness and ability to go through a learning process, to change one’s knowledge (and oneself?)” (Kleining 2001: 30). This willingness also implies being aware as far as possible of our preconceptions, so that they do not control the research process unnoticed.

### 2.4.2 Empirical example: discovering the significance of historical generations

The process of changing our research question, hypotheses, and theoretical sample can be illustrated by a study I carried out together with students in the context of a research training project at the University of Bielefeld between 1986 and 1988. I wanted to investigate what people experienced during the Second World War and how they interpret their experiences today (Rosenthal 1991). I was interested *at first* in gender-specific differences, and – not unconnected with this – differences in the way people experienced the war in the home country, at the front and behind the lines. My original supposition or hypothesis was that these differences might correspond to differences in the way people look back on their past experiences in the present. So we began to select our sample and conducted interviews with women and men who were born roughly between 1910 and 1935 and who had experienced the war in these three “zones”. From interview to interview it became clearer that among the men the most important difference in their experiences and what these experiences mean to them today was not whether they were stationed behind the lines or at the front, but whether or not they took part in war crimes and crimes against humanity (which were mostly committed in the occupied areas, in other words behind the lines). And our analysis of the interviews showed in general that, for both men and women, the commonalities and differences in their war experiences and in the way they regard these today, depended to a large extent on their age, their earlier experiences, and, in particular, their position within National Socialism. It was a more or less unplanned interview that really showed the significance of generational belonging. This interview was with a man who was being treated in hospital and who constantly spoke about the war and the fears he associated with it. The doctor on this ward was a friend of mine and he had suggested that I should come and talk to his patient. The man spoke about the Second World War very differently from all the other men I had interviewed before, including those I interviewed in connection with a project on the Hitler Youth generation (Rosenthal 1987, 1991). He belonged to a different generation from the other men. He was born in 1899 and as a young man he was enlisted and sent to the Western Front in the First World War. In 1939 he was sent to the front again as an experienced soldier. In the interview, he spoke very positively about the moral standards of the soldiers in the First World War, and was very insistent that these were constantly breached in the Second World War. In addition to the consequences of being traumatized during his time in the trenches of the First World War, an implicit pacifism also became evident, which had grown out of these experiences, and which I had not come across in other interviews (Rosenthal 1988). This interview, and its analysis, led to a decisive change in the planned sample. I sought contact with other veterans of the First World War, and conducted biographical-narrative interviews with 16 men born between 1888 and 1900. These interviews revealed very clearly what it means to belong to a particular historical generation, in the sense proposed by Karl Mannheim ([1928] 1952), and,

in this context, the importance of the men's biographical experiences before they became involved in the war of 1939 to 1945. The focus of the study thus shifted onto generational belonging, and the way this affects people's present memories of the Second World War and National Socialism. From my point of view, this was the most important theoretical generalization that emerged from this study. It also gave rise to the question of what constitutes a historical generation, which I was able to investigate empirically in subsequent projects (Rosenthal 2010a).

From interview to interview with these men, and thanks to the insights I gained from reading both fictional and academic and autobiographical literature on the First World War, I was able to see more and more clearly the extent to which experiences of static warfare in the First World War, and the psychological and biographical consequences of these experiences, differ from those of maneuver warfare in the Second World War (Rosenthal 1988). From this empirical observation in the interviews with veterans of the First World War, another research question arose out of this project, regarding differences in people's experiences of the First and the Second World Wars.

In the course of these interviews with veterans of the First World War, I became increasingly sensitive to the traumatizing nature of their experiences in the trenches, which they were scarcely able to mention, let alone tell stories about. This required certain changes in the manner of conducting the interviews, due to the effects of traumatization (see Rosenthal 2003).

As this example shows, the research questions which gradually crystallize in the course of the research process, the modification and discovery of hypotheses, and the composition of the sample, develop interdependently. In this process, questions and hypotheses which were of central importance at the beginning of the study may become increasingly marginalized. After a contrastive comparison of the cases in this study, for example, the question of gender-specific differences in the way people remember the Second World War and National Socialism became less important, and only after empirical reconstruction of the historical generations was it possible to address it and to show the complex relations between generation and gender. For example, an empirical comparison of the life stories of women and men born between 1890 and 1935 showed that historical generations may be formed in different ways for men and for women, and that the birth years of the members of one generation may differ depending on their gender. Thus, in the empirical analyses of men born between 1890 and 1900, the generation-forming effect of having participated as a soldier in the First World War was clear – and also the fact that the last group of young men to be enlisted set a chronological limit for this generation. But for the women of this and later age groups (women born up to about 1905), the generation-forming factor was the changing nature of their relationships with their fathers and husbands (see Rosenthal 1997).<sup>6</sup>

---

<sup>6</sup> Our analyses of the biographies of women born in these years show that the features common to their generation are as follows: From being subject to the parental authority of their fathers, they



### 2.4.3 Openness in the data-collecting situation

Alfred Schütz's recommendation that our academic constructions should be based on the constructions of everyday life means that in the concrete research process, we should *follow the relevance system of the everyday actors* and put aside our own relevances, especially in the initial phases of the data-collecting situation. If, as social scientists, we have an interest in a certain topic – such as migration processes, or the effects of unemployment – we should not define these topics in advance, i.e. we should not decide beforehand what is relevant to the topic and what is not. Neither in the case of migration nor in that of unemployment can we know beforehand what is of relevance for the individual everyday actor. Thus, while for one person it might be the migration history of her great-grandmother that played an important role in her own decision to migrate, for another person this decision may have been due to a frustrating situation at work and have no conscious or unconscious connection with her collective or family history. Or, while one unemployed person might blame his marriage problems on his unemployment, another may say that his partnership has not been affected by his unemployment, and may see no connection between these two biographical strands.

In order to discover how the people we are studying see such interconnections and relevances in their biographies, we need open data-collecting situations in which they can talk about them, whether that be interviews, group discussions, or observations and recordings of everyday situations. In the case of open interviews, this means that the interviewees must be allowed to talk about a topic, or recount stories connected with it, according to their own relevances, before the interviewer asks questions that he or she is interested in. This can be done most consistently using the narrative interview method (see chapter 5.4). In the case of participant observation (chapter 4), it means that we should not go into the field with previously defined categorical systems, and we should not decide beforehand which areas of daily life we want to observe and which we do not. Rather, when observing a situation, we should try to discover the relevances of the milieu we are observing, and allow ourselves to be guided by what is important for the milieu itself. The aim of the observation is to find out where and when important interactions take place. Thus, we might find in one migrant community that the playground is the main place where parents talk to each other about the difficulties they face in the host country, while in another community such discussions take place at political meetings.

---

came under the marital authority of their husbands; however, their husbands frequently came back traumatized from the First World War, while the women had often worked outside the family during the war and had thus gained some degree of autonomy. This constellation often led to marriages in which the husband continued to have the power of decision in important areas of family life, but the wife dominated the communication structures in the family and was psychologically more stable than her husband. Thus, in some of these families, we found men who were infantilized by their wives, and especially by their children who were socialized in the period of National Socialism. On the other hand, these men continued to exercise their male authority via their power of decision and definition.

**Principle of openness in the research process and during data collection**

- Start with only a tentative research question with possibility of modification
- Form hypotheses during the research process
- Develop theoretical samples during the research process
- Be willing *at times* to ignore your own particular research interests during observations or interviews
- During data collection, investigate first the everyday relevance system of the actors (not that of the researchers)
- During analysis, give priority to reconstructing the everyday relevance system of the actors

Openness in the data-collection situation also means that we should let ourselves be guided by the needs of the interviewees in arranging the setting, for instance of a biographical interview or family interview. In the early days of my research practice, if the wife was present while I was conducting a biographical interview with a man, and she actively “intervened”, I tried to prevent her from doing so, but today I can see advantages in this situation for the interpretation of the interview. I first had to learn that my attempts to prevent such “disturbances” usually failed, were just wasted effort, tended to distract my attention from what the other person was telling me, and in the end only led to frustration. On the level of conducting interviews, I learned something that I already knew in theory from my training in conducting client-centered interviews: “There’s no point trying to refuse the interviewee’s structure.” I realized that I would miss something if I did not allow my interviewees to arrange the setting, and I learned to read this as an expression of the structure of their case or of their marriage. It says a lot about the interviewee and his marriage if he wants to have his wife with him for emotional support while he recounts painful experiences, or if his wife tries to stop him from speaking about such experiences. Even more than in a personal interview, in the case of a family interview there is really no point trying to impose our idea of how the interview should be conducted. For example, one family might invite us to begin with small talk over a meal before starting the interview properly, while another family might prefer to start the interview straight away. Especially the research project “The Holocaust in Three Generations” (see Rosenthal 2010a) was a learning process for my colleagues and myself in this respect. We came to understand why there were frequent disturbances of different kinds, in both family and individual interviews, and we learned not to intervene when they occurred. For example, we experienced a family interview in which new family members and their friends constantly came in, sat with us for a short time, and went away again, members of the grandchildren generation interrupted the interview by addressing various everyday questions to the parents, the daughter of the family ordered a pizza by phone for her son while her mother – prompted

by a question put by her daughter – was telling us about the time she spent in an extermination camp, and so on (Moore 2010). Such performances in the context of interviews about the Holocaust must be seen as a way of dealing with a threatening past, just like the choice of place for the interview. For example, the son of a survivor of the Holocaust insisted we should conduct the interview in a pavement café on a busy shopping street in Tel Aviv, while another survivor wanted to have several short meetings in my office at the university, and not in the familiar surroundings of his home. The interview in the pavement café and the series of short interviews at the university gave these two men the feeling of being able to protect themselves from the flood of threatening memories.

If these elements are taken as expressions of special features of the cases of these interviewees, and not just as irritating disturbances, they can be included as useful empirical data in the case reconstructions.

## 2.5 On the principle of openness in interpretive text analyses

*Preliminary remark:* While in respect of data collection the “principle of openness” means avoiding hypothesis-oriented methods, in the analysis of texts it requires the use of a reconstructive method which continues to follow the logic of discovery and not the logic of testing existing hypotheses. This applies to all kinds of analysis used in interpretive social research. In addition to sociological hermeneutics and the approaches associated with ethnomethodology, such as conversation analysis, two main methods of text interpretation have become established in Germany: objective hermeneutics as developed by Ulrich Oevermann (et al. 1979, 1987), and narrative and text analysis as proposed by Fritz Schütze (2007a, 2007b), and modifications and combinations of these two methods (see Hildenbrand 1999a; Rosenthal 1993, 2004; Wohlrab-Sahr 1992). In chapter 6.2, I will discuss in detail my own preferred variant of such a combination in the method of biographical case reconstructions, and will show which parts are taken from objective hermeneutics and which are borrowed from Fritz Schütze’s narrative analysis.

### Principles of data analysis

- Reconstructive analysis  
(instead of subsuming under categories as in content analysis)
- Abductive method
- Sequential analysis (vs. restructuring of texts) of both experienced and presented events
- Use of gestalt theory
- Theoretical generalization based on an individual case (the individual case can be a community, a family, an organization, etc.)  
(vs. statistical/numerical generalization)

*The reconstructive method implies an abductive and sequential approach to developing and testing hypotheses. The most explicit proponent of this approach is Ulrich Oevermann, and it has been consistently applied in objective hermeneutics and conversation analysis (see Bergmann 2004). I will first consider the three principles of reconstruction, abduction and sequentiality, and illustrate the abductive method with an empirical example. After this, I will explain what is meant by theoretical generalization on the basis of an individual case. This principle is common to all interpretive approaches and clearly distinguishes them from other qualitative methods.*

### **2.5.1 The principle of reconstruction**

The principle of reconstruction means that the researcher does not approach the texts to be interpreted with an existing set of hypotheses, regardless of whether these texts are interview transcripts, observation memos, audio or video recordings of daily interactions, or documents such as letters, diaries or texts from the print media. This means that the texts are interpreted neither on the basis of previously formed categories, nor on the basis of categories formed through contact with the text. Ulrich Oevermann calls such methods subsumptive, in contrast to reconstructive methods. In methods based on the logic of subsumption, pieces of the text are taken out of their overall context and assigned to categories. These text segments are thus removed from the context in which they were created and placed in other contexts constructed by the researchers. Structurally, it makes no difference whether the researcher proceeds inductively by developing a classification system on the basis of the data collected, as is often recommended in the case of qualitative content analysis (Mayring 2004), or deductively by deriving the categories beforehand from theories.

If, for example, our interpretation of an interview with a migrant shows that this person was influenced by a family history of migration (or, in terms of gestalt theory, that the influence of this family history is a component with functional significance for the structure of this case), we could inductively formulate the category “family history with experiences of migration”, and seek corresponding text sequences in other interviews. Thus, just as in deductive methods in which categories are derived from existing theories before embarking on the empirical analysis, we would now use this category developed from the empirical material to approach the next text, where we would seek text sequences that might be subsumed under this category, but without having reconstructed their functional significance for the overall text. In both these instances of a content analysis approach, the gestalt of the text is destroyed, elements are lifted out of individual cases and grouped together with the aid of categories on the basis of their phenomenological similarity. By contrast, in a reconstructive method, no categories would be derived from the analysis of the first interview, and no corresponding text sequences would be sought in other interviews. Here, every text is interpreted afresh, and the significance of any particular segment is reconstructed in its relationship to the text as a whole. This also means: recon-

structured in the context of the process of interactive constitution of this “part” in the present of the interview. While in one interview the decision to migrate may have been influenced by the family history, there might be a very different type in another interview, where the interviewee’s family history does play a certain role but cannot be considered as having functional significance for the structure of their migration, or for the migrant’s present self-interpretation. To put it simply: what is recognized as an important “category” in one case may be of little significance in another.

Subsuming text segments under categories means placing them in a particular class in order to assess their “regularity”, in the sense of occurring frequently together. Kurt Lewin (1890–1947), a proponent of gestalt theory who published important methodological texts (1931, 1992) in the 1920s and 1930s, discusses this logic in the tradition of Aristotelian concept formation, where parts are placed in classes and characterized in this way (Lewin 1931). By contrast, the Galilean mode of concept formation explains a case in its full concreteness and identifies its constitutive moments as distinct from situation-specific residual factors.

A sociological formation of concepts on the Galilean model is based on the assumption that social entities such as a self-presentation in an interview, an article in the print media, or a letter, are uniform entities created by an underlying system of rules, and cannot be divided into separate groupings, each with its own rules. In particular, the proponents of gestalt theory, who, in addition to Kurt Lewin, include Kurt Koffka ([1935] 1963) and Max Wertheimer (1938a, 1938b), show in their works that the meaning of parts of a gestalt can only be explained in terms of the structural rules of the concrete gestalt of which they are a part.<sup>7</sup> In gestalt theory, the idea that parts have an independent identity is explicitly rejected. According to this conception, parts have no characteristics independent from their integration in a whole. If we think that we can interpret parts separately from their whole context, we may be subject to the illusion that parts have an unchangeable core, but since parts can always only be interpreted as parts of a whole, we are nevertheless obliged to give them a place in a whole that has been defined by us. This whole, which we define in terms of our everyday or academic concepts, may be structurally incompatible with the gestalt in the real context of its creation. Reconstructing the gestalt in its context of creation therefore does not admit the isolation of single elements.

Thus, in contrast to a subsumptive method, *reconstructive analysis* avoids approaching the text with preconceived classification systems and variables. Social phenomena are not regarded as static entities and examples of certain categories, but are reconstructed in the process of their interactive (re)production (Oevermann 1983; Reichertz 2004, 2014; Wernet 2014). This idea has been formulated by Jörg Bergmann (2004: 296) in respect of conversation analysis: “Conversation analysis (or CA) denotes a research approach dedicated to the investigation, along strictly empirical lines, of social interaction as a continuing process of producing and securing

---

<sup>7</sup> For a detailed discussion of the methodological implications of gestalt theory for biographical research, see Rosenthal (2006).

meaningful social order. ... The goal of this approach is to determine the constitutive principles and mechanisms by means of which actors, in the situational completion of their actions and in reciprocal reaction to their interlocutors, create the meaningful structures and order of a sequence of events and of the activities that constitute these events.” This means that, like objective hermeneutics, the proponents of CA refuse to subsume social phenomena under external, preconceived categories.

### 2.5.2 The principle of an abductive approach

The principle of reconstruction can be applied most consistently by using a method that follows the principles of an abductive and sequential approach. The method of abductive inference was introduced as a scientific theory by the pragmatist Charles Sanders Peirce ([1933] 1980) (see chapter 1.3).

The most important feature of an abductive approach, in contrast to deductive and inductive methods, is that hypotheses are formed and tested on the basis of an individual case. In addition, in an abductive approach the path that is followed in forming hypotheses is of great importance (Fann 1970: 5). Even if the act of hypothesis forming may appear to be spontaneous, a sudden inspiration, Peirce argues that it is important to be able to give a reason for the hypothesis, i.e. to consider to what extent this “spontaneous idea” arose out of the phenomenon being investigated, and how it can be tested in the concrete case.

There are very different ideas in the current sociological literature concerning exactly what abduction means, and especially how it can be applied in terms of methodology; there are also very controversial interpretations of the writings of Charles Sanders Peirce.<sup>8</sup> I believe that these differences have to do with the fact that in Peirce’s work we need to distinguish between abduction, deduction and induction on the one hand as three stages in the inference process, and on the other hand as separate steps in each process. Let us first consider the *steps in the inference process*.

*Abductive inference* means the process of forming a hypothesis to explain a certain phenomenon. *Deductive inference* is understood as inference from a theory to a hypothesis, or from a hypothesis to the consequences to be tested. *Inductive inference* or induction means looking for proofs or evidence in order to test a hypothesis. “This sort of inference it is, from experiments testing predictions based on a hypothesis, that is alone properly entitled to be called *induction*” (Peirce 1980: 7.206). How-

<sup>8</sup> In addition to Peirce’s writings, my reading of abduction is based in particular on the very clear accounts given in Fann (1970) and in Sebeok/Umiker-Sebeok (1985), as well as on my own methodological practice, which owes a lot to Oevermann’s early publications. A critical discussion of Oevermann’s understanding of abduction can be found in Reichertz (2003, 2004, 2014). His claim that Ulrich Oevermann does not generate rules in the abductive method, but takes the rules for granted, is true, in my opinion, of his later work.

ever, induction as a whole method – and this is how it is generally understood in the methodological literature – draws conclusions from a few cases or from a few observations concerning the rule or concerning all cases in a class. In the later writings of Charles Sanders Peirce (from 1901, see Fann 1970: 28), the three kinds of inference are discussed as separate steps in the *three-stage process* of abduction, which is distinguished from the equally multi-stage processes of induction and deduction through the order of the steps. While the process of deduction starts with a theory, and induction with a hypothesis, abduction begins with the observation of an empirical phenomenon.

The steps in the three-stage process of abduction are:

### 1. From an empirical phenomenon to all possible hypotheses

“to adopt a hypothesis as being suggested by the fact, is what I call abduction.”  
Peirce (1980: 6.469)

Starting from an empirical phenomenon in a given unit of empirical data, a general rule is inferred, in the form of “the supposition of a general principle to account for the facts” (Fann 1970: 10). According to Peirce (6.202), a hypothesis must be testable and it must explain the observable facts. This step is the actual abductive inference. The important thing is to formulate not only one hypothesis, but all the hypotheses possible at the time of interpretation that could explain the phenomenon. In forming hypotheses, academic theories and everyday theories are of heuristic value. It is not a question of following and testing a particular theory, as with deduction. Rather, different concepts are used as possible explanations for an empirical phenomenon – in other words to form several possible hypotheses.

### 2. From hypothesis to follow-up hypothesis or follow-up phenomenon

the next thing, “... as soon as a hypothesis has been adopted, will be to trace out its necessary and probable experimental consequences. This step is deduction.”  
Peirce (1980: 7.203)

Follow-up phenomena are deduced from the hypotheses, i.e. other phenomena are inferred that confirm this rule. In other words, for each hypothesis new hypotheses are considered about what will follow in the text, if this reading proves to be plausible. In a sequential text analysis, this means that conclusions are drawn from all the hypotheses formulated in the first step concerning possible phenomena in the coming text which would increase the plausibility of the hypotheses.

### 3. Empirical testing in the concrete case

“We proceed to test the hypothesis by making the experiments and comparing those predictions with the actual results of the experiment.”  
Peirce (1980: 7.205)

This is where empirical testing is carried out in the sense of inductive inference. The concrete case is examined for elements that match the deduced follow-up phenomenon. In a sequential procedure this means that the follow-up hypotheses are now contrasted with the text sequences or the empirical data that follow. Some of them gain plausibility, while others are falsified. The interpretations that cannot be falsified in the process of sequential analysis – those that are left over after hypothesis testing has excluded the improbable readings – are then regarded as the most probable.

In the process of abduction, the possibility of discovering something new lies in this third step, since readings can be discovered that were not anticipated. Here, again, it is important that the social researcher should have an open mind for these discoveries, and not be concerned only with testing her own assumptions.

In contrast to abduction, deduction begins with a theory from which hypotheses are deduced, and in a third step these hypotheses are tested numerically. Induction begins with a hypothesis, seeks empirical evidence or proofs in a second step, and generalizes these numerically in the third step, i.e. it tries to “generalize from a number of cases of which something is true, and infer that the same thing is true of the whole class” (Peirce 1980: 2.624). On the difference between abduction and induction, Peirce writes:

“Abduction makes its start from the facts, without, at the outset, having any particular theory in view, though it is motivated by the feeling that a theory is needed to explain the surprising facts. Induction makes its start from a hypothesis which seems to recommend itself, without at the outset having any particular facts in view, though it feels the need of facts to support the theory. Abduction seeks a theory. Induction seeks for facts” (Peirce 1980: 7.218).

Scholars in the field of qualitative social research often work inductively, by investigating a hypothesis formed on the basis of the available data, and examining the text for evidence to confirm this hypothesis. As suggested in the Sherlock Holmes<sup>9</sup> detective stories by A. Conan Doyle, and as has been empirically demonstrated by Ulrich Oevermann and his colleagues (1985), the police often work inductively. They will

---

<sup>9</sup> The Sherlock Holmes detective stories can be recommended as an entertaining introduction to abduction. Holmes often explains to his assistant Watson how his method differs from the inductive methods of the police. See, for example, “The Sign of the Four” (Doyle [1889] 1975: 41–50). For a comparison of Holmes and Peirce, see Sebeok/Umiker-Sebeok (1985). Umberto Eco’s novel “The Name of the Rose” is also a good illustration of this process.



start, for example, in a particular case from the hypothesis “the brother was the murderer”, and search for evidence that confirms this. In abduction, by contrast, the detective – and that is what we are when carrying out a reconstructive and abductive analysis – would start by considering the observable facts and all possible interpretations of their meaning. As we move from one empirical fact to the next, some possible readings will turn out to be improbable, while others will become increasingly plausible. However, in order to avoid moving in a circle and always returning to the same hypothesis, we must make an effort not to lose sight of the different hypothetical paths we have explored. We must follow these paths until they can be shown to be improbable. The reading we are left with at the end must then be considered as the most likely reading. In contrast to the policeman who works inductively and seeks evidence to prove that his hypothesis is true, “in abduction the consideration of the facts suggests the hypothesis. In induction the study of the hypothesis suggests the experiments which bring to light the very facts to which the hypothesis had pointed” (Peirce 1980: 7.218).

Thus, in contrast to induction and deduction, where hypotheses are derived from a general assumption or theory, abduction is the only method in which the researcher reflects on what has led to the formation of the hypotheses, and not just on testing them. The formation of hypotheses is not attributed to the researcher’s individual intuition, but to their interaction in the social world, their socially constituted experiences (see Fann 1970).

### **2.5.3 Empirical example: on reconstructing the function of the “disruptive son-in-law”**

What exactly is the difference between the method followed by the police and the method used by Sherlock Holmes, who reaches his conclusions in accordance with the process of abduction discussed by Peirce? How does the social researcher working abductively generate and test her hypotheses, in contrast to the policewoman who proceeds inductively to find evidence that will support her suspicion? In order to stay with the image of Sherlock Holmes and the police, here is a problem to be solved: We have a three-generation family – this is the case level – in which the culprit is Frank, the son-in-law, or grandson-in-law. The question to be answered is: What has this man done to make his in-laws speak of him as disrupting the family harmony? What is his offence? The search here is related not to the doer, but to his deeds. In the Seewald family, as we call them, Bettina Völter and I (Völter/Rosenthal 2010; Rosenthal 2010d) interviewed the maternal grandparents, the mother, the daughter, and her husband Frank; in addition, we conducted a family interview. In every case the interviewees spoke of Frank as someone who upsets the family harmony.

On a general level, we have three different possibilities for trying to discover Frank’s offence. In a deductive approach, we would first need to read the existing literature on the role of sons-in-law in family systems, and look for appropriate theoretical concepts. In this particular case, I could, for example, refer to the concept of

a closed family system as in the theory proposed by Michael Wirsching and Helm Stierlin (1982: 123ff.; Stierlin 1981). Such a family system is demarcated from the world outside, while internally there are hardly any boundaries between the different family members. In these families, conflicts are avoided, there is a harmonizing style of communication, and large parts of the family history are taboo. Characteristic of such systems is that married-in family members are either rejected or absorbed. Now it would be possible to formulate the following hypothesis: the Seewald family is a closed family system which is trying to reject Frank. In other words, the Seewald family is trying to get rid of the son-in-law, or grandson-in-law, who is disturbing the family peace. Then we would have to “operationalize” the concept of the closed family system, and show which observable features make us classify this family as a closed system.

Let us not pursue this path any further, but jump to the inductive path. In an inductive process, we would begin our analysis with a hypothesis that comes to mind in the concrete case because of what we know about it. Starting with this hypothesis developed on the basis of the main phenomena in the case, we would examine the available material for evidence that would support this hypothesis. This is how Sherlock Holmes always describes the methods of the police, who have a suspicion and look for evidence to confirm it.

Developing a hypothesis on the basis of the concrete case makes the inductive approach attractive for qualitative, but not abductive, social research which tries to develop categories on the basis of empirical cases and not to deduce them beforehand from a theory. The important thing here is that the researcher does not begin with a theory, but is guided by their knowledge in respect of the concrete case. In the Seewald family, for example, a superficial consideration of the interviews gives us the following facts: The family comes from East Germany, the former German Democratic Republic (GDR). In contrast to the son-in-law, or grandson-in-law, its members are strongly protestant, perceive themselves as strictly pacifist, and, in the past, they distanced themselves from the socialist regime of the GDR. By contrast, the son-in-law was, and still is, a dedicated member of the Communist Party (Socialist Unity Party, SED, and later the Party of Democratic Socialism, PDS), and is a former officer of the National People’s Army. Now, we could conclude that this is the reason for his difficulties in the Seewald family. Thus, we have two observed phenomena and infer a rule from them, in other words, we infer that there is a connection between these two observations. The next step would be to examine the text corpus for further evidence. In accordance with our hypothesis and the corresponding category “differences in political orientation”, we would look for sequences in which such a difference is expressed and subsume them under this category. In the logic of the inductive method, this finding could be generalized as follows: different political activities and opinions lead to disagreements in the family. This generalization would have to be tested in other cases, by checking them to see if these two categories frequently appear together. To test this hypothesis, we thus need more cases. In the logic of induction, as in that of deduction, generalization is only possible in

numerical terms. There is no structural difference in the ways of testing hypotheses developed out of the material and hypotheses formed on the basis of a theory. In both cases, we would approach the concrete text, i.e. the data we have collected, with a preconceived assumption, whether this assumption was developed on the basis of certain elements of the concrete case or derived from a theory. And in both cases, we would put two phenomena, or as we could say, two variables, in this family – difficulties with Frank and Frank's political views – in a causal relationship, without making a concrete reconstruction of the causal connection between them.

The abductive method, by contrast, requires us to reconstruct the rule system governing our research object, on the basis of the concrete data, i.e. our text material. In our example, this means we need to examine the internal family dialogue to find out to what extent Frank's political views or activities lead to conflicts or disturbances in this dialogue. But if we began with this hypothesis, we would run the risk of confirming our existing suspicions in a circular manner.

So how does abduction work? Firstly, Peirce's method of abduction and the method followed by Sherlock Holmes have in common that they both regard a preconceived opinion or hypothesis as the main obstacle to reaching the right conclusion. Holmes criticizes the police mainly because "they tend to adopt the hypothesis that offers the most likely explanation for the major factors in the case, completely ignoring 'minor factors', and rejecting any information that does not support their suspicion" (Sebeok/Umiker-Sebeok 1985: 44f.). They look for evidence to suit their hypotheses, while the abductive method begins with the evidence. This is expressed very nicely by Sherlock Holmes in his advice to Watson: "Never trust to general impressions, my boy, but concentrate yourself upon details" (Doyle 1892: 7) – and especially details that at first appear to be unimportant.

So let us take a detail, a phenomenon, from the dialogue of the Seewald family and begin the abductive inference process from there. We must start by bracketing our impression that Frank disturbs the family peace, i.e. we must not approach the material with this hypothesis in mind by looking for sequences in which people talk about the son-in-law's "disruptive" behavior. Rather, I will select a sequence according to a formal criterion: I will choose the place in the family interview where Frank is mentioned for the first time. Frank was not present at this interview, which was carried out with the maternal grandparents, the daughter and the granddaughter. They spoke about Frank during the second half of the two-hour interview. The sequence is introduced by an intervention on the part of the interviewer, who asks: "Is there anything you would like to ask the other members of your family that you have never asked before?" The family agrees that no one has a question. They assure us that everyone knows everything about everyone else. The grandmother, turning emphatically to her daughter, says: "We don't have any secrets from each other, do we? What do you want to know, you know everything about our life." The daughter confirms that she has no gaps in the family history. Incidentally, this is a sign of a closed family system. Only the granddaughter Petra does not completely fit into this harmony. She says she needs time to think. Then she speaks about her husband

Frank. Before considering what she says, let us focus on the phenomenon of when, in what context, and by whom, Frank is thematized. It was the granddaughter, his wife, who introduced him, in answer to a question put by the interviewer, in other words a question “from outside” which she had in her mind but up to now had not asked openly. There is talk of secrets. If we understand this sequence as a meaningful structure, not as an accidental one, we can interpret the introduction of Frank in connection with the other topics spoken about in this sequence, and formulate several hypotheses:

1. The granddaughter Petra needs Frank in order to give expression to unasked questions or to formulate such questions to her family through him.
2. The granddaughter Petra has introduced Frank as a guarantor of the absence of questions or as proof of the absence of family secrets.
3. Frank has a secret and Petra or the whole family would like to ask him about it.
4. Frank has questions he would like to ask the family. He senses a secret in the Seewald family and thus threatens the absence of questions in the family.
5. Questions are being imposed on the family “from outside”, in this case by the interviewer and by Frank. In the family, Frank is thus somebody “from outside”.

According to the abductive and sequential approach, the second step is to infer follow-up phenomena, meaning how the text would continue according to these hypotheses. We could breach the rules of an abductive and sequential approach (as is not uncommonly done in qualitative analyses), and search the whole text for evidence to confirm these hypotheses. But this would mean ignoring the sequential structure of the text. We could, for example, look to see whether Frank has a secret, and we could come up with the information that the individual interview with him shows how little he knows about the history of his family before 1945. And we could also offer several facts concerning family secrets in the Seewald family as evidence to support the alternative hypothesis.

However, applying a sequential approach to the interpretation of a text means taking its sequentiality, or gestalt-like nature, seriously. In other words, we should not jump about between individual passages looking for evidence to support a particular hypothesis and thus arrive at a circular conclusion. In a reconstructive analysis based on abduction, the fact that a phenomenon appears to fit a certain theoretical concept does not mean that there is no need to prove that this is so in the concrete case. Rather, reconstructive analysis looks for a causal connection in every individual case, and we must be able to show at this point in the dialogue whether and how the secret or secrets and Frank’s position in the family system are connected.

This requires carrying out the second step of the abductive method. We need to work out follow-up phenomena or follow-up hypotheses for each hypothesis we have formulated, by asking ourselves: How should the text continue for this hypothesis to

be falsified or for it to become more plausible? Only after this will these follow-up hypotheses be compared with the concrete continuation of the text.

For the sake of better readability, I will proceed at this point in a relatively rough and result-oriented fashion, by presenting text segments bigger than the meaning units which were interpreted step for step in the micro analysis. Moreover, I will “skip” a consistent decontextualization of this sequence, in the sense of bracketing all knowledge of the context of a family interview and of the persons participating, as required by the principles of objective hermeneutics.

Let us return to the sequence in the interview with the Seewald family described above. From the hypotheses that we have formulated, we can speculate as follows about Petra’s intentions:

If hypothesis 1 is correct, that Petra wants to put questions to the family through Frank, then, depending on the extent to which questions about the family history are taboo in the family, she will say more or less clearly what Frank would like to ask her family, or what doubts he has in respect of her family history.

If, on the other hand, hypothesis 2 is correct (“Frank as a guarantor of the absence of questions”), Petra will say that Frank knows everything about her family, or that she can talk to him “about everything” and has no secrets from him.

If the family wants to know something about Frank, as suggested in hypothesis 3, then she might talk about his family history, or about questions which no one has yet put to him.

If Frank is a threat to the absence of questions in the family (hypothesis 4), then, as in the case of the first hypothesis, Petra will speak about his (unjustified) questions and doubts.

Hypothesis 5 would be strengthened if in the subsequent course of the interview the family resorted to mechanisms in their treatment of us interviewers similar to those used with regard to Frank, or if we take on a similar function in the family dialogue.

Let us now compare our hypotheses with the empirical material and see what Petra says about Frank:

“Well sometimes it’s just difficult (1) with Frank to find the (2) the, the right words that is ( ) let’s say the only problem (2) well, that ((coughs)) when we argue sometimes (1) gets a bit loud or (1) well, you know, like it’s too much for my grandfather”<sup>10</sup>

Let us consider this passage. The granddaughter says the only problem is to find the right words when having an argument, that her husband plays a role, and that her grandfather finds it too much. Who argues with whom, and what they argue about, is not clear and it appears that Petra can only speak about it in vague terms. Here, again, we can formulate different readings. If we stick to the sequence of the text, in

<sup>10</sup> For an explanation of the transcription signs, see chapter 3.2.3.

other words if we consider what was said before this passage, we can hypothesize at this point that the argument is connected with questions and secrets. One possibility is that Petra wants to say that her grandfather doesn't like it when Frank asks questions. This would give plausibility to hypotheses 1 and 4, while hypothesis 2 ("Frank as a guarantor of the absence of questions") can be rejected or at least regarded as less plausible.

What will happen next? Will Petra go on to explain the argument, or will someone else intervene? Will we learn something about Frank and the questions he asks which lead to a loud argument that is too much for the grandfather? Are they questions which – as supposed in hypothesis 1 – the granddaughter is not able to ask, and which she makes Frank ask? But if the family does not want these questions to be asked, we can assume that a family member will try to prevent Petra from saying anything more about the matter.

It is the grandmother who then says:

"Well (1) Grandfather lived a different life from Frank, we have to (3) remember that"

Indirectly she makes it clear that it is the grandfather and Frank who argue with each other, perhaps because of questions which Frank puts to the grandfather, but we do not learn anything about the differences between the grandfather's life and Frank's life; instead, the grandmother gives a reason for their dissonance and pleads for recognition of the grandfather's life. The grandfather then speaks up and reinforces this by saying: "We had very different experiences, we suffered terribly". He suggests here that Frank does not appreciate his "different" experiences and his suffering, and the suffering of others, presumably his wife and other members of his generation. Up to this point, Frank is presented as someone who causes arguments which upset the grandfather, and who does not appreciate the suffering of the grandparents. But what are these "different experiences", which everyone seems to know about? Will the subject of Frank now be closed or will we hear something, and from whom, in respect of what the arguments are about? It was Petra who introduced her husband in answer to the question about unasked questions. If the hypothesis is correct that she tries to put questions to the family through Frank, then we can expect that for her the subject is not yet closed.

And indeed, Petra speaks again at this point:

"Grandfather, often feels that (1) that Frank err, is against him, doesn't believe him or (3)"

Thus, according to the granddaughter, Frank doubts the grandfather, or the grandfather feels doubted by Frank. Petra thus indirectly suggests that Frank has doubts concerning the "answers" given by the grandfather, and that he has questions which the members of the Seewald family do not have, as they assure each other. We can

assume that the family avoids these questions, that Frank threatens this absence of questions, while the granddaughter shows signs of wanting to use Frank to ask questions which no one is allowed to ask in this family (cf. hypotheses 1 and 4). If this is so, then, as we have already concluded, a) Petra will ask the questions only in very vague terms, and/or b) she will be prevented by the other members of the family from saying anything more on this topic.

The family's need to avoid talking about these things can be seen in the next remark. The grandmother wants to change the subject and says: "We've already said enough about that." Thus, she puts both Petra and the interviewers in their place (cf. hypothesis 5); in other words she thinks that we should stop discussing this and not ask any more questions about it. But the grandfather does not change the subject; he speaks about the Nazi years and the time he spent in captivity in the Soviet Union, which Frank did not experience. Thus, it is only the grandmother who would like to end the discussion. She then formulates the question which is presumably the reason for the arguments, and for which she does not want to hear an answer:

"Grandmother: And then the young people say why didn't you  
 Grandfather: Yes, yes  
 Grandmother: do anything? (1) That ((claps her hands)) wasn't possible,  
 we had-"

But what they had, we don't know, because she stops speaking at this point.

This is the question which is asked through Frank, by us interviewers, and probably "from outside" in general, or which Frank asks in the family on behalf of other family members. For our interpretation, the important thing is whether a clear formulation of the question is prevented in the subsequent course of the interview, and by whom. Or will Petra succeed in asking Frank's question? It is the mother who speaks next. It was the mother who at the beginning of this sequence said that she had no gaps in the family history. So what role does she play in this family dialogue on her son-in-law and on the family's past? She explains that in Frank's family no one ever talks about the time before 1945, and implies that they have a Nazi past. She turns to Petra and says:

"(1) for instance what was before 1945 (1) (what went on in families? Well (1)  
 I don't know whether you know anything?"

Here, the mother asks the granddaughter whether she knows anything about the history of her husband's family before 1945. She thus diverts attention away from the subject of her family history, although interestingly this is still co-present in the plural expression "in families". We can now formulate the following assumption: at this critical point in the family dialogue, where questions about the family history are imposed thematically or from outside, Frank is used to avoid questions about the family's own past or to divert attention from their own family secret, by asking ques-

tions about his family history. But Petra had introduced her husband into the discussion for yet another reason. Through him she thematizes her own possible questions and doubts. Although she has asked no questions herself or concretized Frank's questions and doubts, she is reprimanded by her mother. Her mother urges her to think about her husband's family and its history prior to 1945, instead of asking about her own family history. Thus, we can accept all the hypotheses formulated on the basis of the first meaning unit, with the exception of hypothesis 2, and then proceed to differentiate and modify them. And it is not quite true to say that the Seewald family would like to know about Frank's family, as stated in hypothesis 3; their questions in this respect have a particular function in their own family dialogue.

It is now the mother who continues, by distancing herself from Frank, and thus also from her daughter, who is married to him. She says that in her family there is an "indescribable dislike of anything military" and that this explains the disagreements with her son-in-law. Here again, we can formulate the hypothesis that she is speaking vicariously about a topic which is deeply connected with her own family's past, or her father's past as a soldier in the Second World War, and, as shown by the case reconstruction, his active participation in crimes against humanity.

If we had adopted an inductive approach and searched for evidence to confirm our assumption, formed before undertaking the analysis, that there is a connection between the political views of the son-in-law and his disruptive role in the family system, we would have found it here. But then we would not have gone beyond the family's self-interpretation that the arguments are due to political differences, and we would not have recognized the real dynamic behind these differences and the interactive (re)production of this disruptive position in the family system. We would have missed the opportunity to clarify Frank's position, and the position of "strangers" in general within the "systemic" structure of the family (cf. hypothesis 5). In this family, as shown by the complete case reconstruction, we interviewers, like Frank, disturb the family harmony, but serve at the same time to avoid much more threatening disruptions.

## Summary

Our analysis of this sequence shows that in this family a married-in member serves to divert attention from questions about the family history that exist internally and are brought in from outside, in that questions can be asked about his family background, and his questions can help to ward off the family member's own questions. Threats to the harmony of the Seewald family, or to the mutual agreement among its members that they have no questions, are attributed to Frank, or to the position he occupies, or are "redirected" to him. Our case reconstruction revealed the structural rule system of this family communication: whenever the central family secret of the Seewald grandparents is in danger of being revealed, someone in the family – usually the daughter – reveals some other secret, in order to divert attention from this central secret. This can be, for instance, the history of a married-in family member



in the second generation, like Frank's family history. Here, it is the granddaughter who poses a threat to the family's harmony and absence of questions, which continually has to be restored and confirmed. But she knows that she is not allowed to ask questions, and thus, even in her own eyes, her remarks are not a serious threat. Our reconstruction of her biography shows that her attempt to provoke the family system through her choice of partner, and through her own decision to join the Communist Party (PDS), does not lead to any change in the system (at least for the time being), due to the mechanisms described here, but rather contributes to maintaining it.

This brief account of a case reconstruction will have to suffice here. I would only like to underline that other cases are not needed to confirm our assumptions in this particular case (see chapter 2.5.5). Another family cannot serve to test our hypotheses concerning the rules governing communication within this family.

#### 2.5.4 The principle of sequentiality

Our abductive analysis of the interview with the Seewald family was carried out sequentially by interpreting one section of this interview according to its sequential gestalt, i.e. following the order in which the people spoke. In a sequential analysis, the process of creating an interaction or producing a text (whether a spoken or a written text) is reconstructed in small analytical steps. Individual spoken or written units are interpreted one after another, and hypotheses are formed in respect of both explicit happenings, and possible, or implicit, happenings. Part of the aim is to reconstruct references to what is omitted, and rules for the selection of what is thematized and what is dethematized. Thus, the analysis covers not only "what events are described and how they are described, but also *what is not* and *how* it is *not* described, although it could have been described (more or less plausibly)" (Wohlrab-Sahr 1999: 487). Our sequential analysis of the interview with the Seewald family shows that no one may ask questions about the family history, and reveals the strategies that are used, consciously or unconsciously, to avoid such questions.

The different methods of sequential analysis – whether borrowed from conversation analysis, objective hermeneutics or the sociology of knowledge – have in common that they start with the assumption that the temporal sequence of interactions "constitutes a special kind of order" (Willems 1996: 446). The aim of the analysis is to reconstruct this constantly recreated and changing social reality. The analysis takes into account the processual character of social interactions and the decisions constantly made by the actors. Every action – including every act of speaking – involves making a choice between different possible alternatives in the particular situation. Decisions have to be made at every step, whether we are taking part in a family discussion, telling our life story, writing an article, or writing this chapter. The range of possibilities open to us is greatest when we begin to speak or write. This range is reduced with every sequence we choose, but new possibilities then present themselves. While during the process of writing I can rethink my choices by simply erasing the last sentence, for instance, such radical revisions are almost impossible in

the interactive process of speaking; at most I can try to correct something I have said by making additional remarks.

Interactions that can be documented in memos are thus selection processes from which – regardless of the actor’s perspective – certain possible follow-up actions will result while others will be excluded. The case chooses from among the available possibilities. And the case creates something special by the specific choices it makes (see Oevermann et al. 1979: 415). Bruno Hildenbrand (1999a: 13), who has also conducted empirical research on family structures, writes: “Families, like other units of autonomous practice, produce and reproduce social order through the decisions they make ...: they develop a pattern which is characteristic of the individual case and the history of its decision-making processes. I call this pattern the case structure.”

This understanding requires a method of analysis in which the researcher asks which possibilities are available in a certain sequence, what choice is made by the actor or the speakers, what possible choices they do not consider and what consequences this has for the future. The sequential analysis results from these considerations. Hans-Georg Soeffner (1982: 13), following Wilhelm Dilthey, writes: “Interpreting is thus reconstructing the meaning of the text ‘in the line of the action’”.

As explained above (see 2.5.2), an abductive approach involves inferring how the sequence might continue on the basis of different possible readings of its meaning. These follow-up hypotheses are then compared with how it actually continued. In an approach based on objective hermeneutics, the external context is bracketed, i.e. our knowledge of the context is put aside, and instead all conceivable contexts are imagined:

“In the interpretation of a communicative act at a particular point in the interaction sequence, any knowledge of the content and meaning of subsequent communicative acts must be ignored, and knowledge of the external context in which the scene is embedded, i.e. information about the interactants, the institutional framework, the physical conditions, etc., may be used only when the readings made independently of this knowledge to explain the text are to be filtered in order to see which of them could be correct in the concrete situation.” (Oevermann/Konau 1980: 24)

In our analysis of the sequence from the interview with the Seewald family, bracketing the external context, the *de-contextualization of this sequence*, as required by objective hermeneutics, would logically have meant also putting aside our knowledge that this is a family interview. For example, we could have begun with the passage “We don’t have any secrets from each other, do we? What do you want to know, you know everything about our life”, and gone on to imagine appropriate contexts in which these words might be spoken. We could have formulated hypotheses, for instance, about who might say this to whom.

By ignoring both our knowledge of how the text continues, and our knowledge of its external context, we are able to see all the possibilities that were available to

the speaker or the author at the beginning of a specific sequence, before getting entangled in the meaning system of the producers of the text and the logic of the concrete situation. Free of the pressure to act imposed by the everyday situation, and unconstrained by the follow-up actions that seem most plausible, we can proceed in the analysis by imagining all kinds of possible follow-up actions, and thus reconstructing the “systematic” choices made by the case and its “systematic” omission of other alternatives.

Exploring different contexts in which an action or a remark might be pragmatically meaningful in the situation provides – as Oevermann (1988: 248) puts it – “a foil of ‘objective possibilities’ ... which could have been chosen, but which were not chosen”. The specific nature of the case, the case structure, becomes clear only in juxtaposition to this foil. As the sequential analysis proceeds, it will become clear whether the actors “systematically” exclude certain possible interpretations and actions which are open to them, i.e. what kind of rules determine their choices.

With this sequential approach, which involves putting aside our knowledge, a) of the external context, and b) of the way the text continues, we can begin to analyze a text sequence, without knowing anything about the rest of the text or about the text as a whole. The less we know about a text, the easier it is to interpret it without prejudice, because we do not have to make the effort of bracketing our existing knowledge. This is a great advantage of analyzing texts in groups, because here, apart from the researchers who have taken the sequence from their research material, the other participants need no knowledge of the text and its external context. Analyzing texts in groups is a very good way of forming different hypotheses and assuring they are followed up consistently as the analysis proceeds. It is especially advantageous if the group includes people from different disciplines, and in some research projects the analysis can benefit greatly from a multinational or multi-ethnic group.

### **2.5.5 Theoretical generalization and development of types on the basis of an individual case**

One could make the following objection with regard to the results of our case reconstruction of the Seewald family (chapter 2.5.3): “This is only one individual case, and you can’t make generalizations on the basis of it.” This frequently heard objection rests on the assumption that something that is general is something that occurs frequently, and generalization depends on frequency of occurrence. However, interpretive approaches involve a dialectic conception of “individual and general” in which the general can be found in the individual. Each individual case is constituted within a social reality, and can reveal something about the relationship between the individual and the general. It emerges from the general, and is part of the general. Thus, each individual case can tell us something about the general.

If we do not conceive of the general in numerical terms, then inferring the general from the individual will not depend on the frequency of occurrence of a phenomenon, but on our reconstruction of the constitutive moments of the individual

phenomenon in isolation from the situation-specific, i.e. case-specific, features.<sup>11</sup> Generalizations are thus not made in numerical terms, but in a theoretical sense: theoretical generalizations are made on the basis of individual cases and contrastive comparisons of these cases (see Hildenbrand 1999a; Rosenthal 1995).<sup>12</sup> The individual case can be a family, a biography, an organization (such as a hospital or a kindergarten) or a company.

In his methodological writings, Kurt Lewin contributed significantly to this understanding of reconstructing rules on the basis of an individual case. He argues that no other cases are needed to confirm rules reconstructed in an individual case. The effectiveness of these rules does not depend on how frequently we find similar rule systems – like the system we found in the Seewald family, which serves to maintain a ‘fragile absence of questions’. The type of family dialogue we observe in the case of the Seewald family is *one* possible way of interacting, and is a component of social reality, even if only one instance of it exists. We do not draw conclusions about all cases on the basis of this individual case, or about all cases on the basis of many cases, “but about all similar cases on the basis of a single concrete case” (Lewin 1992: 391f.). Once we have reconstructed the constitutive rules, for instance of a family dialogue, we can conclude that any case with a similar rule system also represents this type of family dialogue. This form of generalization is based on the Galilean definition of a law:<sup>13</sup> “[A] law is a proposition about a specific type characterized by its particular essence (Sosein)” (Lewin 1992: 394). A type comprises similar cases independently of how frequently these occur. Frequency of occurrence is of no significance in determining how typical a case is, in the sense used here:

“The complete determination of a type, even an *empirical type*, leaves totally undetermined the frequency with which this type is ‘realized’ in the course of historical time in the world. It is, for example, irrelevant for the chemical definition of gold and oxygen whether such an element is ‘widely’ distributed in a geographical sense and present ‘at all times’, or whether it is a type that is extremely ‘rare’, possibly ‘capable of existing’ at only a single time in a very specific phase of a single star. The frequency with which examples of a specific type are realized in unique world events remains ‘accidental’ for the characterization of the type, for which the only relevant dimension is its essence (Sosein). From the standpoint of systematics, i.e. of characterization as a type,

<sup>11</sup> Lewin (1992: 397ff.) distinguishes between constitutive moments which produce a phenomenon and residual factors which can differ from case to case without affecting the general type.

<sup>12</sup> On the logical complementation of case reconstructions in the tradition of objective hermeneutics using theoretical sampling in the sense proposed by Glaser and Strauss, see also Bude (2003). In this context, Heinz Bude also discusses Kurt Lewin’s conception of types.

<sup>13</sup> Lewin (1931: 144f.) contrasts this with the Aristotelian definition of a law, in which only that is lawful “which occur[s] without exception. Also, and this he [Aristotle] emphasizes particularly, those [things] are lawful which occur frequently. Excluded from the class of the conceptually intelligible as ‘mere chance’ are those things which occur only once, individual events as such.”

this is tantamount to saying: a matter of historico-geographical ‘constellations’.” (Lewin 1992: 394)

Therefore, reconstructive analysis is not aimed at collecting as many cases as possible: “It must, on the contrary, become important to comprehend the whole situation involved, with all its characteristics, as precisely as possible” (Lewin 1931: 166). The typicality of a case depends on the rules that generate it and organize its manifold parts. Two wholes do not have to have identical parts in order to belong to one and the same type, according to our genetic-structural, rather than descriptive, understanding of types – in contrast to a notion of elements and their “and-connection” or “and-summation” (see Wertheimer [1922] 1938a), according to which the sum of identical elements leads to identical wholes, or, conversely, identical wholes are made up of identical elements. Identical phenomena can be the result of very different causal connections (see Lewin 1992: 390). Therefore, a case can only be ascribed to a type after reconstructive analysis, because its structure can be inferred neither from identical elements, nor from identical external circumstances. Two phenomena may have the same gestalt even if none of their parts are the same. And conversely: their gestalt may be different even if many of their parts are identical. Thus, which “cases” are structurally similar, or belong to the same type, cannot be determined on the basis of their parts. In this structuralist understanding of type, which borrows from gestalt theory, developing types means reconstructing the gestalt and the constitutive rules of the social phenomenon – whether it is a family interview, a biographical narrative or a newspaper article – and not, as in a descriptive understanding, considering the sum of characteristic features. Only then can we make an effective contrastive comparison, in the sense of comparing structurally similar cases with structurally different ones, which will help us to develop new models. In other words, whether two cases are different representatives of the same type, or whether they belong to two different types, can only be determined after completing both case reconstructions.

This is also connected with the difficulty of using quantitative methods to test the frequency of occurrence of types reconstructed in interpretive studies. There is nothing wrong with asking how frequently a type occurs in a certain population, but numerical frequency can only be determined on the basis of a reconstructive analysis of every relevant case – and this is rarely done because it involves too much work, even if the task of assigning cases to types can be done fairly quickly once the types have been established. On the other hand, reconstructive analysis of a few cases that represent distinct types, and forming models on the basis of these analyses, can tell us something about interrelationships between types, and the social influence of a type, which cannot be inferred from its frequency of occurrence. Thus, it is possible that rare occurrences of one type have a greater influence on social reality than the very frequent occurrences of another type.

Types are constructions, or, as Alfred Schütz puts it, puppets, created by researchers who define “from what” a type or model should be formed, depending on their concrete research interests. This means that after completing the case reconstruc-

tion, during which the research question was bracketed, researchers then have the interesting option of typing or typologizing the same material in other ways in other research contexts. I will illustrate this in the next section.

### **2.5.6 Empirical example: developing different types on the basis of a case reconstruction**

Going back to the case of the Seewald family, I will try to show to what extent different types can be formed from a completed case reconstruction (here with a family as the case level), depending on the research question.

To recall the general context, we can assume that the Seewald family represents a family system in which no one is allowed to ask questions about the past, and in which harmony is very important. However, because this family has many secrets, there is always a danger that this harmony could be disturbed. The family's behavior is governed by the basic rule that whenever the central secret is in danger of being revealed, other, less threatening, secrets, or secrets of other family members, are revealed instead. This is the *general rule* governing the family dialogue in the Seewald family, and, as shown by the biographical case reconstructions of the different family members, it also influences the biographies of the grandparents, the daughter and the granddaughter. We can regard this as a "general" feature of this concrete case: rules are applied here which could also apply in other cases with a similar constellation. But we can go further in identifying these rules and the related family structure: cracks in the family harmony are repeatedly said to be caused by Frank, the son- or grandson-in-law of the Seewald family. This can also be generalized: this family is a case in which questions asked by "strangers" and by married-in family members are used by the family to maintain their myth of having no questions about the family's past.

To continue our construction of types we now need a concrete research question. I will demonstrate this using two different questions.

#### **Constructing types in connection with transgenerational courses of occupational mobility in families**

First, I will choose an issue that is far removed from the research context in which the Seewald family was interviewed: transgenerational occupational mobility in families.

If we consider the occupational data of this family, we see that grandmother Seewald completed an apprenticeship in dressmaking in the National Socialist period, grandfather Seewald worked as an unskilled laborer in a factory, while the mother qualified as a doctor and rose in the hierarchy of a hospital in the GDR. The daughter, or granddaughter, first trained and worked as a gardener, and after German re-

unification she took up a degree course at a university. Her father is a scientist and both paternal grandparents have university degrees. From these data we can see relatively quickly that in the Seewald family the mother rose up the professional ladder, while the granddaughter remained initially at the educational level of her maternal grandparents.

We could discover these facts by using a questionnaire, without any need to collect and analyze qualitative data. We could also formulate various hypotheses on the basis of these facts, regardless of our text material and case reconstruction. Thus, we could explain the mother's social rise in terms of the better educational chances for children from worker families in the GDR, and we also could interpret the granddaughter's apprenticeship, which took place before 1989, in this context. However, our case reconstruction shows that in this specific case the transgenerational occupational mobility can be interpreted in the light of the family's established way of managing its secrets and the effect this has had on the biographical courses of the later generations. Thus, we can show the mechanisms which have led to this course in this family. Our aim is to construct a type showing the rules that explain this course.

Our reconstruction of the biographical course of Petra, the daughter or granddaughter, shows a clear identification with her grandmother, and competition and rejection in respect of her mother. This is one result of our reconstruction of the separate moments in her biography (or socialization process) in their chronological sequence. Summarized briefly, Petra's biography is characterized by the following components: the first weeks of her life spent in hospital with a poor diagnosis for her chances of survival; a mother who found it difficult during this time to build a relationship with her daughter; spending her first years with her grandparents; being cared for at home by her grandmother and not in a nursery as was usual in the GDR; and a mother who worked long hours and was frequently absent. Petra's choice of occupation, and her choice of partner, both have for her the function of provoking her family of origin. Her choice of occupation was a provocation for her mother, and her choice of husband was a provocation for her grandfather.

This can be illustrated by a few details specific to this case. For example, the grandfather had to be taken to hospital after a serious quarrel with Frank, his grandson-in-law, over his past as a Wehrmacht soldier in the former Soviet Union. As shown by the reconstruction of the grandfather's biography and archive research, he was probably involved in mass executions of Soviet soldiers. As a former officer of the National People's Army, and a member of the SED and later the PDS, Frank represents the exact opposite of the grandfather in this family.

Petra's provocations are directly connected with the secrets management of her family of origin. On the one hand, Petra tries to disrupt the harmony by asking forbidden questions, and on the other hand these disruptions help to preserve the central secrets. In addition, the case reconstruction of this family shows clearly that the social rise of Petra's mother in the social system of the GDR was due, at least

in part, to the need of her parents, Petra's grandparents, to hide their burdensome Nazi pasts and to adapt themselves "externally" to life in the GDR.<sup>14</sup> Their granddaughter's choice of partner and her choice of a manual occupation can also be read as forms of adaptation to the GDR system.

To sum up, we can conclude that this family represents a type of transgenerational occupational mobility in which the social rise of the mother is connected with adaptation to the social system, and the initial social descent of the granddaughter is connected with her provocation of the family system and with her adaptation to the social system. This need for "external" adaptation is connected with the family's Nazi past. The secrets management of the grandparents which enables them to ward off their burdensome Nazi past has functional significance in these occupational courses, although they are also influenced by other factors.

On the basis of this analysis, we have thus formulated a type which not only describes the surface phenomena, but also shows the structure generating the case and the rules of this structure formation. We are thus talking here of a structural, and not a descriptive, understanding of types. In contrast to a descriptive approach to constructing types, a structuralist approach does not mean adding together the features or elements in the sense of an "and-connection".

We can also assume that the same surface phenomenon, "middle generation rises and granddaughter generation returns to the educational level of the grandparents", can be generated by different types, of which we have reconstructed only one up to now. For the next case reconstruction in our contrastive comparison (see chapter 3.2), we could now select a family with a similar transgenerational course of occupational mobility, but which at least superficially – i.e. before the case reconstruction – appears to belong to a different type. For example, we could choose a family in which family secrets do not play such a powerful role, or at least not in relation to the educational and occupational courses of its members.

### **Constructing types in connection with the family dialogue on the Nazi period**

We will now consider our case reconstruction in the context of the question how the grandparents' Nazi past is handled in three-generation families, and construct an appropriate type. The starting point for creating our "puppet" is not the occupational mobility of the family members, but the way the family handles its Nazi past. Constructing a type, i.e. formulating its external gestalt, depends on our question, which in turn depends on our research interest. The completed case reconstruction allows us to show the rules governing the generation of this gestalt. This gives rise to the question: which mechanisms produce this gestalt, which are the effective or functional components in this respect?

---

<sup>14</sup> The analysis of our interview with Petra's mother shows that her decision to study medicine is connected with the occupational past of her own mother, who worked in the Second World War as an auxiliary nurse in a military hospital.



Here, too, I will stay as close as possible to the concrete case, and present some details specific to it, before formulating this type in more abstract terms. These details are also important for the intersubjective comprehensibility of the construction of types.

I have already mentioned the grandfather's burdensome past as a Wehrmacht soldier and the likelihood that he participated in mass executions. He himself speaks of "inhumane orders" which he had to obey. In the case of the grandmother, we know very little about her time as an auxiliary nurse in a military hospital during the war, her arrest by Soviet forces in 1945, and her escape during transport to Siberia. Both the daughter and the grandmother prevent us from asking questions concerning certain veiled remarks.

In this family, the mysterious death of the paternal great-grandfather is also a taboo subject. His dead body was found in a river in 1955. In the family, this is treated as a family secret and interpreted as a mystery. Was a secret service responsible? Is his murder connected with the nearby former concentration camp? Did a Nazi victim take revenge on him? Following this death, the grandfather suffered from paranoia and feared he might be arrested. This explains why he more or less evaded questions that are suggested in the interviews. These distressing components of the family history are all connected with the family's active Nazi past, but also with a fear of possible repercussions on the family in the GDR. It is remarkable here that not only the grandparents and the mother, but also the granddaughter, present the family history as a history of victims of the Soviet regime.

Characteristic of the dialogue on the Nazi period in this family is the fact that all family members repeatedly talk about Nazi crimes and imply their own involvement, but avoid answering questions in this respect and instead speak about the crimes committed by other people. Especially the grandfather talks at length about the Nazi crimes, thematizing his role as a witness but not as a perpetrator, and talking in particular about his friend and brother-in-law. This man, the husband of his wife's sister, did not return from Soviet captivity. Mr. Seewald thinks that in the Soviet Union he was found guilty of war crimes, because he had taken part in mass executions of Soviet prisoners of war. From the way these passages about his friend are embedded in the text, we can conclude that he uses them as an indirect way of talking about his own past.

The individual components of this type of family dialogue, which have been presented in a relatively descriptive manner, such as presenting themselves as victims, denying having taken part in Nazi crimes, or speaking vicariously about the crimes of others, can often be found in Germany. This dialogue also corresponds to the public discourse on the Nazi period. As shown by various studies, these components can be seen as occurring frequently in a statistical sense. But in contrast to quantitative analyses, or qualitative analyses aimed at making numerical generalizations, the case reconstruction of the Seewald family reveals the interplay of these components, the specific mechanisms of this type of secrets management. It also gives some clues to the history of the development of this type.

This family represents a type of family dialogue on the Nazi period in which its members evade their own family secrets in the context of the Nazi past by revealing the secrets of others. Thus, for instance, at a critical point in the family interview when it seemed that the grandfather might start talking openly about his Nazi past, the granddaughter revealed that her paternal great-uncle was an SS officer and guard in the above-mentioned concentration camp.<sup>15</sup>

Our reconstruction of the family history and the individual biographies from the text of the interviews, shows that behind these secrets connected with the Nazi period there are other, even more distressing, secrets concerning the sexual abuse of children in this family. Experiences in their childhood of sexual abuse by a family member are implied in the interviews with the grandmother (by her father) and the granddaughter (probably by her maternal grandfather).

By disregarding the features specific to this case, we can now make the following generalizations: this family represents a type of family dialogue on the Nazi past, in which the participation of several family members in Nazi crimes is repeatedly referred to in a vague and diffuse way, further questions about this are warded off, and a form of secrets management that was established even before the Nazi period is employed, in which the Nazi past of married-in family members is revealed as a way of evading revelation of the family's own secrets, including secrets relating to intrafamilial sexual abuse. In these circumstances, it seems likely that speaking about secrets relating to the Nazi past is in itself a way of concealing other family secrets relating to the sexual abuse of children by family members (see Loch 2004).

The form of type construction I have presented here is not aimed solely at making as detailed a description as possible of the case-specific features and the special historical context, nor does it have the sole aim of defining rules or laws. Only the particular, the individual case, can reveal the typical. Constructing types is thus neither only idiographic, i.e. does not only describe the unique features of individual cases, nor is it only nomothetic, i.e. it does not only seek to define more or less general, and ideally supra-historical, laws (see Hitzler/Honer 1992: 21). In a way, this coincides with Max Weber's (1949) synthesizing strategy of concept formation, according to which pursuit of both these goals is possible (see Rossi 1987: 22–25; Seale 1999: 106; Tenbruck 1986). George Psathas formulates the goal of type construction in terms of Weber's concepts of the ideal type as follows:

“The ideal type is a construct developed by the analyst for particular purposes. It represents a selection of features or elements considered *significant, essential or exemplary*. It is based on or derived from observations of empirical reality and compared with that reality in its formulation but it does not purport to be a fully accurate and complete depiction of that reality *in all of its features*. It systematizes and organizes a number of features by drawing out or focus-

---

<sup>15</sup> By contrast, in the individual interviews, the father's family was consistently presented as a family of resistance fighters or regime opponents.

ing on these and selectively excluding others. In the view of the analyst who develops the ideal type, empirical reality consists of multiplicities of events and activities which are manifest in a virtually chaotic and unending flow of discrete particularities thereby necessitating selection, focus and reduction in order to achieve a more coherent formulation.” (Psathas 2005: 147; emphases added G.R.)



### 3 Research process and research design

*Preliminary remark: In this chapter, I will show the significance of the principle of openness, which has been discussed in the previous chapter, and its methodological implications for the research process. I will start with sampling, or developing a theoretical sample in the course of the research process. I will also describe the sequence of steps for an interpretive study based mainly on interviews.*

*First, let us recall that the steps for collecting and analyzing data are characterized by the following features:*

#### **General principles of research**

- No separation between collection and analysis of data
- Initially, only a tentative research question with possibility of modification
- Hypotheses are formed during the research process
- Theoretical samples are developed during the research process
- Researchers must be willing *at times* to ignore their own particular research interests during observations or interviews
- During data collection, *first* the everyday relevance system of the actors should be investigated (not that of the researchers)

### 3.1 Theoretical sampling and theoretical saturation

Sampling means selecting persons that we want to interview, cases that we want to investigate, situations we want to observe or record using technical means, or documents we want to analyze. All the “units” or “cases” that we study belong to our sample. While in a quantitative study the sample is defined beforehand according to distribution criteria, so that it will be as representative as possible, this is not the case in interpretive social research. Harry Hermanns (1992: 116) describes the difference as follows: while in quantitative social research samples are selected which are intended to “reflect a small part of the existing empirical ‘cases’”, in qualitative social research the samples should “reflect the theoretically important categories”.

If we follow a logic of discovery, we cannot decide which cases we want to include in our study before beginning it, because we cannot know beforehand which cases will turn out in the course of the research to be theoretically important. For example, if we are planning to carry out participant observation in a big company, we will not know at the beginning of the study which situations will be interesting in connection with the social reality of this company, in which departments and in which situations participation will prove to be fruitful, and how many situations we will have to observe in order to be able to reconstruct the main components of the case. If we are interested in different occupational or migration biographies, we do not know how many different “types” we will find at a certain time that are relevant to our research question, and we certainly cannot define the functional components of these types beforehand. It may seem reasonable to create a sample containing equal numbers of men and women, but this selection criterion only makes sense in the context of statistical distribution criteria. In a qualitative study, whether of occupational biographies or experiences of migration, we cannot decide beforehand to what extent “gender” is a significant feature, although we do need to be sensitive to gender as a category in the individual case reconstructions. If gender is of functional significance in the course of occupational careers or experiences of migration, this will become evident during the empirical research. However, this would still not mean that there must be equal numbers of men and women in the sample.

In a theoretical sample, in contrast to a statistical sample, neither the size nor the distribution characteristics of the sample can be determined beforehand. Since there is no separation between the phases of collection and analysis of data, this is no problem. In a quantitative study, it is necessary to carry out all interviews or all observations before beginning the analysis, but in a qualitative study we need to analyze each interview or each observation memo as we go along, for this is what determines how the data collection should continue, and thus how the sample should be selected.

Theoretical sampling does not depend on distribution criteria, but on theoretical assumptions that are formed in the course of the research and are thus empirically grounded. This sampling method, which was proposed by Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss (1967: 45–78), is today one of the commonest methods used in interpretive

social research (Hildenbrand 1999a; Schütze 2007a, 2007b). It can be distinguished from other methods, such as selective sampling (see Schatzman/Strauss 1973), in which the sample is determined beforehand on the basis of theoretical considerations. Strauss (1987: 39), referring to the book he wrote together with Schatzman (1973), puts it this way: "Selective sampling refers to the calculated decision to sample a specific locale or type of interviewee according to a preconceived but reasonable initial set of dimensions (such as time, space, identity) which are worked out in advance for a study." Theoretical sampling, on the other hand, is a continuous process during the study, and depends on the analysis of the data collected so far.

"Theoretical sampling is a means whereby the analyst decides on analytic grounds what data to collect next and where to find them. The basic question in theoretical sampling is: What groups or subgroups of populations, events, activities (to find varying dimensions, strategies, etc.) does one turn to next in data collection. And for what theoretical purpose? So this process of data collection is controlled by the emerging theory." (Strauss 1987: 38f.)

The process of sampling is ended when no new phenomena can be found which will modify the theoretical insights that have been reconstructed, or which will contribute to the construction of new types. To borrow the term used by Glaser and Strauss, sampling, and the analysis, can be considered as completed when the point of theoretical saturation has been reached: "Saturation means that no additional data are being found whereby the sociologist can develop properties of the category" (Glaser/Strauss 1967: 61). While the authors speak here of "data" and "categories", this means that, in the reconstructive analysis of individual cases, the point of saturation is reached when no more cases can be found which require the construction of a new type, or which would modify the theoretical generalizations that have been made. Thus, the complex reconstruction of individual cases does not end "after collecting the cases in a statistically representative way, related to the frequency of their occurrence" (Overmann et al. 1975: 20), but when we find nothing more that is new, in the theoretical sense. With one kind of research topic, the point of "saturation" may be reached fairly quickly, while with a different kind of topic the process may turn out to be endless. It must also be remembered that the criterion of theoretical saturation is an ideal criterion, and that in practice a research process often has to be ended prematurely due to lack of time or funding, although in some cases it can be continued at a later time in the context of a new project. And we can never be certain that there are no new theoretically important insights to be gained, as we all suffer from blind spots that will prevent us from seeing certain facts or conditions and thus hinder the process of discovery, especially if these blind spots are socially shared, supported or even required.

In the many years during which I conducted research on the thematic field of "National Socialism", I experienced such a process of gradually learning to recognize socially shared, and required, blind spots, especially in connection with present-day

Table 1: Differences between theoretical and statistical sampling (borrowed from Peter Wiedemann (1991: 441), modified by Steffen Kühnel and Gabriele Rosenthal)

<b>Theoretical sampling</b>	<b>Statistical sampling</b>
Population is only vaguely defined and its size is not known beforehand	Size of the population is usually known
Features of the population are not usually known beforehand and are constantly revised in the course of the research process	Distribution of features in the population can be estimated on the basis of the sample results
Cases may be selected for the sample more than once according to criteria arising from the analysis	As a rule only one sample is selected according to a preconceived plan, and no change in the selection criteria with sequential selection
Size of sample is not defined beforehand	Size of sample is usually defined beforehand

antisemitism and the participation of the German people in Nazi crimes. This not seeing, and not being allowed to see, certainly affected my doctoral research on the members of the Hitler Youth generation (Rosenthal 1987). By this I do not mean that today I would completely reject the empirically grounded conclusions I came to at that time; but there is a lot that I simply did not see, and I ended the research process much too early, in terms of theoretical saturation. However, if I had not done so, it is likely that I would still be working on my doctoral dissertation today.

While in a quantitative study the size of the sample is defined at the beginning, and as a rule the size of the population is also known, in a theoretical sample the size of the sample and the size and features of the population are only known at the end. If, for instance, I were to begin a study with a vague research question relating to asylum seekers in Germany and how they experience the asylum process, the population would be known at the beginning. But it could change in the course of the study, for example if German friends, or even relatives, should turn out to be important for the way a person experiences the asylum process, so that they need to be included in the sample, or if the empirical findings suggest that it would be interesting to make a contrastive comparison with refugees or migrants who are living illegally in Germany.

The differences between theoretical and statistical sampling can be summarized as shown in the table on top of this page.



## 3.2 The research process in a study based on interviews

*Preliminary remark: How do we organize a research process based on theoretical sampling that is aimed at making generalizations on the basis of individual cases, and constructing theoretical models with the aid of a contrastive comparison of cases? The studies carried out by Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss (1967), and in later years by Strauss together with Juliet Corbin (1990), were mainly based on participant observation, and this is clearly reflected in their discussions of the research process. Some modifications are therefore required for studies that are mainly based on interviews and complex case reconstructions. In participant observation, the researcher goes into the field and makes observations; he then writes field notes or observation memos and analyzes them; depending on the results, he then decides where and when to make further observations, and which phenomena deserve particular attention.<sup>1</sup> The amount of work required for the analysis of each interview conducted is far greater than for the analysis of an observation memo. An observation memo is only one document among many for the reconstruction of a case which is usually related to an aggregated social unit such as a group or an organization (see chapter 6.3). The analysis of interviews usually starts with transcribing the dialogue from a tape recording, which costs time and often money. This has led me to make a distinction between two theoretical samples. The first sample comprises all interviews conducted during the project, or, to put it more precisely, all the cases studied. The second sample contains only those cases which will be subjected to a close analysis on the basis of the transcribed interviews. The second sample is thus a subset of the first sample. Below, I will give a detailed description of this method, which is used in a similar way by other social researchers (see Hildenbrand 1999a; Schütze 1983). I will discuss the recruiting of interviewees, the keeping of field notes or observation memos in addition to the recorded interviews, making a global analysis of these memos, and different ways of presenting the results of the study.*

### 3.2.1 Making the first contact with possible interviewees and arranging an interview

The research process begins with considering what kind of people we could conduct the first interviews with, in the light of our vaguely formulated research question, and how we can make contact with such people. Let us suppose that we are interested in making a study of the process of decision-making in respect of ending a pregnancy, and of how the individuals concerned experience this phase in their lives. In some research fields, the quickest and easiest way to recruit interviewees is to advertise in the local newspaper. However, practice has shown that this is not a suitable method for a topic of this kind (see Wiechers 1998), in contrast to topics relating, for

---

<sup>1</sup> Guidelines for writing observation memos and for analyzing them are given in chapter 4.4.

instance to the Second World and National Socialism: I obtained a good response to newspaper advertisements, both from members of the generation of contemporaries and perpetrators, and from members of later generations. In order to recruit women who have had an abortion, we placed leaflets in doctors' offices.

My intention here is not to list all possible recruitment methods. I only want to point out that these experiences give us some idea of what we need to consider when seeking interviewees. They tell us something about the contexts in which people will agree to talk about a certain topic, and in which contexts they will not. The recruitment method already gives us an idea of how the interviewees will define the interview situation and sometimes there is no way to revise their definition later. It makes a big difference whether someone rings up after seeing an advert in the paper, arranges an appointment for an interview after a short discussion on the phone and knows hardly anything about the interviewers, or whether the person has been persuaded by their boss at work or by their doctor to agree to be interviewed, or whether the interview is arranged by a common acquaintance. The important thing is that we need to reflect on the method of recruitment in our analysis, and wherever possible we should try to use several different methods in order to contact different groups of people.

The principles of *research ethics*<sup>2</sup> require that on our first contact with an interviewee we need to inform the person about our research and the research context, and how we plan to conduct the interview. It is also important to explain that we will adhere to the principles of data protection, and the person must agree to take part in the planned interview. The person must also agree beforehand to us making an audio or video recording of the interview.

We usually send a letter with this information to the interviewee before the first interview, or give it to them in person before beginning the interview. In the DFG project on three-generation families of survivors of the Shoah, or of Nazi perpetrators (Rosenthal 2010a), we used the following formulation:

“We will adhere to the principles of data protection, and the recorded interviews will be used for research purposes only. In publications, personal data will be modified in such a way that it will not be possible to identify the persons concerned. We will also respect the principle of confidentiality within the family; we will not discuss the interviews with other family members.”

The letter should also contain information about the institutional framework of the study and the aims of the research. In our letter to non-Jewish families<sup>3</sup> in the context of the above-mentioned project, we formulated this as follows:

<sup>2</sup> On research ethics, see Bruno Hildenbrand (1999a: 21f., 75–80) and Christel Hopf (2004).

<sup>3</sup> The text in the letter to Jewish families differed slightly; here we referred to the effects of National Socialist persecution.

“We are looking for families who would be interested in talking to us about their personal biographies and family history in the context of a research project funded by the DFG (German Research Foundation). A condition of participation is that at least one member of each of three generations (grandparents, parents, grandchildren) must agree to be interviewed. We are especially interested in learning about the effects of the family history during the Second World War (war experiences, migration, expulsion, persecution) on families and their individual members, both in the past and in the present.”

It is also important to clarify beforehand whether the interviewees have any false expectations. In particular, we have to try to avoid creating expectations that we will not be able to fulfill and which will only lead to disappointment. Such expectations might range from the hope that we will act as social workers and deal with the authorities on their behalf, or persuade their daughter to complete her studies, or even help them to get their biography published. Such expectations may also arise later on, in the course of the contact. The rule here is that before the interview we must decide for ourselves whether or not we are willing and able to fulfill expectations of this kind, and then make our position quite clear to the interviewees. A basic rule is that it is better to promise too little than too much. In certain contexts, such as interviews with people in difficult situations, it is not inconceivable that the interviewer might offer support beyond the research context, and it is always possible to help people to contact qualified professionals, whether social workers, doctors or therapists.

At the end of the interview with the Morina family from Kosovo (see chapter 2.3), for example, Michaela Köttig and I came to the conclusion that in this case we should abandon our normal reticence to offer practical help or to play the role of social workers. Families like the Morinas need practical support, and we decided that at least we could help them to contact aid organizations. Ms. Köttig approached a refugee council on their behalf and asked it to do what it could to prevent the family being deported. Social scientists should show their solidarity with refugees and torture victims, just as David Becker (2000), for instance, argues that psychotherapists should.

### **3.2.2 Memos and global analyses**

How the contact was made and everything else that takes place before the beginning of the recorded interview should be described in our field notes or memos. Like all other data collected in connection with the case (archive material, photographs, letters, medical records, etc.), this information is included in the subsequent case reconstruction. This means that for each interviewee a memo is started at the time of the first contact, and continued as soon as possible after the first meeting or first interview, and after all other meetings. In the case of biographical-narrative interviews,

I recommend conducting at least two interviews with the same person, because this enables us to: a) receive feedback about the effect of the first interview, b) try in the second interview to close the gaps that we have noticed during the first analysis or while writing up the memo, and c) create a different, more open atmosphere in the second interview because a degree of trust has already been built up. Especially in the case of interviews with traumatized people, my colleagues and I often conduct follow-up telephone interviews, and in some cases we meet our interviewees again because we are invited to a cup of coffee, or a family celebration, or a funeral. Each of these meetings is described in a memo. In addition to descriptions of meetings that are not recorded on tape, a memo also contains information about the interview which has been recorded. In narrative interviews, the notes taken during the interview follow the criteria of a case reconstruction (see chapter 6.2), in which the sequential gestalt of the case history, and the sequential gestalt of the *presentation* of the case history in the interview, are reconstructed in separate analytical steps. This applies both to biographical case reconstructions and to analyses relating to other case levels, such as a family, a group or an organization. First, the events are noted in the chronological order of their occurrence. These are data which – probably – do not depend on the interpretation of the narrator (see Oevermann et al. 1980).<sup>4</sup> On the case level of the individual biography, this means biographical data such as birth, number of siblings, education, marriage or medical history. On the case level of a family, the family history data are noted, and in the case of interviews with experts from a certain milieu or a certain organization – for instance volunteer church workers – the data will include both institutional data on this particular church and the biographical data of the interviewees, especially those involved in voluntary work.

In addition, the points that were noted during the narrative interview (see chapter 5.4) are included according to the sequential gestalt of the introductory or main narrative, which is presented autonomously by the interviewee, without any interruptions from the interviewer. As far as possible, it should be noted in which order, in how much detail and in which text type the person speaks about certain areas or phases of their life. The additional information gained in the question part of the interview must also be noted.

These notes can then be used to carry out a *global analysis*, or first provisional analysis. On the basis of this analysis, the first and the second theoretical samples are developed, i.e. a decision is made concerning what interviews should still be conducted, and which interviews need to be transcribed for a closer analysis.

To proceed with the case reconstruction (see chapters 6.2 and 6.3), first the biographical data are arranged sequentially, in accordance with the method proposed

---

<sup>4</sup> However, we must also reckon with interviewees who contradict themselves, for instance by mentioning different dates for one and the same event, because they have rewritten their life story and modified their biographical data. These discrepancies usually come to light during the sequential analysis of the data (see chapter 6.2.2). It is then advisable to stop asking about “what happened”, and instead to form hypotheses concerning these discrepancies and to think about what the function of these contradictions and rewritings might be (see Rosenthal 2002a).

by Ulrich Oevermann et al. (1980), and in a later step they are compared with the presentation of these events by the interviewee. Thus, before the interpreter begins to analyze the interviewee's self-presentation and their interpretation of past events at the time of the interview, hypotheses are formulated concerning possible meanings of the data for the interviewee at the time of the event, and in respect of how the case history might continue.

In the next step, the different segments of the main narrative are considered sequentially in accordance with the method of text and thematic field analysis (see chapter 6.2.3). Here, hypotheses are formulated concerning the possible meaning of the way events are presented in the interview. The hypotheses are mainly related to the sequential gestalt of the main narrative, the difference between the main narrative and the question part of the interview, the choice of text types, and how extensively or briefly the person speaks about a particular topic or a particular period in their life.

Thus, in global analyses first hypotheses regarding the case are formed in separate steps according to the rules of a sequential and abductive method. In the light of the research question, first provisional types can be defined based on the global analysis, and comparisons can be made with other interviews. The global analysis allows us to develop provisional concepts and types which give us theoretical criteria for developing the sample.

### 3.2.3 First and second theoretical samples

We begin our study with first interviews and the subsequent forming of the first theoretical sample. Using our memos and global analyses of these first interviews, we decide who we want to contact for further interviews, and we select the first case to be subjected to closer analysis. This first case can be an individual interview, or, in social systems like a family, it can be interviews with different family members. The tape recordings of the interviews connected with the case are now transcribed. This means transferring the audible interview onto paper, ignoring the normal rules for written texts. The tape recordings are *transcribed*<sup>5</sup> word for word and without any omissions, reproducing all audible speech and signals, including pauses, emphases, mistakes and breaks. It is best to avoid using punctuation marks as required by normal grammatical rules. Commas can be used to indicate a brief pause in speaking (see Bergmann 1976: 2). Division of the speech into sentences using full stops, exclamation marks or question marks should be avoided, as this would be an interpretation. Pauses in speaking are marked by brackets containing a number which represents the length of the pause in seconds.

In my work, I use transcription symbols borrowed from Jörg Bergmann (1976, 1988: 21), which are depicted on the following page.

---

<sup>5</sup> For details of different transcription systems, see Psathas (1995: 70ff.).

Table 2: Transcription symbols

<b>Examples</b>	<b>Description</b>
Speaker 1: and so #we went# Speaker 2: #hmhm yes#	simultaneous utterances
(says he)	approximate transcription
(        )	incomprehensible (space between brackets approximately corresponding to length / duration of passage)
((slowly)) ((coughs))	transcriber's comments, also descriptions of moods & non-verbal utterances or sounds
\... ((slowly))\	\ marks beginning and end of phenomenon
((vividly)) ...	general change of mood, probably continuing
,	brief pause
(5)	pause in full seconds
many mo- , more	sudden halt/faltering / (self-)interruption
ye=yes	rapid speech, words closely linked
ye:s	sound lengthened
'yes'	softly, in a low voice
<b>never</b>	syllable (sound) stressed
<b>NO</b>	loudly
<b>NEVER</b>	stress (emphasis) during passage spoken in a loud voice

The first case reconstruction can influence the way we develop the first sample. For example, in the context of a study of how people experienced the Second World War, it was the analysis of an interview with a veteran of the First World War, and the important insights this gave into the way he experienced the Second World War, that led me to seek more interviewees of this generation.

Thus, the conducting and analyzing of interviews are not chronologically distinct phases; rather, both the global analysis and the case reconstruction continually supply us with new impulses for expanding the first and second samples. The choice of both the first sample (people to be interviewed) and the second sample (cases to be subjected to more detailed reconstruction) is guided by a theoretically interesting case and by the criterion of variance, with the aim of reconstructing different types. While the choice of the sample is initially guided by existing theoretical or everyday assumptions, and it may be formed more or less by chance, this changes in the course of the study. The selection of interviewees is increasingly based on

theoretical generalizations developed under the influence of empirical insights (see Hildenbrand 1999a: 66). In contrast to Hildenbrand, I require no preliminary theoretical considerations in choosing the first interview for the second sample, in other words for the first case analysis. Rather, I assume that every interview – provided it was well conducted – is suitable for the first case analysis, because after analysis every interview can lead to the construction of a type relevant to our research question. With a sufficiently careful and comprehensive typification of the area in which we are interested, it must be possible to ‘locate’ every interview in relation to the types so far constructed, and, where this is not possible, to use it to create a new type. By ‘locate’ I do not mean subsumption under a class, but a kind of ‘distance measurement’ in relation to a type, or to different types if the interview seems to be a kind of mixed type.

Further interviews for detailed case reconstruction are selected in the light of theoretical considerations based on the first analysis (see below).

As I have already pointed out, before the analysis it is not possible to say exactly how many interviews we will need to conduct or how many we will need to analyze in detail. In a study aimed at reconstructing distinct types, the size of the two samples can only be determined *ex post*, in other words after completing the analysis. They are big enough when no more new types can be formed. We can then speak of theoretical saturation.

The steps to be followed in data collection are:

#### **Research design**

The following steps do not correspond to chronological order

- First theoretical sampling = WHOLE SAMPLE
- Memos and global analysis of all interviews, observations, texts
- Second theoretical sampling – drawn from the whole sample
- Transcription of the interviews in the second sample & Case Reconstructions

### **3.2.4 Minimal and maximal contrastive comparison of cases**

I have already shown that types are constructed on the basis of individual cases, and that an individual case can be a personal biography, a family, a group, an organization or a whole society. Typification is the construction of types by the researchers in relation to a research question that focuses on a certain social phenomenon (such as occupational careers or migration courses). The aim of this kind of research is to be able to make statements about the different types found at a certain time, and, where appropriate, about the ways in which they are interrelated. It may then be possible to offer different solutions for a particular social problem. We can ask which different career paths or migration courses can be found in a concrete historically

### Theoretical generalization

1. Development of types from an individual case (after completing the case reconstruction), based on the research question and the case level, which may be an individual, a family, an ethnic or religious we-group, or an organization
2. Maximal and minimal contrastive comparison and further theoretical generalization
3. Further theoretical generalization or empirically based development of a grounded theory

and geographically limited area. These theoretical generalizations and models result from a contrastive comparison of the completed case reconstructions and the types that are based on them.

The method of contrastive comparison in the different traditions (e.g. Schütze, Oevermann, Hildenbrand)<sup>6</sup> follows the recommendations of Glaser and Strauss (1967: 55ff.), who distinguish between minimal and maximal contrastive comparisons. In a *minimal contrastive comparison*, a case reconstruction is completed, and then another case is selected for further analysis which shows superficial similarities with the first case in respect of the phenomenon that is being studied (see Schütze 1983: 287). For example, if we reconstructed a migration course in which the migration was motivated to a large degree by suffering under the difficult economic and political conditions in the country of origin, we could choose for comparison another case involving similar circumstances. However, it is quite possible that our analysis will show that the two cases are very differently structured. In the second case, although the difficult situation in the country of origin was given as the reason for migrating, it is possible that the analysis may show that this component has no functional significance, and that the family history, in the sense of unconsciously fulfilling a delegated obligation to emigrate, played a much more important role in the decision to emigrate. A comparison of the two cases would show to what extent, and why, similar components can differ in their functional significance, and to what extent the surface phenomenon in the second case, i.e. remarks about the difficult situation in the country of origin, is influenced by the public discourse in the migrant milieu or by the dominant discourse in the host society. I should underline here that in every case reconstruction we find traces of the different discourses in which the interviewees have been socialized, and that revealing the power of these discourses is an important result of our research.

In a *maximal contrastive comparison*, cases are compared which on the surface appear to be maximally different with regard to the phenomenon we are studying (see

---

<sup>6</sup> Hildenbrand (1999a: 65) distances himself from Strauss and Oevermann by arguing “that as a rule a cross comparison is not made on the basis of a case structure hypothesis, but that they use aspects of an action pattern for comparative purposes”.



Schütze 1983: 287). Here it is conceivable that two cases which at first appear to be very different are shown by the analysis to be structurally very similar.

These minimal and maximal contrastive comparisons lead to further theoretical generalizations, in the sense of assumptions concerning the relations between the different types, and the development of a grounded theory.

### **3.2.5 Presentation of the results: intersubjective verifiability and anonymization of the data**

The way case reconstructions and theoretical generalizations are presented will differ, depending on whether they are published or presented orally – and also depending on how much space or time is available for the presentation. Presentations can range from detailed descriptions of individual cases which are presented in the light of the results, or in which the reader can follow the process of analysis, to a presentation of the theoretical generalizations, in which the case reconstructions on which these generalizations are based are discussed only briefly. In a detailed description of individual cases, those hypotheses that have been found to be most plausible are presented and illustrated by selected sequences from the text. If our intention is to demonstrate the process of analysis, we will give a few examples of how hypotheses were formed and how they were falsified or increasingly plausibilized. The reader cannot be expected to digest an account of the whole analysis in all its details.

In all cases, our presentation of the results must meet the criterion of intersubjective comprehensibility or verifiability. This means that the research process must be documented, our interpretations must be substantiated by selected sequences from the transcripts or observation memos, and the process of analysis must be described in a manner that is comprehensible to the reader. Since our goal is to reconstruct case structures, and not to describe cases in terms of their content (see chapter 6.2), I would argue that the criterion of consistency is just as important here as in quantitative social research, in the sense that it must be possible to substantiate every interpretation by referring to sequences from the text.<sup>7</sup> Oevermann argues that in a sequential analysis at least one phase of the reproduction of the case structure must be fully reconstructed, and then checked against other text segments in order to falsify or verify this reconstruction (see Oevermann 2000: 119). Thus, when we are discussing the results, any reference we make to a sequence from the text should show how this sequence reproduces the case structure – or indicates the beginning of its transformation.

In our presentation of the results, especially when giving detailed descriptions of individual cases, we are required by research ethics to respect personal privacy and

---

<sup>7</sup> Mayring (1996: 116) argues that a consistency check is superfluous with qualitative data, because there will never be consistency among the parts. However, this can only apply to studies of the contents of texts, and not to analyses of their structures.

to anonymize all biographical data as far as possible.<sup>8</sup> This is not always easy, and it can only be done after completing the case reconstruction. When we know which biographical data are important for demonstrating the case structure and for answering our research question, we can modify these data in a way that does not affect their significance in terms of the case structure, and we can make substantive changes to the data which are of less importance for the interpretation and theoretical generalizations. To protect personal privacy, we should change names and places, and, depending on the sensitivity of the concrete case, it may be necessary to disguise the biography by giving 'false' information, for instance in respect of occupation, age, number of children, medical history, or even gender. If a biography cannot easily be anonymized, for instance in the case of well-known public personalities, we need to find other ways of alienating the data. We must also avoid making reference to documents in archives which would reveal the person's identity.

Anonymization is necessary for ethical reasons, but in some ways it contradicts the principle of intersubjective verifiability. One alternative is to create an ideal case on the basis of several different cases, as is commonly done in publications relating to family therapy (see Stierlin 1981). Another possibility is to simply discuss the results in their relation to the research question, without giving any personal details at all. If we choose such a solution, we must point out that we are talking about a 'constructed' model as is always the case when we develop types. This 'constructed' model cannot be used to substantiate theories, but it can make it easier to reconstruct other empirical instances of this type, or cases with a similar structure.

We always have to decide in what way, and in how much detail, a case can be presented. And we must not forget that the publication may be read by the interviewee. We therefore constantly face the problem of deciding which interpretations to include in the publication and which to leave out, and especially how to present something without hurting the person concerned. For this reason, it is always a good idea to include in our plans some kind of follow-up support for those interviewees who will read the publication (see Hildenbrand 1999b).

---

<sup>8</sup> On problems relating to research ethics in case reconstructions, see Miethe (2003) and Hildenbrand (1999a, 1999b).

## **4 Ethnographical field research – Participant observation – Video analysis**

### **4.1 From the historical beginnings of field research to present-day ethnography**

*Field research* has always been of central importance in qualitative social research. In contrast to laboratory research, it means studying social lifeworlds or milieus, social groups, local communities, individuals or organizations in their “natural” environment, i.e. in their everyday contexts. The aim of field research is to make a holistic description and analysis of the milieu to be studied using open methods, sometimes in combination with quantitative methods. In classic social field research, the researcher spends several months participating in the daily life of the group or organization under study. In ethnology, the observation time covers at least one year, because this assures participation in the whole annual cycle with its regular chronological structure and rituals. Erving Goffman (1989: 130) recommends spending at least one year in the field, as this makes it possible to gain a “deep familiarity”. After a long stay in the field, things which at first are foreign or strange to the researcher gradually become a part of daily life and can be regarded from the perspective of an insider (see O’Reilly 2005: 12). In my view, it is very important to reflect on this change in perspective in order to benefit from it (see below).

Present-day ethnographic studies can be distinguished from classical field research in that they do not consider the whole of a broad social field, but concentrate on one particular aspect of it. Such “focused ethnographies”, as Hubert Knoblauch (2005) calls them, require only a short stay in the field, and often involve making video or audio recordings. In contrast to focused ethnographies and other studies in which the researcher spends a short time in the field collecting “data” by means of interviews, group discussions or video and audio recordings of natural settings, the aim of classic field research is to take an active part in the everyday life and interactions of the people under study. In interviews, people tell us about their everyday interactions, while participant observation allows us to take part in their lives and share their experiences directly. This is an important difference, because it enables the researcher to acquire kinds of knowledge about people’s everyday lives and social structures which is hard to communicate verbally.

To this day, field research is primarily anchored in ethnology and cultural and social anthropology. Its beginning is associated with the Polish anthropologist Bronislaw Malinowski (1884–1942). In 1914, Malinowski was carrying out an ethnographic study in the Trobriand Islands, which lie to the north-east of New Guinea. When the First World War broke out, the Commonwealth government of Australia did not allow him to leave the island because he was a citizen of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, and therefore regarded as an enemy. So he stayed in New Guinea for several years, devoting himself to his studies. Partially in contradiction to his own research practice (see Geertz 1973; Wax 1972), he argued explicitly that it is important to get close to the people one is studying: instead of sitting on the veranda and observing their way of life from a distance, the social anthropologist should make their observations in the everyday contexts of the culture in question:

“As regards anthropological field-work, we are obviously demanding a new method of collecting evidence. The anthropologist must relinquish his comfortable position in the long chair on the veranda of the missionary compound, Government station, or planter’s bungalow, where armed with pencil and notebook and at times with a whisky and soda, he has been accustomed to collect statements from informants, write down stories, and fill out sheets of paper with savage texts. He must go out into the villages, and see the natives at work in gardens, on the beach, in the jungle; ... Information must come to him full-flavored from his own observations of native life.” (Malinowski 1948: 122f.)

This is a clear call to go out into the field, but not to participate actively. In participant observation, however, it is conceivable that the researcher may switch from the role of “observer” to the role of “participant”, i.e. take part in, rather than just observing, certain social activities, like the researchers of the Chicago School (see section 1.3). They were active around the same time as Malinowski, at the beginning of the twentieth century. Sociologists and ethnologists at the University of Chicago

worked together in what was called the Department of Sociology and Anthropology. Robert Ezra Park (1925) “compares the approach of urban sociologists with that of the patient observation methods used by anthropologists to investigate primitive cultures” (Lindner 1996: 2). Just as Malinowski wanted the researcher to leave their familiar surroundings and go into the jungle and other areas of the “foreign” life-world, Park also urged scholars to go into the field instead of developing academic sociological theories at their desks:

“Go and sit in the lounges of the luxury hotels and on the door-steps of the flophouses; sit on the Gold Coast settees and on the slum shakedown; sit in the Orchestra Hall and in the Star and Garter Burlesk. In short, gentlemen, go get the seat of your pants dirty in real research.” (Park, quoted after Bulmer 1984: 97)

While Malinowski and other anthropologists at that time concentrated on the study of “foreign cultures”, Park taught his students to treat their “own” environment in the city of Chicago as if it were foreign, or to put themselves in the position of the foreigner; in other words, to regard the milieu they were studying as if it were a foreign lifeworld and thus to “alienize” things that were familiar.

Klaus Amann and Stefan Hirschauer (1997: 12) write: “Things that are largely regarded as familiar are then treated *as if they were foreign*, they are not approached with understanding but are methodically ‘alienized’: they are placed at a distance and subjected to sociocultural observation. Any everyday sociology based on the ideas of Alfred Schütz can thus make the most familiar things, the things that are most taken for granted in a culture, an “object of research”. Thus, the authors explain why – like other contemporary social researchers – they prefer the term “ethnography” to that of “participant observation” (ibid.: 11). With this concept, the authors follow the Chicago School’s idea of ethnographic field research and ideas in the phenomenological sociology of knowledge. They argue that the term ‘ethnography’ is bound up with “a theoretical and methodological culturalism”:

“*Theoretically* it is a matter of throwing light on a phenomenon of lived and practiced sociality whose “individuals” (situations, scenes, milieus ...) can be located somewhere between the persons of *biographical* research (with their lived sociality) and the (national) peoples of *demography*. Methodologically, by adopting the fundamental ethnological distinction between the strange and the familiar, a procedure is established which is characterized by that aggressive relationship to non-knowledge which we have referred to as the heuristic of discovering the unknown.” (Amann/Hirschauer 1997: 11)

Before going into further details of the current debate in Germany, I would like to return to the classic authors of ethnographic field research in the tradition of the Chicago School. In addition to the studies by Park or Anderson (1923) on home-

less people, or Thrasher's study (1927) of gangs, I would especially like to mention the work of William Foote Whyte (1943). From 1937–1940 Whyte lived in a slum area of an American city which he called "Cornerville"<sup>1</sup>, in order to carry out an investigation there based on the model of the famous study of "Middletown" by Robert S. Lynd and Helen M. Lynd (Whyte [1943] 1955: 284). The Lynds lived in "Middletown" for one and a half years in 1924 and 1925, and again in 1935. They made a study of the great changes that took place in a small American town due to rapid economic growth, and later of the effects of the depression. Robert and Helen Lynd used a number of different research methods. They conducted open interviews and used written surveys. A similar combination of qualitative and quantitative methods for fieldwork in community studies was also used in Austria in the same period, in the famous study "The Sociography of an Unemployed Community" by Marie Jahoda and Hans Zeisel (1974).

However, Whyte's study, which was designed along the same lines, very soon began to move in a different direction. He had taken a room in a hotel located within the community he wanted to study. He soon became aware of the presence there of a gang of Italian youths, i.e. a group of young second-generation migrants. At first, he found it very difficult to access this milieu. Then a female social worker helped him to establish contact with a young Italian man. Being able to claim this man as his friend gave Whyte access to other youths, very few of whom knew who he was. What had been planned as a comprehensive study of a community became an analysis of the group structures of a gang of Italian youths in a small American town. The published study contains a very entertaining appendix on methodology (Whyte 1955), which shows clearly how Whyte progressed from distant observer to involved participant, his initial lack of familiarity with the field, the resulting critical interactions, and his increasing involvement in the activities of this gang of youths.<sup>2</sup>

The studies by Barney Glaser, Leonard Schatzmann, Anselm Strauss and his colleagues (see the articles in McCall/Simmons 1969) all follow the tradition of the Chicago School. To this day in the US, and also in Great Britain, fieldwork is firmly established as a research method in the social sciences.<sup>3</sup> In Germany, however, it has been the subject of serious methodological debates among sociologists only since the 1990s. As already mentioned, the term "ethnography" is used here, following the anglophone discourse, in preference to "fieldwork" and especially in preference to "participant observation" (see Amann/Hirschauer 1997; Lüders 2004). The primary meaning of ethnography is the description (Greek: *graphein*) of a people (Greek: *ethnos*). Thus, the representatives of present-day ethnography strive to study a milieu that is largely familiar to them as if it were a foreign milieu. Ronald Hitzler and Anne

<sup>1</sup> In reality North End in Boston.

<sup>2</sup> On the structural problems of access to the field, and the effects of observers on the field, see the handbook article by Wolff (2004).

<sup>3</sup> In addition to the classic Reader by McCall and Simmons (1969), see the more recent studies in the Reader edited by Atkinson et al. (2001), or the monograph by Spradley (1980).

Honer (1988) speak of lifeworld ethnography, meaning the description of “small lifeworlds”, i.e. “thematically limited, goal-oriented normalities specific to a particular subculture, milieu or group, in other words relative normalities” (Honer 1994: 87). Like Amann and Hirschauer, Hitzler and Honer are interested in reconstructing how different social realities are created through the everyday practices and actions of the people concerned.

Since even in our own society we are often not familiar with the “small lifeworlds” we set out to study, as in the case of Anne Honer’s studies of do-it-yourselfers (1991) or bodybuilders (1985), we initially behave like foreigners, whether or not we adopt this as a methodological principle: “The researcher is repeatedly confronted with unexpected situations, has to figure out what is going on, has to get along with the other people, and respect their habits and customs. Thus, practical research is highly dependent on the milieu and the situation, on the people involved, their lifestyle and the conditions under which they live, as well as the imponderables of everyday life” (Lüders 1995: 310). However, the longer the researcher stays in the field, the more familiar the foreign lifeworld becomes. He or she is increasingly accepted as a member of the small lifeworld by the other members, and treated accordingly. As a result, there is a change in the way the observer experiences and perceives the small lifeworld. If we, as researchers, reflect on these changes in our observation records and reconstruct the process in a subsequent sequential analysis of these records, we will gain special kinds of knowledge and recognize the value of spending a long time in the field (see below).

## 4.2 Participation in the field

In ethnographic field research different methods are used, such as interviews or group discussions, and different materials are included in the analysis (documents, photographs, everyday objects, etc.), but the most important method is participant observation. Therefore, I will use this term here.

Observation makes it possible to compare “data” or texts gathered using different methods, such as interviews conducted in the context of the observation, with interpretations formed during the observation. Furthermore, reference can be made to the researcher’s observations during the interviews. A number of authors point out that the observer is especially interested in “common everyday practices that are frequently repeated, in order to raise awareness of such practices, which are often regarded as so obvious that they are ignored in reflections and analyses” (Friebertshäuser 1997b: 510). In the literature on research methods, participant observation is said to have the advantage that practices can be observed and analyzed which the actors are not consciously aware of, for instance because they have become routine. Against this argument it could be objected that this does not require participation on the part of the researcher, who could just as well make audio or video recordings of everyday situations. Routine practices can also be deduced from narrations in in-

interviews – assuming that narrative interviews are conducted (see chapter 5.4) – since the interviewees narrate situations in which normal routines are interrupted. And conversely, during participant observation it is useful to concentrate on situations in which daily routines are interrupted, or crisis situations. On the one hand, our perception of these situations is much clearer than our perception of routine situations, and they are easier to remember and thus easier to record in the notes we make after the observation. On the other hand, interruptions can throw light on routine practices. For example, if I am conducting observations in a kindergarten where punishment is not normally used as a disciplinary measure, the accurate recording and detailed sequential analysis of a scene in which a child is punished will help me to interpret the predominant teaching style in other situations; in other words, it will help me to explain what is special about this situation in contrast to other situations.

The main advantage of participant observation over other methods, such as making video recordings of everyday situations, is that the researcher is able to experience such everyday situations from their own perspective, and can refer to this experience in conversations, ask questions, and try out different ways of reacting to the actions of others:

“The ethnographer participates, overtly or covertly, in people’s daily lives for an extended period of time, watching what happens, listening to what is said, asking questions; in fact collecting whatever data are available to throw light on the issues with which he or she is concerned.” (Hammersley/Atkinson 1983: 2)

The observer takes part in various daily practices and can interpret them from the point of view of their own experience. This participation can be covert or overt; some actors in the field may be in the know and others not. The observer can play a normal role in the field, for instance by spending time in a hospital as a nurse or a patient, while at the same time observing the interactions between nurses, doctors and patients. In overt observation, the researcher can be involved in the daily routine in their function as a participant observer, and thus with the status of a guest. In this case, there will be considerable differences in the way the researcher takes part in, or is involved in, the situations, depending on the context. An observer at a family party will play a more active role than someone observing a doctor attending to a patient in a hospital.

Above all, participation means giving up the emotional distance which an observer has when analyzing video recordings. As Erving Goffman (1989: 125f.) has put it, participant observation consists of “getting data ... by subjecting yourself, your own body and your own personality, and your own social situation, to the set of contingencies that play upon a set of individuals, ... you are in a position to note their gestural, visual, bodily response to what’s going on around them and you’re empathetic enough ... to sense what it is that they’re responding to.” Participation means a physical and emotional experience which we do not have in the case of



non-participant observation. To use the terminology of Alfred Schütz, participation in the field means that we have a “face-to-face relationship” to the actors in this field, in which, unlike a “We-Relationship”, the “in-order-to” motives of our actions “become the Other’s because-motive[s] to perform an action” and vice versa (Schütz 1962: 23). We gain an understanding of the actions of others through our reaction to the way they behave towards us as observers.

### **4.3 Empirical example: Physical and emotional challenges for the participant observer**

The following example illustrates the aspect of physical and emotional involvement on the part of participant observers. In 1979, in the context of a study led by Rainer K. Silbereisen and Petra Schuhler at the Technical University of Berlin (see Schuhler 1984) on vocational training for socially disadvantaged adolescents in different workshops run by the West Berlin Jugendaufbauwerk, we conducted participant observation in these workshops over a period of several months. However, in contrast to the adolescents, we took part in the lessons and in the work only on two or three days each week. We observed the interactions between the adolescents and the masters teaching in each workshop. The aim of our study was to develop a curriculum for training the masters in communication techniques.

We observers, all female, were placed in different workshops and, like the young trainees, we produced “workpieces” under the supervision of the master. I myself worked and observed in the kitchen, and in the workshops for tailoring, pipe fitting and bookbinding. When I think about this observation exercise which took place more than twenty years ago, the main thing I remember is the physical and emotional stress associated with each kind of work, but also the satisfaction associated with completing a workpiece. In the bookbinding workshop, I bound a copy of a book by G. H. Mead, which is still on my shelf today. My memories of the kitchen are not associated with any such sense of achievement. I remember the heat, which was often extreme, and the unbearable monotony and boredom resulting from the division of work, so that I became slower and slower in my actions. In the tailoring shop, I experienced physically what it means to spend the whole day standing on one’s feet cutting fabrics, or sewing while sitting on a kind of bar stool with no footrest. These physical conditions meant that my legs ached in the evening, and they affected my work routine during the day; for instance, I repeatedly felt obliged to find excuses to leave the workshop, which automatically led to frequent visits to the toilet. The physical restlessness that was sometimes perceptible in the room was surely due to the same problem.

In discussions and short interviews with the young people, I brought up the topic of the physical hardships. Unlike me, they had been working here for several months, on every workday of the week, and it seemed that they were no longer aware of this problem. It was only when they heard me “complaining” that they started to

talk about the physical conditions which had become routine for them, or about the routines they had developed to cope with this kind of stress. One might argue that if we had only conducted interviews, we may never have heard about the physical challenges. However, I assume that such problems would have become evident on the latent level of the texts, providing we conducted consistent narrative interviews and providing we not only analyzed the content of the interviews, as we did at that time, but also made a sequential and detailed analysis of them. In the literature on methodology, emphasis is laid on the importance of participant observation, as against interviews, for gaining an understanding of routine practices and implicit knowledge. This is true on the manifest level, because routine practices are rarely described in interviews. However, as I have already pointed out, narrative interviews tend to contain accounts of events that interrupt normal routines, and this can tell us something about the routines themselves. Thus, it is conceivable that the young apprentices might have talked about their activities at weekends or during the holidays in a way that revealed their relief from the hardships they suffered during long hours of standing and sitting in the workshop. However, it is an open question whether we would have grasped the full extent of the physical hardships, and whether we, as interpreters of the interviews, would have had the necessary emotional closeness to these hardships in order to appreciate their significance. I am not trying to argue here that participant observation can be replaced by interviews, but that it has an important advantage over other methods on a level that is different from making routine practices visible. As I see it, the main advantage of participant observation, in contrast to other methods, is in the holistic experience, the physical, cognitive and emotional experience of everyday practices. This includes in particular experiencing the consequences of intensive relations of interaction and interdependence with the actors in the everyday environment we are observing, where our actions are a response to their actions and vice versa. For example, in the pipe fitting workshop, I discovered how it felt to be told by a chauvinist master that I, as a woman, was unsuitable for the work in his workshop, and to what reactions such feelings could lead. The master teaching in this workshop made fun of me for wanting to work there. He was sure I would not be able to grind a pipe accurately to the exact size needed, wanted to relegate me to the role of observer, and more or less refused to give me instructions. This made me determined to show him he was wrong, and I concentrated my whole attention on producing an accurate workpiece, which, to the surprise of the master, I succeeded in doing. Thus, *because* the master underestimated my competence, I wanted to do a perfect job and concentrated fully on my work, *in order to* achieve this. Gradually, I changed from being a participant observer to being a participant, and I paid less and less attention to the interactions between the master and his pupils which I was supposed to be observing. This experience not only reveals something about me and my determination to succeed, but also something about, a) how this master might treat other female apprentices, or male apprentices he considered to be incompetent, and b) what reactions his behavior might trigger in these apprentices.

During the observation period, we as observers go through a kind of socialization process. This includes in particular a process of gradual familiarization, a slow transformation process in which things that at first were new and strange to us become quite normal; we develop routines and implicit knowledge of which we are less and less aware as time goes on:

“Like a child going through the process of socialization, the field worker goes through a second socialization, even if the process is very short and incomplete. He learns; he learns new languages, he learns new rules for interacting with other people, he discovers his physical and social environment, he learns new skills. ‘Participation’ means not only ‘doing’, but also responding emotionally.” (Fischer 1988: 63)

Because of the way the observer’s experience of everyday practices changes over time, it is very important to record and to reflect on these changes in field notes or observation memos, and later to make a sequential analysis of them, i.e. to interpret the notes in the order in which they were made.

## 4.4 Recording observations and sequential analysis

### 4.4.1 Field notes or observation memos

Observation memos written subsequent to the observation are not factually reliable in the sense that electromagnetic or mechanical recordings are reliable. The observer sees everything from their own perspective and thus in a highly selective manner, and has to express his observations in words. We perceive only snapshots of the social realities we are observing, and much is lost when we try to write our experiences down, because there are things we are not consciously aware of, and we are not always able to capture everything quickly in words. We cannot take our records as an accurate account of social realities. Jörg Bergmann (1985: 308) speaks of “*conservation by reconstruction*” in contrast to video or audio recordings which are “*conservation by recording*”:

“Of course, this kind of reconstruction soon reaches its limits: we have only a very limited ability to remember and reproduce the amorphous mass of social interactions taking place around us. The participant observer generally has no choice but to note what he has witnessed in a standard, summary, reconstructing form.” (ibid.)

Because of this problem, Ralf Bohnsack sees participant observation as only complementary to other methods. He argues that “in the interest of reliability and validity, participant observation should always be complemented by the text interpretation

of electromagnetically recorded communication sequences from discourses and (biographical) narrations" (2003: 132); for only in this way is it possible to consult the "original texts". While I agree that if audio or video recordings are possible in the context of the "field" under study, they constitute important "sources" for the analysis, I think that Bohnsack underestimates the potential usefulness of participation and of the sensory and holistic experiences of the participant observer, as well as of their carefully kept records and their sequential analysis. Conversely, Bohnsack overestimates the reliability of audio and video recordings (see Amann / Hirschauer 1997; Hirschauer 2001). Such recordings do not give a complete picture of a social reality: they are also selective, depending on their specific restrictions with regard to non-audible components of the interaction, or those parts that are outside the range of the camera. Ulrich Oevermann (2000: 85) points out that this kind of selectivity must be distinguished from the selectivity of field notes or observation memos, because an audio or video recording is a "purely technical procedure without the interpreting or discerning subjectivity of the observer". Yet, it can be argued that these technical procedures are also carried out by human beings: the recording devices must be switched on and off, microphones and camera lenses have to be set up and focused, etc.

Like Gerald Schneider (1987), who made a sequential analysis of observation memos following the assumptions of objective hermeneutics for his study entitled "Interaction in the intensive care unit", I am convinced, on the basis of my own empirical experience, of the usefulness of the case-reconstruction method for the analysis of observation memos. However, the degree of usefulness depends on the quality of the memos and requires them to be made in a certain form. We need memos which, in addition to describing the overall situation, concentrate on individual situations which are recorded in as much detail as possible, and which reproduce the chronological sequence of the observations made. It is clear that there are limits to what we can remember, and that no one can be expected to remember every detail and every situation. Therefore, as observers we need to concentrate on particular scenes that capture our attention and try to remember them in their sequential order.<sup>4</sup> Together with Michaela Köttig, I have conducted training courses in observation for students. They carried out field observations, usually in pairs, lasting two or three hours. We taught them to concentrate on a couple of scenes which they should repeat to themselves in their heads while still in the observation situation, because this would help them to remember the scene better afterwards, just as it is better to recount a dream immediately after waking if we want to remember it. The students were told to write a report of their observations as soon as possible afterwards, independently of each other. If they had no time to do this immediately, they were taught at least to make a written note or tape recording of their most important memories. We advised them to discuss their reports with each other and to add details that were remembered by the other person, or ask about details they still needed for the complete description

---

<sup>4</sup> On the importance of considering the sequential order of the actions observed, see Wolff (1986: 363).

of a scene. Thus, the reports or memos were extended and completed, and – as in the case of global analysis of interviews (see chapter 3.2) – could be used to formulate hypotheses and start planning the final analysis. The students were told to indicate which details had been added later, so that in their analysis they would be able to distinguish between their perspective at the time of making their first notes and the way this perspective was modified during the course of their work.

When writing a report, the observer must distinguish between describing what happened and their own impressions or interpretations of what happened; in other words it is important to try to remember and describe in detail which observed phenomenon led to a particular interpretation. For instance, a remark such as “The boy acted provocatively” tells us nothing, a) about how the boy acted, or b) about the interaction between him and the other boys.

In the recent ethnographical literature, the writing of observation memos has been increasingly reflected on, and reference is repeatedly made to the importance of keeping a field journal in which the observer records their impressions and feelings. Great emphasis has been laid on the importance of noting the “Day, date, time and observation to which the report refers” (see Friebertshäuser 1997b: 519). However, I see no difference between an observation memo and a field journal. In my opinion, observation memos must also contain reflections on the observer’s impressions and feelings, and should consider, as an abductive procedure, at which points during the observation or during the writing, and on the basis of which observed phenomena, the observer had particular feelings, ideas, etc.

When training students to carry out observations, it is essential to teach them to refer their impressions to particular phenomena they have observed, or to concentrate on the concrete behavior and interactions of the observed persons, and in particular on their non-verbal behavior. A good way to sensitize students to different kinds of non-verbal behavior is to show video recordings with the sound turned off and let them analyze what they see. Another important point is learning to concentrate on interactions between people and to take these into account when writing observation memos. In our experience, untrained observers tend to concentrate on observing and describing the behavior of persons as individuals, instead of embedding their behavior in an interaction process. Instead of considering how others react to the behavior of a certain person, so that the meaning of their behavior is generated interactively, the observers ascribe a meaning to the behavior they have observed. The questions observers must ask is not (only) what do I, as observer, think about the behavior and the actions of a person, but what effect does this behavior have on other people who interact with this person, or how do they behave and act. Here is an example from a memo relating to the observation of adolescents in the car park of an electronics store next to McDonalds in Northeim on a Saturday evening between about 8.30 p.m. and 10 p.m.:<sup>5</sup>

---

<sup>5</sup> Memo written by Jan Mielenhausen for a seminar at the Georg-August University of Göttingen on the observation of adolescents in a small town, summer semester 2002.

“The driver, together with a male passenger, gets out of the car and presses the signal horn again. Then he turns towards the road. His facial expression and his body language are deliberately provocative. He has his hands on his hips, his chin is jutting out and he looks challenging. He stays in this position for a few seconds and then turns round, lowers his arms and walks over to the group. He offers his right hand loosely to two of the male youths, and nods to the third one. He bends down slightly to the two girls/women and kisses each of them first on the right cheek ...”

This part of the memo very nicely meets the criterion of a detailed description of non-verbal behavior, but in this sequence the description is limited to one boy. There is no mention of what the others did and how they reacted to him. The observer writes: “The boy goes towards the group”, and the question arises: How does the group react to him, or how does the group behave? The memo continues: “He offers his right hand loosely to two of the male youths”, but we learn nothing about what these two boys do.

In several ways, the rest of the memo shows clearly why the writer concentrated on Person A, and why he paid so little attention to the other people. The observer describes in detail how Person A drove into the car park, where the others and the observer had been standing for half an hour, in his stylish VW Golf (which had a German flag in the rear side window), with howling engine and repeated sounding of the “signal horn”. A’s performance was effective in that it caused unrest among the group of adolescents standing in the car park. It also impressed the observer, who from this point on concentrated his attention on this young man and tended to ignore the others. The observer’s perspectivity is clearly revealed by this detailed description. He is aware of his selective perception, and writes: “My attention became focused on this driver because the arrival of the Golf triggered restlessness in the group.”

During the same observation exercise, another observer was also fascinated by this Person A, which is reflected in his memo.<sup>6</sup> However, the second observer concentrates on the interaction between A and a young woman. While the first observer only mentions a male passenger in A’s car, in this memo a female passenger is introduced. Here we learn something about the interactive process. The scene described in most detail in this memo is the following:

“After about a quarter of an hour, he (A) speaks often to the young woman who came to the car park with him in his car. After going to change the music for the third time, he comes back and gives the young woman a smack on her bottom. She turns round. They both smile. But she tries to slap him. He moves his head to avoid the slap and succeeds in grabbing her wrist. After struggling for a few seconds they both let go. He stays close to her for the next

---

<sup>6</sup> The second memo was written by Kai Hasse.

few minutes. Again he waves a box that I cannot identify in front of her face. He appears to box her on the forehead with it. But obviously he doesn't really hit her, and stops before making contact. At the same time he taps on the box with his other hand, which makes a knocking sound. She argues with him, her voice is louder than it was before."

The description of this interaction scene is detailed enough to be able to make a close sequential analysis of it. Before proceeding to a discussion of the advantages and the limitations of sequential analysis of observation memos, here is a summary of the rules for recording observations, which are the prerequisite for this form of analysis:

#### **Guidelines for writing participant observation memos**

1. The main "objective" data: place, persons present, time frame, and where applicable the organization in which the observation exercise was carried out.
2. Information concerning access to the field.
3. Rough notes on events observed in the order in which they happened. Since it is not possible to note or remember everything, there must be a focus on single interactive scenes and thus:
4. Detailed description of a couple of situations, noting the events in the order in which they happened, and showing how they are embedded in the overall situation. This constitutes the main core of the memo.
5. As far as possible the observer should distinguish between the actions he observes and his interpretation of these actions. Wherever possible, it should be made clear which observations have led to which particular impressions. But this rule should not prevent the observer from noting his interpretations!
6. The observer should note and reflect on his own position in the field: on his feelings, impressions and associations during the observation (embedded in the experienced situations), directly afterwards and when writing the memo.
7. Thoughts in respect of possible observations in the future.

#### **4.4.2 Sequential analysis of observation memos**

The observation sequence quoted above describing the interaction between a young man and a young woman was microanalyzed in the seminar for which this observation was carried out, in accordance with the principles of objective hermeneutics. First, knowledge of the external context was disregarded or bracketed, meaning we ignored our knowledge of the context and interpreted the observation sequence meaning unit for meaning unit (separated into individual action sequences), in accordance with the abductive and sequential methods (see chapter 2.5). We began with the unit: "After about a quarter of an hour, he (A) speaks often to the young woman who came to the car park with him in his car." We ignored everything that

came before this place in the text until after completing the microanalysis. During this stage of the analysis in the seminar, the two observers were instructed not to reveal any additional information. From meaning unit to meaning unit, the hypothesis became stronger that this was a performance, or a case of impression management, by two people, which required spectators, or in other words a sequence of actions deliberately performed in front of other people. We tried to think of pragmatic contexts into which this sequence would fit, and increasingly found ourselves imagining situations in which other people were present who would be impressed by such a staging of “pretended violence”. At the end of the memo of this scene, we learn something which lends plausibility to this reading: “Many of the friends are near them, but smiling just like A (the young man being focused on).”

Now, one could argue that Person A’s need to put himself center-stage, and the effect that this had, was clear from the first memo, so that no further insights could be expected from a close sequential analysis. This can be countered by showing that the analysis a) confirms the plausibility of our interpretations, and b) allows us to see how the performance is carried out in practical terms in the interaction with the young woman, and that its effectiveness depends on this interaction. Furthermore, during our analysis we began to suspect there was another reading: that behind this performance there was more aggression than appeared on the surface, or in other words that this performance was a playful way of dealing with existing aggressions. To test this reading, we would have to make close analyses of other sequences.

Our analysis of this sequence was different from the observer’s interpretation, which he notes at a later point in the memo:

“Interpretation: The fighting and ‘boxing’ are obviously expressions of affection and not serious. He probably wants to tease her, make body contact in a playful way, and attract her attention ...”

The interesting thing about this interpretation is that it is again focused only on Person A. One gains the impression that it was A alone who initiated the sequence, and that it is only his intentions (which are “expressions of affection and not serious”) that constitute the meaning of the scene. In the analysis of this sequence with the students, the observer’s interpretation and his failure to consider the perspective and intentions of the young woman were attributed – especially by the female students in the group – to the gender-specific selectivity of a male observer. In the light of our close analysis, the observer was able to accept this explanation without any need for further persuasion.

Before planning another observation of this group of adolescents, it would be important to learn from this analysis. For instance, during the next field observation it would be important to concentrate on the actions of the other young people, and in particular on this girl. If it were possible to observe the same group several times, and perhaps to talk to them and thus become a participant rather than just an observer, we could test in the field the hypotheses developed during analysis of the



observation memos, and carry out observations for this purpose. However, this does not mean that further field observations should be used as an inductive procedure purely to gather evidence for or against the hypotheses that have been formed. On the contrary, during the whole observation period the observer must always keep his mind open for the possibility of new hypotheses.

This pattern, in which periods of observation alternate with phases of writing memos, and in which new observations can be used to test hypotheses, is different from a method using only interviews, because with interviews the phases of data collection and analysis do not alternate so often. Even when several interviews are conducted with the same person, the analysis is usually carried out and completed using the whole of the existing text material, and no further interviews are conducted with the same person in order to test hypotheses. In the case of long interviews recorded on tape (audio or video), hypotheses can be tested using existing data, and – provided the interviews are well conducted – it is generally unnecessary to return to the field in order to collect more data relating to the same case. While a recorded interview has fewer gaps and is far less tied to the perspective of the transcriber, the weaknesses of observation memos can be compensated by returning to the field several times, and staying there for longer periods, in order to fill substantive gaps and to confirm or reject different hypotheses.

However, in the analysis of observation memos, it is important not to underestimate the gaps they contain, as well as possible errors in the sequential description of a scene. For instance, in the record of the above scene we are given no information about how the young woman reacts physically to being “boxed”, but are only told that she begins to speak to A more loudly. Thus, a comparison of descriptions of the same scene written by different observers, or a comparison of written memos with a video recording of the same scene, shows how differently the sequence of actions described can be remembered. The way the observer experiences a scene also has a considerable influence on the reconstruction of the sequence of actions. For instance, it is conceivable that in the scene described above the young woman first began to speak louder and that only then the young man began to “box” her.

Gerald Schneider (1987: 100) points out that in observation memos “the sequential structure of any scene tends to be flawed, or at least to contain gaps”, and that, in contrast to analyzing transcriptions of recorded interviews, this increases the number of possible readings: “Omissions are always based on subjective relevances, and during subsequent interpretation of the scene this can lead to a higher number of readings, between which it is often difficult to decide. That a missing piece of information can topple a whole interpretation is hypothetically conceivable, but unlikely in practical terms.”

In my own experience, it is true that there are more possible readings, and that, in contrast to analyzing audio or video recordings, the process that leads to excluding some readings and confirming others is much longer. Unlike the analysis of recordings, the analysis of observation memos requires a greater number of closely analyzed text sequences, or new observations in order to test certain hypotheses, until

it is possible to say that the interpretation can be regarded as empirically confirmed. Moreover, the independent writing of memos by two observers, and the subsequent discussion of these memos, are a very efficient way to eliminate gaps and to reflect on the different ways the observers experienced the situation, which can also represent the different experiences of the observed persons. It is quite possible that at least some of the young people in the car park also thought that the actions described above were “expressions of affection and not serious”. It is important to include the perspectives of the observers in the analysis, not only for the purpose of reflecting on their selective perception, but also in order to use them as aids to generating hypotheses. Without talking here of the advantages of countertransference in the psychoanalytical sense, I think it is self-evident that in all research settings and in the different phases of the research we can use our own experiences and our own feelings as a key to discovering the structure of the case we are studying. By this I don't mean that we should ask, for instance: “What does it have to do with me, why do I feel so angry?” The right place for this kind of question is in a supervision session, which is a different part of the research process. When analyzing what has been observed, the question should be: “What does the fact that I feel so angry tell me about this case?” Understanding oneself and understanding others cannot be separated, but in a research process it is necessary to focus on each side of this dialectic interrelationship in separate contexts.

Up to this point, I have only discussed the *detailed sequential analysis* of isolated segments. Before this step, as when analyzing other data in accordance with the principles of objective hermeneutics (see Oevermann et al. 1987), the “*objective data*”, or event data, can be interpreted in respect of the potential actions open to the observed persons or the observed interaction system (see chapter 6.2.2). Thus, in the light of the “objective” data of the setting – adolescents meeting in a car park on a Saturday evening – hypotheses can be formed concerning the possible ways these young people could act in this situation. If we are observing an interaction system that has existed for some time and about which we have some historical data – in the above case, for instance, data concerning this clique of adolescents – we could make a sequential analysis of these data before analyzing an observation unit – such as, in this case, Saturday evening in the car park. If we are studying an organization, or part of an organization – for example, the intensive care unit in a hospital – we might, a) analyze the objective data on the situation of the intensive care unit (number of doctors and nurses, number of beds, the different rooms) in terms of the possible actions open to the different actors, and, if applicable, i.e. depending on the research question, also interpret sequentially, b) the historical data of this unit (when the different actors joined the unit, what changes have taken place and when, etc.). Schneider defines the case level in his study as “a patient and the group of people caring for him or her”, so that here such data will relate to a particular patient: when was he or she admitted, in what order was he or she treated and cared for and by whom, in what order was he or she given what treatment, etc.

In our analysis of the individual observation units, each of which is recorded in an observation memo, we first need to carry out a sequential analysis of the “objective” data on the factual situation.

In the given case, this means a description of the initial situation, which I quote here from the two observation memos:

“5 teenagers are standing in a car park with two cars, loud hip-hop music is coming out of one of the cars, the three males are drinking beer out of cans, the girls are drinking sparkling wine. About 150 meters away from the car park, another group of teenagers (4 male and 3 female) is standing on the corner in front of McDonalds. The two observers now drive into the car park, and get out of their car.”

In an analysis, hypotheses about what might happen next should now be developed concerning possible contacts between the two, or three, groups (the group in the car park, the group on the corner of the street, and the observers). It is conceivable that the two observers will be treated with suspicion or harassed, but it is equally conceivable that they will just be ignored.

The following facts about what happened before the scene discussed above can be taken from the two observation memos:

- The young people in the car park talk to each other, and one of the boys frequently uses his mobile phone.
- A boy from the group standing on the corner in front of McDonalds comes into the car park and goes up to the other group – he greets the men with a handshake, and kisses the women on the cheek.
- The boy chats with them for a short time and then goes back to “his” group.
- Teenagers frequently drive past in their cars and accelerate as they pass the car park.
- After about half an hour, a car (A and two passengers) drives into the car park ... (description of the car and its approach).

Without presenting the various hypotheses, it should be clear that at this stage of the analysis the two observers are involved in the situation, and thus in the hypotheses, to a much greater extent than in the microanalysis of a single scene. From the above facts it is possible to hypothesize, for instance, that the three young people who drove up later had been summoned by the boy who had been seen using his mobile phone, and that this was perhaps connected with the presence of the “strangers”.<sup>7</sup>

---

<sup>7</sup> The observers’ car was a white Passat saloon. Jan Mielenhausen notes in his memo: “at least in my experience, this type of car is often driven in Göttingen by plainclothes police officers”, and he supposes “that the young people thought we were policemen”.

### **Guidelines for the sequential analysis of observation memos**

#### *A Before analyzing the memos relating to a case*

Analysis of the “objective” data and – depending on the research question – sequential analysis of the historical data relating to the case

#### *B Analysis of the memo of an observation unit*

1. Sequential analysis of the “objective” data or facts, i.e. a description of the different phases of the overall situation in chronological order
2. Microanalysis of scenes that have been described in detail
3. Embedding of these scenes in the overall situation and in the overall context of the case (see A)
4. On the basis of the first hypotheses: formulation of subsequent hypotheses in respect of how to proceed next in the field
5. Considerations on the design of further possible observations on the basis of the analysis

#### *C Analysis of further selected memos following the chronological order of the observation units*

Embedding the closely analyzed interaction between the young man and the young woman in the context of the preceding factual situation and its interpretation leads to further hypotheses about the possible meaning of the “boxing” scene as a performance for the benefit of the two “strange” men in the car park, or as “aggression held in check” because of the presence of the strangers, etc.

A method that involves considering the sequential structure of social interactions and reconstructing phenomena in the order in which they happened, will apply this principle to the whole of the text material relating to a case, or to a part of the material in the sense of a second theoretical sample, in addition to making a sequential analysis of the factual event data for an observation unit (see chapter 3). By this I mean making a sequential analysis, not just of a single observation memo but of all or several memos relating to a case – as well as other materials relating to the same case – in the order in which they were generated or in the order of the observations made (see Köttig 2004: 85ff.). When the fieldwork covers a long period and results in a large number of observation memos, it will not be possible to make a careful analysis of all the memos. The best way to deal with this is to first make a global analysis of all the memos, and then to carry out a second sampling of selected memos from different phases of the fieldwork.

Following the analysis of an observation memo, the logic of the sequential method requires the formation of hypotheses concerning what will happen next in the observed setting, according to the conclusions reached so far, or the use of such hypotheses to confirm or reject ideas concerning what will happen next. The issue is not only to form a hypothesis in the sense of continued reproduction of the observed

setting or social system, but rather to formulate hypotheses on what would have to happen in this particular case to bring about a change in its structure. The predictions formulated in a sequential analysis should always give event constellations in which transformations would be possible, in order to avoid static ascriptions or erroneous mechanical and determinist interpretations of the case.

A sequential analysis of observation memos in the chronological order in which they were written also makes it possible to follow up changes in the observer's perspective in the course of the observation exercise, and thus to reconstruct the process of transformation from an outside observer to a participant who becomes more and more familiar with the lifeworld he or she is studying. In other words, the fact that the observation process itself is regarded as a structured process helps to counter a tendency for self-reflection on the part of the observer to lead only to a generalized questioning of the validity of the research results and a sterile relativism in terms of research practice.

Like Gerald Schneider or Bruno Hildenbrand (Bohler/Hildenbrand 1995), I plead in favor of concentrating on a single case in participant observation. The first thing is to define what the case, or the case level, is (see chapter 6.3). Before the observation memos are analyzed, it must be decided whether the case is the individual teenager or the whole group, or – as in our study of the Berlin Jugendaufbauwerk – a workshop with a master and apprentices, or an organization like a hospital or a “small lifeworld” like the young people meeting in a car park at night. In his study of interactions in an intensive care unit, Schneider defined the case level as follows: “A case is formed by a patient and the group of people caring for him” (1987: 94). However, the author then had to admit that, because of the nature of the memos which were written for a bigger research project,<sup>8</sup> he was subjected to certain limitations, because on the whole there were insufficient observations relating to a single patient. Thus, the analysis could not be “consistently focused on the development process of particular cases” (ibid.: 95). It is important to determine beforehand what the “case” is to be, or whether the case level will be defined during the process of discovery, in other words whether the question of what constitutes a case will be answered in the course of the observations. This openness in respect of defining the case level can be said to apply for example to the observations made in the car park next to McDonalds in Northeim which was “discovered” during a “search” for teenagers in public spaces in Northeim. It is quite conceivable that this car park, as the “stage” of a “small lifeworld”, could be defined as a case for a long-term study; the same applies to the group of adolescents observed in the car park, who could be observed in other settings.

---

<sup>8</sup> The observation memos were written in the context of a research project led by Elmar Weingarten entitled “Patient-oriented intensive therapy and medical technology”.

## 4.5 Analyzing video films

*Nicole Witte & Gabriele Rosenthal*

### Introduction

Video films can be extremely useful, especially for the detailed analysis of non-verbal and verbal communication and actions, and for reconstructing the implicit knowledge that drives interactions. This usefulness increases if the analysis of the video film is embedded in ethnographic fieldwork or participant observation. In other words, we favor a combination of methods in order to gain maximum benefit, or in order to counter the disadvantages of each method. The main advantages and disadvantages of participant observation, which are almost a mirror-image of those of using video films, have been discussed in the previous chapter. We will therefore restrict ourselves here to the advantages and disadvantages of videography.

The use of video recordings in interpretive social research today is more popular than ever, as can be seen in the large number of studies in this field published in recent years.<sup>9</sup> This tendency began in the 1980s with the spread of ever cheaper video cameras, and the attractiveness of making audio-visual recordings for research purposes has revived as a result of new digital technologies. In addition to lower costs and improved availability, the supposed simplicity of collecting data in this way seems to be the main reason for the popularity of video as a medium. It is assumed by many to be easier than participant observation, where the writing of observation memos seems (at first) to be a much more difficult and time-consuming task, and one which is constantly open to critical questions such as whether everything was 'seen' during the observation, or whether anything has been 'forgotten' or remembered 'wrongly'. It certainly sounds as if it is easier to make a video recording: the camera records everything and the film can be watched and analyzed as often as necessary. We will not repeat here what we have already said about writing observation memos (section 4.4.1), but we would point out once again that the advantages and disadvantages of recording versus reconstruction for the conservation of data (Bergmann 1985: 308) are a mirror-image of each other, and the decision in favor of using one or the other method depends on the nature of the object to be studied. Making a video film is not the ideal way to make a record of interactions between people. Nevertheless, despite the methodological challenges, audio-visual data can be useful in many ways for a detailed reconstruction of interaction processes. However, it is important to work out a method that takes into account the challenges or problems of using videography for research purposes, and makes them manageable.

---

<sup>9</sup> On methodological issues, see for example Bohnsack (2009); Fischer (2009); Friebertshäuser et al. (2007); Knoblauch et al. (2006, 2008); Knoblauch/Schnettler (2012); Raab (2008); Witte/Rosenthal (2007).

Below we will give some empirical examples taken from a study of doctor-patient interactions by the principle author of this chapter (Witte 2010), and from our ethnographic research project in Israel and the Palestinian territories.<sup>10</sup> The examples will show which kind of research questions are suitable for videography. We will discuss the practical challenges faced when using this technology for research purposes, and suggest a method for dealing with these challenges.

### **When should a camera be used?**

What kind of research interests are best served by videography? This question can be answered by recalling the advantages of this medium. In addition to verbal communication, a video film records the smallest details of both non-verbal and verbal actions and behavior, and gives researchers a chance to study the material as often as they like, from a new perspective and with a different focus. It is possible to study specific actions closely, such as pointing gestures made by speakers (Schnettler/Knoblauch 2007; Knoblauch 2008, 2013), and to make a detailed and accurate reconstruction of the actions and behavior of individuals, or of several people interacting with each other, or just of people who are seen at the same time on the recorded material. Good examples of the use of video film are the studies carried out in the 1980s by Christian Heath and colleagues (Luff/Hindmarsh/Heath 2000), especially of people at their workplace, alone or in interaction with others. Their aim was to reconstruct certain action patterns or routines within the particular field of action.

Using a camera necessarily means focusing on a particular part of social reality, and this requires a basic knowledge of the social world of which one aspect is chosen (Knoblauch 2005). In our experience, a field that is unknown to the researchers is not suitable for making video films, because the selectivity of pointing the camera in a particular direction is in itself problematic. If the researcher is not familiar with the social setting, she will find it difficult to decide what to focus the camera on. The danger is that if we don't know what to focus on, we will produce so much material that afterwards we will have no clear idea of what it all means, and we may be disappointed that the film material tells us so little. It might be argued that such a film can at least serve to jog the researcher's memory, but the amount of material produced and the work required to process and classify it should be in a balanced relationship to the benefits gained. A more serious problem, however, is that the camera will always be between the researcher and the field to be studied, in a factual and a metaphorical sense. While a participant observer in the field has a much greater variety of

---

<sup>10</sup> The research project 'Belonging to the Outsider and Established Groupings: Palestinians and Israelis in Various Figurations', funded by the German Research Foundation (DFG), was carried out by a group of researchers from Germany, Israel and the Palestinian territories. The principal investigators were Gabriele Rosenthal (Georg-August University, Göttingen), Shifra Sagy (Ben-Gurion University of the Negev, Beer Sheva, Israel) and Mohammed S. Dajani Daoudi (Al Quds University, Autonomous Palestinian Territories). For further information on this research project, visit <http://www.uni-goettingen.de/en/77993.html> and see Rosenthal (2016a).

experiences involving different sensory perceptions and changing focuses, the camera woman has to choose at the start where the (visual and auditive) focus will be and which aspects of the field will be recorded. Put simply, it is not easy to capture on film what a particular smell or rough surface is like, without going to a lot of trouble to demonstrate this. And if the camera woman – who may be using a hand-held camera – does not focus on a single part of the field of perception, she will have to turn the camera back and forth so often that analysis of the film afterwards will be very difficult. If the camera is focused on one particular part of the field, other parts will not only fail to appear in the film, but may even not be noticed by the camera woman at all. When I embark on research in a field that is unknown to me, I first need to spend some time carrying out participant observation and/or first narrative interviews; I can use the camera at a later point of time.

Before making video recordings, it is important to decide how many persons, which persons, and in which constellations will be ‘followed’ with the camera. Although this is a technical requirement of the medium, our experience shows that it is also important if the recordings are to be useful for the subsequent analysis. The more people there are in the film, the more they move about, and the greater the spatial distance between the actors, the bigger is the danger of ending up with an audio-visual recording that is unsuitable for the analysis.<sup>11</sup>

In order to be able to make such a decision, the researcher should start with a period of participant observation in the field, and choose observation units, i.e. clearly delimited situations, based on analysis of the observation memos. This can be illustrated by an example taken from our study of everyday interactions between Jewish Israelis and Arabs (Palestinians with and without Israeli citizenship, and Israeli Bedouins). During our first period of fieldwork in spring 2010, we concentrated on making observations. Besides clearly delimited and defined social situations, such as a meeting with Bedouin and Jewish-Israeli students, we mainly conducted our observations in public contexts. We went into hospitals, various cafés, university campuses, markets visited by different population groups, and especially various security checkpoints, such as those between Israel and the West Bank or at the entrance to public buildings. We usually had a camcorder with us, so that we could make video recordings at any time. However, we rarely used it because it was very difficult to find situations that constituted concrete or clearly delimited interactions which we could record. We therefore concentrated at first on finding situations and local contexts in which meetings take place between members of different groupings, and on the question whether it would be useful and opportune to make a technical recording in these situations. While security checks are part of daily life in Israel and the West Bank, and we were struck by differences in the behavior of the security agents depending on the person they were checking, this is a context in which making video recordings is not advisable. The risk is too high that just being present in these con-

---

<sup>11</sup> In group discussions with a large number of participants we also need a microphone with adequate sensitivity, and suitable “characteristics” and orientation.



texts may become impossible. On the other hand, it was relatively easy, for example, to film from a certain distance the people milling about at the entrance to a hospital, including the security checks. However, although people with different belongings interacted with each other at this hospital, we had the problem that only a small part of the whole scene is visible when looking through the viewfinder of a camera. Things that happen outside the recorded scene are lost which would be useful as context information in the analysis. It cannot be repeated too often that operating the camera requires such great concentration that other things tend not to be noticed.

Further, when we considered the material, we realized that it was almost impossible to film and reconstruct single interactions, because there was too much movement, people moved out of the picture, or other people came into the picture and blocked our view of the interaction we had been filming, etc. In addition, it was impossible to record verbal interactions because the people were too far away from the camera or the microphone. However, while we were filming in front of this hospital, we noticed a kiosk where interactions took place between the vendor and his customers which could be recorded as a unit. There was not too much movement here. This situation also had the advantage that we could ask the kiosk owner for permission to film. He agreed, and this enabled us to get so close to the actors that we could record their voices. We were able to position the camera so that both customer and vendor were visible, at least in profile, at the same time.

### **Where and how should the camera be set up?**

After locating a good setting for making a video recording, as in the above example, or in cases where the setting is clear from the beginning, as in the study of doctor-patient interactions carried out by the main author of this chapter, where the setting was the everyday routine in doctors' offices, there still remains the question of where to place the camera. The researcher must remember that only that will be recorded which he or she chooses to capture on film. The camera does not deliver 'objective' or unfiltered data, but by selecting a particular position the researcher decides which data will be included in the analysis. Some of the questions which arise here are: How much of the concrete setting will be recorded? Who is in the picture? How are the actors shown (in profile, frontally, their whole body, only their upper body, etc.)? And it is important to be aware that the decision to focus on certain elements is always at the same time a decision to omit other elements. This decision is thus comparable to the decisions made by a participant observer in respect of what to concentrate on during the observation, and what to write about in the observation memo.<sup>12</sup>

Thus, the researcher needs to remember (and to choose the focus correspondingly) that certain advantages for the analysis are always bound up with disadvantages. If

---

<sup>12</sup> This is not a question of the "objectivity" of the data (in the sense of intersubjective reproducibility), but of their perspectivity or selectivity. On the perspectivity of visual objects, see Karl Mannheim (1995: 258ff.).

I choose a very wide focus, I will have a large amount of data on the concrete setting, but I will not be able to record, for example, every detail in the facial expressions of the actors.

In the above-mentioned study by Nicole Witte on doctor-patient interactions, it was often unclear where the camera should be placed in each consulting room. Where do the doctor and the patient sit in relation to each other? Is it technically possible to film them both in profile at the same time? If this is not possible, which of them should be filmed, in profile or from a frontal angle? Which of the two faces is less 'important'? How is the furniture arranged? Where is there room for the camera? Such questions arose in each new consulting room, but often in different ways. A good solution in one case may be impossible in another. It was impossible to decide on the 'right' place for the camera before the beginning of the study, and it is equally impossible to present a solution here. The solution will always depend on the individual setting and on the concrete research interest. Thus, when obliged to choose, Witte decided in favor of a frontal focus on the doctors, because it was their patterns of interaction that were the main subject of the study. However, the price that had to be paid for choosing this focus was that the actions and behavior of the patients could often only be plausibly deduced from the overall course of the interaction.

### **How can the video material be processed and classified?**

We will briefly discuss these methodological issues, even though they may appear to be uncomplicated, because, since video films are relatively easy to make, it is common to produce a large amount of material and to record a large amount of information in a single film. In order to make maximum use of this great quantity of data, it is important to have a clear overview of it. For this purpose, before beginning the study, the researcher should design her own system for processing, classifying and storing the material in the most useful and manageable way. Again, we cannot offer a ready-made solution but we can make some suggestions.

First of all, it is necessary to have enough storage capacity for the amount of data to be stored. There should always be two copies of each film, for example on a DVD and a hard disk. The file name for each film should clearly indicate the context in which it was made so that it can be easily connected with other materials relating to the same context. For each film it is advisable to make a short list of the contents, so that particular scenes can be located quickly. In addition to the list of contents, we strongly recommend that the circumstances in which the film was made should be recorded in a memo. This makes it possible to include in the analysis how the field was accessed, what initial observations were made without the camera, what criteria were used for deciding to make the film, the choice of the location and the social context, and the time filming began and how long it lasted. This information on the setting is not normally shown in the film, and would otherwise be lost. The memo

should be written in the same way as an observation memo.<sup>13</sup> However, the detailed description of observed scenes is not necessary here, where it suffices to note which situations were filmed.

Another important point in respect of making a sequential analysis of video material is that it should not be processed in the sense of cutting material out or dividing it into individual scenes that can be sorted under various headings or categories. The material should be preserved in the sequential order in which it was recorded.

Once we have such a corpus of data, which can constantly be expanded in the light of our analysis of the existing data and in accordance with the criteria of theoretical sampling, the question remains as to how we should analyze it.

### **How should the material be analyzed?**

For the researcher, analyzing video recordings involves methodological challenges arising from the nature of the data. While each film may contain a fascinating variety of information, it may not be easy to decide how to treat all this data, which may show great structural differences, in a methodologically justifiable way. Questions which have been considered by other colleagues (for instance Knoblauch et al. 2006) are: how can we deal with the wealth of information provided by video recordings – information which is at first overwhelming in its quantity and variety? And: how can we analyze the material in ways that are methodologically justifiable and not too expensive and time-consuming?

We have worked out a method that we will present here in detail, showing the various challenges involved in each step and how these can be met. The method involves four steps, as shown below.

#### **Sequential analysis of the videographed interactions**

1. Analysis of the context data
  - a) Analysis of information about the social milieu ('external' context)
  - b) Analysis of the concrete situation ('internal' context)
2. Microanalysis of the opening sequence
  - a) Analysis of the video recording with the sound turned off
  - b) Analysis of the film with the sound
3. Global analysis of the whole interaction (script analysis)
4. Microanalysis of other sequences

<sup>13</sup> For advice on how to write observation memos, see chapter 4.4.1.

### Analysis of the context data

A crucial difficulty has been referred to above which not only arises in connection with video films, but is important when analyzing any kind of data: how to clarify the horizon of the analysis, in other words the historical context, the overarching social context, and the milieu-specific context. A video film allows systematic inclusion of the concrete spatial setting in which the recorded scene takes place (and which can be seen in the film), and it is natural to consider how this affects the course of the interaction. But it is harder to decide how far to extend the horizon of the analysis beyond this visible context, how far to include things that the camera does not record. What information needs to be included in the analysis about the 'external' context of an interaction, the institutional conditions, the historically developed figuration in which the actors are embedded? How wide must the horizon of the analysis be, both historically or in terms of time, and in terms of social and spatial structures? There is no fixed answer to this question. In setting the horizon of the analysis, we must take into account the nature of the object we want to study, our research question, and how much time or other resources we have at our disposal.

If we consider again the example of doctor-patient interactions, which are highly institutionalized and ritualized, and which have been the object of various social discourses in recent years in Germany (for instance in connection with changes in social security systems), it seems to us that we need to set a fairly wide horizon for the analysis. We have only to think, for example, of the introduction of what was commonly referred to as a 'surgery fee', which was part of the 'external context', and how this affected every doctor's surgery, and therefore also individual doctor-patient interactions, at least indirectly. For example, a patient who has been involved in an argument with the receptionist about having to pay ten euros will meet the doctor with feelings different from those of a patient who did not have such an argument beforehand. We try to meet such challenges in the first step, analysis of the context data. We begin with an analysis of the 'external context'.

#### *Analysis of the social milieu ('external' context)*

Like the other steps, this step is based on Ulrich Oevermann's objective hermeneutics (Oevermann et al. 1979). Here, we consider the structural conditions outside the concrete intentions and possibilities of the actors in the present situation. It could be argued that all contextual factors – including macroscopic factors – are part of the intentions and possibilities of the actors. In our example of doctors and their patients, we can say that a person who has chosen to become a doctor has voluntarily become an actor in the health system, and is free to leave this institutional framework at any time by choosing to give up this profession. The wider the horizon is set, the fewer potentials for change there are for the individual actor, and in extreme cases – as we have just pointed out – there are only two possible choices. However, the nearer the limits of the context are to the interaction with physically co-present cooperation

partners, the higher is the number of possible choices and the actors' potentials for change. In our opinion, this justifies analyzing the data concerning the social milieu and the concrete setting of the interaction in two separate substeps.<sup>14</sup> Thus, in her study of doctor-patient interactions, Nicole Witte began this step by considering macro-factors like the German health system and the figuration of doctors and their patients within this system. As the analysis progressed, these contextual factors became successively closer to the concrete interaction situation.

The aim of this step is to clarify how much freedom of choice the interaction partners have in their actions. First hypotheses can be set up in the light of structural regularities in the options open to the actors. Some examples can be given here in respect of the health system. For instance, there are restrictions concerning which doctors may set up a practice of their own. There are clear rules about how many specialists may practice in any one area. These institutionally anchored rules must be taken into account when analyzing the geographical location of the surgery, because they clearly restrict the choices open to the doctor. Showing the limitations affecting each doctor's decisions is a way of limiting the hypotheses that can be formed in respect of the object of study.

This first step thus reveals how much freedom of choice the actors have, what restrictions they are subject to, and what choices they make. Questions can also be asked about who interacts with whom, in what social setting, and about the possible figurations and power balances that exist in this context. If, for example, we compare a doctor from former West Germany who opens a practice in Mecklenburg-Vorpommern to a doctor on the island of Sylt, we will probably find different figurations with different power balances, although the doctors and the patients constantly confront each other. Following Norbert Elias (1978), as mentioned above, we see how the individuals interact with each other, not in a power-free field but embedded in, and influenced by, social – and to some extent institutionalized – networks of interdependent humans which are constantly changing and developing.

Even in the logic of objective hermeneutics, analysis of the context data does not stop at a consideration of the broad 'external' context, but gets closer and closer to the interaction under study. We will therefore now present a second step in the analysis of the context.

#### *Analysis of the concrete setting ('internal' context)*

As in the previous step, the aim here is to establish what choices are open to the actors in this interaction, and to reconstruct the processes by which they make their

<sup>14</sup> The patients also have such choices, although not so many, both in the external and in the internal context. Of course, the patient can as a rule decide whether, and how, he wants to be treated, and how he interacts with the doctor. But because the power balance in the doctor-patient figuration is unequal, for various reasons, his freedom of choice is much more restricted than that of the doctor, especially since in many cases the patient is obliged to enter into this figuration because of the nature of his illness.

choices. Thus, beyond the individual actors, we also reconstruct the patterns that are typical of this kind of figuration. Unlike in the previous step, here the actors have more, and more differentiated, possible choices, the closer we get to those conditions which they are more or less able to influence or control. For example, a doctor can decide not only how to decorate and furnish his consultation room, but before this he can choose where he wants to set up his practice.<sup>15</sup> In this step, hypotheses can be formed in respect of both decisions. It is important to remember that even in highly institutionalized contexts, people react not only to given structures or in particular circumstances, but also create the context for future possible actions with every decision they make and every action they carry out.

On the one hand, the doctor's consultation room, as part of the space within which he acts, is thus an expression of the doctor's actions in the past: he rented the rooms, and bought and arranged the furniture. On the other hand, these actions define the spatial possibilities available to the doctor and the patient in the interaction. Hypotheses can be formed here regarding questions such as: why did the doctor choose not to have an examination couch in his consultation room, although there is enough room for one, and instead to place a very big desk in the middle of the room? Thus, by considering the context of present actions, one is actually considering the results of past decisions or actions, which permits the making of first hypotheses regarding the patterns structuring these actions after concluding this step of the analysis. On the other hand, the spatial decision made by the actors limit their choices within the concrete interaction, which also limits, or in other words simplifies, the forming of hypotheses during the analysis.

### Microanalysis of the opening sequence

A microanalysis of the opening sequence that takes into account the results of the context analysis will help us to reveal the process structure of the recorded scene. Hans-Georg Soeffner presents convincing arguments in favor of making a close analysis of the opening sequence: "The action framework set up by the interaction partners in their initial exchange, and the horizon of meaning this creates for further actions, contain the perspective(s) for action in the subsequent interaction process. This means: the opening sequences of an interaction can be understood as the partners' reaction to a previously conceived goal or result (see Mead 1934: 187f.). The expected future result is what determines their present actions. The structure of the interaction process is laid down in the first exchanges" (Soeffner 1989: 72).

Formulating a hypothesis in respect of the structure of the interaction process also makes it possible to predict the subsequent course of the interaction, and to make hypotheses on constellations which might lead to changes in its structure.

---

<sup>15</sup> Although the choice of location is limited by the area in which the doctor is permitted to set up a practice, the importance of which was mentioned in connection with the previous step.

However, the subsequent course of the interaction will not be focused on until the next step of the analysis, the script analysis.

What does making a microanalysis of the opening sequence mean in concrete terms? We recommend that the scene should first be studied with the sound turned off, because the sound affects how the visual elements are perceived, and it is difficult to concentrate on both picture and sound at the same time. We begin by looking at still images in order to analyze the setting and the meaning of visual spatial objects. We then look at very short sections of film,<sup>16</sup> always in the sequence in which they were produced.<sup>17</sup> In addition, we concentrate first on the formulation of hypotheses regarding non-audible temporal phenomena (especially movements) and spatial phenomena (such as the clothing worn by the interactants). It is much easier to analyze these data extensively in this way than if the sound was audible. In a second step, the whole of the opening sequence is examined with picture and sound, and hypotheses are formed regarding the whole sequence or the whole scene.

Again we base our analysis on the principle of objective hermeneutics. First, the scene is de-contextualized; in other words we set aside our knowledge of the broad context and the hypotheses we made during the first analytical step, in order to be able to imagine as many different readings as possible of contexts in which a particular still image or concrete scene could be meaningful (see Oevermann et al. 1979: 415; Oevermann 1983). Subsequent phenomena are deduced from these abductive hypotheses; in other words, conclusions are drawn from each hypothesis concerning possible follow-up actions, which strengthen the plausibility of the hypothesis in the course of the interaction. The third step of this abductive process is empirical testing. The hypotheses, or the predictions contained in them, are compared with the next video sequence in the concrete case, and will gain plausibility or have to be modified or rejected. In the strictly sequential reconstruction of a case, it is thus possible to work out its individual structure.

With the analysis of the opening sequence, as mentioned above, we try especially to deal with the fact that we are confronted with different kinds of data (visual and auditive) in the video material. While the sound only contains chronological objects, the visual material contains chronological and spatial objects, and thus opens up “an additional synchronic time dimension” (Knoblauch 2004: 134). Not only do we have non-auditive chronological phenomena, such as silent movements, as further data for the analysis, but also spatial things that have no time dimension, or which do not change during the time of our observation, like a cupboard, a table, a parked car, etc. However, the visual perception of these things, which is composed of many

---

<sup>16</sup> Raab and Tänzler (2006: 87) also propose a detailed analysis of still images or “key scenes”: “on the micro-level it means, that these key scenes are interpreted step-by-step, i. e. picture-by-picture”. These key scenes are selected by the group of interpreters in accordance with specific criteria.

<sup>17</sup> The length of the sub-sequences to be analyzed is determined by the visible and audible course of the video recording. While on the acoustic level, a change of speaker can be taken as the end of a sequence, on the visual level complete movements such as gestures or facial expressions can be regarded as marking the limits of a sequence.

different acts of looking, is a temporal act.<sup>18</sup> “The difference in the perception of spatial and temporal phenomena is [...] that what we see exists on one occasion, and on another occasion is in the process of becoming” (Rosenthal 1995: 32). These differences are clear if we think about the advantages of looking at a still image. In the still image, the sound and the movements ‘disappear’. Like movements, acoustic events are only conceivable chronologically, i.e. they happen in a certain order. Even if we let the film continue and notice for instance that two people are talking at the same time, or that other sounds can be heard at the same time, this does not affect the sequential structuredness of the acoustic data.

It can be assumed that when looking at a sequence of images our conscious attention tends to be focused on the sequential data rather than on immobile objects, although these are, of course, also perceived. We, as observers, generally focus on the sequence of actions and less on the simultaneous and always co-present visual information included in the setting. If we stop the film and look at a still image, our attention is captured by many of these simultaneously present data. While this offers an opportunity to include them all in a systematic analysis, it increases the risk of getting lost in the “infinite variety” of empirical reality, to borrow Max Weber’s expression.

A consideration of simultaneous data also raises the question as to which of these data, and in what order, were perceived, explicitly or implicitly, by the actors and affected their interaction in this space.<sup>19</sup> However, this question can be answered only by a further sequential analysis of the interaction, and not at the end of the analysis, because we must assume that phenomena which are of significance to the actors are not always clear to the observers (see Knoblauch 2004: 135; Knoblauch et al. 2014a; b). It is important here not to overlook the fact that this analytical problem corresponds to everyday perception processes. We constantly receive a host of visual impressions and have to decide which ones to focus our attention on, which ones are thematically co-present, and which ones are thematically irrelevant. Depending on how we direct our attention, what is thematically relevant and what is irrelevant can change. In contrast to strictly sequential sensory impressions, data that are received simultaneously require choosing those to be focused on first, and those to be focused on later, and this produces a sequential structuring of our perception. The perceiver creates sequentiality through the temporal sequence of his perceptions; it is not a

<sup>18</sup> On the difference between the perception of things and the perception of time objects, or processes, see Husserl ([1913] 1983: 324f.).

<sup>19</sup> We are aware that olfactory impressions are always co-present and affect the way actors perceive the space in which they find themselves. However, there is as yet no way to record ‘olfactory data’, and so it is not possible to make a systematic analysis of the way actors react to smells. This can only be done indirectly, for instance by analyzing explicit comments made by the actors or their physical reactions. The same applies to haptic perceptions, but here there is less of a problem, since as a rule what the actors touch can be seen in the video material. This makes it easier to include in the analysis an interpretation of how these haptic perceptions affect the interaction.



property of the spatial objects themselves. However, our perception of the objects is determined, or at least suggested, by their configuration. The space that presents itself to our perception has its own structure and this influences the way we approach it. Conversely, the way we approach the space determines what is presented to our perception. This is different from the inherent sequentiality of speaking or acting, in that this sequentiality has a much wider horizon of possibilities, resulting from the order in which objects that present themselves simultaneously are perceived, and the increased work of analysis which this involves.

A further challenge connected with the analysis of videographed scenes, which will be treated in the next step (script writing and script analysis), arises from the possibility of studying in detail the body language of the actors in its significance for the course of the interaction.<sup>20</sup> The problems begin before the explicit formulation of hypotheses, on the level of making a verbal description of the observed gestures, non-intended body signals and non-verbal sounds, i.e. the 'translation' of body language into words. In addition, the question arises of how to include body language in the interpretation in relation to the spoken word. Here it may be objected that this question is based on a dualistic conception of verbal and non-verbal language, and that the interpretation should be based on the overall expressive gestalt. Our perception of this expressive gestalt will implicitly and explicitly include all information that seems important to the observer. Let us assume, for example, that while observing a doctor-patient interaction we find it hard to believe the verbal assurances of a patient that he has succeeded in refraining from smoking for several weeks. In a sociological analysis, we have to show why we got this impression, or in other words to say exactly what we perceived. This means that we must pay attention not only to what people say, but also to what they do with their bodies. In this example, we could offer as evidence for the plausibility of our impression, or our interpretation, the fact that while making these verbal assurances the patient avoids looking at the doctor and instead fixes his eyes on his yellow fingertips and bites his nails. We see here that despite the patient's verbal message and his cognitive construction that he had succeeded in giving up smoking, on the bodily level there are signs that he may have reduced, but not completely ceased, his consumption of cigarettes. The process of being irritated by something that we perceive and then looking to see what has caused this impression is a normal part of our everyday processes of perception. In our everyday lives – as in this example – we are aware of how we interpret objects only when interpretation is a 'problem', i.e. when the object cannot be interpreted in a routine way. "Most of the time we interpret things without being aware of it, as a routine based on [...] implicit knowledge about what is and what must be done" (Soeffner 1989: 74). By contrast, the first step of a sociological analysis based on the abductive method (Peirce [1933] 1980) is to deduce from an empirically observable phenomenon all hypotheses pos-

---

<sup>20</sup> Here, we cannot go into the role of non-verbal communication in interactions in detail. We plan to refine our analytical instrument for this purpose in the future.

sible at the time of the interpretation – and especially from phenomena which at first appear to be unimportant. This means that hypotheses must also be formed about things that are not perceived as a problem.

### **Global analysis of the whole interaction (script analysis)**

In the third step of the analysis, the interaction as a whole is considered. First, a script is written for the whole course of the interaction. While the concept of a “score” has been proposed by Bergmann, Luckmann and Soeffner (see Luckmann 2006: 33), and adopted by Raab and Tänzler (2006), we prefer to make a written description of the whole interaction and not only of certain “key scenes”. When writing a script, we thus move from a microscopic to a mesoscopic level. By comparison, the writing of a score in the sense proposed by Bergmann and his colleagues represents a microanalysis.

Here, in contrast to the method used for a microanalysis, long sequences are analyzed. In this phase we are interested in reconstructing the whole sequence or process structure of an interaction from the beginning to the end. This pragmatic “global” or coarse sequential analysis makes it easier to see and reconstruct the whole course of the interaction. In this step, sequences can be marked which may serve to test the hypotheses formulated in the analysis of the opening sequence, and which should therefore be analyzed in detail in the next step.

This script includes a transcription of the audible data, and paraphrases of non-audible data, especially non-audible body language such as body signals and bodily movements.<sup>21</sup>

In order to show how much information can be contained in such a script, or how long or short it can be, we will quote a short example taken from our study of doctor-patient interactions, on the opposite page.

As with any kind of translation or editing of a text, writing the script changes the configuration of the perceived data. It constitutes in itself an interpretation. However hard the researcher tries to paraphrase all the non-audible body language, the written script will always be selective. Moreover, writing the script ‘creates’ a sequentiality that is different from the order of the visual data in the film and from the order of perceptions of the actors in the situation; this new sequentiality arises because in a written (or oral) description, simultaneous movements and spatial objects that are perceived simultaneously can only be recorded successively.

What are the implications of all this for the analytical procedure? There can be no doubt that the ‘quality’ of the script and its analysis is increased by working in groups and by repeated reference to the video recordings. In interpretation groups, the script can be critically reflected on and compared to the video recording, and part of the analysis can be done jointly by the members of the group.

---

<sup>21</sup> The space in which the interaction takes place is not described here because it has already been treated extensively in the context analysis and the detailed analysis of the opening sequence.

**Empty consultation room, artificial light is switched on**

F: Hello Mr. Vogel (1) Come this way (1) the young man is going for some tests and so you won't have to wait so long

V: all right

F: we said we (4)

*both enter the room, first the patient (about 50 years old, around 1.80 meters tall, slim with the beginnings of a paunch, very short hair, wearing glasses, dressed casually in black jeans, black sports shoes and a dark pullover) the doctor is talking and explaining that she can see him while waiting for the other patient. She goes to the window and opens or closes it. The patient sits down on his chair, glances at the camera and then looks at what the doctor is doing with the window.*

F: can begin here (2) I'll open the window so I told you about the results of your tests on your answering machine (3)

*The doctor sits down and rolls her chair under her desk until she is almost wedged in. She opens the folder and picks up a pencil in her right hand. The patient is sitting on his chair leaning back with his hands folded on his stomach and his legs stretched out. Only one heel is on the ground, his legs are crossed.*

V: yes what does a high white blood cell count mean

*The patient briefly turns his head towards the camera, but then looks at the doctor again.*

F: yes 18900

**Microanalysis of other sequences**

As already mentioned, the fourth analytical step is based directly on step three: following the principle of falsification, other sequences are subjected to a microanalysis in the light of previously formulated (structural) hypotheses, in order to test the previous hypotheses or to find possible new interpretations. For this purpose we need to choose sequences which we think may confirm or contradict our assumptions, or which may add new aspects.

This final step will thus either verify or falsify the conclusions we have reached so far. In the latter case, more detailed analyses will be needed, and it may be necessary to make a critical rereading of the script in order to find possible modifications in the structure of the interaction.



## 5 From open guided interview to narrative interview

### 5.1 Introduction

Qualitative or open interviews, which, as shown in the previous chapter, also play an important role in field research,<sup>1</sup> are the most frequently used data collection method in the social sciences, both internationally and in the different social science disciplines. In 1986, Charles Briggs estimated that 90% of all studies in the social sciences are based on interviews. David Silverman (1993: 19) speaks of an “interview society” in which interviews seem to occupy a central position in our lives. People are invited to answer questions in many different social spheres, and in the media: surveys are used to gather information, dialogues are carried on in talk shows for entertainment purposes, and interviews are conducted with well-known personalities. Thus, in modern societies, most people have a fairly good idea of how interviews are conducted, and how to make them pleasant or unpleasant.

For the social researcher, an interview takes up far less time and is emotionally less demanding than observation. Interviewers go into the field for only a short time and can leave it again after completing their interviews. In addition, an interview can very easily be preserved by means of audio or video recordings (see Bergmann 1985).

---

<sup>1</sup> For a discussion of ethnographic interviews in field research, see in particular Spradley 1979.

While in traditional social research, open and explorative interviews, for example with experts who possess professional knowledge relating to the field to be studied (see below), are used only in the context of pilot studies, in order to be able to construct a questionnaire, or in addition to other forms of data collecting, in interpretive social research they play a key role. Here, the decision to use a form of open interview is due to the researcher's desire to see the phenomenon to be studied from the perspective of the interviewees, and to be able to understand and explain why they see it from this perspective, how it has developed in the course of their lives or how it is generated in the interview context.

The different open interview methods used in Germany are the result of increased attention paid to the methodological implications of a *Verstehende* or interpretive sociology in the 1970s. In addition to the methodological and empirical studies published in the context of the Bielefeld Sociologists' Working Group, there were other authors at that time, for instance Christel Hopf (1978) or Martin Kohli (1978, 1986a, 1986b), whose arguments were widely discussed; they pleaded strongly in favor of open interviews and a consistent use of open methods by the sociological community. A clear and well-developed method for conducting open narrative interviews was presented in the mid-1970s by Fritz Schütze, a member of the Bielefeld Sociologists' Working Group. Today the narrative interview is used far beyond the circle of Schütze's students and colleagues. It has become established both in Germany and internationally as an instrument of interpretive social research, especially biographical research. It is a technique which consistently implements the "principle of openness", both in the interview and in the subsequent analysis, and it can easily be adapted for use in other forms of interview, such as focused interviews. I will discuss the narrative interview in detail below, in connection with biographical research and other research contexts such as interviews with experts (chapter 5.3). But before doing so, I will make a few remarks about the meaning of the term "open" in respect of an interview, and about the different types of interview that can be used.

## **5.2 On wrestling with an open method oriented towards the interviewee**

The main characteristic of an open interview, in contrast to a questionnaire or a standardized interview, is that the interviewee plays an active role in shaping the course of the interview. While in standardized interviews pre-formulated questions are asked in a specific order in accordance with an interview guideline, the course of an open interview is determined by what the interviewee says. In interpretive social research, interactions between the interviewee and the interviewer are not regarded as a nuisance, as they are in standardized methods, but as a constitutive part of the research process (see chapter 2.2). From a constructivist perspective the interview is understood not just as a way of gathering information, but as a way of mutually producing social reality through the interaction between interviewer and interviewee.

James A. Holstein and Jaber F. Gubrium (1995) speak in this context of an “active interview” in which meaning is produced through social interaction. They argue that an interview cannot be regarded as a “pipeline” through which knowledge flows that is authentic as long as the “right” questions are asked, since in every interview a form of social relationship is created between the interviewer and the interviewee. An open or active interview allows us to reconstruct the interactive processes in which meaning and knowledge are produced (ibid.: 3). The more openly an interview is conducted, the greater is the chance of being able to render these processes transparent. A good rule for conducting an open interview is this: the lower the degree of standardization, the less rigid the structure of the interview, the more the interviewees will be able to unfold their perspective and the clearer the interactive processes of defining or framing the situation will be. Christel Hopf puts the opportunities offered by open interviews in a nutshell as follows:

“Because of the possibility of enquiring openly about situational meanings or motives for action, or collecting everyday theories and self-interpretations in a differentiated and open way, and also because of the possibility of discursive understanding through interpretations, open or semi-standardized interviews provide important opportunities for an empirical application of action-theory ideas in sociology and psychology.” (Hopf 2004: 203)

For a long time scholars have debated what exactly is meant by an open interview, or how far such openness can go, but in my opinion this debate is no longer relevant today in the light of *hypothesis-generating* methods. In interviews that work with pre-formulated guidelines, unlike narrative interviews, the following questions arise:

- To what extent should the interview questions be formulated in a guideline beforehand?
- Should only a list of key points be prepared relating to thematic areas to be touched on in the course of the interview?
- Should the questions always be asked in the same order?
- Must all questions in the guideline be put to all interviewees?

It is clear that these questions relating to the preparation of an interview guideline follow the quality criteria of standardized interviews and are aimed at testing pre-conceived assumptions or hypotheses. Thus, a list of topics for a guideline can be set up only if the researcher already has some assumptions about which topics might be important in respect of a certain thematic field. The decision to conduct a guided interview is therefore based on existing knowledge of the field to be studied and prior theoretical considerations. Barbara Friebertshäuser has expressed this succinctly as

follows: "Guideline questions can only be formulated on the basis of sound theoretical or empirical knowledge" (1997a: 376).

Guided interviews are good in a *hypothesis-testing* method intended to leave room for modifying the hypotheses. However, in a "more open" research design the guideline is usually based on the idea that in order to produce comparable interviews it is necessary to put the same questions to all interviewees in the same order, so that they are all exposed to the same stimuli. This is based in turn on the assumption that the same questions serve as the same stimuli for the interviewees, or that people interpret linguistic symbols in more or less the same way provided they are properly formulated. But the ascription of meanings depends on the subjective perspectives which are developed interactively both in the biographical process and in the interview situation itself (see chapter 2.2). Identical questions can thus have quite different meanings for different interviewees, or even for the same person in different biographical and interview contexts. Aaron Cicourel discusses this problem in detail in his book "Method and Measurement in Sociology", which was so important for the debate on methods in the 1970s. He comes to the conclusion that we can achieve constancy only by offering the interviewees different "stimuli" to which the same meaning is ascribed:

"... the same stimuli which are used to produce an experience and awareness of some object in a subject do not necessarily produce the same experience and awareness in another subject. Therefore a distribution of responses to identical stimuli does not necessarily reveal the nature of object constancy. Yet constancy may be achieved, the same meanings imputed, when different stimuli are presented to different subjects." (Cicourel 1964: 219)

In consistently open interviews, our questions must be guided by the linguistic codes of the interviewees and the course taken by the interview. Thus, there is no need to think about how to express certain phenomena in a standard form, as in a questionnaire or standardized interview. For example, if one contemporary witness of the Second World War speaks of the "collapse in 1945", another of the "end of the war", and still another of "liberation", I as interviewer can use these expressions, which have very different connotations in respect of this historical phase, in my subsequent questions. In contrast to ticking topics off a list that has been prepared beforehand, letting the course of the interview be structured by the interviewee means accepting the order in which they speak about different topics and their temporal and thematic leaps, even if these may not always seem plausible. If, for example, in an open interview about how she experienced September 11th, 2001, a woman from Lebanon jumps directly from how she saw the collapse of the Twin Towers in New York on television to her own experience of war in Lebanon, I must show interest in her own experiences of war and terror attacks and ask questions about them, while in a different kind of interview I might ignore them as irrelevant.



The more detailed the interview guideline, the harder it is for the interviewer to abandon it and not to use the questions he has formulated so carefully beforehand, or not to mention all the topics he thinks are important. Christel Hopf (1978) speaks in this context of “guideline bureaucracy”, and argues that guidelines have the disadvantage that the interviewer feels obliged to tick off all the topics on the list, and thus has no time to ask about extra details. She thinks that interviewers should be flexible enough to depart from the guideline and ask questions about other topics where this seems appropriate. In my opinion, in a method aimed at discovering hypotheses and grounded theories we do not need a guideline, and should choose a form of interview which can be conducted with as few pre-formulated questions or topics as possible, and which is structured by the interviewee. The task of the interviewer is to render transparent the interpretations, the relevances and the experiences of the interviewee. It is helpful if the interviewer puts himself in the position of a stranger who is not too quick to say that he understands, even in the case of answers or thematic developments which he finds plausible, but who tries to clarify the meaning of what the interviewee has said by asking questions or by simply continuing to listen, and who uses non-verbal gestures to motivate the interviewee to say more.

Thus, as Martin Kohli (1978: 6) has put it, we need a form of interview which enables us “to show, or render visible, as clearly as possible the perspectives of the persons involved in the interview and the contextual conditions, so that these can be duly taken into account in our interpretation of the data, i.e. so that we can assess what the interview represents”. If we consider the literature on open interviews, or empirical studies based on open interviews, we are struck by the fact that, apart from the narrative interview and the client-centered (Rogers 1951) or psychoanalytically oriented interview borrowed from therapeutic settings, there are hardly any systematically or theoretically founded techniques for asking questions. Considerations such as that questions should not be too complicated or too long, and should use the everyday language of the interviewee, are not theoretical considerations, and are not associated with any particular type of interview. And the idea of asking open questions which, unlike closed questions, have no predictable answer such as “I am for or against the death penalty” (see Lamnek 1995, II: 58f.), tells us nothing about possible ways to formulate such open questions. In connection with this example, Siegfried Lamnek suggests the question: “What do you think about the death penalty?” (ibid.) and regards this as an open question. He makes it clear enough how to formulate closed questions, but his recommendations for open interviews are vague and unconvincing, as illustrated by the above-cited “open” question, since this question does not invite the interviewee to give a long, autonomously structured answer. With a guideline containing “open” questions similar to this one, we would then have to rely on our everyday competences in deciding what to ask in order to elicit more details, for instance after an answer such as “Not much”.

If the author of an empirical study claims that they conducted open interviews, or used an “open guideline”, this tells us nothing about the interview method, and the course of the interviews is often determined by their own academic interests and

their own implicit everyday techniques. How little interviewers are aware of their own techniques, or how little they realize that their questions always have the same form or tend in the same direction, has become clear to me during the many years in which I have held training courses in different contexts on how to conduct interviews. For instance, in oral history interviews, historians tend to ask about “facts”, such as the time of an event (“When was that?”) or the name of the place where something was experienced, while psychologists ask questions relating to emotions (“How did you feel about that?”), and sociologists ask cognitive questions (“Why did you decide to do that?” or “What made you act in that way?”).

### 5.3 Different variants of a semi-standardized method

The different types of open interview presented, for example, by Christel Hopf (2004) or Uwe Flick (2006) in their handbook articles, differ primarily in terms of their initial specifications. Besides the narrative interview, which operates with an initial question that generates a narrative, and the clinical interview, the structure of which depends on the particular type of therapy, Christel Hopf discusses the focused interview, in which a certain topic is specified, and structure or dilemma interviews which specify a moral conflict. With such specifications it is possible that the interviewee then determines the subsequent course of the interview, and that interview techniques other than those planned by the inventors of these methods, such as the narrative technique, can be used. Before moving on to the narrative interview and the narrative technique, I will take a brief look at the focused interview, the structure or dilemma interview, and expert interviews, which can be combined with a narrative technique.

#### The focused interview

This form of interview was developed by Robert Merton and Patricia Kendall (see Merton/Kendall 1946) in the 1940s, in the context of research on communication and propaganda. According to Merton and Kendall (1946: 541), the special feature of this method, which was first used in group interviews but which can also be applied in individual interviews, is that all the interviewees “have been involved in a particular *concrete situation*”. This means that they have all seen a particular film, read a particular newspaper article or other text, or heard a particular radio broadcast. The aim of the focused interview is thus to investigate the interviewees’ reactions to, and interpretations of, a social phenomenon they have all experienced, using a fairly open method. The important thing about this method for Merton and Kendall (1946: 541) is that it can be used as the basis for a content analysis that produces “a set of hypotheses concerning the meaning and effects of determinate aspects of the situation”. These hypotheses can then serve to formulate an interview guideline. The relatively open form of interview makes it possible for the interviewees to depart

from the specified topic, which enables the interviewer “to ascertain unanticipated responses to the situation, thus giving rise to fresh hypotheses” (ibid.: 541). Merton and Kendall used “unstructured questions”, which were intended to give the interviewees a chance to refer to all possible aspects of the given “stimuli”, as well as semi-structured and structured questions. An example of an unstructured question is “What impressed you most in this film?” (ibid.: 546), while the following is a structured question: “Judging from the film, do you think that the German fighting equipment was better, as good as, or poorer than the equipment used by Americans?” (ibid.: 547).

Clearly, Merton’s and Kendall’s method is a balancing act between a *hypothesis-testing* and a *hypothesis-generating* method. While the authors agree that the guideline can act as a straitjacket, they argue that it guarantees the necessary comparability of the interviews, “by insuring that they will cover much the same range of items and will be pertinent to the same hypotheses” (ibid.: 548).

The focused interview is used today in different research spheres, for instance in studies of reading and the media (see Pette 2001), and in combination with a more or less consistent open method. Heide Appelsmeyer (1996), in her comparative analysis of biographical and literary constructions of elderly women, gave the women a literary text to read (“Zwei Frauen im Spiegel” by Gabriele Wohmann) before a second interview, following a previous biographical-narrative interview. She comments on her method as follows: “I generally started the interview by asking: ‘Ms. X, how did you get on with this text?’, which was an invitation to tell me about different aspects of their experience of reading this text” (Appelsmeyer 1996: 126).

Christel Hopf and her colleagues used focused interviews in a project on the “subjective meaning to young people of acts of violence represented in films” (Hopf 2004, 2001). They showed a group of adolescents the “film ‘Romper-Stomper’, which is about a right-wing violence-oriented group of skinheads in Australia, and immediately after watching the film they were asked how they reacted to it” (Hopf 2001: 153). Due to the open nature of the questioning technique, the interviewees were also able to talk about their own experiences of violence. In addition, at a second meeting, the young people took part in biographical interviews with “flexible guidelines” (ibid.) focusing on their media biography.

### **Structure or dilemma interviews**

A similar method in respect of starting with a common specified topic is the structure or dilemma interview, in which the interviewees are presented with a story involving a moral conflict and then asked to give their own opinion, to justify this opinion, and to say how they would behave in such a situation.

This method, which was developed in the Piaget / Kohlberg tradition, is still often used with a relatively standardized guideline in order to record how people form moral judgments (see Kohlberg 1976), but such interviews can be conducted much more openly and can be used in respect of other research question (see Aufenanger

1991; Döbert/Nunner-Winkler 1983; Hopf et al. 1995; Litvak-Hirsch et al. 2003; Nunner-Winkler 1989; Schuhler 1979). In particular, it is possible to use moral conflicts that might arise in the everyday experience of the interviewees, instead of the far-fetched dilemmas that were commonly used in this research tradition in earlier times, such as: "Heinz breaks into a chemist's and steals a drug that he would never be able to afford for his wife who is suffering from cancer" (Eckensberger et al. 1975). Thus, in their study of radical right-wing tendencies in young men, Christel Hopf and colleagues (1995) used stories about how young people observe moral standards in their everyday life. Stefan Aufenanger (1991), in his interviews with teachers, worked with everyday situations in school. In interviews with Jewish and Palestinian Israelis, Tal Litvak-Hirsch (Litvak-Hirsch et al. 2003) presented the interviewees with moral dilemmas relating to the conflict between the two groups. In our study of altruistic behavior in schoolchildren, Petra Schuhler and I took situations from the everyday life of the children at school (Schuhler 1979; Rosenthal 1981). In this study, after a phase of open interviews, in which we asked the children about their experience of moral conflicts at school, we set up a dilemma by asking them to imagine themselves in the following situation and having to decide how to act. The dilemma was this:

"Imagine that one of your classmates is very bad at math. In the last test before the end of the school year, he is sitting next to you and asks you to let him copy from you. You agree to let him copy. But he does not always copy correctly, so that sometimes the intermediate steps are wrong, and yet the final answer is right. The teacher sees this as evidence that he copied from someone and fails him. For your classmate this is the final straw: he will have to repeat the year. In desperation, he asks you to go to the teacher and swear you didn't let him copy from you and you know he did everything by himself." (Rosenthal 1981: 336)

The initial questions for the subsequent interview were: "What do you think of this story?" and "What would you do in this situation?" In addition, the children were repeatedly asked to explain the reasons for their decisions.

### **Expert interviews**

In the methodological literature, there is no common agreement over what is meant by expert interviews, or any uniform method. There are also very divergent views concerning which persons may be regarded as experts. The interview forms that are used in this sphere range from closed to very open or even narrative interviews. And expert interviews play a very subordinate role in discussions of qualitative methods, despite the fact that this kind of interview is frequently used, especially for sociological studies in industrial, organizational or educational contexts. However, in these cases, it usually has an explorative status, serving to provide initial orientation and

initial hypotheses regarding the research field (Bogner / Menz 2009: 46). By contrast, Michael Meuser and Ulrike Nagel (1991), in an approach that has gained prominence in Germany, argue that the open expert interview should occupy a central status in the research design. Alexander Bogner and Wolfgang Menz speak in this context of theory-generating expert interviews, which they distinguish from both explorative and systematizing interviews. While the systematizing expert interview serves to gain information from people who are in possession of expert knowledge, the theory-generating interview is used to analyze explicit and implicit stocks of knowledge and patterns of interpretation “which the experts develop in their activities and which are constitutive for the functioning of social systems” (Bogner / Menz 2009: 48).

In their research fields, Meuser and Nagel (1991: 443) concentrated on those experts “who are themselves a part of the field of action which is the object of study”. In this approach, the researchers attribute the status of expert to any person “who is responsible in some way for finding, implementing or monitoring the solution to a problem”, or “who has privileged access to information about groups of people or decision-making processes” (ibid.: 443). Bogner and Menz (2009: 54) criticize this pre-formed definition, and, in line with the principles of the sociology of knowledge, argue that the researcher should empirically reconstruct who “is responsible in some way” in the field of interaction under study, and who, and in what way, “has privileged access to information”. They define experts not only in terms of their specific expert knowledge, but also in terms of their influential power or the power chances they have due to their knowledge or their position in a social field.<sup>2</sup> When we begin investigating a certain field of interaction for the first time, we usually do not have this knowledge. Thus, one of the goals of an interpretive study is to reconstruct who has which stock of knowledge in this field, and is therefore likely to have more power chances than others, more chances of prevailing in cases of conflict.

Ulrike Froschauer and Manfred Lueger (2009) distinguish between intra-field expertise, in which the interviewees play a role as actors, and extra-field expertise. The latter refers to a group which “incorporates sound relevant theoretical knowledge supported by secondary experience and second order observation and can throw light on various aspects of a subject (both intra- and inter-disciplinary)” (ibid.: 222). This distinction also means that in the case of intra-field expertise, the interesting thing is people’s implicit knowledge, which can be explained only to a limited extent, while in the case of extra-field expertise the focus is on explicit knowledge that can easily be formulated. Froschauer and Lueger quite rightly find that this requires different methods for conducting and analyzing the interviews. For intra-field expertise, they propose to use a narrative-generating method for the interview and a reconstructive

---

<sup>2</sup> In later publications, following Hitzler, Honer and Maeder (1994), this aspect of influential power is taken up by Meuser and Nagel in their definition of experts: “We would like to conclude that a person is considered an expert if she or he possesses an ‘institutionalized authority to construct reality’” (Meuser / Nagel 2009: 19).

and sequential method of interpretation, but for extra-field expertise they explain that it is better to work with open guided interviews and qualitative content analysis (see chapter 7.2).

Although their studies mostly relate to intra-field expertise, Meuser and Nagel (1991) vehemently reject a reconstructive and sequential method for analyzing expert interviews, and do not take advantage of the narrative method. While in the 1970s Fritz Schütze carried out and discussed narrative expert interviews with local politicians in a study of interactions in the context of an amalgamation of municipalities, Meuser and Nagel prefer open guided interviews and a form of content analysis based, as they claim, on Glaser and Strauss, in which statements made by experts relating to certain topics are compared with each other. They justify this by arguing that expert interviews differ from other forms of open interview, in that here the researcher is only interested in the specific institutional or organizational context in which the interviewee is active, and not the whole of their experiential space. The object of the analysis, according to Meuser and Nagel, is not the “whole person”, even if, in reaction to the criticisms of Bogner and Menz, they admit in later publications – without making any structural changes to their method of conducting and analyzing interviews – that it is also important to take into consideration the expert’s “personal life experience as a private person” (Meuser/Nagel 2009: 26). For them, the decisive point in a study of expert knowledge is that “the focus remains on the institutional framework within which the expert moves and on the individual actor involved, her or his position and responsibilities within a particular context” (ibid.: 27).

Meuser and Nagel argue that the interesting thing in this approach is not the individual case but the knowledge shared by the experts. They conclude from this that there is no need for sequential analysis and no need for detailed transcription of the interviews. Instead, they make a thematic analysis of the interview: “Different from the analytic approach appropriate for case studies, in the analysis of expert interviews attention is focused on thematic units, that is passages with similar topics which are scattered about the interviews. Sequentiality of statements within a single interview is not of interest” (ibid.: 35). But how does the interpreter decide which passages belong together? The authors imply that researchers are able to determine which passages from interviews with experts belong to which topics, or even what the topics are. To put it provocatively: they assume that in order to decode the meanings of statements made by experts, it is not necessary to observe the rules of hermeneutic interpretation. Even if we accept the argument that the whole biography of the expert is of no interest here, and that the case level is the field of interaction we are studying and not the expert as an individual, this is an over-hasty rejection of a reconstructive and sequential method. It means that Meuser and Nagel are making the doubtful assumption that, a) the expert knowledge in which the researcher is interested is not connected with the concrete person of the expert, and b) persons and their concrete qualities are not among the important components of the relevant field of interaction. These two assumptions must be queried from the point of view

of the interpretive paradigm: we may think here of the role of technical knowhow, operational knowledge of an organization, “charisma”, informal personal relationships and similar qualities that are part of the concrete person. The statements made by experts are also part of their individual perspectives and need to be reconstructed in order to be able to understand their latent content. Just as with other texts, the meanings of statements made by experts should not be too hastily subsumed under existing categories. We need to reveal their meaning in the context in which they were made, by considering them in the context of the overall gestalt of the text and its sequential layering. Even if in expert interviews we are not interested in the whole biography of the interviewees, their views of the field of interaction under study and their action patterns in this field are based on their individual experiences both inside and outside the field. When Meuser and Nagel claim that their aim is “to generalize the corresponding knowledge structures, action structures, attitudes and principles on a theoretical level”, this presupposes their understanding verifiability in the experiential context of the expert and in the articulation context of the interview. Thus, here, as in other research contexts, narrative interviews are useful for reconstructing the experiences of experts, because they motivate the interviewee to recount their own experiences and, importantly, they can reveal implicit knowledge which cannot be asked about directly (see Froschauer / Lueger 2009: 223–224).

As I will show below, people’s accounts of their lived experiences give us a chance to reconstruct *action-oriented* knowledge and attitudes and their genesis. Therefore, in interviews with experts who are also actors in the field under study, and in studies where the case level is not an individual biography but a particular field of interaction or a particular institutional context, it is my view that the interviewer should begin by asking the interviewee to recount a phase in their life in the field under study, in accordance with the rules for narrative interviews (see below), and should conduct the interview in such a way that the interviewee repeatedly feels invited to talk about events he or she has experienced.

## 5.4 Narrative interviews

### 5.4.1 On the basic idea of the narrative interview

The purpose of a narrative interview is to encourage the interviewee to produce long narrations, embedded in an autonomous presentation relating to a certain topic, whether this is the amalgamation of two municipalities, the history of a club, or the person’s life story. In the initial stage of the interview, the job of the interviewer is to maintain the flow of the presentation without making any substantial interventions. Only in the second stage, the questioning period, may the interviewer ask questions about things that the interviewee has mentioned. In the final stage, the interviewer can ask questions about topics which the interviewee has not mentioned but which are of interest to the researcher. In observance of the principle of open-

ness, the researcher will not base the collection of data on preconceived hypotheses but on the relevances of the interviewees and their everyday constructions. Thus, a narrative interview gives the interviewees maximum freedom to present their experiences in their own way, and to develop their own perspective with regard to their life story or the given topic. The aim of this method is to be able to reconstruct action sequences.

Since the narrative text type is the best way of describing personal experiences, Fritz Schütze (1976, 1977; see also Riemann/Schütze 1991) took up impulses from narrative analysis and linguistics – especially the work of William Labov and Joshua Waletzky (1967) – and developed the instrument of the narrative interview in the 1970s, in the context of a study of the amalgamation of municipalities. He argues that the narrative interview method should be used in such studies of interaction fields, with the aim of making an “event-specific cross comparison” between the ways different people narrate an event in which they have all been involved. In contrast to Meuser and Nagel, we are not interested here in comparing different statements on a certain topic, but in reconstructing personal experiences of an event in which all the interviewees have been involved. Schütze’s proposal is that the interviewee should be asked to describe the course of a constellation of events. In the context of the above-mentioned study, this was “the history of the dispute over place names” in the municipality of the politicians who were interviewed. The interviewees were asked to tell their stories as follows:

“We are interested in unanticipated problems that local politicians have to deal with when municipalities are amalgamated. We have observed that determining the name of the new municipality is a typical and very important problem, and we have therefore decided to focus on this special problem. We would like you to tell your story in such a way that it is centered around the name dispute, or so that the dispute over the name forms the climax. Of course, we are also interested in how this dispute came about and what effects it has had ...” (Schütze 1977: 27)

This initial narrative question, which does not invite the interviewee in general terms to tell the story of how the name was chosen, but stipulates that the dispute over the name should form the climax, could also be formulated much more openly. Thus, the politicians could be asked to recount what they have experienced personally in connection with the amalgamation, from the time when they were first confronted with it up to the present. This more open form of invitation would correspond to the narrative interview method that has been further developed in terms of methodology and procedure since that time (a development also initiated by Fritz Schütze); it would, for example, make it possible to consider which events are described by most of the politicians, and which are described only by some of them. If certain topics, such as how the name was chosen, are not mentioned in the initial presentation, the



interviewee can be asked about this in the final stage of the interview, when external narrative questions are allowed (see below).

In later years, Schütze (1983) worked on the development of the narrative interview within biographical research, and proposed that the interviewee should be asked to present their whole life story, regardless of the thematic focus of the empirical study. This makes it possible to consider the genesis of individual spheres or phases of a person's life in the context of the whole biography (see chapter 6.1). Today, this form of interview has become established as a data-collecting method in sociology, and especially in biographical research in various disciplines, beyond Schütze's own circle of students and colleagues (e.g. Heinemeier et al. 1981; Hermanns 1987; Hermanns et al. 1984; Riemann 1987; Inowlocki 1997, 2000). It has also been further refined in respect of questioning methods and techniques (Rosenthal 1995: 186–207; Rosenthal 2003).

A biographical-narrative interview should last for several hours, spread if possible over two meetings. I usually offer to conduct a second interview, especially in the case of traumatized people. Not least, this makes it possible to gain an insight into the reception and effect of the first interview.

#### 5.4.2 On the advantages of long narrations

Why are *narrations* particularly suitable for making a study of people's actions and experiences? In continuation of linguistic narrative analysis (see Labov/Waletzky 1967), Fritz Schütze explains that narrations are stories of personal experiences, as against descriptions and argumentations: "those linguistic texts which are closest to, but separate from, the factual event that is of interest to the researcher, and which to a significant degree reconstruct the orientational structures of the factual event through the recapitulation of experience ..." (Schütze 1977: 1). Narrations are accounts of a sequence of actual or fictive events in the past which are connected chronologically or which have a causal relationship. While a *report* is a brief narration, similar in style to a telegram, *stories* refer to outstanding events within a larger narrative; they have the highest degree of indexicality and the highest level of detail (see Kallmeyer/Schütze 1977). Indexicality means context-dependency, reference to a concrete situation. Narrations refer to a certain time, a certain place and a certain person. *Arguments* are theory-based text elements, general ideas and reflections on the part of the speaker, and can occur both inside and outside narrations. They are close to the here and now of the speech act, and much more remote from past experiences than stories embedded in narrations of what led to certain actions. In contrast to spontaneous, unprepared narrations, arguments depend on the listener who is to be convinced of something, on the speaker's present perspective and their desire to find explanations for their own experiences, and on criteria of social desirability.

Another type of text are descriptions. Unlike narrations, *descriptions* do not refer to unique events but describe static structures. "The processual character of what is

described is ‘frozen’ (Kallmeyer / Schütze 1977: 201). Frequently experienced events are often reduced to a single situation and the repeated elements of these events are *described*. This form of description is called a “*condensed situation*”. While in descriptions and arguments it is easy for speakers not to introduce themselves as actors, this is not so easy when narrating personally experienced events, and quickly leads to questions from the listener such as: “And what was your reaction?”

Experiences can be presented in all text forms or text types, as I will show with an example. The following sequence from an interview can be categorized as a text of the argumentative type:

“My grandmother, that is my father’s mother, doesn’t play a big role in our family, we meet occasionally at Christmas and birthdays, but otherwise this woman is relatively unimportant for me.”

These rare visits by the grandmother could also be described as a condensed situation:

“When my grandmother comes to visit us, it’s always boring. She talks a lot, says things about people no one knows, my mother goes into the kitchen and my father hides behind the television.”

In a narration, such a visit could be presented as follows:

“Last Christmas, my grandmother came to visit us again. My mother spent most of the time in the kitchen, my father sat in front of the TV and stared at whatever was on. And then she followed me and jabbered away at me, and made me freak out ...”

The person might also choose to narrate a story or a particular situation in more detail:

“and then she came into my room, where I was trying to read, and started talking about when my father was a child, and all the problems she had with him when my grandfather was in the war, and a load of drivel about the Second World War. And then I yelled at her to stop boring me with all that stuff. You should have seen her, she ...”

This narration of a concrete interaction between the grandmother and her grandson has the advantage of giving us an insight into the context of the interactions between the two, into the experience of the grandson and how he acts in this situation, and into the genesis of his attitude to his grandmother. But this does not mean that arguments about the grandmother, or descriptions of her and the way she acted, are of no interest in a narrative interview. We don’t need any particular questioning tech-

niques in order to obtain arguments or descriptions, because people use these text types anyway as a result of everyday expectations. When we analyze the interview, it will be important to consider the differences between these different text types used to present experiences, in this case the grandson's experience of his grandmother (see chapter 6.2).

If we are not satisfied with only learning about the supra-situational attitudes and everyday theories of interviewees, which are separate from their experiences and memories, and if we do not want to promote the dualism of thought and action that is widespread in the social sciences, then we must have recourse to certain techniques. If we want to reconstruct what people have experienced in the course of their lives and how this experience constitutes their present perspectives and actions, then we will need to induce *processes of remembering* and the expression of memories in the form of *narrations*. Apart from re-enacting past situations in role plays, a sequence of past actions or the gestalt of a past experience can only be reproduced holistically by telling a story. The cognitions and feelings embedded in narrations of personally experienced situations are *closer* to those of the past situations than arguments produced in the here and now of the interview situation, which are remote from the past context.<sup>3</sup>

Questions typically asked in open interviews of the kind “Why did you ...?”, “What made you ...?”, “Why didn't you ...?” tend to produce arguments and not narrations. This questioning technique also leads to a question-answer structure; in other words, it fails to motivate the interviewees to produce long, self-structured passages. If the interviewees can be motivated to produce narrations, then they are bound by the so-called “constraints of storytelling”. This may lead to the interviewees telling more than they perhaps first intended, because they remember more and more details as the story proceeds. On the other hand, it obliges them to set limits to their narrations in order to avoid losing themselves in too many details. Schütze proposes that the “constraints of storytelling” can be divided into the constraint to close the form or gestalt, the constraint to go into details, and the constraint to condense (Schütze 1976, 2014). Once we begin telling a story, our listeners will expect us to finish it. For our story to be intelligible to the listeners, they will need to know the “overall context and all other important contexts” (Schütze 1976: 224). The “constraint to close the form (Gestalt)” has the following impact: the narrator is driven to finish the depiction of an experiential pattern (Schütze 2014: 236). In the case of unprepared, off-the-cuff storytelling, as against anecdotes, this usually leads to the narrator telling more than he first intended. In addition, listeners who were not present during the events being recounted will need to be told enough details to enable them to understand the story or the events that are being narrated. Peter Alheit (1995: 4) describes this “constraint to go into details” very graphically: “But in order to be able to immerse himself in the ‘world’ of the narrator, the listener needs more than the bare bones of past events. He must have some idea of the scene and

---

<sup>3</sup> On the dialectical relationship between experience, memory and narration, see Rosenthal (2006).

the periods of time involved. He must be able to imagine the other actors or opponents. He must be able to conjure up a 'picture' of the situation to which the narrator is referring. For this, details are needed." However, despite the need for details, there is also a need for limitation. On the one hand, the narrator does not have unlimited time or the unlimited attention of the audience, and, on the other hand, they might fail to communicate the significance of the story if they surround it with too many unimportant details. Because of this "constraint to condense", the narrator will try to reduce the story to those elements which will make it understandable to the audience. Which elements are considered important depends on the narrator's own relevances. Thus, the way the narrator condenses a story can reveal what is important to him or her personally, and (implicitly) the criteria according to which something is judged as important or unimportant.

Because interviewees are invited at the beginning of the interview to tell their story at length and in whatever way they like, and because the interviewer does not interrupt by asking questions (which are saved for the questioning period of the interview), these constraints play a more significant role in narrative interviews than they do in interviews that are structured by questions put by the interviewer. In long and uninterrupted narrations of personal experiences, it is easy to observe how narrators increasingly slip into a narrative flow and a stream of memories, while their stories become more and more detailed and bodily memories are activated. At the beginning of the interview, they need time to organize their thoughts and decide what they want to say, but after launching into a narrative flow, they gradually cease all attempts to limit and control the topics they talk about. As the memories and stories begin to flow, impressions, feelings, images, physical sensations and other components of the remembered situation well up, which do not always fit into the present perspective of the narrators, and which they may not have thought about for a long time. In narrations, a growing closeness to the past thus develops during the narrative flow, and the narrator reveals past points of view that are very different from their present perspective, which is clearly dominant in arguments, and in quoted anecdotes. During uninterrupted narrations and processes of remembering, interviewees may increasingly forget the present interaction with the interviewer and sink deeper and deeper into their own world. This can be seen, for instance, in reduced eye contact, or in pauses, when they suddenly remember who they are talking to and what they are saying. Then they will make remarks like, "Why am I bothering to say all this, I'm sure you're not interested", or "Sorry, I forgot, you're from West Germany".

Interviewers are missing an opportunity to trigger such processes when they interrupt the stream of memories by asking questions which require the interviewee to respect the interviewer's relevances. With questions asking for further details, like "When was that?" or "What did you feel at that time?", the interviewee is pulled back into the interaction with the interviewer and out of the process of remembering. He or she is asked to think about when the experience took place or what they felt at the time. While feelings or thoughts can become present again during the

process of narration, direct questions invite a construction from the person's present perspective which is fundamentally different from the construction of the past situation. This does not mean that no questions should be asked to clarify certain points or to add certain details. But this kind of question should be kept for the second part of the interview. The ideal way to conduct a narrative interview is discussed in detail in the next section.

### 5.4.3 On the technique of conducting narrative interviews

As mentioned before, a narrative interview can be divided into the following phases:

**Phases of a narrative interview:**

1. Initial narrative question
2. Self-structured presentation (main narration)  
Interviewer: active listening & taking notes
3. Questioning period
  - a) internal narrative questions
  - b) external narrative questions
4. Closing the interview

#### On the construction of the initial narrative question

Narrative questions differ depending on the research context and the case level; in other words, on whether we are interested in an individual biography, or the history of a milieu or of an organization. Let us begin with the most closed form of initial narrative question, which is focused on a certain period of time and a certain institutional context or a particular theme. If, for instance – like Meuser and Nagel – we were to conduct an investigation into the implementation of equality plans at universities by interviewing experts, such as women's representatives, the narrative question could be formulated as follows:

“We are interested in your personal experiences in connection with the equality policies of this university/faculty. Perhaps you can tell us how you first became actively involved in this field, and what you have experienced since then.”

With all forms of narrative question, the interviewer must add a procedural instruction to this effect:

“You can talk about any experiences you can think of. You can take as much time as you like. We/I won’t ask you any questions for now. We/I will just make some notes on the things that we/I would like to ask you more about later.”

With this kind of narrative question, it is important to define a chronological starting point and to ask the interviewee to talk about what he or she has experienced since that time. This temporal structure, which is implicitly given when we ask someone to tell the story of their life, helps the interviewee to start a stream of memories. He or she can follow the chronological course of events, and doesn’t need to spend time pondering about which situations are worth mentioning and which not.

Since narrations always tend to become more detailed in the course of the interview, the proposed starting point should be carefully planned. In the above example, it would be possible to name an earlier starting point, and the question could be formulated more openly, e.g. “... how you first heard about equal opportunities, how you then started becoming actively involved, and ...”

A similarly restricted narrative question is possible in short interviews, which can be useful, or necessary, in connection with certain topics. For instance, in the autumn of 2001 some of my students conducted interviews with Arab women and men on how they experienced September 11th. The narrative question – quoted here from one of the interviews – was formulated as follows:

“We are a group of students from the university who are conducting interviews on how people experienced September 11th. We are interested in hearing how people were affected by the attacks on New York, what they experienced personally. Our idea is that you should first tell us about what you were doing when you first heard about the attacks, and what you did then, what you have experienced since then, up to today, your concrete experiences, what concrete experiences you have had.”

In a *biographical-narrative interview* (i.e. an interview on a biographically relevant topic, with the individual biography as the case level), the interviewee is usually asked to tell their whole life story (see chapter 6.1). In this case, the narrative question can be put in this form:

“Please tell us/me (the story of your family and) your personal life story. We are/I am interested in your whole life. Anything that occurs to you. You have as much time as you like to tell it. We/I won’t ask you any questions for now. We/I will just make some notes on the things that we/I would like to ask you more about later: if there isn’t enough time today, perhaps in a second interview.”

This is the most open form of initial narrative question, in which the person concerned is asked to tell their life story without reference to any particular topic. A somewhat more closed form links this request for the life story with a particular topic. It could be formulated as follows, for example:

“We are interested in the life stories of soldiers (or: of people with a chronic disease), in your personal experience. Please tell us your whole life story. Anything ...” (plus procedural instruction as above)

This form of initial narrative question can be used in research contexts where we need to explain what we are investigating, and it is not enough to simply refer to our interest in biographies. However, this is usually explained when we first make contact with the interviewee, and it doesn't need to be repeated at the beginning of the interview. In some contexts, for instance in interviews with refugees and migrants, it is important to stress that we are interested in the person's whole life story. People who have suffered violence or persecution tend to limit their story to this traumatizing time (see Rosenthal 2004), and migrants frequently begin with their migration. In the case of people who have had traumatizing experiences, we would contribute to reducing their life to the time of these experiences which cause them such distress in the present, if we did not also ask them to tell us about the other phases of their biography.

With certain groups of people, or certain topics that are of no great biographical relevance, a very open narrative question may result in the interviewees saying nothing about the topic in which we are most interested. To ensure that they do talk about it, we can specifically mention the topic. But with an open initial question, unlike a request to tell us about their occupational history or the story of their disease, for instance, we always leave enough space for stories relating to other biographical strands. The resulting presentation can reveal the relative importance of their occupation (or their disease) in their biography, at which points it is interlinked with other biographical strands, and, for instance, where they try to localize the beginning of their career or their disease within their life story. Nevertheless, even here there are reasons why the most open form of initial question should be chosen, if possible. Thus, life stories narrated by people with a chronic disease who have not been directly asked to talk about their disease, and who do not mention it in their main narration, are theoretically interesting. For instance, this can be an expression of the fact that they have not integrated their disease into their biography. This kind of problem was also revealed in interviews with people suffering a chronic disease who were told that we were interested in “life stories of people with a chronic disease”.<sup>4</sup> Some of them reacted by asking: “What shall I talk about, my disease or my life story?”

---

<sup>4</sup> The interviews with women and men who defined themselves as suffering from a chronic disease were conducted by students under my supervision in the summer semester of 2004.

### Main narration or autonomously structured self-presentation<sup>5</sup>

In the phase following the initial narrative question, the interviewer should not interrupt the narration by asking for more details, but should maintain eye contact and make encouraging paralinguistic sounds like “mm”, or use other bodily signs that they are listening; if there is a pause in the narration, the interviewee can be motivated to continue by a question like, “And what happened then?” After asking the person to talk about a certain topic or to tell their life story, the interviewer should not intervene or try to influence the structure of the presentation. Rather, interviewees must be given complete freedom to decide how to present themselves, and what topics to talk about, or how to react to a thematically focused narrative request. In this phase of the interview, regardless of the research question and the topics that are of interest to the researcher, the form and content of the presentation are determined by the interviewees themselves. The second phase of the interview offers enough opportunity for asking questions about what has been said. If we assume that a sequence in a presentation, whether it is the narration of a story or an argumentative sequence, can be understood in its manifest and latent meaning for the speaker through the way it refers to the thematic field in which the speaker is immersed (see chapter 6.2), we must give them the freedom to shape this field. The meaning of an experience presented by the interviewee is reconstructable in the *how* of its positioning within the presentation. By interrupting the narration to ask questions relating to the interviewer’s own relevances, they would contribute to structuring the presentation and thus miss the chance to see whether, how, and at what points, the interviewee introduces certain experiences, topics or details of their own accord.

### On taking notes

During this autonomous presentation by the interviewee, which may last a few minutes or several hours, we listen attentively and make brief notes (often just key words) on the experiences and topics that are spoken about or mentioned. Thus, we develop a case-specific guideline based on the experiences and relevances of the interviewee for our questions in the second part of the interview. It is helpful for the formulation of narrative-generating questions if we write our notes in the language of the interviewee and not in our own language, and our notes should not be mixed with interpretations. For example, if an interviewee begins her presentation by saying “I had no brothers or sisters”, our notes should reflect this exact wording. We should not write “only child”, which would be an interpretation, and we should not note questions implying an interpretation, such as “Did she feel lonely?”

---

<sup>5</sup> Sometimes the sequence following the initial question is relatively short, and is followed by a longer narration only later on in the interview. It is also possible that in this initial phase the interviewee will choose to use an argumentative or descriptive text type. In such cases, we can speak of an autonomously structured presentation.



During long sequences, it is essential to make notes for later questions, because when we are listening we tend to pay less attention to the content of the experiences described and concentrate more on their meaning and the feelings expressed by the interviewee in the present of the narration. If I am trying to understand the emotional dimensions of what I am being told, my attention is focused on things that are completely different from what I would focus on if I was trying to memorize what is being said. Thus, in the course of an interview one forgets things which would be useful to be asked about later in order to gain a full understanding. Moreover, when listening and trying to understand, we allow ourselves to become involved in the defensive strategies of our interviewees and may overlook the importance of things that are mentioned only marginally. It quite often happens that I realize only after an interview that I have not asked questions about certain important details in the person's biography. This is one reason why it is a great advantage if we are able to conduct a second interview. At any rate, our notes are a great help in this respect in the interview. Even in the case of a self-presentation in the form of a short report lasting just a few minutes, they are important for the second part of the interview. We can refer to all the facts or events in the order in which they were mentioned by the interviewee, and ask him or her to say more about them.

### **Narrative questioning**

The questioning part of a narrative interview is of considerable importance, but frequently underestimated. On the one hand, it shows the interviewees that we are interested and it may help them to talk about certain issues which are important to them.<sup>6</sup> On the other hand, these additional narrations, prompted by our questions, are frequently necessary for the analysis because they can confirm, refute or complement our hypotheses in respect of sequences in the main narration.

When interviewees signalize that they have nothing more to say – this is usually when their story has arrived in the present – the interviewer begins the next phase in which he or she asks internal questions on subjects that have been mentioned. At this point, I always thank the interviewee for telling me their story, and explain how I intend to proceed, for example as follows:

“As you have seen, I have been taking notes and now I would like to ask you some questions. If it's all right with you, I will start at the beginning, with my first note. I noted that you said ... Can you tell me more about this?”

In this phase of the interview, we proceed in the order of the notes we have taken during the main narration, and thus follow the thematic structure of the presentation. This has the advantage that when responding to a question interviewees often return to the sequential gestalt of their main narration, and questions relating to some other

---

<sup>6</sup> On the supportive, or even healing, effect of narrative interviews, see Rosenthal (2003).

notes thus become unnecessary. At first our questions are restricted to subjects that the interviewee has mentioned. Since these topics or biographical experiences have been introduced by the interviewee, we can understand this as an invitation to talk about them, and need not have doubts as to whether this might be too embarrassing or too difficult for the person concerned. If we want to ask about sensitive issues, we can formulate our questions tactfully, for instance: "Could I perhaps ask you to say a bit more about ...?" or "I wonder if you would like to say more about the time when you ...?"

When we have finished working through our notes, and only then, we can begin to ask external questions about things we are interested in which have not been mentioned yet.

With all our questions, whether internal or external, our aim is to generate further narrations, and we should avoid questions asking for an opinion or a reason (such as "Why did you ...?", "What made you do that?", "Why did you decide to ...?"). After many years of experience and experimentation with narrative interviews, it is clear to me that any topic or interesting aspect can be asked about using narrative questions, by linking it with a concrete situation in which it was thought about or talked about, such as imaginations of the future or experiences that have been fantasized or transmitted. It is always in special situations or concrete interactions that people ponder about their future career, learn about transmitted experiences, or start to fantasize, for instance about a family past of which they have only a fragmentary idea. And the effect of transmitted experiences on people depends not just on the facts that are handed down, but on when in their biography, in what concrete situation, and how, they are told these facts. For example, if a pregnant woman who fears the coming birth is told by her mother about how she nearly died when giving birth to her, this story will have an effect on the daughter that it would not have if told at a different point in her life.

We can distinguish different types of questions and formulate them as shown on the opposite page.

### **Other techniques**

The interview may involve difficult passages when the memory of painful and distressing experiences reactivates strong feelings and the interviewee weeps or shows signs of anger or other emotions. In such cases, I resort to the "active-listening" technique from client-centered therapy (Gordon 1974; Rogers 1951). This technique is helpful when a narrative-generating question seems inappropriate and our "everyday competence" in interacting with other people makes us want to comfort the person or take their mind off the subject. Thomas Gordon speaks here of "road blocks" which do not prompt the person concerned to say more but are aimed at putting an end to the difficult passage. For example, if someone says that he discovered the dead body of his mother in the house and then starts to weep, we cannot react by asking

### **Narrative questions**

1. Questions addressing a phase in the interviewee's life  
*"Could you tell me more about the time when you were ... (a child, pregnant, etc.)?"*  
 Or indicating interest in the process:  
*"Could you tell me more about your time in the army, perhaps from the first days up to the end of your training?"*
2. Questions addressing a single theme in the interviewee's life by opening a temporal space  
*"Could you tell me more about your parents? Perhaps from your earliest memories up to the present."*
3. Questions addressing a specific situation already mentioned in the interview  
*"You mentioned situation x earlier. Could you tell me in more detail exactly what happened?"*
4. Questions to elicit a narration in connection with an argument that has been presented  
*"Can you recall a situation, when your father behaved in an authoritative way (when you stopped believing in justice, peace, etc.)?"*
5. Questions addressing transmitted knowledge or a non-self-experienced event or phase  
*"Can you remember a situation when somebody talked about this event (how your father died)?"*
6. Questions addressing visions of the future or phantasies  
*"Can you recall a situation, when you imagined that you wanted to quit your job (what your grandfather experienced in the concentration camp)?"*

him to tell us exactly what happened. Changing the subject would also be wrong, because that would imply that we do not want to pursue this difficult subject and the feelings connected with it. With the "verbalization of emotional experiences" which the listener tries to decipher from what the person says, the interviewer can try to understand and accept the other person's feelings and signalize this by means of responses which Gordon calls "door openers". We can either talk of the person's feelings in the present, for instance by saying "You still feel sad when you think about it", or of their feelings in the past situation, for instance with "You felt helpless". If necessary, I also use this technique during the main narration, when interviewees show signs of being deeply moved or are unable to continue, in order to let them know that it's all right to verbalize their feelings or talk about difficult experiences.

People who have experienced very difficult or traumatizing situations often think they shouldn't upset other people by talking about them. Active listening is a way of helping to reassure people that they can talk freely in the interview.

### Closing the interview

An important rule is that an interview should not end with a difficult or distressing phase of the person's life. The interviewer must allow time for the interviewee to move away from a difficult phase or distressing topic and talk about reassuring and supporting aspects of their biography. If an interview has involved talking about very difficult phases, we can ask questions that encourage the interviewee to tell us about "safe places" in their life (see Rosenthal 2003).<sup>7</sup> A long biographical narration usually gives us some clues as to the phases or areas in which the person feels safe and secure.

In order to leave enough time for this, competent time management is very important. I make it a rule that there should be at least half an hour at the end of the interview for this process. At the beginning of a biographical interview, I usually offer to meet the person a second time, which means that before the end of the interview I can refer to our next meeting and say that we can talk about certain topics again then.

At the end of an interview we can ask: "Is there anything else you would like to tell me (today)?" The following questions are a good way of "rounding off" a biographical interview: "If you look back at your life, what would you say was your worst experience or the most difficult phase in your life?" And then we should ask what was the best time in their life, in order to end with a positive experience. In our experience, answering these questions often results in narrations of important experiences which have not previously been mentioned. Finally, to end the interview, I always ask my interviewees what the interview was like for them, and whether there is anything they want to ask me.

This type of interview, in which we ask people to tell us their life story or to recount a particular phase in their life, is a serious intervention, whether we like it or not. I therefore believe that special training is necessary before trying to conduct this kind of interview, and that the interviewer must reflect on which kinds of intervention are supportive and which kinds act as obstacles or barriers.

---

<sup>7</sup> This method is in some ways similar to the techniques used by Luise Reddemann and Ulrich Sachsse for establishing a safe inner place. "Most patients report that as children they either went to concrete places which seemed safe to them (for instance a wood or a particular meadow), or that they went in their minds to a place where they felt safe. This ability is reactivated in the therapy" (Reddemann / Sachsse 1996: 172). Sachsse also tries to awaken memories of good experiences in which the person felt safe (Sachsse 1999: 60). However, it must be underlined that Reddemann and Sachsse take several sessions to identify these safe places.

### **On combining narrative interviews with other methods**

Before the end of a narrative interview, or at a second interview, it is conceivable that other methods may also be used. In research contexts relating to relationships within the family and family traditions, my colleagues and I (Rosenthal 2010a; Loch 2004; Völter 2003) use a form of family sculpting, modified for use in individual interviews, as developed in systemic family therapy (see Simon 1972). We give our interviewees different colored sticky dots and tell them that they represent themselves and their family members (sometimes also friends); then we ask them to group the dots so as to show the emotional closeness or distance between these people from their perspective. We then ask the kind of questions that are commonly used in family therapy. In some contexts (see Loch 2004), we use another method borrowed from family therapy (McGoldrick/Gerson 1985): together with the interviewees, we construct a genogram, i.e. a graphic representation of the family data, rather like a family tree.

As already mentioned, it is conceivable to combine the narrative interview method with focused or dilemma interviews. In 1995, at the request of the Hamburg Institute of Social Research, I directed a project in which Sabrina Böhmer, Angelika Heider and Christine Müller conducted interviews similar to focused interviews with visitors to the exhibition “War of Annihilation: Crimes of the German Wehrmacht, 1941–1944”, immediately after they left the exhibition. The interview was opened with an initial narrative question in which the interviewees were invited to say how they had heard of the exhibition, what made them decide to come and see it, and what they thought about it now they had seen it. In the second part of the interview, the first questions that were asked were related to points noted during the main narration. In addition, older women and men who had first-hand experience of the Second World War were also asked whether the materials in the exhibition reminded them of their own experiences or of things they had heard about, whether they had themselves experienced situations like those shown in the photographs, or whether they had been told of such situations. The younger visitors were asked to describe situations in which they had been told or learnt about things that happened during this period in the collective and family history.

## 5.5 On the necessity of asking in-depth questions

### 5.5.1 Processes of understanding in the interview situation

Academics interested in interpretive social research commonly imagine that it is possible to conduct “open interviews” without using a special technique and without any training in how to conduct interviews. Much more has been written and said about the problems connected with guided interviews than about the difficulty of conducting a good open or narrative interview. The lack of reflection, and especially the lack of practical training, among interviewers using narrative methods, or working without a guideline, is connected with the idea that one only needs to let the interview take its course, and the case structure will be perfectly clear. Narrative interviews are often conducted with the naive idea that the interviewer can just let the person talk, without any further effort on their part. Interviewers using a narrative method often think: if we formulate an initial narrative-generating question, or simply ask the person to tell their life story, and do not try to influence them, then we will have a good interview. Such interviewers feel they have met the requirements of so-called openness if they end up with a text structured by the interviewee in the form of a narration, lasting, let’s say, thirty or ninety minutes, which has been created without any intervention on their part. The interviewer comes out of the interview feeling satisfied, and thinks: “The person told me so much; I hardly needed to ask any questions.” The consequence of this doubtful approach is that the process of understanding is shifted to the analysis phase. Not infrequently, questions only arise during the analysis. Even with a narration lasting several hours, we repeatedly have the problem that we can set up a number of hypotheses, but the text provides no way of testing them reliably. Instead of reinforcing the process of understanding during the interview through active listening and by asking questions relating to the presentation, the interviewer will have to try during the analysis to understand what the interviewee could have meant by certain utterances. But, despite all our hermeneutic skills, if no further indications are to be obtained from the text, we are left only with what we think we understand, and can only interpret the text in terms of our own horizons of meaning. An over-hasty understanding is much more problematic than the formulation of hypotheses which cannot be falsified or verified on the basis of the text alone. The result is that no hypotheses are set up in respect of different interpretations, and that the researcher may come to false interpretive conclusions. While a guided interview is usually followed by a content analysis, with the aim of comparing and creating links between certain passages from interviews with different people, the analysis of narrative interviews focuses primarily on the individual case and the reconstruction of its overall gestalt. Here, regardless of what method is used for the analysis, the aim is to discover the meaning of certain passages within the overall context of the text, and, in the case of biographical case structures, from the overall gestalt of the person’s experienced life history, and not by subsuming them under general categories or comparing them with passages from other interviews.

In my everyday practice of training in methods, I am often shown transcripts of so-called biographical-narrative interviews and asked for advice on analyzing them. These interviews frequently permit the formulation of hypotheses in respect of certain passages, certain biographical data or certain phases in the person's life that have not been thematized, but because of weaknesses in the way the interview was conducted it is often not possible to test these hypotheses on the basis of the interview text. If I ask the interviewers "Why didn't you ask more questions about this topic, this passage, this biographical phase, etc.", the answers are usually very similar. The most frequent answer is: "Because it has nothing to do with my research question." Another is: "The person had already explained that clearly", or: "I thought I understood what that passage meant." And sometimes I am told: "I thought that was too delicate, too intimate or too traumatic", or "Asking about that would be too intervening." And then the interviewer refers to the rule that we should avoid making interventions in our interviews. I will discuss these arguments, but first I will formulate a counter-argument: if we say we are satisfied with the over-hasty processes of understanding of everyday communication, with arguments like "I, as interviewer, can understand this", then in our analysis of the case we will have no choice but to proceed according to the logic of subsumption. And so we let something in again through the back door that we intended to avoid when we decided to make a reconstructive analysis.

Thus, I believe that we need to conduct our narrative interviews in such a way that after the main narration we can ask questions which enable us to start testing possible hypotheses arising from the main narration. When listening, we must pay attention to vagueness, inconsistencies and gaps, in other words, we must be sensitive to passages that can perhaps be clarified by asking questions. The way we conduct the interview must allow us to test our understanding, to ask questions which serve as a means of testing first hypotheses (based on the concrete individual case). We are interested here not only in the manifest content of certain passages, but also in meanings of which the interviewees themselves may not be aware. In order to capture these latent meanings, a competent interviewing method is required which allows us to gain insights into the action and meaning structures of our interviewees by means of narrative-generating questions, but also through subsequent questions aimed at electing more details in connection with certain situations or topics. This means that during the interview we must first subordinate or bracket our own research interest and listen to the narration of the life story before asking questions related to our own system of relevances. It is also necessary that we should not be satisfied with the mere naming of events or facts, but that we should try to gain insights into past situations and actions by prompting narrations. Another rule is that we should not bypass difficult topics and experiences which are introduced by the biographers themselves, and which can be considered as an invitation to ask questions. If the interviewee hints at difficult and traumatic experiences and we ignore these hints by not asking about them, the person will feel that they are burdening us, that this makes us feel uncomfortable, and that they should not talk about them. Especially in the case of traumatic experiences, setting up barriers in a dialogue can have the effect of rein-

forcing the trauma or may even cause secondary traumatization. This also shows how obeying the rule that we shouldn't intervene can actually result in a bad intervention. If we were to follow this rule consistently, then we shouldn't conduct any interviews at all, since both asking questions and not asking questions will have an influence on the interviewee.

### **5.5.2 Empirical example: what is the significance of the mother's death for different research questions?**

In this section, I will show how to be responsive and open to an interviewee and how it is possible to probe carefully into the meaning behind stories told by interviewees, on the basis of a concrete example. This interview with a woman from eastern Germany who was born in 1921 was conducted by Bettina Völter and myself in the context of our study of three-generation families (Rosenthal 2010a). Ms. Liebig, as we call her, got divorced in 1949. As a thought experiment, we could imagine that we interviewed her in the context of a study of people's experience of divorce. Another possible context is research on war experiences in the Second World War. Regardless of these two research contexts, however, I would a) start the interview with an open biographical-narrative question, and b) put aside my research question during the internal questioning part of the interview, when I would ask questions about all the topics and biographical experiences mentioned by Ms. Liebig. Only in the external questions would I ask about things relating to my research topic which had not been mentioned by Ms. Liebig.

We asked Elisabeth Liebig to tell us about her family history and her own biography. She begins the story of her life as follows: "Nothing turns out as you think it will. Everything happens differently from what you expect. You fall in love when you're young at fifteen with someone you meet, get engaged at eighteen and married at twenty and when I was twenty-one my son was born ((laughing)) that was in '42, after the war had started ..." After this, she speaks about her marriage and her life during the war years, the time following the war, the return of her husband from captivity, the problems she had with her husband, her divorce, her own subsequent career, and then comes back to the present. After about fifteen minutes, she ends this self-structured presentation and goes into the kitchen to fetch coffee for the interviewers.

How could the interview continue? With the two above-mentioned possible research topics, we could argue that no matter whether the interviewers are interested in people's experience of divorce or in their war experiences, they can be satisfied with this initial narration and can now begin to ask questions. Depending on their research question, they could continue with external questions relating to either divorce or war experiences. However, in our interpretation of this main narration or biographical self-presentation, we need to ask why Ms. Liebig begins with her youthful romance and why she says nothing about her life before this. Here, we can formulate various hypotheses, such as that her marriage and divorce are of such



biographical importance that they push other matters into the background in her self-presentation. Another possible hypothesis is that Ms. Liebig feels embarrassed or uncomfortable about the part of her life before she met her husband. However, we would be unable to test these hypotheses if she did not speak about this time in the rest of interview. The text would only provide evidence that the marriage which Ms. Liebig experienced as “failed” was, and still is, a main point in her biography. But it would not be possible to ascertain whether the biographical importance she attaches to her failed marriage, including the fact that she fell in love with her husband at the age of fifteen, has anything to do with the earlier part of her life, or whether there are things about which she feels uncomfortable, and which are perhaps more significant for the case structure than her failed marriage.

To cut a long story short, the significance of Ms. Liebig’s life story up to the age of fifteen becomes clear only after four questions. First, after having coffee, one of the two interviewers asks Ms. Liebig whether she could say something about the history of her family. The resulting text, with accounts of her grandparents and many descriptions of the family history, is longer than the initial presentation. This second presentation also contains an important biographical fact. At the beginning of this section, Ms. Liebig says that her mother suffered from multiple sclerosis, and made several attempts to end her life, before a final attempt which led to her death: “In 1933 she succeeded; I was twelve years old.” Ms. Liebig immediately continues, without pausing: “But I often went down to my aunty’s in the holidays”, and goes on to describe (13 lines) how she enjoyed these holidays with her aunt. On the basis of this sequence, we can now form several hypotheses. We can assume that, not only in the present of the interview, but also as a twelve-year-old girl, Ms. Liebig needed to fend off the emotional impact of her mother’s suicide, because this experience was much too stressful and threatening. However, this sequence does not help us to understand the present and past significance of this event. It is clear that if the mother of a twelve-year-old girl commits suicide, this will be a deeply disturbing experience for the girl, and will affect her subsequent biography and her other relationships, as well as her later experiences of separation or divorce. But on the basis of this text, we can only speculate as to how this biographical event affected Ms. Liebig’s life. A study of relevant literature on the consequences of the death of a parent in early adolescence (see Bowlby 1980) would tell us that these consequences depend very much on the concrete circumstances of the death, on the girl’s relationship with her mother, and on the family constellation after the mother’s death. But these are things about which we know nothing at this point. Here, the reader may argue that while this knowledge could possibly be helpful for interpreting experiences connected with the process of divorce, and that research on divorce should include a consideration of other experiences of separation and loss, this knowledge is irrelevant for the reconstruction of war experiences.

However, in the interview with Ms. Liebig, the next question followed the rule that the interviewers should first put aside their research question, give their full attention to the story told by the interviewee and try to understand it. Here, it is im-

portant that they should not be satisfied with the mere mentioning of events like “my mother committed suicide in 1933”, but that they should try to prompt narrations that will give some insight into what actually happened. Moreover, a competent interviewer who wants to support the interviewee should not avoid talking about difficult topics that the interviewee has introduced. In this case, the next question was: “Perhaps you can tell us a bit about your mother, any particular situations that you can remember.” Ms. Liebig first maintains the style of a report and gives some biographical details concerning her mother: that she lost her first husband in the First World War, that she had a child from this marriage that died young, that she met Ms. Liebig’s father in 1919, and then contracted multiple sclerosis. Ms. Liebig talks again about her mother’s repeated attempts to commit suicide, reporting that her mother once tried to hang herself, and that the police and firemen were in the house. Another time, her father had been able to prevent such an attempt. After this report, Ms. Liebig was asked if she could say more about her mother’s illness. At this point, about half an hour into the interview, comes the first real narration. Ms. Liebig tells the story of her first day at the grammar school: she had to go there on her own, because her mother was already hardly able to walk. The interviewer then asked about her mother’s suicide attempts: “Can you remember one of her suicide attempts?”

Before giving Ms. Liebig’s answer, I would like to respond to the frequently heard objection that we should not insist on asking about traumatic experiences because we don’t know what reactions our questions might trigger, and there is a risk that we will plunge the interviewee into a crisis. Here, it is important to note that the subject of these suicide attempts had been repeatedly introduced into the interview by Ms. Liebig herself. If we do not follow up such references to distressing experiences in an interview, but ignore them by not asking about them, the speaker will feel that we are indifferent to their pain and suffering.

Ms. Liebig reacts to the question with a long narration (30 lines in the transcript) of what happened on the day her mother died. This passage is much more detailed than the first narration in connection with her mother’s illness. Thus, the text structure reveals the biographer’s willingness, or need, to talk about this subject. The content of the story reveals a very difficult biographical constellation. It was in the spring of 1933, and Ms. Liebig says that on this day she “came home late” because she had gone to the cinema with a friend after school. She had immediately smelt gas and found her mother’s dead body in the kitchen. She turned off the gas and fetched her father home from his work. The sequence shows that Ms. Liebig is presenting herself as a competent girl on the manifest level. On the latent level, however, it is clear that she is fending off feelings of guilt. The twelve-year-old girl felt that her mother’s death was her fault because she had not come straight home from school. In addition, our microanalysis of this sequence shows that after her mother’s death the girl felt guilty because she had had a distanced relationship with her mother. It

is a striking feature of this narration that Ms. Liebig speaks about these events without showing any emotional involvement. The following sequence suggests that as a twelve-year-old child she dealt with the stress of her mother's suicide by splitting her feelings. When the interviewer remarks (in accordance with the technique of active listening) that it must have been difficult for Ms. Liebig as a young girl to find her mother's dead body, she answers: "Well, I did like my father more, I've realized that **since**, and all this trouble at home was well pretty bad really and when I was nine I joined a gymnastics club." Just as in an earlier sequence Ms. Liebig mentioned the holidays she spent with her aunt immediately after speaking about her mother's suicide, without any apparent connection, now she mentions the gymnastics club with a similar abruptness. The biographical importance of this club becomes clear in the overall context of the interview, and especially in connection with her husband. The man she met and fell in love with at the age of fifteen, who was later to become her husband, was a keen sportsman who took part in the Olympic Games. Like Ms. Liebig, he, too, was trying to work through his feelings of abandonment by taking part in sporting activities in the context of the community of a club. Our analysis of the whole interview shows that this woman is using the story of her failed marriage as a substitute for the loss of her mother and her unconscious guilt feelings. This is shown, for example, by the fact that she inserts in her initial biographical narration a detailed argumentative sequence on the reasons for her divorce.

The reader might still be wondering why we would need this interpretation of the significance of the mother's suicide, if the interview was conducted in the context of a study of war experiences. To put it first in general terms: without understanding the significance of a statement or a biographical experience in the concrete case at hand, we will not be able to judge whether this statement or this experience is relevant to our research question or not. If we construct connections apart from the concrete case, we run the risk of interpreting the text on the basis of what we think may be connected or unconnected components of the person's biography, and may miss seeing which components have interacted with each other in the concrete case – and thus also the case structure. The basic aim of a reconstructive analysis is to discover possible connections between two components – such as war experiences and the mother's suicide – in the concrete individual case. Our analysis of the interview with Ms. Liebig shows that she defends herself against her feelings at all difficult times, including the war years, and that sports and work in the company of others are biographical strategies that help her to live with the feeling of having been abandoned, and her repressed sorrow and distress.

How little she is aware of the significance of the loss of her mother, and how she deals with this by vicariously remembering instead her war experiences, and especially her failed marriage, becomes clear in her answer to one of the final questions in the interview: "If you look back at your life, what would you say were the **worst** and **most difficult** times for you?" Ms. Liebig answers that these were the war years, and

goes on to say: “What **really** made me unhappy was when my marriage broke up and that I basically I was so fond of my husband that I didn’t get over it for years it **took twenty years for me to get over that divorce deep down, no it wasn’t a good time.**”<sup>8</sup>

On the level of conscious self-interpretation, we see that for this woman her failed marriage and the war years are central and distressing phases. This already shows in her initial narration. If the interviewers had asked no questions about the time before her marriage, they probably would not have perceived the latent structure of this case, i.e. that for Ms. Liebig the circumstances of her mother’s death significantly influenced her biography, determining her early choice of a partner and sharpening the effect of her divorce. The biographical strategy of splitting her feelings, which she adopted following her mother’s death, also proved to have a high impact in other spheres of her life. The researchers would probably have given a wrong interpretation to the impassive way she told stories about the war, and especially about the suffering of other people, which was striking in the interview, and thus would have denied empathy to Ms. Liebig, who is unable to feel compassion for herself as a child with an ailing mother by whom she was abandoned.

---

<sup>8</sup> For a key to the transcription signs, see chapter 3.2.3.

## 6 Biographical research and case reconstruction<sup>1</sup>

*Preliminary remark: What is the aim of biographical research and what basic principles and methodological assumptions is it based on? This will be discussed in the following section (6.1), before I go on to explain the method of biographical case reconstruction and illustrate it by presenting the analysis of an interview (6.2). Finally (6.3), I will discuss how this method can also be used for case reconstructions on other case levels, such as families or organizations.*

### 6.1 Biographical research and its theoretical basis

#### History of biographical research<sup>2</sup>

Biographical research began around the same time in university departments of psychology and sociology, i.e. in the 1920s. In the field of psychology, practicing psychoanalysts used biographical methods before these were taken up at universities. The psychoanalytical interview is a biographical method, but Sigmund Freud also analyzed written biographical texts by and on historical personalities (such as Moses

---

<sup>1</sup> This chapter is a revised version of Rosenthal (2004).

<sup>2</sup> For a detailed account, see Fuchs-Heinritz (2000).

or Leonardo da Vinci). These studies do not focus on the person's whole biography, however, but show the importance of biographically relevant experiences in the person's childhood and youth (see Erikson 1959).

Academic biographical research reached a peak in the 1920s and 1930s among the students and colleagues of Charlotte and Karl Bühler at the Psychological Institute of the University of Vienna. On the basis of empirical studies of childhood and adolescence, Charlotte Bühler, in her well-known work "The Course of Human Life as a Psychological Problem" ([1933] 1968b; 1968a), argued that a person's behavior must be analyzed in the overall context of this particular phase of their life, and that development psychology should take into consideration the whole of a person's life. Bühler put this as follows:

"To understand the manifestations and data of a person's life it is necessary to know the interrelatedness of events. This interrelatedness of events is the result of their structural properties and of the motives and purposes that affect the continuity of individual development. By development we mean a succession of events that occurs in a recognizable order or pattern and conveys a certain direction and unity. And it is this process of development that we are looking for when we study a person's history." (Bühler 1968a: 1)

The study of migration entitled "The Polish Peasant in Europe and America", carried out by William Isaac Thomas and Florian Znaniecki ([1918–1920] 1958) at the University of Chicago, is considered as the beginning of biographical research in sociology. In addition to an analysis of documents relating to the migration process, this voluminous work contains only one autobiography of a Polish migrant, written at the request of the authors. The authors even go so far as to claim that:

"life-records have a marked superiority over any other kinds of materials. We are safe in saying that personal life-records, as complete as possible, constitute the perfect type of sociological material." (Thomas and Znaniecki 1958, II: 1832f.)

In their opinion, autobiographical sources give us access to "the actual human experiences and attitudes which constitute the full, live and active social reality beneath the formal organization of social institutions" (1958, II: 1834).

Thanks to the initiative of Ernest W. Burgess and Robert E. Park, who were inspired by this study, the biographical method flourished at the department of sociology in Chicago in the 1920s (see chapter 1.3). They recognized the advantages of the biographical case study, not only for understanding the subjective perspectives and social actions of members of particular milieus, and their development, but also for reconstructing social life worlds in general and providing useful advice for social work practice.

In the 1970s, especially in Germany, but also internationally, there was a return in sociology to the traditions of the Chicago School, which led to a boom in interpretive biographical research. The first collection of articles on biographical research was published in 1978 with the title “Soziologie des Lebenslaufs” (“Sociology of the life course”), edited by Martin Kohli. In 1981, the French sociologist Daniel Bertaux published the reader “Biography and Society”; and Joachim Matthes, Arno Pfeifenberger and Manfred Stosberg were the editors of a collection of conference papers with the title “Biographie in handlungswissenschaftlicher Perspektive” (“Biographies from a perspective of action theory”). Another volume, with the title “Biographie und soziale Wirklichkeit” (“Biography and Social Reality”) followed in 1984, edited by Martin Kohli and Günter Robert.

The same year saw the publication of Werner Fuchs’ introduction to biographical research, a revised version of which was published in 2000. This was followed, especially in the anglophone world, by several edited volumes, most of which contained articles by German scholars (see Chamberlayne et al. 2000; Harrison 2009; Miller 2005).

In Germany, it was Martin Kohli (1986a, 1986b, 1978) who, with his programmatic and empirical studies, made the most substantial contribution to the institutionalization of biographical research. In Germany this tradition is clearly based on the principles of social constructivism (see Alber 2016a, 2016b; Breckner 2015; Bogner/Rosenthal 2017a; Fischer-Rosenthal 2000; Fischer/Kohli 1987; Riemann 2006; Riemann/Schütze 1991; Schütze 2008), and this is increasingly the case in other countries, too; the Brazilian sociologist Hermílio Santos (2015, 2016), for instance, refers explicitly to Alfred Schütz.

Today, biographical research is practiced in many different areas of sociology. In particular, a tradition has become established of studying migration and transnational biographies (see Anthias 2009; Apitzsch/Siouti 2007, 2014; Brandhorst 2014; Breckner 2007, 2014; Kaya 2008; Köttig 2009; Lutz 2011; Phoenix 2009; Rosenthal/Stephan 2009; Schulze 2006, 2009a; Siouti 2017; Tepecik 2009; Worm 2017). Biographical methods are also used in research fields such as the transgenerational consequences of the Second World War, National Socialism, the Holocaust, the history of East Germany (Alheit 1995; Inowlocki 2000; Kazmierska 2002, 2012; Miethe 2002a; Pohn-Weidinger 2014; Rosenthal 2010a), or people who have been, or still are, active in political resistance movements (Miethe 2002b; Pohn-Lauggas 2016; Schiebel and Robel 2011). Other important areas are gender research, (Apitzsch 2012; Dausien 1996, 2002; Haas 2016; Köttig et al. 2017; Lutz 2011), research on socialization, especially the political socialization of young people (Hinrichsen 2017; Inowlocki 2000; Köttig 2016; Santos 2010; Schiebel 2000), and, more recently, studies in urban sociology (Bahl 2017; Becker 2016, 2017; Witte 2016, 2017), and research on collective, familial and individual memories (Kazmierska 2012; Mamul 2009; Rosenthal 2016a, 2016b). Together with other scholars, the present author is carrying out research in the field of conflict and peace studies in the Middle

East and in African countries (Uganda, Ghana and countries in North Africa), using a figurational biographical approach (see Becker 2013, 2017; Rosenthal 2016a; Bogner/Rosenthal 2014, 2017a, 2017b; Bogner/Rosenthal/Schmiereck 2017).

Most of the studies mentioned here are characterized by sound methodological reflection and often combine biographical methods with other interpretive methods, such as participant observation, discourse analysis or video analysis.<sup>3</sup>

Today, biographical research is increasingly being used in other disciplines in the social sciences and the humanities. It has also become established in the educational sciences (Alheit 2009; Alheit/Dausien 2002; Marotzki 2004; Miethe/Soremski 2016; Pineda Olivieri 2017) as a sub-discipline offering a general theoretical basis for research. Many historians recognize the value of oral history and use biographical interviews, usually based on narrative interpretive methods, when studying more recent historical periods (see Bornat 2004; Sieder 1999; Thompson 1992; v. Plato 1998).

Psychology has also rediscovered the biographical concept. Noteworthy in Germany is the work of Gerd Jüttemann, who has edited two collections of articles together with Hans Thomae (1987, 1998). With his concept of comparative casuistics, Jüttemann (1998) argues that psychological phenomena must be studied in terms of their development, and can only be understood and explained in the light of their origin and cause. On an international level, the studies by Dan Bar-On (1995, 2004), Jerome Bruner (1990), George C. Rosenwald and Richard L. Ochberg (1992) or Dan McAdams (1993), to name but a few, have caused a return to a form of *understanding* psychology, and especially to biographical research based on narrative methods. From 1993 to 1999, the American psychologist Ruthellen Josselson and the Israeli psychologist Amia Lieblich edited annual volumes entitled “The Narrative Study of Lives”, which presented studies in narrative biographical research from the realm of academic psychology. A prominent figure in this field in Germany is Jürgen Straub (2004, 2008).

Today, biographical research is well established in the sphere of social work. In Germany, biographical and ethnographic research principles have become institutionalized in social work practice (Köttig/Rätz 2017; Rätz/Völter 2015; Schulze 2009a, 2009b).

## Theoretical assumptions

The proponents of interpretive biographical research do not restrict the use of biographical methods to research topics that have an obvious connection with people’s life stories. Rather, they formulate all kinds of research questions in a biographical form. This is based on certain basic theoretical assumptions. In order to make these

---

<sup>3</sup> Biographical analyses can be combined with ethnography (see Becker 2013; Rosenthal/Bahl/Worm 2017), discourse analysis (see Alber 2016a, 2016b; Bogner/Rosenthal 2017a; Pohn-Lauggas 2016), or video analysis (see Santos 2010; Witte 2010).



clear, I will describe how we could carry out two possible empirical research projects, as a kind of thought experiment. The first project is a study of people's experience of sickness and health, using the example of people suffering from multiple sclerosis (MS). In the second project, we want to reconstruct the experiences of socially disadvantaged adolescents doing vocational training.<sup>4</sup> In both these projects, when collecting and analyzing data we could concentrate on the chosen research topic and focus directly on the phenomena in which we are interested. Thus, in both cases we could decide to carry out guided interviews. In the first case, we could ask the interviewees questions about their experiences of health and sickness, or – as in a narrative interview – we could ask them to tell us the story of their illness from when it was first diagnosed up to the present. In the other case, we could ask the interviewees about their experiences in connection with their training, and perhaps combine the interview with participant observation at the training site. However, in both these research projects I would prefer to take a biographical approach, with its methods of data collection and analysis, in other words I would conduct biographical-narrative interviews and carry out biographical case reconstructions. Thus, I would ask both the people who have MS and the young people doing vocational training to tell me their whole life story and then try to reconstruct it. In both cases, this could be combined with participant observation. I would then try to interpret my observations of daily interactions at the training site in the light of the biography of the young persons concerned.

This methodological preference is not simply due to the fact that I am involved in biographical research and have an interest in people's life stories, but is based on theoretical assumptions. These assumptions mean that with sociological or historical research topics relating to social phenomena that are bound up with people's experience and are biographically significant for them, the meaning of these phenomena must be interpreted in the context of their whole life history. Like many of my colleagues in biographical research, I think it is necessary to reconstruct both people's life histories and their present biographical constructions, whether we are interested in people's experiences of health and illness or young people's experiences of vocational training, or whether we want to analyze people's attitudes to the health-care system or the system of vocational training.

These ideas are based on the following theoretical assumptions:

1. In order to understand and explain<sup>5</sup> social and psychological phenomena we have to reconstruct their *genesis* – the process of their creation, reproduction, and transformation.

---

<sup>4</sup> Such a study was commissioned by the Jugendmarke Foundation and carried out under my supervision by Michaela Köttig, Nicole Witte and Anne Blezinger (Rosenthal et al. 2006).

<sup>5</sup> Understanding and explaining are understood here in the sense used by Max Weber and Alfred Schütz. According to Weber's postulate of subjective interpretation, scientific explanations of the social world must refer to the subjective meaning of the actions of human beings and thus explain

2. In order to understand and explain people's actions it is necessary to investigate both the subjective perspective of the actors and their *courses of action*. We need to find out what they experienced, what meaning they gave to their actions at the time, what meaning they assign to them today, and in what biographically constituted context they place their experiences.
3. In order to be able to understand and explain statements made by interviewees/biographers concerning particular topics or experiences in their past, it is necessary to interpret the latter as part of the *overall context of their current life* and their present and future perspectives.

What do these assumptions mean for our two possible research projects? In order to be able to understand and explain a present or past phenomenon, such as suffering from multiple sclerosis, or the situation in which a person first hears the medical diagnosis, or the everyday interactions of an adolescent undergoing vocational training, we need insights into the person's history, their biography. We need to ask what experiences preceded and followed the phenomena in which we are interested, and in what order. We need to reconstruct the phenomenon in which we are interested, such as a person's experience of illness, in the process of becoming. This concerns both the processes of creating and reproducing established structures, and processes of change. Therefore, we reconstruct the genesis of a phenomenon by interpreting not only the person's *present* experience of illness or vocational training, but also their experience of hearing a diagnosis or undergoing training in the past. Like the process of remembering, a person's narrations or arguments in connection with hearing a diagnosis or undergoing training are constituted in the present of a concrete interaction situation. This present is a result of the past experience of hearing a diagnosis or undergoing training, as well as biographical processes and experiences in the time before and after these experiences. Not least, biographical case reconstructions can reveal important biographical turning points – so-called points of interpretation (Fischer 1978) – which have led to a reinterpretation of the past and the present, but also the future. These points of interpretation can be the result of public discourses and social developments, as well as changes in the family system, or biographical events. They can be triggered, for example, by changes in the public debate on the causes of MS and the chances of finding a cure for it, or debates on the effects of combining income support and unemployment benefit, or by the death of a parent, a sister's serious illness, or meeting a new partner.

Therefore, most sociologists interested in biographical research, especially in Germany, consider the whole life history, both its *genesis*, and its *construction* in the present of the biographer. In the collection and analysis of narrated life stories, no

---

their actions and the consequences of their actions through their interdependency with the actions of others. Schütz (1962) is a prominent proponent of the idea that sociological constructions should be based on the constructs of everyday life.

attempt is made to restrict the initial narration to certain aspects or particular phases of the person's biography. The analysis of particular areas or phases of a person's life, such as daily interactions at work or the process of a migration, should only follow when the structure or gestalt of the whole life history and the whole narration has become clear.

### **Experiencing – remembering – narrating**

How can we make statements about the past when our information is obtained from narrations made in the present? Answering this question requires some theoretical considerations concerning the relationship between experiencing, remembering and narrating. On the basis of the phenomenological discussion of gestalt theory by Aron Gurwitsch (1964), I have tried to examine this relationship in its dialectic (Rosenthal 1995: 27–98).

Narrations of past events are bound to the present of the narration. The way people look back at the past, or their specific memories of the past, are determined by their present situation. If, for example, I am unexpectedly confronted by my doctor with the news that I have a chronic condition like multiple sclerosis, this will change the way I see my past. I will spend more time thinking about health and illness; this will become a dominant issue, and I will now remember things that I never thought about before the diagnosis. Through this act of remembering, which Edmund Husserl calls *noesis*,<sup>6</sup> not only do different memories become more dominant, but they also appear in a new way. A new memory or *noema* emerges, as Husserl calls the object that appears in recollection, the remembered as such (Husserl 1931: 258).<sup>7</sup> I may suddenly remember situations in which I dropped something and thought I was just being clumsy, but now realize that these were the first signs of MS. I will embed these experiences in a new context, where experiences are co-present which before were unconnected. The theme of the experience has changed and thus also, as Gurwitsch puts it, the *thematic field*. The experience is no longer embedded in the thematic field of “being clumsy”, but in that of “symptoms of my disease”. After learning about the different symptoms of my disease, I will perhaps remember situations in which I had the impression that my sight was getting worse. I will now see these situations where I had difficulties seeing properly as being connected with those which I had interpreted as instances of clumsiness; from the present perspective of my disease, I

<sup>6</sup> “Husserl differentiates between the intentional object, the object that appears in consciousness and the actual object” (Moustakas 1994: 70).

<sup>7</sup> Husserl uses the term *noema* to refer to what appears to us, whether we perceive it directly, remember it or imagine it. Husserl thus distinguishes between perceptual *noema*, experience *noema* and memory *noema*. While *noesis* is how something is perceived, *noema* is how something presents itself. “By *noema* Husserl understands not the object simpliciter, as it is in itself, per se, but the object as it is meant, the object just – precisely just, but also only just – as it appears through the act of consciousness in question, as it is apprehended and intended through this act, the object in the perspective, orientation, illumination, and role in which it presents itself” (Gurwitsch 1966: 339).

can see that all these situations are components of the thematic field “symptoms of my disease”.

Our present perspective conditions our selection of memories, the temporal and thematic linking of our memories, and the way we represent remembered experiences. This is because the meaning of an experience, like any meaning, depends on a context, or several contexts, so that new remembered pasts are created in the course of our life with its points of interpretation. However, this construction of the past from the present should not be understood as being completely separate from the experienced past. Rather, narrations of lived experiences on the basis of memories are always constituted in part by the past experience. What presents itself to the mind in the present of the narration is a memory, and each memory or *noema* is related to other possible *noemata* within the whole *noematic* system. This means that each experience *noema* may appear in different ways, forming a comprehensive, interconnected complex of possible or probable interlinked thematic connections. The relationship between experience *noema* and experience is reproduced in this basic relation between *noema* – as member of a system – and the *noematic* system as a whole, i.e. between the part and the whole. If I remember, for instance, that a few weeks ago my full cup of coffee had suddenly slipped out of my hand during breakfast, and I now see that this was a symptom of multiple sclerosis, this is how I perceive the event (*noesis*), and how the event presents itself to me (*noema*). It is one possible experience *noema* among others. This experience *noema* is related to the event in the same way as the previous one which presented the event as an instance of my clumsiness. When this experience *noema* is related to a past experience and to the whole *noematic* system, including the experience *noema*, the past influences the present. Thus, when I remember the event again it is possible that it will not present itself to me in the same way it did before, and that this new memory is “nearer” to the actual event. When I think about how I dropped my coffee cup, I might also remember that at the time I was at first perplexed and had the feeling I was unable to coordinate my hand properly. However, both at the time of this event and when remembering it later on, I had quickly reassured myself by interpreting it as an instance of ordinary clumsiness. I only remember this component of the situation, or put it in focus, when thinking about it again from my present position of knowing that I have multiple sclerosis.

Thus, the dialectical relationship between experiencing, remembering and narrating means, among other things, that past experiences cannot present themselves to the biographer in the present of remembering and narrating as they were actually experienced, but only in the way they present themselves, i.e. only in the interrelationship between what presents itself in the present of the narration and what is intended. The experience that presents itself in the process of narrating and remembering is not only constituted by the narrative situation, but is also given a structure by the experience *noema* that presents itself from the narrator’s memory.

Narrations of lived experiences are thus related to the way the person lives with this past experience in the present, as well as to the past experience itself. Just as

what is past is constituted by the present and the anticipated future, the present is constituted by what is past and what is intended in the future. Thus, biographical narrations tell us about the present of the narrator, as well as about their past and their future expectations. Even fictive narrations, in other words stories people invent in order to cover up certain experiences or as a way of rewriting their own biography, are real in the sense that they contribute to creating the present reality, and they contain traces of the disclaimed reality or past (see Rosenthal 2002). In their attempt to negate lived reality, in their content, and in their structure, they relate to what is to be negated. “For even in negation our orientation is fundamentally centered upon that which is being negated, and we are thus still unwittingly determined by it” (Mannheim [1928] 1952: 298).

### **The general in the individual case**

In interpretive biographical research we try to make theoretical, not numerical generalizations, as has already been discussed in detail (see chapters 2.5.5 and 2.5.6). In sociology in the early 1980s, life course research based on quantitative methods became distinct from biographical research using qualitative methods. While life course research examines the “factual” events in people’s life courses, biographical research investigates the interpretations and biographical constructions of the autobiographers themselves (referred to henceforth as biographers). Interviewees are not asked directly about predefined events – as is the case in life-event research – but the researcher reconstructs from the overall context of the narrated biography which experiences are biographically significant for the interviewees, how they interpreted these experiences at the time and how they interpret them today, and how they try to embed their life in a meaningful context, i.e. in a construct that we call biography. Biography is understood here as being constructed by the subject (Fischer/Kohli 1987; Fischer 2000; Rosenthal 1995). Biographical research necessarily concentrates on understanding and explaining individual biographies, and is therefore based on interpretive methods.

Because biographical research concentrates on individual cases and their history, it has often been likened to psychoanalysis. It is therefore worth commenting on the differences. Apart from the fact that the questions put by sociologists and the resulting concepts formed by them differ from the theories formed in psychoanalysis, which are related to the psychodynamics of the individual, there are also differences in the way individual cases are understood. Andreas Hanses, who carried out a biographical study of people suffering from epilepsy, discusses the difference between the methods of psychoanalysis and those of biographical research. Hanses argues that in psychoanalysis the connection between a patient’s life history and their illness is formulated as a connection between “two points”: the appearance of a symptom of illness in the “here”, which “is related to a ‘there’ of early conflict management in childhood. ... But we need to ask how the time between the formation of structures in childhood and the outbreak of the illness can be interpreted” (Hanses 1996: 83).

In my opinion, this idea of psychoanalytical practice is exaggerated and does not correspond to the self-image of those psychoanalysts who do not concentrate entirely on the level of fantasies but ask what the patient has experienced in reality (as in biographical research). Nevertheless, we can assume that biographical research, unlike psychoanalysis, is devoted to studying particular phenomena – such as illness and health – in their continuous process of becoming, and seeks to embed these phenomena in a person's whole biography, which in turn should be understood in terms of the mutually constitutive relationship between individual and society. The researcher avoids using pathological categories as long as possible and instead tries to reconstruct the rationality of particular phenomena. Another important difference is that biographical analyses are focused on reconstructing the meaning of particular phenomena *in their genesis*, while psychoanalysis tends to perceive phenomena selectively according to its own theoretical criteria, and to subsume them under preconceived categories.

If we want to reconstruct the overall biographical process of how certain phenomena come into existence and are maintained and transformed, for instance in a study of people with multiple sclerosis, this means that, in addition to reconstructing the course of the illness, we need to analyze the person's experience of health, and reconstruct their reinterpretation of past experiences with health and illness following the reception of the diagnosis and after other experiences of illness and health. Similarly, with biographies of difficult adolescents who have failed at school or at work, the researcher will reconstruct the process of their failure, as well as the way they maintain or constantly recreate through their actions a state of being-so as difficult teenagers; and the researcher will try to see these elements as parts of an overall biographical context. As researchers, we do not follow the model, borrowed from classical mechanics, of causal connections, or cause-and-effect relationships, but prefer “a historical and reconstructive approach based on stories of the type ‘How it came about that’” (Dausien 1999: 228). We investigate the interaction between biographical experiences and their configuration in the biographical construction (Rosenthal 1995).

In biographical analyses, we are concerned not only with the biographical self-definitions of individuals, but also with definitions ascribed by other people. In the case of an adolescent trainee, for example, we need to ask what images are ascribed to him by other people in the institutional context of his training and in other spheres, and what effect these ascriptions have on the way he acts and on his biographical constructions. Or, to take the example of the course of an illness, we can ask not only how the individual concerned defines health and illness, but also how these are defined by others, and how the public or dominant discourse on illness and health has changed in the course of the individual's life. Biographical research thus consistently follows an interactionist theory of socialization in focusing on the interaction between they-definitions and self-definitions, or, more generally, between the general and the individual, and the effects of this interrelationship, for instance on the course of an illness (see Hurrelmann 2000: 69f.; 1989). Unlike many other theories

of socialization, it thus does justice in empirical terms to the idea that socialization of the individual is a life-long process resulting from the interrelationship between the social and the individual (see Hurrelmann 1998).

Biographical experiences, and the communication of these experiences, are embedded in different social frameworks. We can distinguish between informal, everyday framings, such as interactions with family and friends, and formally organized framings, such as a political party meeting, a meeting in a church context, or a therapeutic session in a medical context (see Fischer-Rosenthal 1999: 37). In modern societies, these social framings are bound up with functional social spheres such as the legal system, the health care system, the educational system, or science and scholarship. What meaning was ascribed to biographical experiences at the time, how they are classified in the biographer's stock of experiences, and how they are presented in the present of the narration, depends on these social framings and the cultural rules by which they are governed. In the analysis of interviews in the social sciences, it must be taken into account that different framings prescribe different rules in respect of the articulation of biographical experiences, and that these rules, which depend on the person's subjective situational definition, have an influence on the topics that are thematized or not thematized in the interview. Situational definitions differ considerably from one interviewee to another. While some define the interview primarily in its academic context, others regard it as a therapeutic session, or as gossip, or as comparable to interviews in the mass media.

Social, institutional and group-specific rules, or the rules of different discourses,<sup>8</sup> prescribe *what, how, when*, and in what contexts, may, or may not, be thematized. Not only the discourse that is specific to the particular training institution, but also public discourses in the broader society on adolescents and their chances in the labor market, will influence the way the adolescent trainee tells his life story. The same applies to the different medical discourses, which change in the course of the patient's life, in respect of the self-presentation of a person with multiple sclerosis. It is important to know, for example, that MS was regarded as a hereditary disease under the Nazi euthanasia policy. Biographical research must take into account the interrelationship between individuals and society, and when analyzing narrations we must try to understand the rules of the changing discourses that are effective behind the backs of the actors. Biographical analysis is thus also a form of discourse analysis.<sup>9</sup> On the one hand, we can make sequential analyses of texts in diaries, letters, print media, etc., depending on our research topic, and on the other hand we can make a contrastive comparison of biographical narrations which will reveal the discourse specific to

---

<sup>8</sup> Following Michel Foucault (1972: 49), the term discourse is used here to refer to "practices" of speaking or writing "that systematically form the object of which they speak". These practices result in the empowerment or exclusion of speakers, and they prescribe rules concerning what may, or may not, be said or written in any particular context.

<sup>9</sup> On the connection between discourse analysis and biographical analysis, see Bogner / Rosenthal (2017a).

our group of interviewees, or specific to their generation.<sup>10</sup> A contrastive comparison will show which topics may be talked about, which experiences may be reported (and which not), how these experiences should be interpreted, and which argumentative figures have become established. The empirical grounding of these results can be enhanced by additional group discussions (see, for example, Miethe 1999).

The sociological reconstruction of biographical work, in the sense of “how people’s mental system *experiences and interprets* their lived life” (Fischer-Rosenthal 1999: 36), reveals not only the special features of a particular case, but also the effect and genesis of social rules in people’s actions. Analyzing narrated biographies enables researchers in the social sciences and humanities to remain aware of the interrelationship between individuals and society, and the present relevance of collective pasts. The individual history of a person and the collective history, or subjective and collective realities, interact with each other. Both in its development and in the way it is interpreted in the present by the biographer, a life story is always an individual and a social product at the same time.

## 6.2 Biographical case reconstruction

### 6.2.1 Experienced life history and narrated life story

The theoretical assumptions discussed above imply particular requirements in respect of methods of data collection and analysis. These must allow:

1. insight into the genesis and sequential (i.e. diachronic) gestalt of the life history,
2. proximity to the courses of activities and experiences, and not only to the present interpretations, of the investigated persons, and
3. reconstruction of their present perspectives and the differences between these present perspectives and the perspectives that were adopted in the past.

*The biographical-narrative interview*, as I have shown in chapter 5.4, meets these requirements particularly well and is used as a data-collecting method by most scholars involved in biographical research in Germany. I have proposed a method of biographical case reconstruction (Rosenthal 1993, 1995, 2004) in which the analysis is usually based on this kind of data collection. The aim of this method is to reconstruct both the present perspective of the biographer, and their past perspectives and experiences, in separate analytical steps.

---

<sup>10</sup> In addition to the constitutive experiences of a generation, these discourses are important for an empirically grounded reconstruction of social generations (see Rosenthal 1997).



This method combines text analysis as proposed by Fritz Schütze (1983), structural hermeneutics as developed by Ulrich Oevermann (Oevermann et al. 1979, 1987), and thematic field analysis (Fischer 1982, following the proposals by Gurwitsch 1964).

It is a reconstructive and sequential method. 'Reconstructive' means that the text is not approached in terms of predefined categories, as in content analysis, but rather that the meaning of individual passages is interpreted through the examination of an overall context of the interview. 'Sequential' in this context means an approach where small text units are interpreted according to their sequential gestalt, the sequence of their creation. The analysis reconstructs the progressive creation of an interaction or the production of a spoken or written text step by step in small analytical units (see chapter 2.5). The method of biographical reconstruction that I have developed follows a sequential approach in which the temporal structure of both the *narrated* life story and the *experienced* life history is analyzed. This means that while individual passages are subjected to a microanalysis in their sequential gestalt according to the principles of objective hermeneutics (Oevermann et al. 1979), and the whole of the main narration is analyzed according to the method of thematic field analysis, the experienced life history is also analyzed. We need to consider not only how the biographers present their biographically relevant experiences or their life story, in what order of succession and using which text types, but also the chronological order of these experiences in their experienced life history. When reconstructing a case history, we thus try to reveal the genesis of the experienced life history, and when analyzing the biographical self-presentation we try to show the genesis of the presentation in the present, which in its thematic and temporal associations is fundamentally different from the chronology of events.

As already pointed out, with this method the sequential gestalt of both the narrated life story and the experienced life history is reconstructed. It is crucial to investigate the two levels of the life story narrated or presented in the present and the experienced life history in separate analytical steps. This means that the goal of reconstruction is both the former biographical meaning of the past experiences and the meaning of the self-presentation in the present. In reconstructing the life history, the researcher needs to consider the biographical significance of an experience in the past, but when reconstructing the life story, in the so-called text and thematic field analysis, it is important to ask about the function of the narration of this experience for the interviewee in their present social context.

The decisive point about this method, or any method in the tradition of objective hermeneutics, is that the research question is at first ignored; depending on the discipline to which the researcher belongs, this question will relate to different kinds of generalization and model building. Some researchers will reconstruct a biography with the aim of setting up a model of different political generations, while others want to compare different perspectives on historical events, and still others want to study the long-term effects of traumatization processes. However, the first task is to reconstruct the case structure (see chapter 2.5), and researchers from different

disciplines can do this together using the same method. Indeed, interdisciplinary cooperation in making case reconstructions can save us from regarding the case in a one-sided way and reaching erroneous conclusions.

The successive *analytical steps* for case reconstructions are as follows:

#### **Analytical steps**

1. Analysis of the biographical data (event data, including historical data) → preparation for step 3
2. Thematic field analysis (structure of self-presentation; reconstruction of the narrated life story)
3. Reconstruction of the experienced life *history*
4. Microanalysis of individual text segments (can be carried out at any point during the analysis)
5. Contrastive comparison of life *history* and life *story*
6. Development of types and contrastive comparison of several cases

In the following, I will discuss each of these steps in detail and demonstrate the process using the example of an interview with Galina, as I call her. She was born in Siberia in 1968. At the time of the interview in 1992 she was a member of the academic staff of the department of history at a university in Russia (see Rosenthal 2000).

### **6.2.2 Sequential analysis of biographical data**

In the *sequential analysis of the objective or biographical data* (see Oevermann et al. 1980), those facts which are not (in principle) subject to the biographer's interpretation (such as birth, number of siblings, education, marriage, birth of children, change of place of residence, medical history, etc.) are analyzed in chronological order. These facts are extracted from the transcribed interview, as well as from other available sources (archive material, interviews with other family members, medical records, or official sources such as judicial records). Historical or socio-political data which could be relevant to the case in hand are included in this list, and the biographical data are embedded in the historical context. In the interview with Galina, for example, it was important to take into account the process of liberalization in the Soviet Union and the course of *perestroika*. In addition to this historical contextualization of biographical experiences, it is also important to consider different phases of the person's life history in the light of theories of socialization and psychological development. Thus, *perestroika* will not affect the everyday life of a historian or student of history in the same way as that of a young child; it will be experienced differently depending on the person's cognitive and emotional development. When

forming hypotheses, it is therefore heuristically necessary to include theoretically and empirically grounded knowledge of the effects of certain events at a certain age.

Each individual biographical fact is first analyzed regardless of what we know about the interpretations and narrations of the interviewee in respect of this fact, and leaving aside our knowledge of the rest of the person's life course. We reconstruct the context of an event with which the biographer was confronted, and try to imagine what practical problems or developments might have resulted from this event, as well as the choices these developments might have presented them with. The researcher must consider what practical options were open to the biographer in a particular situation, or, as Ulrich Oevermann and colleagues (1980: 23) put it, what a person "reasonably, i.e. in accordance with the prevailing system of rules, could do or should do ... in a specified context on being confronted with a specified practical problem". Hypotheses concerning how the story might continue are formed for each single fact, in accordance with the principles of the abductive method. The decisive point here is to imagine what could happen in the life of the biographer to make changes possible. Forecasts concerning what might happen next are thus related not only to reproducing structures that have been detected in the analysis or set up hypothetically, but also to possible transformations of these structures. Thus, it is important not to assume that the individual or their life history are immutably determined at an early stage, but to imagine possible changes.

The analysis of one fact is followed by analysis of the next fact, which shows the interpreter the path that was followed in reality by the biographer. Again, forecasts are made concerning possible developments which could result from the new biographical constellation. While at the beginning of the analysis there is a wide range of possibilities, this range becomes narrower as the analysis proceeds. In the end, only a few possible hypotheses concerning the structure of the biography remain, which then serve as case-specific questions for the subsequent interpretation. The result of this first step, which serves *only* as preparation for the subsequent analysis, differs greatly from case to case and depends on the number of available facts. Sometimes the biographical data clearly suggest the structure of the life course, i.e. a systematic pattern of similar choices among various possible actions, while in other cases at the end of the analysis the interpreter may still be faced by questions and various plausible hypotheses, without being able to identify a structure. It is important to underline here that without the text, in other words without the interviewee's own statements, we have gained only initial hypotheses; the "case" has not yet been explained, and the subsequent analysis frequently leads to new discoveries.

As in the other analytical steps, this sequential and abductive method requires a certain degree of discipline: we must ignore our existing knowledge of the case. Critics have repeatedly argued that this is not possible. However, experience shows not only that it is possible, but also that as a rule we can memorize in detail neither the exact order of the facts, nor the relevant passages of the interview. The significance of certain biographical data often becomes clear only after beginning the analysis, and therefore little attention is paid to them, or their significance is not perceived during

this first step. Nevertheless, great advantages are offered by interpretation in working groups where the other members of the group are not familiar with the (whole) text of the interview. Moreover, during this step in which we seek information about the social background, or need to acquire specialist psychological knowledge in respect of certain biographical events, it is useful if the group contains people from different disciplines.

Another critical question that is often asked in respect of this method is: Why should we consider all the possible interpretations of a biographical fact, when the interviewee has spoken about it, so that its meaning is clear? Here we can reply that, on the one hand, the interviewees' self-interpretations are a product of their present situation, while we are also interested in the former meaning of the experience at the time it happened. And on the other hand, as social scientists, we are interested in reconstructing latent structures of meaning, in other words meanings of which the interviewee is not aware. Here it is helpful if we first ignore the interviewee's own interpretations and the question of their plausibility, and instead try to imagine other possible interpretations. If, in the third analytical step, the *reconstruction of the experienced life history*, we examine the text with this spectrum of possible interpretations in mind, we will be able to find many more possible interpretations between the lines.

Our analysis of the biographical data thus serves as preparation for this third analytical step, in which we compare our hypotheses in respect of the biographical facts with the statements made about them by the biographer. However, before embarking on the reconstruction of past perspectives, it is advisable to first concentrate on an intermediate step, which we can call *text and thematic field analysis*, in order to reconstruct the interviewee's present perspective. This helps us to avoid falling into the trap of naively interpreting the text as a true account of past experiences, when in reality it reveals how the interviewee needs to present him- or herself in the present, or a view of the past which has been newly constituted in the present circumstances. For example, we will be more receptive to other interpretations at the level of the experienced life history if, at the end of the text and thematic field analysis, we clearly see that the interviewee has chosen to present herself within the thematic field "I live my life autonomously and independently of my family" because this relieves her of having to talk about her family relationships and the suffering caused to her by her family, or because she feels that this is a socially expected form of self-presentation, whether or not she is fully aware of these motives.

If the biographical ('objective') data are analyzed *before* carrying out the text and thematic field analysis, they can serve as a foil to the analysis of the self-presentation. Thus, we find it easier to detect and to consider which biographical data, or which spheres or phases of the person's life, are spoken about at length in the main narration, which aspects are not mentioned at all, and the temporal order in which they are presented.

Before discussing this second step, I will first demonstrate how biographical data can be analyzed, at least in principle, taking as an example the interview with Galina which I conducted in English in 1992. Galina subsequently conducted biographical-

narrative interviews herself with her paternal grandmother and her parents. I have the transcriptions of these interviews.

The first piece of information to be analyzed is the date and the circumstances of Galina's birth. When forming our hypotheses, we need to take into account all the known facts about her family and the social setting into which she was born. In Galina's case, these facts can briefly be summed up as follows:

### **First piece of information**

#### **1.**

Galina was born in 1968 in a small village near Krasnoyarsk in Siberia. She lived with Olga, her paternal grandmother, and Vera, Olga's mother. Vera and Olga spoke Ukrainian with Galina, but her parents probably spoke Russian. At this time, Galina's parents worked and lived in Krasnoyarsk, after having completed their university degrees. Her mother came from the central Volga region, where her parents and most of her family lived. Galina's father's family came from the Ukraine. Olga, a committed Ukrainian nationalist, taught Ukrainian language and literature in the Ukraine up to 1943, including the period of the German occupation from 1941. In 1943, when the Red Army recaptured the Ukraine, Olga was arrested, accused of collaboration with the Nazis, and charged with high treason under Article 58 of the penal code of the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic. She was condemned to ten years' imprisonment with subsequent banishment to Siberia. At that time, arbitrary arrest and detention under this article was common in the Soviet Union. Her son Vasily, Galina's father, was about five years old when Olga was arrested. At first he lived with Vera, his grandmother, and after the war he moved with her to the central Volga region, where his paternal grandparents lived. His father was a soldier who went missing. Only after 1956, when Vasily had completed his schooling and entered university, did the family follow Olga to Siberia. 1956 was also the year in which Olga was rehabilitated, probably in the context of the wave of rehabilitation during the politically more liberal period following the 20th Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union and Khrushchev's secret speech in February 1956.

On the basis of this information (here only a brief outline focused on her father's family), gleaned not only from the interview with Galina but also from other sources, we now form all possible hypotheses concerning the family constellation into which Galina was born in 1968, and the effects it might have on her and her subsequent life. Taking each hypothesis in turn, we imagine how the history of her family and her own life history might develop, so that the hypothesis can later be tested, or labelled as plausible or implausible.

In forming hypotheses in this concrete case, we must remember that even after 1968 Olga's past was strictly taboo in the public discourse in the Soviet Union. The

effects of this past on her granddaughter's biography will be very different depending on how freely the family talks about it. In this very brief account of the case, I will reveal here that on the manifest level Galina was told nothing about her grandmother's past when she was a child. We can then think about when Galina might begin asking questions like where the family comes from, or why her Ukrainian grandmother and her great-grandmother live in Siberia. If Galina does not ask such questions explicitly, this suggests that she has learned that this is a taboo subject.

It would go beyond the scope of this chapter if I were to present all the hypotheses that I formulated during this step of the analysis. I will therefore concentrate on two hypotheses concerning Galina's relationship with her grandmother and her grandmother's past.

### 1.1

Since Galina was brought up by her grandmother and her great-grandmother, she will have had a closer relationship with them than with her parents. Olga was probably a mother figure for her. Olga's past, even if it was only latently passed on to her granddaughter, will therefore be of great biographical relevance for Galina and will gain increasing significance in her life. We also need to take into account here the role played by Vera as attachment figure for Olga's son Vasily after 1943. Thus, it is possible that there were disputes between the two women over their parental role in respect of Galina.

On the basis of this hypothesis, we can form several new hypotheses with regard to Galina's subsequent biography:

#### 1.1.a

If Galina feels very close to her grandmother Olga, then later on, when she learns of her forced exile, she will become interested in Olga's past, and will tend to concentrate on how she must have suffered in exile, rather than on her life before her arrest, or what she did during the German occupation.

#### 1.1.b

As a result of her identification with her grandmother, she will adopt a distanced attitude to socialism, and try as far as possible, for instance, to avoid getting involved in the state youth organizations (Young Pioneers from the age of nine, Komsomol from the age of fourteen).

#### 1.1.c

Galina's biographical choices in her later life, such as her choice of occupation or partner, will be influenced by this family past. This hypothesis is based on empirical evidence from similar cases in previous studies (see Rosenthal 2010a).

There are also possible counter hypotheses, for example:

### 1.2

Galina misses her mother or her parents as she grows up – perhaps due to tensions between Vera and Olga – and dreams of a better life with them in the town. She develops an increasing aversion to village life with Olga and Vera.

Again, we can speculate as to how Galina's life might continue on the basis of this hypothesis:

#### 1.2.a

Galina seeks attention from her parents in different ways, for instance by frequently falling ill, or, later on, having serious problems at school.

#### 1.2.b

She will try to move out of her grandmother's house as soon as possible.

#### 1.2.c

Because she does not feel close to her grandmother, when she learns as an adult about Olga's arrest and forced exile, she will be more interested in the time before her arrest, and perhaps reject her because she was suspected of collaborating with the Germans. As a child at school, she might dissociate herself from her grandmother by increasingly identifying herself with socialism and getting actively involved in the state youth organizations. She may also initially have no doubts about the lawfulness of Olga's conviction.

After forming all possible hypotheses in respect of the effects of this family constellation on Galina's subsequent life, and attempting to relate the follow-up hypotheses to other possible biographical data that can be tested (such as involvement in the youth organization), we can turn to the next piece of information and see how Galina's life history continues. For the sake of brevity, I will join together two biographical facts:

## **Second piece of information**

### 2.

When Galina was five years old, she moved to the region of Bataysk, close to the Ukrainian border, together with her great-grandmother and her grandmother. Under Soviet law they were not allowed to return to the Ukraine. Her parents followed one year later and the four generations lived together in one household. The parents spoke Russian to Galina. This was also the time when Galina started school, in 1974.

Again we formulate as many hypotheses as possible and consider on the basis of each hypothesis how the family system might have subsequently developed, what this might mean for Galina and how her life might have continued. It is perhaps important to remember here that Galina is now at the same age her father was when her grandmother had to leave him behind for many years and missed seeing him grow up. From her father's perspective, Galina is now at the age he was when he was separated from his mother for many years, and his father went missing. We can suppose that this past phase of the family history now becomes more vivid for the members of the family, not least because of their geographical proximity to the Ukraine, which probably did not happen by chance. We can also suppose that life was not completely conflict-free for the four generations living together in a completely new environment. For Galina, at least, this year brought profound changes.

The following are some of the simplified hypotheses that can be formulated:

### 2.1

Galina finds herself in a serious conflict of loyalty and has to face the question: who is now my "mother", my most important female or motherly attachment figure, who should I turn to? Here there are different possibilities, just as with the first piece of information:

#### 2.1.a

Because she has always been close to her grandmother (see 1.1), she will reject her mother and continue to turn to Olga. One effect of this might be that she begins to identify herself with the position of an outsider, for instance at school, a position reinforced by experiences in the extra-familial context.

#### 2.1.b

She will be happy to have her mother with her at last (see 1.2) and will now turn to her mother for all her needs. This could go together with increasingly enjoying the company of friends of her own age, which is normal for school children, and a growing need for social acceptance.

#### 2.1.c

She tries to evade this conflict of loyalty by turning to her father or her great-grandmother, or she begins to withdraw into herself and increasingly forms relationships with people outside the family.

In addition, we can formulate another hypothesis (2.2) in respect of this piece of information: Galina begins to ask about her family history, as a result of the move and starting school. The form taken by this interest in Olga's political past, or increased attention paid to it, will depend on which of our imagined possible developments are actually realized.



I will skip her school career and her time in the Pioneers, where she was a “leader”, and conclude by considering a very important event in connection with the family history. Up to the age of thirteen, Galina knew nothing on the manifest level about her grandmother’s conviction and exile. In 1981, when she was thirteen, she found a document which showed that her grandmother was condemned to ten years’ imprisonment in 1943 and rehabilitated in 1956.

Even if we consider this piece of information alone, we can certainly assume that this was a biographically significant event for Galina. Her discovery must have made her wonder about the concrete circumstances and reasons for her grandmother’s conviction, and whether it was justified. And she must have wondered why nobody told her about it, especially since it also impinged on her father’s life. The way Galina feels about this discovery will depend very much on the nature of her relationship with her grandmother, and with Soviet socialist society. We can therefore go back here to our initial hypotheses (1.1.a, 1.1.b and 1.2). The question is whether her reaction to the discovery of her grandmother’s persecution in the past is sympathetic or critical, or whether she has mixed feelings and oscillates between the two possibilities, or whether she avoids thinking about it at all, or perhaps feels ashamed of this family past and tries to deny it.

After finishing school, Galina went to university to study history and at the time of the interview she was a research assistant in a university history department. She began her studies in 1986. This coincided with the beginning of *perestroika*, which was launched at the 27th congress of the CPSU (Communist Party of the Soviet Union) with Gorbachev’s program for a political and economic restructuring of the Soviet Union. Galina later did research in the field of “Oral History” and conducted interviews with people who had been persecuted in the early years of the former Soviet Union. Here we can hypothesize that this helped her to understand her own family past. Her later choice of a partner can also be seen as being influenced by her biography. About a year after our interview, she met the man who was to become her husband. He is a US-American citizen and comes from a Jewish family in Ukraine.

### **6.2.3 Text and thematic field analysis**

I will not discuss this first step of the analysis any further, and will move on instead to the next step, which I call *text and thematic field analysis*. This is based on Aron Gurwitsch’s (1964) theory of thematic field analysis and its methodological implementation by Wolfram Fischer (1982), and the method of text analysis developed by Fritz Schütze (1983), translated into the logic of a sequential and abductive method (for more details, see Rosenthal 1995). The aim of this step is to discover the rules underlying the genesis of the biographical narration presented in the present of the interview, or, in more general terms, the self-presentation. Here, in contrast to our analysis of the biographical data and later reconstruction of the experienced life history, when the hypotheses formulated during the first step are compared with the statements made by the biographer, we do not consider how the biographer experi-

enced an event at the time it took place. Rather, in this step, the analysis is focused on the question why the biographer has presented him- or herself in this particular way, whether intentionally or unconsciously. If, for example, Galina were to begin her presentation with a detailed account of how she discovered her grandmother's secret, we would set up hypotheses about why she has chosen to begin with this topic in the present of the interview, what function this fulfills, what image she intends it to convey, and why she relates this component of her biography in such detail. In this step, we are thus concerned with uncovering the mechanisms that determine which topics are presented and in what way, and the temporal and thematic links between the different parts of the narrated life story or written autobiography. As repeatedly shown by our empirical analyses (see Rosenthal 1995), a narrated life story does not consist of a collection of unconnected sequences, but the sequences are related to each other in some way. In more open terms, we can say that here, as with all other kinds of long, independently composed texts, we need to examine the text in chronological order to find out whether it is a gestalt in which all the parts are related to each other, or whether it is just a collection of separate parts. Following Aron Gurwitsch and his theory of thematic field analysis, we need to ask whether the separate parts of a text composed by an author are elements belonging to one or several thematic fields. In his gestalt-theory-based discussion and continuation of the work of Edmund Husserl, Gurwitsch considers the dialectic relationship between theme and thematic field. By theme he means "that which engrosses the mind of the experiencing subject, or as it is often expressed, which stands in the 'focus of attention'" (Gurwitsch 1964: 4). Themes are embedded in a thematic field, which in turn Gurwitsch defines (*ibid.*) as "the totality of those data, co-present with the theme, which are experienced as materially relevant or pertinent to the theme and form the background or horizon out of which the theme emerges as the center". In this terminology, those data which are only chronologically co-present belong to the margin. The thematic field is not a random collection of facts, but these facts are arranged in a certain way and are objectively related to the theme. The relationship between the themes is a gestalt relationship. In other words, the field determines the theme and the theme determines the field. When a theme changes from one field to another, the theme is modified, and when a theme is embedded in a specific field, this field is modified. Thus, the meaning of the different parts of a biographical presentation lies in its overall gestalt, and chronological order also plays an important role. If, for example, a sequence on how Galina studied the history of Stalinist persecutions were to follow the account of her discovery of the secret, then the first sequence would be located in a different field, or "would appear in a different light", than if it were followed for instance by a sequence on Galina's close relationship with her great-grandmother. Thus, in each sequence we look for inherent references to possible thematic fields and form hypotheses in respect of possible subsequent sequences. As the analysis proceeds, we will see which thematic fields are spoken about at length by the biographer, which potential topics in these fields are not developed or are only briefly mentioned, and which fields are avoided. It will become clear, a) which themes are not spoken about

even though they are co-present – regardless of the biographer’s own interpretations, and b) how the biographer systematically embeds their experiences in specific fields and avoids other possible framings inherent in the experiences.

When formulating hypotheses on the possible meanings of a sequence, we also need to take into account the text type used by the biographer to present their experiences (see chapter 5.4). This idea goes back to Fritz Schütze (1983). Assuming that the choice of a particular text type for talking about an experience is not accidental, and that experiences can be presented as a detailed narration, or as a brief report, or in the form of a description or an argument, we can set up hypotheses in each concrete case about the function of the chosen text type. Thus, we can ask why the biographer chose this text type for this sequence and this theme. We can start from the working hypothesis that the choice of text type has something to do with the interaction between interviewer and interviewee, as well as with the particular biographical experience. In this analytical step, it is important to consider to what extent the choice of text type, and the choice of themes that are presented, is due to the process of interaction between interviewee and interviewer. From sequence to sequence we can ask whether the interviewees are following the system of relevance that they ascribe to the interviewer, or whether they are following their own relevances.

As preparation for the analysis, the whole of the interview text is sequenced in chronological order in the form of a brief summary, in other words it is divided into analytical units. The criteria for this sequencing, i.e. for deciding when a sequence begins and ends, are: change of speaker, change of text type, and change of content or topic. It is important to note at which points in the interview, in connection with which topics and which biographical phases, the biographer argues, describes or narrates.

In other words the three main criteria for defining the beginning and end of a textual sequence are:

- change of speaker
- change of textual sort (argumentation, description, narration)
- change of content

Let us consider the first sequences of the interview with Galina, shown on the following page.

### Sequencing the interview with Galina

1/1 <sup>11</sup>	initial question:	family history – own life story
1/7	description:	great-grandma – father's side: Ukrainian, old when she died, 92
1/16	argumentation:	she had a very tragic story happy childhood stopped by something she liked to tell the family story
1/23	report of non-self-experienced family history:	sister of grandfather told the story grandfather disappeared without news grandmother was in prison after occupation grandmother ten years in a camp, never talked about it
1/37	argumentation:	mother told not much about her family – not exciting for her met grandparents from mother's side only when she was in the third class (11 years old)
1/43	description:	lived with great-grandmother and grandmother first language Ukrainian small village near the town where my parents lived
1/51	condensed situation:	“when I refused to eat” grandma told stories about my father in situations where he would not eat – about not having enough food – father childhood during war – father liked to invent words
	evaluation:	“I liked these stories very much”
2/18	argumentation:	past of grandma is not clear this produces a psychological barrier
2/29	non-verbal asking for turn-taking	
2/30	Interviewer:	come to your life story
2/33	global evaluation:	it is very long and very short
	description:	born in Krasnoyarsk in Siberia

*End of main narration is on page 13*

<sup>11</sup> The first number refers to the page of the transcript and the second one to the line respectively.

This sequencing, which is also used as a kind of table of contents for later analysis, is now itself subjected to a sequential analysis. The question here is no longer the biographical significance of an experience in the past, but instead why the experience is presented this way and not otherwise. In formulating hypotheses we can use the following sub-questions:

#### **Thematic field analysis**

General questions for developing hypotheses:

1. Why was this content introduced at this point?
2. Why was this content presented using this text type?
3. Why was this content presented in such a detailed or such a brief way?
4. What could the theme of this content be?  
Or what possible thematic field does this theme fit into?
5. Which themes (areas or phases of the person's life) are mentioned and which are not mentioned?
6. Which areas or phases of the person's life do we first hear about in the questioning part and why were these not mentioned during the initial self-presentation (or main narration)?

Let us consider the first sequence in Galina's interview. On being asked to tell her life story and that of her family, Galina begins with a description: she tells us about her great-grandmother, mentioning her ethnic belonging and her age. Here, we can ask why she begins in this way. Could it be that age and ethnicity are very important to Galina today, in view of the fact that Ukraine became independent just one year before the interview? If this hypothesis (1.1) were true, we would expect that these two themes, or one of these two themes, would be repeatedly mentioned in the subsequent course of the presentation, or that they would be constitutive elements of the thematic field of this main narration. In this way, we formulate follow-up hypotheses, in other words we imagine possible ways in which the text might continue.

We should also consider whether Galina begins by explaining her family's ethnic belonging because she thinks this would be of special interest to the German interviewer (1.2). Another hypothesis (1.3) would be that the great-grandmother is of great biographical importance for Galina and that she will have a lot to say about her in the rest of her presentation. A very different hypothesis (1.4) is that Galina begins with a family member who is not so much bound up with taboo subjects. For example, she could choose to begin her presentation of the family history with her great-grandmother as a way of avoiding talking about her grandmother's past.

As we can see, the second sequence is also devoted to the great-grandmother. Galina uses the argumentative text type to tell the story of her suffering. We might ask whether there is a need here for legitimation, and hypothesize (2.1) that Galina needs to present her family history as a history of suffering or victimization, perhaps

as a way of justifying other parts of the family history. If this hypothesis is true, perhaps she will locate her grandmother Olga in this thematic field? There follows a brief report taking up 15 lines. Galina gives some facts about the history of her paternal grandparents: her grandfather went missing in the Second World War and her grandmother was interned for ten years. She was told this by a sister of her grandfather's; her grandmother never spoke about it.

Up to this point, only difficult parts of the family history have been introduced (see 2.1). In this sequence, however, besides the family's suffering, there is another theme: "Who talked about the family history and who didn't?" This theme becomes clearer in the following argumentative passage, in which Galina says that her mother hardly ever spoke about her family. A description of her life with her grandmother and her great-grandmother that takes up only four lines is followed by a longer sequence (24 lines) describing what we can call a condensed situation, i.e. a situation that occurred repeatedly. In this sequence, Galina mixes up the generations. First she says that, when she refused to eat, her grandmother would tell stories about her father's childhood and how he often refused to eat. Then she corrects herself and says her father never had enough to eat because of the war, and concludes that these must have been stories about when her grandfather was a child. If this is true, then it must have been her great-grandmother and not her grandmother who told the stories. This sequence is very important for the next step in our reconstruction of Galina's experienced life history, because it is connected with the question of who was the most important attachment figure or substitute mother for Galina in the first five years of her life. I will return to this below. But first I will continue with the thematic field analysis. Galina says that her grandmother told her entertaining stories about her father, who liked inventing words when he was a child. This sequence also suggests that the thematic field of this biographical self-presentation has something to do with who says what about the past, and who says nothing about it. The next sequence seems to confirm this. Galina argues that, because her grandmother's past was never explained or talked about, this produced a "psychological barrier" between them. Thus, she indirectly accuses her grandmother of saying nothing and being responsible for letting a barrier grow up between them. The striking thing about this passage is that after explaining this, Galina needs to be helped by the interviewer. Thus, we can hypothesize that the silence in respect of her grandmother's past also produces a barrier in her own presentation, or in the narration of her own life story. Our analysis during this analytical step then goes on to show that Galina's biographical self-presentation has two main themes: "my grandmother's past which was never explained or talked about" and "my own life". The tension between these two themes makes it difficult for Galina to tell her own life story, and thus constitutes the thematic field, which can be roughly formulated as follows: "My own life is burdened and handicapped by the unknown past of my grandmother." This thematic field shows Galina's latent global evaluation of her biography; she is not aware of this herself. This field is clearly manifested in the textual structure of the autonomously composed presentation. Galina needs the interviewer's help several times in order to

be able to switch from the family past to her own biography. Galina's present and future are dominated by her need to free herself from the burden of her family's past and the corresponding family dynamics. In those passages in which she is able to narrate her own life story, she concentrates entirely on her experiences at school and university. Our analysis shows that the dominant theme in Galina's self-presentation is her need to lead a life of her own.

#### **6.2.4 Reconstruction of the experienced life history and sequential microanalyses**

But why does Galina have this need, or what biographical experiences have made this need so dominant? Obviously, there is still a strong bond between her and her family history, and of course her family. We may therefore ask in what way Galina feels bound to her family's past. This can be answered during the next analytical step, the *reconstruction of her experienced life history*. Here, we again consider the biographical significance of certain experiences in the past, and especially the sequential structure of her experienced life history, its temporal gestalt. We go back to our analysis of the biographical data, and compare the known facts with Galina's presentation of them. For our text and thematic field analysis of the text, we asked: "Why does she present this in this particular way in the present of the interview?" By contrast, we now look for traces of her past perspectives. On the basis of these findings, we can falsify or verify the hypotheses we set up in the first step, or formulate new interpretations. To put it more clearly: following the logic of sequential analysis, we take the chronology of the person's experienced life history, and consider each separate biographical experience in the light of all the interview passages in which this experience is mentioned by the biographer. As we proceed, we will probably discover other biographical experiences which we had not taken into account in our analysis of the biographical data.

In our reconstruction of Galina's experienced life history, we found that up to the age of six she had a much closer relationship with her great-grandmother Vera than with her grandmother Olga. The interview shows that from the age of six, Galina grew closer to her mother, and also to her father. After moving in with her parents, she suffered from conflicts of loyalty, mainly because of tensions between her mother and her grandmother. We can only speculate on the role played in this constellation by the great-grandmother, who died when Galina was about sixteen. Probably she was not on Olga's side.

In these conflicts, Galina felt that her mother was the weaker figure, and she increasingly began to side with her. In the present of the interview, she says that the psychological barrier between her and her grandmother began to grow up at this time. Here, we see that the reason given in the present for this barrier – the mystery surrounding her grandmother's past – is not the only possible reason, or there were probably other reasons for it. Thus, there is a suggestion in Galina's narration that this barrier has something to do with the time before she was six, and with conflicts be-

tween Olga and Vera, in which the child took the side of Vera against Olga. There are several indications of this in the text and in the family history. Furthermore, Galina says that her grandmother had felt much happier in Siberia in a group that consisted mainly of exiled Germans and Lithuanians, and that she suffered from depression after moving to the region of Bataysk, and had played with the idea of committing suicide. Galina was told by her family that the decision to move was taken because of her own poor health. This reveals an interpretation given by the family which did not occur to me in my analysis of the biographical data. In view of Galina's statement that she caused a lot of problems for her parents because she was often ill, it would be easy to accept this as the main reason for the move. However, in our analysis we can also hypothesize that this explanation was intended to conceal another motivation connected with the family past. At any rate, the explanation given to the child had serious effects on Galina. Our analysis shows that she felt she was to blame both for her grandmother's problems, and for those of her mother, who had to live together with Olga after the move. We will now turn to Galina's discovery of the well-kept family secret at the age of thirteen, and see how she reacted to it. It is important to note that she described this event only in the question part of the interview, even though it belongs to the thematic field of who said what about the past and who said nothing about it. However, only at a superficial level does this story fit into the field of "my grandmother's unexplained past", because in the situation she describes she suddenly understood some of the facts relating to her grandmother's past, which had been hidden from her, and in her present position as a historian she has the means to probe further into this past. But more on this later.

At the time of the discovery, she was already an ally of her mother. And so, in accordance with the hypotheses we set up when analyzing her biographical data, we can assume that this insight into her grandmother's past led not only to empathetic feelings because of the way she was persecuted, but also to a critical stance. Let us consider exactly how she made the discovery: Galina was learning English at school and wanted to look something up at home in the Russian-English dictionary. Hidden in the binding of the book she found her grandmother's rehabilitation document, which only said that Olga had been convicted under "Article 58" and had been rehabilitated. Galina read this and wondered what could be in this article:

"I was very surprised and I couldn't understand. Why? How? My grandma? I know her and she was convicted of ... what crime? It was so strange because there was only the number of the article. And with this sheet of paper I ran to my father." (Galina, 1992)

With the aid of the interviewer, who utilizes the "scenic-memory" technique (see Rosenthal 2003), Galina remembers the fantasies that came into her head when she read the document, concerning what "crimes" her grandmother might have committed. She says: "When I read this number I connected her guilt with her second husband" (Galina, 1992). She imagined that her grandmother had murdered her second



husband, even though Galina knew him, and knew that he was still alive. Her grandmother was divorced from him before Galina's birth; but sometimes he came to visit Olga when they were still living in Siberia. How can this fantasy be interpreted? First, this shows that Galina tends to condemn her grandmother. But in order to be able to better interpret this concrete fantasy, we need to make a microanalysis of the passage in which she speaks about this man. We will break the text up into small units and examine them closely in the order in which they appear in the text. In her childhood, Galina was afraid of this man. She begins her account of him as follows:<sup>12</sup>

“It is one of the most — err (4) — frightening recollections from earliest childhood ...”

Here, we can ask what Galina found so frightening about this man. The formulation “it is one of the most ...” suggests that, whatever it was, the fear is still vivid for her today, and we can hypothesize that her fear becomes real again in the four seconds pause. If this is really so, we would expect more indications of the same phenomenon in later passages – probably on a paralinguistic level. The next unit in the text is:

“it's-, he is-, he is coming-, he is coming”

Galina begins to stutter, uses the present tense, and it seems as if she is being transported back into the scene. This adds plausibility to our hypothesis that this scene is still frightening for Galina today. She continues:

“and his voice and his- his presence in our home (3) I don't know”

In Galina's memory, this man is again present in the house. But here she falters and stops, says, “I don't know”. One possible interpretation of this is that Galina finds this extremely frightening memory too threatening, and that she tries to suppress it. The interviewer asks if she can give more details:

“When you go back in this situation, he is coming to your home and he is crying loud (3) what can you see”

Galina answers:

“Ah- I can't say that eh (2) I (2) I'm lying in my bed in my room and eh, I eh, I am seeing the same low table and that cross and white (2) walls and I just, hear his eh-, very angry voice, very loud” (Galina, 1992).

---

<sup>12</sup> For the transcription rules, see chapter 3.2.3.

On the manifest level of the text, Galina says here, and later on, that she feared the visits of her grandmother's ex-husband and the fights that took place. But the text also allows other possible interpretations. Thus, we can ask whether the frightened little girl lying in bed heard the sounds of violence between her grandmother and her ex-husband. The text also leaves open the possibility that perhaps she herself was a victim of this man's violence, or that she associates other experiences of violence with these situations. Other passages also support the hypothesis that she was exposed to violence in her childhood. Even if this is not confirmed by this passage, we can at least assume that Galina's fantasy of her grandmother as the murderer of this man comes from an unfulfilled wish, and that as a child she sometimes wished that her grandmother would protect her and herself from this man.

Let us go back to the situation where she discovers the document. She runs to her father, who snatches it out of her hand. Galina wants to know what the document means, and her father answers: "It is about Grandma, it shouldn't be talked about." She grips his arm, wants to take the document back, and he shouts at her: "It's none of your business; don't ask." Galina is very surprised at this hefty reaction:

"I was so surprised because I had a very close relationship with my parents, and I discovered that there is something he wants to hide, and I asked my Ma and she was just as surprised as I, she said that she didn't know" (Galina, 1992).

It turns out that Galina's mother, as she later said herself in an interview conducted with her, knew nothing about the conviction of her mother-in-law, and thus also nothing about her husband's childhood. As a result of this experience, and a constellation in which mother and daughter were excluded from the family's secrets management, the bond between Galina and her mother was strengthened in a dramatic fashion. This also explains why Galina is unable to feel empathy for her grandmother's persecution in the past.

Following this discovery, Galina was tormented by questions which she did not dare put to her grandmother. This increased the psychological barrier between them, which she still feels in the present of the interview. In the interview, she says:

"The story of my Grandma is not clear to me. I know only the plot ... and it is a big problem for me that I can't ask."

However, it is also clear that Galina is afraid of finding out the truth about her grandmother's past. At the time of the interview, although she was a trained historian, and although Article 58 had started to be the subject of public discourses, she had never tried to find out exactly what this article meant. On the one hand, we can assume that the idea of uncovering the past was still too threatening for her in 1992, and that she was avoiding, perhaps unconsciously, a possible rehabilitation of her

grandmother. This defensive attitude can also be seen in the interview which Galina conducted with her grandmother a few months after this interview.

The analytical step that can be called *sequential microanalysis of text passages*, and which has been demonstrated here, is based on the method of objective hermeneutics (Oevermann 1983). Certain passages are subjected to a detailed sequential analysis, the aim of which is to reveal the latent meaning and structure of the text. Criteria for selecting a passage for this kind of analysis can be that it shows striking paralinguistic features, like long pauses, slips of the tongue or unfinished sentences, or that the passage makes a general impression that it contains more meaning than may first appear. This analytical step also serves to test and expand hypotheses formulated in the course of the previous steps. This does not mean, however, that microanalysis of a passage should begin with a preformed hypothesis. As always, it is important to first put aside previous interpretations and, in accordance with the principles of an abductive and sequential method, to formulate all possible hypotheses and all possible follow-up hypotheses, starting from an empirical phenomenon – here the text unit.

### **6.2.5 Comparing narrated life story and experienced life history and construction of types**

The aim of the final contrastive comparison of the life story and the life history is to find possible explanations for differences between the biographer's past and present perspectives, and differences in the temporality and thematic relevance of the narrated life story and the experienced life history. Comparing them helps us to find rules for the difference between the narrated story and the experienced history. The question of which biographical experiences have led to a particular presentation in the present is also pertinent here.

In Galina's case, the life history level shows a bond with her mother that became stronger over the years, an increasing condemnation of her grandmother (probably based on early childhood experiences where she felt insufficiently protected by her), and a growing sense of guilt because of this. At the conscious level in the present, however, this is associated with the grandmother's political past and her silence about it. This family constellation led to strong ties between her and her family of origin. However, Galina tries to present herself as leading her life independently of her family history. We may surmise that her need for independence is so strong because she still feels tied to her family and its past.

After completing the case reconstruction, we can now return to our research question and attempt to explain the social and mental phenomena we have uncovered. Our analysis enables us to set up a type on the basis of this single case (see chapters 2.5.5 and 2.5.6). Obviously, this case shows the transgenerational consequences of a painful family past, and this is what first interested me. But I will use another possible research topic to illustrate the construction of a type. Let us assume that the interview was conducted for a project on people's everyday political experiences in the former Soviet Union at the time of *perestroika*. The completed case reconstruc-

tion enables us to take statements made about this by the interviewee and consider them in the context of her life as a whole. In Galina's case, she underlines her lack of interest in politics and her need "to separate my life from the life of the state", as she puts it herself (see Rosenthal 2000). On the other hand, contrary to this claim, her presentation makes clear that she was politically active, especially in connection with her work. On the basis of our case reconstruction, we can now construct a type in the light of our research question, and based only on this single case, which not only describes surface phenomena – such as an apolitical attitude – but also explains the biographical course which led to this presentation, or which shows the rules that produced it. Thus, Galina's need to separate her own life from the life and past of her family also finds expression in her attitude to everyday politics in Russia. We can see how, in the course of Galina's biography, the pattern became established of needing to separate herself from her family history, while at the same time needing to maintain her ties to it, a need which in this case is intimately bound up with the history of the society in which she lived. Thus, biographical case reconstructions allow us to construct types which show the rules governing the genetic process of a biography and enable us to explain it.

### 6.3 Case reconstructions on a different case level

Case reconstructions can also be carried out in respect of other case levels, or, as Ulrich Oevermann (2000) has put it, more aggregated social structures than that of a single biography or person. The social unit that forms the case can be a family (see chapter 2.5.3 for an analysis of a family interview), a group, an organization, a social milieu, or a whole society. A case reconstruction can be carried out with all kinds of data. For biographical case reconstructions, the analysis will always be based on biographical interviews or written biographical sources. If, on the other hand, we are interested in social interactions, we will make electronic recordings or carry out participant observation of interactions between the individuals belonging to the selected social unit or interaction context, and base our reconstruction on this data. Biographical interviews can also be used to analyze the case structure of a family, a group or an organization to which the interviewed person belongs. And conversely a family interview or observation of a group can be used as data on which to base the reconstruction of a single biography (see for instance Köttig 2005). For the case reconstruction, however, it is first necessary to define what is the case. Oevermann (2000: 106) puts this as follows:

“A transcribed interview, for example, can represent many different cases, in addition to both the interviewee and the interviewer: the interview as a pragmatically specific type of dialogue, the milieus or life worlds to which these two people belong, and plenty more besides. The reconstructor must therefore decide at the beginning of his operation which of the case structures expressed

in the text he wants to analyze. This is important in order to prevent existing knowledge of the case from influencing the analysis. An analytical procedure using existing knowledge of other case structures would not be circular.”

When the case reconstruction has been completed, it is possible to infer the case structure of other social units to which the analyzed case belongs. For example, our reconstruction of Galina’s biography allows us to draw conclusions about the case structure of her family, or the structure-forming characteristics of her generation. If I were interested in the case of Galina’s generation, a generation that was in school or college at the time of *perestroika*, I could assume that Galina’s emphatically “apolitical” self-presentation – an attitude that is described in the literature as being typical of this generation (see Kon 1991: 31) – is a typical characteristic of her generation, namely the need to lead a life free from and unburdened by all the restrictions imposed by the state in the past, but also still in the present.<sup>13</sup> This hypothesis could be tested by means of a contrastive comparison with other members of this generation (which would have to be empirically defined in terms of age and shared experiences). If, on the other hand, I were interested in studying the “family” as a social unit, in this case – as in the case of the Seewald family (chapter 2.5.3) – I might formulate the hypothesis that Galina’s family represents a closed family system in which the intrafamily dialogue is pervaded by secrets and feelings of guilt. There are many passages in the interview with Galina that support this hypothesis. Our analyses of interviews conducted with Galina’s parents and with her grandmother show that this hypothesis can be extended in the sense that this structure of a family dialogue characterized by secrets and feelings of guilt had become established several generations earlier and had been repeatedly reproduced, and thus reinforced, due to the family’s experiences of political persecution and stigmatization. As independent farmers and landowners, Galina’s great-grandparents had been persecuted and exiled in the 1930s, in the course of collectivization. Their daughter, i.e. Galina’s grandmother Olga, had denied her origins, and in her social circles she had described her mother as a distant relative. When her son, Galina’s father, was a child, he in turn was warned by members of his family not to talk about his mother, and to say she was his aunt.

Using one case to make inferences about other social units or cases on other levels requires making a case reconstruction, in contrast to a case description. According to Ulrich Oevermann (2000), the decisive criterion for a case reconstruction, in contrast to a case description, is that it is a methodologically controlled way of discovering the case structure and the rules that govern its reproduction and transformation. Case descriptions, on the other hand, can only be used to illustrate or plausibilize

<sup>13</sup> In response to a comment by the interviewer that she has not said how she experienced the social changes at that time, Galina says: “I can say that for me they’re not important, when these changes began in our society it was, it was interesting, to go to the lectures and to see, the movies, ahhh and eh, what else, it was very interesting and very important at that time, now I, absolutely consciously try to, restrict, or restrict my life from the life of, state and from the general situation in the country because it’s too hard, I can’t solve my own problems and to think about problems of country it’s, too hard”.

previously formulated concepts, i.e. “previously selected and formulated general classificatory concepts” (Oevermann 2000: 61). In contrast to a logic of reconstruction, they follow a logic of subsumption, in other words the case is fitted into predefined categories. In objective hermeneutics the concept of structure discussed by Oevermann goes together with sequential analysis, which enables us to reconstruct the sequential reproduction and transformation of the case structure as an interactive process (see chapter 2.5.4). The methodological instrument used to do this is a sequential microanalysis of individual text segments. This involves using the method of text and thematic field analysis to reconstruct the sequential gestalt of the basic structure not only of the narrative interview but also of other text materials, whether a group discussion, a video recording or a newspaper article. For an analysis of the whole text, it is necessary to consider the gestalt of the text and the research question, and to sequence the whole text on the basis of certain criteria, i.e. to divide the text into segments and interpret them sequentially. With narrative interviews, the text type used, or the change from one type to another, is generally the main criterion for sequencing, while in texts involving changing speakers (like family interviews or group discussions) the main criterion will probably be “change of speaker”. With newspaper articles, I usually sequence the text on the basis of changes of topic or content.

For the reconstruction of biographies, an analysis of the sequential gestalt of the experienced life history is also required in addition to a sequential analysis of the structure that is reproduced during the act of speaking or writing. Following the tradition of objective hermeneutics, any case reconstruction should begin with a sequential analysis of the biographical or factual data, whether these cover a long or a short period of time. This is an important analytical step which can also be used in analyses of other case levels (see chapter 4.4.2 for a discussion of the sequential analysis of the data in observation memos). The historical data of an organization or a family history can also be analyzed in this way. In order to test the hypotheses formulated during this step it is necessary to consider all statements made by people who move and act within the system. Their stories of past events which they have experienced themselves constitute useful data that can also be applied to other case levels. For example, if we intend to reconstruct the history of an organization and its present social reality, we must consider the perspectives of its members, remembering that these perspectives are a product of their personal experiences in this organization, and of their biographical experiences in general. In addition to other data-collection methods, such as participant observation, I would thus also use narrative interviews in such a case. The interviewees could be asked, for instance, to talk about their experiences in the organization from the time they joined it up to the present (see chapter 5.4.3). I would then analyze the interviews following the same logic as biographical case reconstructions. The next step would be to compare the perspectives and different versions of the history of the organization presented by various members of it.

When analyzing the data of a family's history, a useful aid is a genogram that should also be subjected to sequential analysis (Hildenbrand 1999a: 32ff.; Rosenthal 2010a; Völter 2003: 48). This instrument, borrowed from systemic family therapy (McGoldrick/Gerson 1985), is a graphic representation of family data. Rather as in a family tree, it shows the order of the generations – at least three – and how they are related to each other. It also shows the most important personal data for each member of the family (birth, marriage, divorce, occupation, illness, death, etc.). Once again, we proceed sequentially in our interpretation. We begin with the data of the oldest generation shown in the genogram, while hiding (in a technical sense) the data for the following generations. We set up hypotheses concerning the meaning of the data for the first generation, and follow-up hypotheses concerning how the family history might continue. In a third step, in accordance with the principles of the abductive method, we then “uncover” the data for the next generation and compare them with our hypotheses. In this way, we continue to progress in our analysis from generation to generation.





## **7 Content analysis – Coding in grounded theory – Discourse analysis**

### **7.1 Introduction**

Both qualitative content analysis, especially the methods developed by Philipp Mayring in Germany (1983, 2004), and coding as in grounded theory are often applied in qualitative studies. As these methods can be very useful for the first “viewing” of large amounts of material, I will discuss them briefly here. However, I do not intend to describe in detail the concrete methods required in order to form categories, or the technique of coding; rather, I will discuss the problems connected with the logic of these methods. These problems result from a contradiction between a reconstructive analysis following the principle of openness and a classificatory method which cannot do justice to the principles of reconstruction and sequentiality (see chapter 2.5). Content analysis is based on the construction of a system of categories, which are used to regroup the text segments by assigning each segment to a category. With the aid of the categories the material is dissected into units which can then be examined.

Regardless of whether the categories are developed before the analysis, or on the basis of the text corpus, the text segments are removed from their original context before the overall gestalt of the text has been reconstructed, and subsumed under

categories constructed by the researchers. In other words, the text is reorganized, and its sequential structure is not reconstructed. And the researchers more or less assume that the categories constructed through content analysis are equivalent to the meanings created by the producers of the text (see Hitzler/Honer 1997b: 23; Wohlrab-Sahr 1999: 490).

We need to consider how to deal with this problem, because when large amounts of data have been collected, before proceeding to carry out a reconstructive and sequential analysis, it can sometimes be useful to first make a content analysis of the whole corpus of texts. This preliminary analysis can be considered as a first viewing of the material, and a new theoretical sample can be formed on the basis of it. Making both a content analysis and a reconstructive and sequential analysis is useful when there are large amounts of text, for example in discourse analysis based on mass media texts relating to a particular theme.

For example, in a small-scale empirical study of “Antisemitism in present-day Austria” which I carried out with students at the University of Vienna, we combed through recent issues of Austrian daily newspapers with different political orientations, looking for articles that were connected in some way or another with Jews and Israel. In addition, we conducted short thematically focused narrative interviews, in which we invited the interviewees to tell us about their personal experiences with Jews. The data we collected was first examined superficially for different expressions of antisemitism, such as philosemitism, apportioning blame for the genocide of the Jews, denial of atrocities, etc. But these categorizations were based on an interview or a newspaper article as a whole; the texts were not dissected and re-ordered according to categories, and could thus represent different forms of antisemitism. For us, this was only a preliminary exercise, especially as antisemitism is often hidden between the lines, in contradictory arguments and vague allusions. In our subsequent micro-analysis of selected texts, we were able to reject or refine these preliminary categorizations, and in particular we were able to unravel their cross-connections.

## 7.2 How qualitative can a content analysis be?

The most prominent proponent of qualitative content analysis in Germany is Philipp Mayring. He sees qualitative content analysis as a systematic rule-based and theory-based method for the analysis of fixed communication, with the goal of making a “systematic examination of communicative material” (2004: 266). In this method, the texts to be analyzed are divided into segments, and, with the aid of a theory-based system of categories developed from the material, “those aspects are identified that are to be filtered out of the material” (Mayring 1996: 91). But with Mayring, the process of developing “categories gradually from some material” is not such an open process as may first appear. Instead, it is predetermined to a high degree because it is theory-based and because the research question is precisely formulated before beginning the process. What Mayring refers to as “inductive category formation”

requires a “general definition of categories, fixing the selection criterion and level of abstraction” prior to “gradual category formation from the material” (2004: 266). According to Mayring, “the basic idea of a qualitative content analysis, then, consists of maintaining the systematic nature of content analysis for the various stages of qualitative analysis, without undertaking over-hasty quantifications” (ibid.:266). For a subsequent quantifying analysis, he suggests a method based on the quality criteria of quantitative research. This logic demands for example that categories be formed only for phenomena that occur frequently. Accordingly, hypotheses in respect of connections between frequently occurring categories can be tested only in quantitative terms. In a study of unemployed teachers in the new states of the Federal Republic of Germany (i.e. former East Germany), Mayring, König and Birk (1996) set up inductively formed categories on the basis of open biographical questionnaires aimed at finding out “what view of their profession the probationers had developed in the GDR period” (Mayring 2004: 268). From the most frequently detected categories, they set up two “umbrella categories”, which they labelled as follows: “teachers out of professional pleasure” and “teachers out of commitment to socialism”. The next step was to investigate “whether these different orientations had any influence on dealing with the experience of unemployment” (ibid.: 268).

It is clear that with his method of content analysis Mayring strives to meet the standards of quantitative social research, while at the same time he would like to profit to some degree from the advantages of qualitative research, such as the possibility of modifying the categories during the research process. In this, as I will show below in a short account of the history of content analysis, he falls behind the recommendations made in 1952 by Siegfried Kracauer in respect of qualitative content analysis.

### **On the history of content analysis**

Content analysis was developed in the first half of the twentieth century in connection with the growth of mass-media communication through radio and newspapers. It was to be used as a measure of public opinion, and especially as an instrument of ideological criticism and propaganda research. At first, emphasis was laid on analyzing large amounts of data to establish the frequency with which certain features appeared in the texts. “In 1910, at the first conference of the German Sociological Association, Max Weber recommended combing through the content of newspapers with ‘scissors and compass’ in order to track the historical development of quantitatively measurable changes in the published contents” (Ritsert 1972: 15). In the US, the first empirical studies of newspaper articles were carried out around this time. It was the First World War which led to a special need for research in the field of propaganda, both during and after the war. Harold D. Lasswell (1927) studied the different propaganda techniques of the powers conducting the war (USA, England, France and Germany) and discussed propaganda as a kind of war of ideas against ideas (1927: 12). In his analysis he showed that modern war is conducted at the

propaganda front, and not only in the military and economic fields (ibid.: 214). Sociological research in the context of the Second World War also contributed to the development of content analysis. In the service of the US military authorities, US-American social scientists analyzed propaganda produced in other countries. Lasswell, who at that time was the director of the Experimental Division for the Study of War-Time Communications, produced some important studies in this respect. While Lasswell and his staff were mainly concerned with Soviet propaganda, Kris and Speier (1944) analyzed National Socialist propaganda on German radio, with the aim of being able to forecast which direction the war would take.

Some of the studies by Lasswell and his staff were published in 1949 in the volume entitled “Language of Politics”, which also contained a methodological and theoretical discussion of content analysis. The authors argued that the language of politics could best be studied by using quantitative methods (ibid.: 40ff.). Their focus was on examining the text material to find certain contents which were coded in accordance with categories that were laid down in advance, and on recording the frequency with which they occurred (see Lisch 1978: 20).

A further “milestone” in the field of quantitative content analysis, and in a way the trigger for methodological reflections in the field of qualitative content analysis, was the study published in 1952 by Bernhard Berelson, a pupil of Paul Lazarsfeld. Berelson offered a systematic account and methodological discussion of the current methods used in content analysis, and recommended a quantitative method as opposed to qualitative methods. He argued, justifiably, that qualitative analysis is “quasi-quantitative” because it “usually contains quantitative statements in rough form”. Qualitative analyses “use clearly quantitative terms – ‘repeatedly’, ‘rarely’, ‘usually’, ‘often’, ‘emphasis’, etc. – in describing communication content of one sort or another” (1952: 116f.). This criticism can also be applied to present-day qualitative content analyses, and is due in my opinion to the logic of methods which try to base assumptions about connections between elements on the frequency with which they appear together, rather than on the reconstruction of genetic causal connections.

Even more polemical were Berelson’s arguments concerning claims that qualitative content analysis can uncover “deeper phenomena”, or latent content, through the use of “richer” categories than quantitative methods. His arguments were directed in part against Leo Löwenthal, a prominent member of the Frankfurt School who had published an analysis of biographies of famous people in popular magazines in 1944, or against Siegfried Kracauer, who also belonged to the broad environment of the Frankfurt School. In 1942, Kracauer had carried out a qualitative content analysis of National Socialist propaganda films, and in 1947 he published his famous study of the German film, “From Caligari to Hitler”. Against these qualitative studies, Berelson argued that they showed, “that the content descriptions are not particularly ‘advanced’; it is the flavor of the *interpretation* of the content data that makes these analyses seem sophisticated and rich” (ibid.: 133). This criticism is based on the assumption that the manifest content of a text can be separated from an “interpretation of the content data” (see below). Berelson suggests that “instead of stopping

with an impressionistic or an ambiguous formulation they should state as precisely as possible just what indicators are relevant in the particular content for the categories they have in mind, just what sample of content would be appropriate, just what frequency distributions or cross-tabulations would be necessary to test their ideas, etc.” (1952: 133). According to Berelson, by stating their hypotheses as precisely as possible, they would make it possible to carry out subsequent quantitative studies, and thus bring about a constructive integration of qualitative and quantitative content analysis. Thus, in a similar way to Mayring today, Berelson places qualitative content analysis in the realm of pilot studies which produce hypotheses that can be tested later according to the standards of a quantifying method.

Berelson set standards for quantitative content analysis: “Content analysis is a research technique for the objective, systematic, and quantitative description of the manifest content of communication” (Berelson 1952: 18). He argues that in order to be objective the analysis must be carried out according to clear rules; for it to be systematic, the rules must be laid down beforehand, and the material must be selected according to well-founded criteria (see Herkner 1974: 158). This approach is restricted to the manifest content because it is assumed that, besides its latent meaning, a text has a more or less stable meaning, i.e. a meaning that is usually attributed to a word or an utterance, and which is more or less directly clear to every reader in a particular linguistic milieu, regardless of the individual context and the subjective definitions or framings of the persons involved (whether producers or recipients of the text).

Siegfried Kracauer responded to Berelson in 1952 by making a vehement plea in favor of qualitative methods in content analysis. Kracauer also assumed that creating categories is a vital component of any content analysis, but he argued that qualitative content analysis should not be governed by the same criteria as quantitative content analysis. He said that the categories applied should do justice to the structure of the text as a whole, i.e. all the manifest and latent connections which form a “Gestalt” from the elementary units of the text: “... dealing with the structure of the text as a whole, i.e., the linkage, manifest or latent, which makes the atomistic units a Gestalt” (Kracauer 1952: 639). His aim is to reconstruct *patterns* and avoid the isolated analysis of individual text elements. He formulates the following criteria for qualitative content analysis (see Ritsert 1972: 14ff.), which must:

1. reconstruct the context, i.e. consider individual text elements in the overall structure of the text (context),
2. analyze the latent meaning of the text (latency),
3. take into account rare cases or special features (singularity),
4. take into account the interdependency of the parts of a text, i.e. reconstruct its Gestalt (Gestalt).

With regard to present-day methods of content analysis, it seems important to take seriously Kracauer's recommendation that the analysis should take into account phenomena or special cases that do not occur frequently. If we want to do justice to the methods of ideological criticism or discourse analysis by asking which themes are admitted and which are not in specific contexts, or which themes are evaded or denied in particular discourses, then we must pay attention not only to the presence of certain contents or features, but also to their absence. As underlined by George (1959: 10), this needs to be interpreted in qualitative content analysis. If the analysis is restricted to those themes that are present, or to themes that occur frequently – whether in the mass media or in research interviews – then academic research will reproduce the rules of certain discourses which lead to the suppression or denial of certain contents.

If we take Kracauer's recommendations seriously, as Jürgen Ritsert (1972) does from the perspective of critical theory, then the question arises whether they can be applied to content analysis, i.e. a method which restructures the text according to a system of categories that has been set up beforehand or created on the basis of the material. In my opinion, applying the criteria formulated by Kracauer inevitably leads to a reconstructive and sequential method, because it is very difficult to group the elements of the text in categories while at the same time proceeding holistically or sequentially, as required by gestalt theory. For this reason, qualitative content analysis – as practiced by Mayring – generally falls behind Kracauer's recommendations. By arguing that it is necessary to quantify in the course of the analysis, Mayring follows the logic and the criteria of a quantifying method. In my opinion this explains why, in his discussion of the work of Siegfried Kracauer in a handbook article on content analysis, Mayring (2004) does not mention Kracauer's warning not to neglect special cases.

### **7.3 Empirical example: on the deciphering of antisemitic statements**

The significance of the absence of certain contents can be seen very clearly in biographical interviews with so-called contemporary witnesses of National Socialism, in which the theme "Nazi crimes and genocide" is often not mentioned at all. In the later generations, we can observe an avoidance of the theme "Jews", or in certain thematic contexts we may find that people never say the word "Jews" at all (Rosenthal 2010b: 306ff.). If we ignored this phenomenon in our analysis, we would be contributing to transferring this dethematization into the academic discourse on National Socialism, or repeating the myth communicated in latent form that Auschwitz happened on a different planet. In the analysis, it is important to ask at which points of the text certain themes like "Nazi crimes and genocide" are co-present, and what strategies are used to avoid them.

In order to analyze the absence of certain themes, strategies for evading them, allusions, or vague and diffuse statements, we need to use a sequential and microanalytic method of the kind proposed by Ulrich Oevermann (see chapters 2.5.4 and 6.2). Those sequences in a text which cannot be classified in categories *before* a more thorough examination and reconstruction of their latent meaning are often those which reveal most about the structure of the whole text.

The difficulty of attributing a text segment to a category, even when it is explicitly related to the Holocaust, and the importance of making a sequential microanalysis, can be illustrated by an article from the Austrian print media entitled “*Remembering the Holocaust*”, in which the first passage contains a large number of vague allusions. Before describing the external context of the text, i.e. the newspaper in which the article appeared, I will first present the text itself. Let us consider the title. Here we can imagine very different contexts in which the text might have appeared, and different contents for an article with this title. The title could mean that the article is a reminder of the Holocaust, or that the text is about keeping the memory of the Holocaust alive. It could be an article by an author who survived the Holocaust, with an account of his memories. Equally, the article could relate to an event which is part of the collective memory (such as the liberation of Auschwitz), or during which the Holocaust is remembered (such as Holocaust Remembrance Day in Israel). Another hypothesis could be formulated as follows: the article is about a particular way of remembering the Holocaust, defined as the “right” way. If this hypothesis were correct, we would expect the article to tell us how we should remember the Holocaust.

The first sentence of the article is: “Next week the Holocaust memorial will be opened in Judenplatz in Vienna.” This is a reference to the memorial that was donated by the City of Vienna at the initiative of Simon Wiesenthal and unveiled on 25th October 2000. It is a memorial to over 65,000 Austrian Jews who were murdered between 1938 and 1945. The sentence, which contains neither the date nor the time of the ceremony, leaves open the question whether the author intends to inform the reader about the ceremony or about (right) ways of remembering. The next sentence is not easy to understand. It says: “It preserves the memory of the unimaginable, murderous suffering which the Nazis inflicted on Jews, gypsies and others, but it also shows what National Socialism really meant and the thoughtless way today’s politicians wield the Nazi club.” Without closer analysis it is hard to assign this sentence to an abstract category; rather, its main feature is its ambiguity. Each part of the sentence offers the reader different possible meanings. This sentence therefore needs to be analyzed in small units. I will give here, in a condensed and result-oriented form (from the perspective of the completed analysis), some of the main hypotheses that were constructed by students in a seminar at the University of Vienna. A closer look at the expression “the unimaginable, murderous suffering”, which is very unusual in the context of murder, reveals various possible readings. First, this statement has the ‘manifest’ meaning that the memorial is a reminder of the unimaginable suffering of those who were murdered in the Holocaust. But on the latent level, it can be read differently, for example: if the suffering is unimaginable, then there is no need

to thematize it, in this article and in general. Moreover, the expression “murderous suffering”, which is normally used metaphorically, is confusing in the context of real murders. It is possible to read this in a literal sense: it was the suffering that killed the victims and not the violent acts of the perpetrators. Or even: the murderers suffer, so the article is about the suffering of the murderers or of their followers. Another reading is possible: the victims are murderous because they inflict suffering on the murderers.

In contrast to the purpose of the memorial, the listing of “Jews, gypsies and others” broadens the group of victims so that any Austrian can regard him- or herself as being included in these “others”. The list suggests that this is probably not a text by a Jewish survivor, and the text was probably not published in an organ of the Jewish community in Vienna, or in a newspaper close to the Social Democratic Party of Austria. Rather, we can hypothesize that it was written in the context of, or reproduces, that discourse on National Socialism in Austria which can be described as apologetic and not critical, in other words that it was published in a right-wing oriented newspaper. In Austria, as in Germany, the apologetic discourse on National Socialism is characterized by the myth that “we are all victims of NS” (see Wodak et al. 1990), and, with reference to the Moscow Declaration of 1943,<sup>1</sup> by Austria’s image of itself as the first victim of Fascism or of Germany (see Uhl 2001). In the above-quoted sentence, “Jews”, and “gypsies” (the pejorative term) are mentioned in the collective of victims, along with other people. This list does not include, for example, those who were persecuted because of their political views, and, again, it admits very different readings. It seems unlikely that the author of this text or this newspaper’s usual readers are social democrats or communists. The sentence goes on to say: “but it also shows what National Socialism really meant”. Here, the contrasting conjunction “but” indicates that what has just been said can be understood to mean that remembering the suffering which the Nazis inflicted on others does not reflect the real meaning of National Socialism, but obviously a wrong meaning, a meaning that is not “real”. An alternative reading is that the memorial preserves the memory of far more than just the suffering of the Nazis’ victims, but goes beyond this and can be interpreted in a much broader way.

With these formulations, the text gives the readers a chance to make their own associations with the “real” meaning of NS, such as reducing unemployment or the construction of major arterial roads (*Autobahnen*). At any rate, the sentence seems to confirm the hypothesis that the author thinks there is a wrong way and a right way to remember. However, in the rest of the sentence, this real meaning is not named explicitly, but reference is made to the “thoughtless way today’s politicians wield the

---

<sup>1</sup> At the Moscow Conference in October 1943, the foreign ministers of the USA, Great Britain and the Soviet Union agreed to continue the war until Germany’s unconditional surrender and the founding of a new organization for maintaining peace and security. The joint declaration included a Declaration on Austria in which Austria was described as the first country to fall victim to Hitlerite aggression, and it was agreed that Austria should be liberated from German domination.



Nazi club”. In what follows, we then learn who wields the Nazi club, in the opinion of the author: Michael Häupl, the mayor of Vienna. Here I can add the information, not included in the text, that Michael Häupl is a member of the Social Democratic Party (SPÖ) and spoke at the opening of the memorial. Again, this suggests that the article was not published in a paper close to the SPÖ.

To stay with the metaphor of the Nazi club, the mayor turns others into victims by thoughtlessly brandishing the club against them. The author argues that Häupl, the mayor of Vienna, does not “deal with the past in the right way”. Häupl is quoted by the author as saying: “It is a sign that antisemitism in this city is older and goes back further than the NS period. No one in this city can be absolved from blame.” The author of the article counters: “Excuse me, Mr. Häupl, but that is the kind of exaggeration that triggers the wrong reflex, that makes people refuse to remember anything at all. It’s obvious that present-day Austrians cannot be blamed for crimes committed against the Jews, no one can be blamed, unless he is a practicing antisemite, but then he will end up in court anyway.”

So this is a denial of guilt and a declaration that present-day Austrians are free of blame. They are not practicing antisemites, and the only guilty ones are those who practice antisemitism, which could mean very different things. This argument is typical of the apologetic discourse on National Socialism, and we are therefore not surprised at how the author continues. He suggests that there should be an additional plaque in Judenplatz to commemorate Joseph II, a tolerant emperor who allowed “the admission of Jews to crafts, trade, industry”. This is evidently meant to prove that antisemitism is not “practiced” in Austria.

While the middle sequence could fairly easily be coded as an example of the defense strategy that involves “denial of guilt and absolving present-day Austrians from blame”, and the next sequence as evidence of support for the Jews, and thus as an argument for the non-existence of antisemitism, the beginning of the text is characterized by ambiguity, and thus by latent meanings between the lines which cannot be expressed on the manifest level. The text makes it possible for the readers to understand it in accordance with the above-quoted hypotheses. Our microanalysis of this passage shows how the author works with diffuse and vague allusions, and with omissions, for instance in respect of the real meaning of National Socialism, and thus arouses in the readers associations which cannot be expressed publicly. This is reminiscent of antisemitic statements by politicians who belong to the Freedom Party (FPÖ), such as Jörg Haider’s defamations of political opponents, including Michael Häupl,<sup>2</sup> especially during the election campaign in spring 2001 (see Wodak 2001). By using vagueness, allusions and omissions, as Haider does, such speakers

<sup>2</sup> On 23rd February 2001, in the Kurhalle in Oberlaa, Haider made the following statement: “Häupl has an election campaign strategist called Greenberg (loud laughs in the audience). He had him flown in from the east coast! My friends, you have a choice between the spin doctor Greenberg from the east coast or the Viennese heart!” (quoted after Wodak 2001: 132). Haider fended off accusations of antisemitism by denying the antisemitic connotations of the “east coast” based on the stereotype of a powerful Jewish lobby in New York, claiming that it is a perfectly neutral geographical term. How-

can deny accusations of antisemitism by claiming that that is not what they meant in the first place.

In this article, which begins with remembering the suffering of the NS victims, and continues by criticizing an SPÖ politician, the order of the individual sequences is not without significance. The author subtly uses the commemoration of murdered Jews to divert attention from both the perpetrators and the victims, and to defame others – namely SPÖ politicians – as “perpetrators”. Due to “thoughtless wielding of the Nazi club” by left-wing politicians, the right-wing politicians in the country become victims.

It will be clear enough by now that this article is unlikely to have been published in an organ close to the SPÖ. It was published by the Austrian journalist Kurt Markaritzner in the “From Person to Person” column in *tA-online*, which is close to the right-wing oriented *Kronen Zeitung*.

A sequential analysis of such articles, or of thematically focused narrative interviews, together with a microanalysis of some passages in these texts, makes it possible to reconstruct the latent meaning and the characteristic features of certain patterns of argumentation. In contrast to the methods of content analysis, it is very important in a sequential analysis to observe at what points in the text certain contents are formulated, or avoided, and, as in our example, at what points antisemitic views are implied or expressed. It should be noted that texts with a broad thematic content offer more opportunities for discovering the function of such patterns of argumentation for the producers of the text. I can illustrate this with a biographical interview in which the biographer expresses his antisemitism quite clearly. The passages in which this openly expressed antisemitism appears are fairly easy to code. But more important for the analysis is the question of when they occurred in the interview, and what this reveals about their functional significance in the overall gestalt of the biographical narrative.

A passage from the interview with Otto Sonntag,<sup>3</sup> as I have called this man who was born in the 1920s, shows a typical argument which gives the Jews the blame for the Second World War:

“I won’t talk about this now, there **WERE REASONS**<sup>4</sup> at that time that the Jews were- especially in Berlin, you ought to read the history of the role played by the Jews in Berlin, ‘something wasn’t right there’. ... **That** was- and now I come to my remark, **that** this – (this unsolved problem of the Jews (2) is what really (2) led to the world war ((pointedly)). It sounds funny, but it is so. Because international Jewry, which enjoyed esteem everywhere in the- above

---

ever, his next remark, “and it is where the political center of America is” (quoted after Wodak 2001: 134) does make it possible to read antisemitic connotations between the lines.

<sup>3</sup> For a detailed discussion of this case, see Rosenthal (2010c).

<sup>4</sup> The use of capital letters and bold type in this quotation from the transcript of the interview means that these words were shouted. On the rules for transcription, see chapter 3.2.

all in America even today, of course they then said: We won't let ourselves be treated like this, as Jews in Germany, we must do something”

This passage can easily be coded as an argumentational pattern that blames the Jews for the Second World War, and thus implicitly justifies their murders. But what function does this have for Otto Sonntag? If we consider a further aspect of this case, his involvement in Nazi crimes, we can formulate a hypothesis concerning the function of this element in his biographical narration. After 1945, Otto Sonntag was sentenced to imprisonment by the Allies for crimes against humanity. Our analysis of his biographical interview, and our archive research, suggest that he was probably involved as an architect in the construction of crematoria in concentration camps. We can thus hypothesize that because of his own involvement in the Nazi crimes, this man is trying to absolve himself by the strategy of blaming others, and to fend off accusations. Blaming the Jews thus serves the purpose of justifying his own actions.

It would be possible to use other cases to test this interpretation numerically, by asking whether people who were involved in the persecution and murder of Jews tend to put the blame on the Jews more often than people who were not involved. However, in contrast to quantitative methods, the aim of an interpretive analysis is to show the causal connection in the concrete individual case.

If we consider at what point of his main biographical narrative these words are spoken by Otto Sonntag, and the thematic context in which they occur, then the connection is clear. After I invited him to tell me about his family history and his own life story,<sup>5</sup> he first told me the story of his life up to 1939 in great detail and in a clearly structured manner (21 pages in the transcript). Otto Sonntag openly admitted to having been a supporter of National Socialism and a member of various National Socialist associations. He then spoke for some time (four pages in the transcript) on the topic of how “the Jews were to blame for the war”, and only after this does he recount his experiences from 1940 up to his release from prison in 1946; this fills only five pages, is very chaotic, and full of breaks and chronological jumps.

The textual framing of the theme “the Jews were to blame for the war” is very interesting. Before launching into this theme, Otto Sonntag says that up to 1940 he worked for the military construction department (*Heeresbauamt*), building barracks in the context of re-armament. At this point the linearity of his story comes to an end. Instead of speaking about what he did after working for the *Heeresbauamt*, and about his active participation in certain actions during this phase, he begins to argue that the Jews were to blame. The subsequent presentation of his life during the war and his imprisonment is thus embedded in a declaration that the Jews should be blamed for what happened in those years.

He opens the above-quoted sequence on the Jews being to blame with the statement “And then came the year 1938, 1939”. In the question part of the interview,

---

<sup>5</sup> I interviewed Otto Sonntag in 1993. He agreed to an interview that lasted almost three hours and refused any further interview.

it becomes clear that blaming the Jews is a way of avoiding talking about the part he played during the war. Asked to tell me again how he experienced the beginning of the war, Mr. Sonntag answers: "I keep telling you, it was nothing other than the retaliation of international Jewry, they said, **now** we've got them and now we will **not** give in."

With the words "**now** we've got them and now we will **not** give in", the accusation of cruelty or mercilessness is diverted from the perpetrators to the victims.

As this example shows, biographical interviews make it possible to reveal the biographical function of antisemitic patterns of interpretation, and to reconstruct their genesis and transformation in the course of the person's life, and thus also in the history of the community in which they live. Our analysis of biographical interviews with so-called contemporary witnesses of the Third Reich very clearly shows the interconnection between the course of the government's policy of disenfranchisement and extermination, and changes regarding attitudes and behavior towards the Jews among the non-Jewish part of the German population. According to my analyses of narrated life stories, the gradual process of dehumanizing the Jews happened in successive phases (1933–1935; 1935–1938; 1938–1945) corresponding to the escalation of the measures taken by the government against the Jewish population (Nuremberg Laws, the Night of Broken Glass (*Reichspogromnacht*) and transportation) (Rosenthal 1992: 455ff.).

## 7.4 Coding in grounded theory

The method of coding in grounded theory, as proposed by Anselm Strauss and Juliet Corbin, is characterized by the fact that it does more justice to the principles of openness and reconstruction than Mayring's very closed method of qualitative content analysis. On the other hand, it involves the risk of over-hastily following the logic of subsumption, and, in particular, it does not do justice to the principle of sequentiality. While in Mayring's method, the object of research and the research question must be clearly defined at the beginning of the analysis, and the categories for coding are determined beforehand, in grounded theory the research question and thus the categories used for coding are discovered and developed during the research process. Thus, this is a method of theory building that is "grounded" in empirical experience. While qualitative content analysis is more or less restricted to the manifest content of a text, with open coding (see below), as in grounded theory, it is also possible to analyze its latent content. Here, the relations between categories are not analyzed numerically, according to the criterion of how frequently they occur together, but by reconstructing causal connections in the context of the particular case.

Strauss and Corbin (1990) distinguish three different kinds of coding, open, axial, and selective coding. Although these are separate analytical methods, they are not carried out successively and separately but it is possible to switch back and forth

between them, especially between open and axial coding. The aim is to generate a theory from the data by investigating the relations between the categories.

This method begins with *open coding*. “Codes”, or categories, are assigned to the empirical material (in this tradition usually observation memos and interviews); they are formulated close to the text and are descriptive. Only as the research proceeds does category building become more abstract; the codes are grouped together and relations between the categories are examined. According to Strauss and Corbin (1990:61), open coding is “the process of breaking down, examining, comparing, conceptualizing, and categorizing data”. They explain this as follows:

“... because to uncover, name, and develop concepts, we must open up the text and expose the thoughts, ideas, and meanings contained therein. Without this first analytic step, the rest of the analysis and the communication that follows could not occur. Broadly speaking, during open coding, data are broken down into discrete parts, closely examined, and compared for similarities and differences. Events, happenings, objects, and actions / interactions that are found to be conceptually similar in nature or related in meaning are grouped under more abstract concepts termed ‘categories.’ Closely examining data for both differences and similarities allows for fine discrimination and differentiation among categories” (1990: 102).

Especially at the beginning of the analysis, as in sequential microanalyses, pieces of the text are analyzed line for line. Only in the course of the analysis does this reconstructive method switch to a method based on the logic of subsumption, in which text units are assigned to the categories that have been formed. However, this coding is provisional and the next step is to test it.

*Axial coding* is a “set of procedures whereby data are put back together in new ways after open coding, by making connections between categories. This is done by utilizing a coding paradigm involving conditions, context, action / interactional strategies and consequences” (Strauss / Corbin 1990: 96). This procedure is intended to reduce the quantity of data. Its aim is “to raise raw data to higher levels so that they can be related to more than one case”, writes Juliet Corbin (2003: 74), and she illustrates this with a study of cancer patients with a life-threatening condition. Here, “reduction of the biographical threat” was formed as a category during open coding; it contained biographical strategies for coping with an uncertain future. In axial coding, this category can be further refined by asking more questions with the aid of a so-called coding paradigm. The categories that have been formed are examined in order to reveal the conditions that produce the phenomenon, the context in which the phenomenon is embedded, the interaction strategies used in handling it, and the consequences of these strategies (Strauss / Corbin 1990: 97f.). In the case of the category “reduction of the biographical threat”, for example, the researcher asked in which contexts or under which conditions the threat-reducing strategies were used

(Corbin 2003: 73f.). If we apply this to the argument that “the Jews were to blame for the war”, we could ask in which contexts this argument appears, what its function is, and what consequences it has.

*Selective coding* continues axial coding by seeking to integrate the categories thus developed. “Integration means grouping them around a major theme, around one or several concepts, which describe the studied phenomenon in its ‘broader significance’” (Corbin 2003: 74). This may be a category that was formed during axial coding; it “is characterized by its formal relationships with all the other important categories and occupies a central position in the network of terms” (Böhm 2004: 274). In Juliet Corbin’s biographical study of cancer patients with a life-threatening condition, the existing categories “reduction of the biographical threat” or “learning to live after a life-threatening event” can be such a major theme (or “core category”) (Corbin 2003: 74).

The first joint publication on grounded theory by Glaser and Strauss (1967) did not include the coding paradigm. This was presented by Strauss in 1987, and introduced more prominently into the discussion with Juliet Corbin in 1990. In his book “Emergence vs. forcing: Basics of grounded theory”, Barney Glaser (1992) reacted with a severe critique of the coding paradigm, accusing Strauss of forcing the data into an implicitly preconceived theory, and thus of failing to adhere to the principles of grounded theory. Jörg Strübing shows the inconsistency of Glaser’s critique; in contrast to Strauss, Glaser applies theoretical codes to the data: “While for Strauss and Corbin the coding paradigm only has the character of a pragmatic heuristic, Glaser tries to put the coding perspective in the frame of a list of basic sociological concepts which is understood as being pretty complete” (Strübing 2004: 68).

Although this criticism of Glaser is probably justified, and although the empirical studies by Strauss and Corbin are based on an open and reconstructive method, I think that with open coding, and even more so with axial coding we run the risk of destroying the gestalt of a text too soon, and exposing our analysis to the typical disadvantages of a method based on the logic of subsumption. And, as with qualitative content analysis, this method fails to reconstruct the sequential gestalt of the whole text, which can be a great help in deciphering the meaning of individual text segments in the context in which they were produced, as shown by the method of thematic field analysis (see chapter 6.2.3).

## 7.5 Discourse analysis

*Anna Ransiek, Gabriele Rosenthal & Bettina Völter*

In this volume, reference has repeatedly been made to discourse analyses in qualitative social research. Firstly, it must be noted that the term “discourse analysis” says nothing about a concrete theoretical approach, and even less about methodology. Apart from this, the concept of discourse is increasingly used in an inflationary manner. For this reason, it is important to clarify one’s position when speaking of discourse analysis. In this chapter, we will first briefly discuss the different academic traditions of thought associated with this concept. Next, we will outline the basic ideas in Michel Foucault’s theory of discourse, and show how it has been developed for the purpose of interpretive social research by Reiner Keller in his sociology of knowledge approach to discourse analysis (2011, 2013). And finally we will show how research methods can be based on these ideas.

Since the mid-1960s, various disciplines have used discourse analysis in connection with different theories and different methods of data collecting and data analysis (see Keller et al. 2001). There is a long tradition of discourse theory and discourse analysis not only in (socio-)linguistics, literary studies and philosophy, but also in history, political science and psychology. However, sociologists began to be fairly interested in discourse analysis only in the 1990s. Research involving discourse analysis is associated with theories that can be found in the context of conversation analysis in (socio-)linguistics and ethnomethodology, in (post-)structuralism and the philosophy of language in France in the 1960s, in American pragmatism, in the phenomenological sociology of knowledge, and in Jürgen Habermas’ discourse ethics.<sup>6</sup> Both quantitative and qualitative research methods are used in these approaches. Within qualitative social research they range from methods based on language analysis (Jäger 2001a), to coding methods borrowed from more recent versions of grounded theory (Diaz-Bone 2002; Keller 2007), to analyses of narrative structures (Viehöver 2003, 2012) and analyses that proceed more sequentially and reconstructively (Keller 2004: 104–106; Pohn-Lauggas 2016; Völter 2003: 64–74; Wundrak 2010). Thus, the term “discourse analysis” should not be understood as referring to a specific method, but rather as a “*research perspective*” (Keller 2004: 8).

We cannot go into details here of all the various discourse theories and the different methods applied (instead we refer to the introductions by Keller et al. 2001). In order to show the possible benefits of a discourse analysis, we will present here only some central aspects of the discourse theory and analysis inspired by Michel

---

<sup>6</sup> To avoid any misunderstanding, it is important to note that the sense in which Habermas uses the term “discourse” is not the same as the sense in which we use the term here. For Habermas, it means argumentative debates or discussion processes which follow, and ought to follow, egalitarian and pluralistic principles. Scholars such as Ruth Wodak (1996) have tried to reconcile the understanding of discourse in “critical discourse analysis” with Habermas’ discourse ethics.

Foucault, and point out how the principles of interpretive methods (see chapter 2) can be applied in this field.

*Foucault's discourse theory* is complex, and various aspects of it have been criticized and subjected to modifications. However, the most effective contributions to the debate on discourse theory are still his two texts contained in the English-language edition entitled book 'The Archaeology of Knowledge and the Discourse on Language' (1972), and his genealogical studies, such as 'Madness and Civilization' (1965), 'Discipline and Punish' (1977) or 'The History of Sexuality' (1978, 1985, 1986), which seek to uncover the power relations bound up with discursive formations. According to Foucault, discourses are instruments used to produce or construct social reality and social knowledge. In other words, (manifest and tacit) orders of knowledge are contained both in the (written or spoken) language and in other symbolic forms (such as pictures or architectures) which are neither self-evident nor natural. In studies such as 'The History of Sexuality' or 'The Birth of the Clinic' (1973), Foucault reconstructs how these orders of knowledge are created and acquire the value of truth. As institutionalized knowledge that has congealed into "objective facticity" (Berger/Luckmann 1966: 18), discourses are effectively constitutive of social reality – independently of their material or non-material forms of existence (as e.g. written or spoken texts, visualizations or ways of acting).

In his writings on theoretical and explanatory concepts from 1970 onwards, Foucault increasingly replaces linguistic terms by terms relating to the theory of power. Not least, these include the concept of the *dispositif* or "apparatus" (in our translation: "set-up"), which encompasses both discursive and non-discursive elements of historical or social reality, and is described by Foucault as follows:

"a thoroughly heterogeneous ensemble consisting of discourses, institutions, architectural forms, regulatory decisions, laws [...] – in short, the said as much as the unsaid. Such are the elements of the apparatus. The apparatus itself is *the system of relations that can be established between these elements*" (Foucault 1980: 194; our emphasis).

The reception of his work in sociology led, among other things, to the development of *dispositif analysis* (see Bührmann/Schneider 2008), which provides a method for dealing with the change. Keller, who proposes *The Sociology of Knowledge Approach to Discourse (SKAD)* (Keller 2013), also pleads emphatically in favor of devoting more attention to the non-discursive elements of historical and social reality or the non-linguistic networks or relationships between discursive and non-discursive elements (Keller 2004: 76f.; 2007).

Already in the middle phase of his work, Foucault had underlined that discourses should be seen not only as "groups of signs (signifying elements referring to contents or representations), but as practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak" (Foucault 1972: 49). Each particular manner of "discursivizing" the world results in certain subjects being empowered to speak, while others are excluded. Social



rules are bound up with discourses, with what may be said or not said, how, and in which context. These rules determine the dividing line between ‘true’ and ‘false’. They delegitimize or exclude or marginalize certain people as speakers. For example, the antifascist discourse in the GDR (Republic of East Germany) had the effect of legitimizing the government because it described the ‘natural’ and ‘logical’ continuity of the antifascist resistance movement from the Nazi period to the GDR, and related primarily to communist or workers’ resistance movements. In this discourse, other resistance groups were ignored or even disparaged. Its symbols and its concepts, its way of thinking and way of speaking, did not allow their representatives to speak, because their view of the Nazi past and the current post-war politics of the ruling party were regarded as ‘false’. By contrast, communist resistance fighters and their heirs were stylized as ‘true antifascists’. They were allowed to tell their stories or to give political instruction to other GDR citizens, at least as long as they used the official political terminology of GDR historiography (even in their own biographies) (Völter 2003: 57–85).

Discourse analyses based on Foucault’s ideas are thus mainly concerned with examining such connections between power and institutionalized ways of presenting “facts”, in other words with showing that, or to what extent, discourses shape, and are shaped by, power relations in the historical or social world – which is always and inherently a world of symbols and meanings. Foucault discusses the question of power in various works. The following can be said to be constitutive of the development of his concept of power: ‘Discipline and Punish’ (1977), ‘The History of Sexuality’ (1978, 1985, 1986), and the studies of governmentality that were published after his death (2009). Foucault moves away from a purely negative concept of power towards an interest in the productive aspects of power. He understands by power not a repressive force that inhibits certain activities or impulses towards activity, but something productive, the power of definition, a power that constitutes reality, that produces knowledge, that creates an understanding of the self/subject or of the world, and leads to corresponding ways of conduct. In special cases this power of definition may of course be accompanied by political “repression”, but as a discourse it is effective primarily or only through the power of words or descriptions. For Foucault, power and knowledge are closely related; he argues, “that power and knowledge directly imply one another; that there is no power relation without the correlative constitution of a field of knowledge, nor any knowledge that does not presuppose and constitute at the same time power relations” (1977: 27). Thus, Foucault emphatically underlines the interrelationship between knowledge and power, or discourse and power. This interrelationship between discourse structures and power relations is expressed in the following quotation: “Truth is linked in a circular relation with systems of power which produce and sustain it, and to effects of power which it induces and which extend it” (1980: 133).

Foucault’s concept of power, and similar (post-)Marxist theories of hegemony, such as those of Louis Althusser (1971), or Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe (1985), have had a strong influence on the development of discourse analysis in the

context of social criticism or criticism of ideologies. Thus, the main aim of “critical discourse analysis”, as practiced for instance by Ruth Wodak and Norman Fairclough in the field of socio-linguistic discourse research,<sup>7</sup> is to expose practices of the control of discourse, or the ‘discursive’ exercise of power: “The aim of Critical Discourse Analysis is to unmask ideologically permeated and often obscured structures of power, political control, and dominance, as well as strategies of discriminatory inclusion and exclusion in language use” (Wodak et al. 1999: 8). Like Foucault, Fairclough and Wodak regard written or spoken discourses as forms of *social practice*, and they conclude: “Describing discourse as social practice implies a dialectical relationship between a particular discursive event and the situation(s), institution(s) and social structure(s) which frame it. A dialectical relationship *is a two-way relationship: the discursive event is shaped by situations, institutions and social structures, but it also shapes them*” (Fairclough/Wodak 1997: 258; our emphasis).

Scholars in the field of interpretive social research have also worked on theories of discourse. Combining Foucault’s postulates with Peter L. Berger’s and Thomas Luckmann’s conception of the social construction of reality (1966), Reiner Keller has developed what is known as *The Sociology of Knowledge Approach to Discourse Analysis (SKAD)* (ibid. 2013). In addition, discourse analysis is increasingly linked to other interpretive methods, such as biographical analyses and case reconstructions (Alber 2016a, 2016b; Rosenthal/Bogner 2017a; Pohn-Lauggas 2016; Ransiek 2016; Schäfer/Völter 2005; Spies 2009; Tuidier 2007; Völter 2003; Waldschmidt et al. 2007), or ethnographical methods (Hermann 2006; Wundrak 2010).

Discourses are not tied to individual subjects, but develop for instance in formalized organizations, or through more or less institutionalized political, economic or cultural practices. Nevertheless (or for this very reason), they can influence individual life courses and courses of action.

Following Link (2003, 2005) and Waldschmidt et al. (2007), Pohn-Lauggas (2016) distinguishes three types of discourse: specialized discourses (in scientific studies), inter-discourses (such as public discourses in the media or in politics), and everyday discourses (for instance in biographical narratives<sup>8</sup>). Within these areas, discourses can be identified thematically as “ongoing and heterogeneous processes of the social construction – production, circulation, transformation – of knowledge” (Keller 2005: para.11) which have been more or less institutionalized in a certain form, in other words socially standardized or stereotyped.

One could argue that discourses should be regarded as communicative processes. They can appear suddenly, producing new objects, but they can also rapidly come to an end. It is possible to describe their emergence, growth and decline as a process.

<sup>7</sup> Other approaches to a “critical discourse analysis” have been developed in Germany by Jürgen Link and Ursula Link-Heer (1990), and by Siegfried Jäger (2001a).

<sup>8</sup> Biographical narration in the research setting of a biographical-narrative interview can be understood as a situation in which everyday discourses and special discourses come together.

Thus, “discourse” should be understood as a process-oriented theoretical concept which can be linked to other process-oriented research concepts (see Völter 2003: 32–41). This processuality means that a “historical” or diachronic approach is required (see Bogner/Rosenthal 2017a). A long-term research perspective makes it possible to reconstruct in which collective and biographical constellations a discourse first emerged, developed and changed, or began to fade away.

### On concrete methods

As we have already pointed out, discourse analyses can be carried out using very different methods. Depending on the research question or the available material to be analyzed, the methods used include quantitative and qualitative content analysis, detailed analysis of selected parts of texts, or segmentation methods in image analysis (see Breckner 2012). The quantity and the size of the sample of empirical material also depends on the research question and the choice of methodology (see Keller 2001: 136). Thus, quantitative or qualitative content analysis (see earlier in this chapter) requires samples that are different, i.e. larger and suitable for the application of distribution criteria, from those needed for reconstructive analysis (see chapter 3.1). If my research question relates to a single discursive event and a specific context, for example, how September 11<sup>th</sup> 2001 was reported in the German print media immediately after the event, I am dealing with a much more restricted “population” than if I am interested in investigating changes in the international media discourse on a certain topic (for example “Islamic terrorism”) over a long period of time. Practitioners of discourse analysis also differ considerably in the way they collect their data. While some carry out interviews, others examine published texts, or set out to find informal unpublished texts, such as journals or letters, or use semi-public sources such as Facebook pages. Classical text-based materials include newspaper articles, legislative texts, academic publications, novels, transcripts of interviews or records of conversations and observations; currently there is a growing interest in analyzing data obtained from photographs, paintings, advertising posters and images from newspaper articles, or practices documented through participant observation (Keller 2004: 82f.). It is important to note that not only different research questions, but also different kinds of data require different analytical approaches. For example, in the case of texts, we can follow the principle of sequentiality and reconstruct the *sequence* presented by the text and the pictorial elements embedded in it; but the analysis of a *single* image is an analysis of its separate segments and is *not determined by their sequence* but by the different possible sequences involved in focusing and perception.

In what follows, we will propose a research design for text-based interpretive discourse analysis which attempts to do justice to the principle of openness. In particular, it does not strictly separate the phases of data collection and data analysis (see chapter 2.4), and it consistently applies the principles of reconstruction, sequential-

ity and abduction (see chapter 2.5).<sup>9</sup> Our model borrows from the SKAD as presented by Reiner Keller, while our method of analyzing single discourse fragments<sup>10</sup> follows the logic of the analytical steps presented by Gabriele Rosenthal (see chapter 6). In addition to detailed sequential analyses, the external and internal context data relating to particular discourse fragments are analyzed (as in objective hermeneutics), independently of the concrete contents of the discourse fragments, before analyzing the individual fragments in their overall form, and reconstructing the various thematic fields (following Aron Gurwitsch 1964). In the analysis, it must always be remembered that individual texts are only fragments of discourses, and that an individual text is not a representation of one entire discourse in its completeness (Keller 2001: 136).

Before describing in more detail the method we propose for analyzing individual discourse fragments, first a few remarks on the collection of data, which is an important step in the analytical process. To build a corpus of data, the method of theoretical sampling from grounded theory can be used (Keller 2004: 86; see chapter 3.1). This means defining a “discourse strand”<sup>11</sup>, or discursive theme, such as the discourse in Germany on Islamic terrorism; initially, only a rough definition is required, and the definition may be modified in the course of the research. When collecting data, and in the subsequent analysis, it is important to consider in what contexts or in what places the data were generated. It is also necessary to decide how far the research should be limited to certain places, certain discursive fields and certain kinds of data. Thus, discourse fragments can be part of a media discourse (e.g. in daily newspapers or on web sites), a scientific discourse (e.g. in educational brochures or scientific publications), a political discourse (e.g. in legislative texts, newspapers or parliamentary speeches), or an everyday discursive context (in popular magazines or records of conversations). We need to remember that this distinction between different types of discourse is very often only an analytical distinction, in other words based on criteria selected by the researchers, and not on criteria that are immanent in the material. Thus, the texts or places mentioned here as examples can of course also contain references to other discursive fields or types. A legislative text, for example, can relate simultaneously to a scientific and a political discourse. In setting limits for the data to be collected, it can also be helpful to choose as a starting point *one* discursive event that is connected to the discourse strand in question. For an analysis of “Western” discourses on Islamism, for example, this could be media reporting immediately after September 11<sup>th</sup> 2001.

<sup>9</sup> Our design is based on our own empirical research and on guidelines for analysis developed by Anna Ransiek, Gabriele Rosenthal and Rixta Wundrak, which have been successfully used with students in teaching and practice.

<sup>10</sup> Jäger (2001b: 47) defines a discourse fragment as “a text or part of a text which deals with a certain theme”; one text can contain several fragments.

<sup>11</sup> For Jäger, discourse strands are “thematically uniform discourse processes”. According to him, discourse fragments should be understood as parts of discourse strands (Jäger 2001b: 47).

In the course of gathering discourse fragments, the researcher gains an even better overview of the chosen field of investigation. In an analysis of the discourse on “Islamic terrorism” using September 11<sup>th</sup> 2001 as the initial event, for instance, we would consider where this topic is discussed (print media, academic debates, internet, everyday situations, etc.), and let our search for data be guided by certain terms that we associate with it (such as “terror attacks”, “Nine-Eleven”, “World Trade Center”). If we find in an interview a long passage relating to September 11<sup>th</sup> 2001, we could select this fragment for the analysis. Of course, such decisions would always be based on assumptions that imply a specific perspective (or a combination of a limited number of perspectives), depending on our research interest, whether intentionally or not. Therefore, it is necessary to reflect on this during the research process. Some of the questions which arise are: Why am I looking for these particular concepts and events? Why am I concentrating on these places and not (also) on other places? What is so specific about the source I have chosen, whether from the internet, an interview or the print media? Who are the addressees and who are the producers of this source? What are their relationships in terms of (discursive as well as non-discursive) practices in the social world? Reflecting on the particular way we have chosen to collect our data can lead to a first, provisional typification, and enable us to formulate first hypotheses in respect of the spread and structure of the discourses concerned (Keller 2004: 79ff.). This helps us to define what further data we need for the analysis, for instance whether to concentrate on *one* discursive event, or several significant events. It is also possible to limit the research to a study of a particular discourse at a *particular point in time*, or to follow it over a *long period* in order to examine the transformation processes of the discourse (or of several discourses). For pragmatic reasons, it may be best to further limit the data, and, for example, to study only the media discourse, or only certain media within the media discourse. Thus, we could ask how reporting on “Islamic terrorism” in the print media – or in a limited number of print media (such as daily newspapers) – has changed from September 11<sup>th</sup> 2001 to the present day. It would be important here to consider how such changes are linked to certain historical events, such as the death of Osama Bin Laden, or the military advance of the “Islamic State” (IS) into northern Syria. The research question thus takes on a more concrete shape during the process of data collection and the analyses of discourse fragments, and it becomes clearer what limits can be set for collecting data, or how the search for data can be widened.

The selection of discourse fragments from the corpus of data that has been gathered (*first sample*) for further analysis in the sense of a *second sample* (see chapter 3.2.2) can *at first* be a random selection. The selection can be limited initially to certain parts in relation to which the discourse is to be examined, and can be extended in the course of the analysis. Following analysis of these first discourse fragments, further fragments should be selected on the basis of empirically more saturated theoretical arguments. The second sample ought to be as multi-faceted as possible, i.e. it must offer *minimum and maximum* contrasts (see chapter 3.2.4.). Following the principle of openness, we formulate the research question in a relatively open manner during

the initial collection of data; both the question and the sample can be concretized or modified in the course of the research (see chapter 2.4.1; Keller 2004: 82ff.).

### **On the analysis of single discourse fragments**

In accordance with a sequential and reconstructive analysis, we propose that the external and internal context data (see Witte/Rosenthal 2007; in this volume chapter 4.5) relating to a single discourse fragment should first be analyzed. The second step, the text and thematic field analysis (see chapter 6.2.3), corresponds to text analysis in the context of case reconstructions, and is aimed at reconstructing the gestalt of the whole text and its dominant thematic fields. In addition, particular parts of the text will be subjected to a microanalysis.

For an *analysis of the context data* following the principles of Ulrich Oevermann's objective hermeneutics (see for instance Oevermann et al. 1987), the first thing is to consider the external context of the selected discourse fragment, so that the structural conditions of this context can be taken into account. In other words, it is important to ask when the discourse fragment was created, and in what historical and geographical setting or (to put it differently) in what overall social situation. In addition, it is important to examine the history of the terms or symbols that are constitutive of the discourse in question. In Oevermann's logic, such a context analysis does not stop at investigating this broad 'external' framework, but gradually narrows the circle around the discourse fragment under consideration. The aim is to find out what limitations and what possibilities affected the production of the discourse fragment in the given frame or place (e.g. that of a short article in the local section of a daily newspaper). Overall, the following questions arise for an analysis of the external and internal context: In what context was the discourse fragment created, at which time, and in what thematic, spatial and social environment? What events preceded the production of this discourse fragment? What were the conditions governing its production? In what debates was it embedded? What rules were the composition and design of text and images subjected to at the given place and time, or how was speaking about a certain issue allowed, encouraged or prevented, for instance in an interview situation?

In the next step of *text and thematic field analysis*, the selected fragment is analyzed sequentially in its overall gestalt. The aim is to determine the significance *in the context* of specific terms, patterns of interpretation, and narrative structures. As a preliminary step, the data is sequenced according to content, change of text type, change of rhetorical style, change of speaker (in the case of interviews, for instance), or change from text to image. This sequencing does not have to follow blindly the given order of paragraphs in a text which reflects the logic of the authors or typesetters.

The analysis can now be carried out following the principles of *text and thematic field analysis* (see chapter 6.2.3) on the basis of the sequencing of the whole document. The aim of this analytical step is:

- a) to reconstruct existing patterns of argumentation and interpretation, and narrative structures and their significance for the discourse(s) concerned in their inner logic, in their thematic embedment, and with their (co-present) references to thematic fields outside this document,
- b) to discover the forms and the themes of discourses which cut across the document and which may be interrelated,
- c) to identify the linguistic and rhetorical devices used in a discourse fragment (such as metaphors, idiomatic expressions, proverbs, composition, structuring schemes), and to decipher them in their sequence, their possible compression or condensation, and their contextual embedment,<sup>12</sup> and
- d) to reconstruct references to immanent knowledge and implicit (or ‘tacit’) representations of social order.

Put simply, in addition to forming hypotheses on the sequential gestalt of the text, the choice of themes, the relations between the *themes*, possible *thematic fields* and the *thematic margin* (i.e. themes that are co-present but are not mentioned or are only hinted at), the following specific questions can be addressed:

- Which discursive events are referred to, how (including whether at length or only briefly), and in what sequential order?
- What immanent or implicit “knowledge” is referred to, and how?
- What linguistic, symbolic, pictorial devices are used, how, and in what sequential order?
- Which actors are introduced, in which speaker position, in what order, and how? For example, are the opinions of laypeople reported or quoted first, and later those of “experts”, and how?
- Are opposite positions thematized, and if so, which ones, and how?

Especially in the case of complex or unintelligible parts of the text, this sequential analysis of the whole discourse fragment is followed by sequential *microanalyses*, which also follow the principles of objective hermeneutics (see chapter 6.2.4). However, as in the other analytical steps, the focus here is not on the intentions or ideas of the producer(s) of a source, but on the microstructures of interconnected discourse strands or patterns of interpretation, the rules by which it is governed, and the linguistic means used to produce it.

---

<sup>12</sup> Following for instance the suggestions made by Jäger (2001a: 175–187) and Viehöver (2003).

Finally, the discourse fragment is re-embedded in the context in which it was created or appeared (place, immediate authors or presenters, socio-historical context), and in social processes (with their changing political, economic, cultural power constellations), and it is linked to the results of the context analysis and the analysis of other discourse fragments. This can lead to the identification of other “discursive events” that are associated with the document, such as social events which made the theme a topic of public discussion, which drove the discourse forward, which divided it into several themes, which made the present document known, which contributed to its spread and symbolic relevance, etc.

Following the reconstructive analysis of a discourse fragment, a decision can be made on the basis of the findings, in accordance with the rules of theoretical sampling, whether to analyze another document as a contrasting case. In minimum-maximum comparisons, the results of the individual discourse fragment analyses relating to empirically saturated theoretical statements concerning the whole discourse field, its phenomena, its structures, and the history of its emergence or development, are gradually consolidated: this makes it possible to reveal the thematic interrelationships between different discourse strands, and the gestalt and significance of individual discursive events. Analysis of a discourse is complete when it can draw empirically saturated conclusions concerning the institutionally consolidated rules of discourse production, and can determine the (changing) reception of the discourse, its (established and changing) power effects, and its consequences.



## References

- Alber, I. (2016a): Warum reproduzierst gerade Du diesen Diskurs? Zur Interdependenz von biographisch etablierten Handlungsmustern und Diskursen. In: Bosancic, S./Keller, R. (eds.): Wissenssoziologie und Diskursanalyse. Wiesbaden: Springer VS, 261–278.
- Alber, I. (2016b): Doing civil society in post-socialist Poland. Triangulation of biographical analysis and discourse analysis. In: *Przełąd Socjologiczny*, Vol. 65 (4), 91–110.
- Alheit, P. (1995): Social demobilisation through the German reunification. A challenge to popular adult education. In: Papaioannou, S. et al. (eds.): Education, culture and modernisation. Roskilde: RUC, 59–81.
- Alheit, P. (2009): Biographical learning. Within the new lifelong learning discourse. In: Illeris, K. (ed.): Contemporary learning theories. Learning theorists in their own words. London: Routledge, 116–128.
- Alheit, P./Dausien, B. (2002): The 'double face' of lifelong learning. Two analytical perspectives on a 'silent revolution'. In: *Studies in the Education of Adults*, Vol. 34 (1), 3–22.
- Althusser, L. (1971): Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses. In: *Lenin and Philosophy and other Essays*. London: New Left Books, 121–176.

- Amann, K. / Hirschauer, St. (1997): Die Befremdung der eigenen Kultur. Ein Programm. In: Hirschauer, St. / Amann, K. (eds.): Die Befremdung der eigenen Kultur. Zur ethnographischen Herausforderung soziologischer Empirie. Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp, 7–52.
- Anderson, N. (1923): The hobo. The sociology of the homeless man. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Anthias, F. (2009): Belonging, identity, intersectionality, and translocational positionality. In: Rosenthal, G. / Bogner, A. (eds.): Ethnicity, belonging and biography. Ethnographical and biographical perspectives. Münster: LIT Verlag, 229–250.
- Apitzsch, U. (2012): Transnational migration, gender and European citizenship. In: Saarinen, A. / Calloni, M. (eds.): Builders of a New Europe. Women Immigrants from the Eastern Trans-regions. Helsinki: Kikumora Publications, 122–131.
- Apitzsch, U. / Siouti, I. (2007): Biographical analysis as an interdisciplinary research perspective in the field of migration studies. York: University of York. Online: [http://www.york.ac.uk/res/researchintegration/Integrative\\_Research\\_Methods/Apitzsch%20Biographical%20Analysis%20April%202007.pdf](http://www.york.ac.uk/res/researchintegration/Integrative_Research_Methods/Apitzsch%20Biographical%20Analysis%20April%202007.pdf).
- Apitzsch, U. / Siouti, I. (2014): Transnational Biographies. In: Zeitschrift für Qualitative Forschung, Vol. 15 (1–2), 11–23.
- Appelsmeyer, H. (1996): Stil und Typisierung in weiblichen Lebensentwürfen. Weinheim: Deutscher Studienverlag.
- Arbeitsgruppe Bielefelder Soziologen (1976): Kommunikative Sozialforschung. München: Fink.
- Atkinson, P. / Coffey, A. / Delamont, S. / Lofland, L. (eds.) (2001): Handbook of ethnography. London: Sage.
- Aufenanger, S. (1991): Qualitative Analyse semi-struktureller Interviews. Ein Werkstattbericht. In: Graz, D. / Kraimer, K. (eds.): Qualitative-empirische Sozialforschung. Opladen: Westdeutscher Verlag, 35–61.
- Bahl, E. (2017): Precarious transnational biographies. Moroccan juveniles in the Spanish enclaves Ceuta and Melilla. In: Rosenthal, G. / Bogner, A. (eds.): Biographies in the Global South. Frankfurt: Campus.
- Bar-On, D. (1995): Fear and hope: Three generations of the Holocaust. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Bar-On, D. (2004): Erzähl dein Leben! Meine Wege zur Dialogarbeit und politischen Verständigung. Hamburg: Edition Körber Stiftung.
- Becker, D. (2004): Dealing with the consequences of organized violence in trauma work. In: The Berghof handbook for conflict transformation. Berghof Research Center for Constructive Conflict Management. Online: [https://www.berghof-foundation.org/fileadmin/redaktion/Publications/Handbook/Articles/becker\\_handbook.pdf](https://www.berghof-foundation.org/fileadmin/redaktion/Publications/Handbook/Articles/becker_handbook.pdf).
- Becker, H. S. (1970): Sociological work. Method & substance. Chicago: Aldine.

- Becker, J. (2013): Old men's truth. The 'poverty generation' of neighborhood men talk about life in Jerusalem's Old City. In: *Middle East Journal of Culture and Communication*, Vol. 6 (3), 264–285.
- Becker, J. (2016): Commitment to the Old City and ambivalent emplacement. In: Rosenthal, G. (ed.): *Established and outsiders at the same time. Self-images and we-images of Palestinians in the West Bank and in Israel*. Göttingen: Göttingen University Press, 125–146.
- Becker, J. (2017): A mixed family of 'long-time residents' and 'internal migrants' in Palestinian Jerusalem. The established-outsider figuration of 'Hebronites' and 'Jerusalemites' in the context of the Israeli occupation. In: Bogner, A. / Rosenthal, G. (eds.): *Biographies in the Global South. Embedded in figurations and discourses*. Frankfurt/Main: Campus, 209–235.
- Berelson, B. (1952): *Content analysis in communication research*. Glencoe: Free Press.
- Berger, P. L. / Luckmann, T. (1966): *The social construction of reality. A treatise in the sociology of knowledge*. Garden City, NY: Doubleday.
- Bergmann, J. R. (1976): *Richtlinien und Symbole für die Anfertigung von Transkripten*. Konstanz: Unpublished manuscript.
- Bergmann, J. R. (1985): Flüchtigkeit und methodische Fixierung sozialer Wirklichkeit. In: Bonß, W. / Hartmann, H. (eds.): *Entzauberte Welt. Zur Relativität und Geltung soziologischer Forschung*. Special issue No.3 of *Soziale Welt*, 299–320.
- Bergmann, J. R. (1988): *Ethnomethodologie und Konversationsanalyse*. Studienbrief der FernUniversität Hagen, FB Erziehungs-, Sozial- und Geisteswissenschaften, Kurseinheit 2.
- Bergmann, J. R. (1994): *Ethnomethodologische Konversationsanalyse*. In: Fritz, G. / Hundsnurscher, F. (eds.): *Handbuch der Dialoganalyse*. Tübingen: Niemeyer, 3–16.
- Bergmann, J. R. (2004): *Conversation analysis*. In: Flick, U. / Kardorff, E. v. / Steinke, I. (eds.): *A companion to qualitative research*. London: Sage, 296–302.
- Bertaux, D. (1981) (ed.): *Biography and society*. Beverly Hills: Sage.
- Blumer, H. (1939): *An appraisal of Thomas' and Znaniecki's The Polish Peasant in Europe and America*. With statements by William I. Thomas and Florian Znaniecki, a panel discussion, and summary and analysis by Red Bain. New York: Social Science Research Council.
- Bogner, A. / Menz, W. (2009): The theory-generating expert interview. Epistemological interest, forms of knowledge, interaction. In: Bogner, A. / Littig, B. / Menz, W. (eds.): *Interviewing experts*. Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 43–80.
- Bogner, A. / Rosenthal, G. (2014): The 'untold' stories of outsiders and their significance for the analysis of (post-)conflict figurations. Interviews with victims of collective violence in Northern Uganda (West Nile). In: *Forum: Qualitative Social Research*, Vol. 15 (3), Art. 4. Doi: 10.17169/fqs-15.3.2138.

- Bogner, A./Rosenthal, G. (2017a): Biographies – Discourses – Figurations. Methodological considerations from the perspectives of social constructivism and figurational sociology. In: Rosenthal, G./Bogner, A. (eds.): *Biographies in the Global South*. Frankfurt/Main: Campus, 15–49.
- Bogner, A./Rosenthal, G. (2017b): Rebels in northern Uganda after their return to civilian life. Between a strong we-image and experiences of isolation and discrimination. In: *Canadian Journal of African Studies*, Vol. 51 (2), 175–197. Doi: 10.1080/00083968.2017.1306451.
- Bogner, A./Rosenthal, G./Schmiereck, J. (2017): Familial and life (hi)stories of former child-soldiers of the LRA in northern Uganda. In: Rosenthal, G./Bogner, A. (eds.): *Biographies in the Global South*. Frankfurt/Main: Campus, 50–102.
- Bohler, K. F./Hildenbrand, B. (1995): Conditions for sociological research in biography. In: *International Sociology*, Vol. 10 (3), 331–340.
- Böhm, A. (2004): Theoretical coding. Text analysis in grounded theory. In: Flick, U./Kardorff, E. v./Steinke, I. (eds.): *A companion to qualitative research*. London: Sage, 270–275.
- Bohnsack, R. ([1991] 2003): *Rekonstruktive Sozialforschung. Einführung in die Methodologie und Praxis qualitativer Forschung*. Opladen: Leske + Budrich.
- Bohnsack, R. (1997): Gruppendiskussionsverfahren und Milieuforschung. In: Friebertshäuser, B./Prenzel, A. (eds.): *Handbuch Qualitative Forschungsmethoden in der Erziehungswissenschaft*. München: Juventa, 492–502.
- Bohnsack, R. (2004): Documentary method and group discussions. In: Bohnsack, R./Pfaff, N./Weller, W. (eds.): *Qualitative analysis and documentary method*. Opladen: Barbara Budrich, 99–124.
- Bohnsack, R. (2009): *Qualitative Bild- und Videointerpretation. Die dokumentarische Methode*. Opladen: Barbara Budrich.
- Bornat, J. (2004): Oral history. In: Seale, C./Gobo, G./Gubrium, J. F./Silverman, D. (eds.): *Qualitative research practice*. London: Sage, 34–47.
- Bowlby, J. (1980): *Loss. Sadness and depression*. London: Hogarth Press.
- Brandhorst, R. M. (2014): Transnational families in Cuba and Germany. On the intersection between isolation, restrictions and agency. In: *Canadian Journal of Latin American and Caribbean Studies (CJLACS)*, Vol. 38 (2), 254–278.
- Breckner, R. (2007): Case-oriented comparative approaches. The biographical perspective as opportunity and challenge in migration research. In: Schittenhelm, K. (ed.): *Concepts and methods in migration research*. Conference Reader, 113–152. Online: <http://sowi-serv2.sowi.uni-due.de/cultural-capital/reader/Concepts-and-Methods.pdf>.
- Breckner, R. (2012): Bildwahrnehmung, Bildinterpretation. Segmentanalyse als methodischer Zugang zur Erschließung bildlichen Sinns. In: *Österreichische Zeitschrift für Soziologie*, Vol. 12 (2), 143–164.

- Breckner, R. (2014): Collective identities in migration. Biographical perspectives on ambivalences and paradoxes. *Sociology and Anthropology*, Vol. 2 (1), 15–24.
- Breckner, R. (2015): Biography and society. In: Wright, J. D. (ed.): *International encyclopedia of the social & behavioral sciences*, Vol. 2. 2nd edition. Oxford: Elsevier, 637–643.
- Briggs, Ch. (1986): *Learning how to ask. A sociolinguistic appraisal of the role of the interview in social science research*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Bruner, J. (1990): *Acts of meaning*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Bude, H. (1988): Auflösung des Sozialen? Die Verflüssigung des soziologischen ‘Gegenstands’ im Fortgang der sozialen Theorie. In: *Soziale Welt*, Vol. 39, 4–17.
- Bude, H. (2003): Fallrekonstruktion. In: Bohnsack, R. / Marotzki, W. / Meuser, M. (eds.): *Hauptbegriffe Qualitativer Sozialforschung*. Opladen: Leske + Budrich, 60f.
- Bühler, Ch. (1933): *Der menschliche Lebenslauf als psychologisches Problem*. Leipzig: S. Hirzel.
- Bühler, Ch. (1968a): The course of human life. A study of goals in the humanistic perspective. New York: Springer.
- Bühler, Ch. (1968b): The course of human life as a psychological problem. *Human Development*, Vol. 11, 184–200. Originally published in German 1933.
- Bührmann, A. D. / Schneider, W. (2008): *Vom Diskurs zum Dispositiv. Eine Einführung in die Dispositivanalyse*. Bielefeld: Transcript Verlag.
- Bulmer, M. (1984): *The Chicago School of Sociology*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Chamberlayne, P. / Bornat, J. / Wengraf, T. (eds.) (2000): *The turn to biographical methods in social science*. London: Routledge.
- Cicourel, A. (1964): *Method and measurement in sociology*. New York: Free Press.
- Corbin J. (2003): Grounded Theory. In: Bohnsack, R. / Marotzki, W. / Meuser, M. (eds.): *Hauptbegriffe Qualitativer Sozialforschung*. Opladen: Leske + Budrich, 70–75.
- Dausien, B. (1996): *Biographie und Geschlecht. Zur biographischen Konstruktion sozialer Wirklichkeit in Frauenlebensgeschichten*. Bremen: Donat.
- Dausien, B. (1999): Geschlechtsspezifische Sozialisation. Konstruktiv(istisch)e Ideen zu Karriere und Kritik eines Konzepts. In: Dausien, B. / Herrmann, M. / Oechsle, M. (eds.): *Erkenntnisprojekt Geschlecht*. Opladen: Leske + Budrich, 217–246.
- Dausien, B. (2002): On the ‘gender’ perspective in adult education. Methodological notes. In: Bron, A. / Schemmann, M. (eds.): *Social science theories in adult education research*. Bochum Studies in international adult education. Münster: LIT Verlag, 81–108.

- Diaz-Bone, R. (2002): *Kulturwelt, Diskurs und Lebensstil*. Opladen: Leske + Budrich.
- Döbert, R./Nunner-Winkler, G. (1983): *Moralisches Urteilsniveau und Verlässlichkeit. Die Familie als Lernumwelt für kognitive und motivationale Aspekte des moralischen Bewusstseins in der Adoleszenz*. In: Lind, G./Hartmann, H./Wekenhut, R. (eds.): *Moralisches Urteilen und soziale Umwelt*. Weinheim: Beltz, 95–122.
- Doyle, A. C. (1892): *Adventure 3: 'A Case of Identity'*, In: *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes*, Lit2Go Edition. Online: <http://etc.usf.edu/lit2go/32/the-adventures-of-sherlock-holmes/347/adventure-3-a-case-of-identity/>
- Doyle, A. C. ([1889] 1975): *The sign of the four*. New York: Ballantine Books.
- Durkheim, É. (1964): *The rules of sociological method*. New York: Free Press. Originally published in French 1895.
- Eckensberger, L. H./Reinshagen, H./Eckensberger, U. S. (1975): *Kohlbergs Interview zum moralischen Urteil*. Auswertungsmanual, Form A. Arbeiten des Fachbereichs Psychologie 35, Universität des Saarlandes.
- Elias, N. (1978): *What is sociology?* New York: Columbia University Press. Originally published in German 1970.
- Elias, N./Scotson, J. L. (1965): *The established and the outsiders*. London.
- Erikson, E. H. (1959): *Identity and the life cycle*. New York: International Universities.
- Fairclough, N./Wodak, R. (1997): *Critical discourse analysis*. In: Van Dijk, T. (ed.): *Discourse as social interaction*. Discourse studies. Vol. 2. London: Sage, 258–284.
- Fann, K. T. (1970): *Peirce's theory of abduction*. The Hague: Nijhoff.
- Fischer, H. (1988): *Feldforschung*. In: Fischer, H. (ed.): *Ethnologie. Einführung und Überblick*. Frankfurt/Main: Dietrich Reimer, 61–81.
- Fischer, W. (1978): *Struktur und Funktion erzählter Lebensgeschichten*. In: Kohli, M. (ed.): *Soziologie des Lebenslaufs*. Darmstadt: Luchterhand, 311–336.
- Fischer, W. (1982): *Time and chronic illness. A study on the social constitution of temporality*. Berkeley: Self-published.
- Fischer, W. (2000): *Biographical work and biographical structuring in present-day societies*. In: Chamberlayne, P./Bornat, J./Wengraf, T. (eds.): *The turn to biographical methods in social science. Comparative issues and examples*. London: Routledge, 109–125.
- Fischer, W. (2009): *Rekonstruktive Videoanalyse. Wahrnehmungs- und interaktionstheoretische Grundlagen*. Online: <http://kobra.bibliothek.uni-kassel.de/handle/urn:nbn:de:hebis:34-2009032326755>
- Fischer, W./Kohli, M. (1987): *Biographieforschung*. In: Voges, W. (ed.): *Methoden der Biographie- und Lebenslaufforschung*. Opladen: Leske + Budrich, 25–49.
- Fischer-Rosenthal, W. (1991): *Florian Znaniecki/William I. Thomas: The Polish Peasant in Europe and America*. In: Flick, U. et al. (eds.): *Handbuch*

- Qualitaiver Sozialforschung. Grundlagen, Konzepte, Methoden und Anwendungen. München: Psychologie Verlags Union, 115–118.
- Fischer-Rosenthal, W. (1999): Biographie und Leiblichkeit. Zur biographischen Arbeit und Artikulation des Körpers. In: Alheit, P./Dausien, B./Fischer-Rosenthal, W./Hanses, A./Keil, A. (eds.): Biographie und Leib. Gießen: Psychosozial, 15–43.
- Fischer-Rosenthal, W. (2000): Biographical work and biographical structuring in present-day societies. In: Chamberlayne, P./Bornat, J./Wengraf, T. (eds.): The turn to biographical methods in social science. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 109–125.
- Flick, U. (2006): An introduction to qualitative research. London: Sage.
- Foucault, M. (1965): Madness and civilization. A history of insanity in the age of reason. London: Tavistock. Originally published in French 1961.
- Foucault, M. (1972): The archaeology of knowledge and the discourse on language. New York: Pantheon. Originally published in French 1969.
- Foucault, M. (1973): The birth of the clinic. An archeology of medical perception. New York: Pantheon Books. Originally published in French 1963.
- Foucault, M. (1977): Discipline and punish. The birth of the prison. New York: Pantheon Books. Originally published in French 1975.
- Foucault, M. (1978): The will to knowledge. The history of sexuality. Vol.1. New York: Pantheon Books. Originally published in French 1976.
- Foucault, M. (1980): Power/knowledge. Selected interviews and other writings 1972–1977. New York: Pantheon Books.
- Foucault, M. (1985): The use of pleasure. The history of sexuality. Vol. 2. New York: Pantheon Books. Originally published in French 1984.
- Foucault, M. (1986): The care of the self. The history of sexuality. Vol. 3. New York: Pantheon Books. Originally published in French 1984.
- Foucault, M. (2009): Security, territory, population. Lectures at the Collège de France, 1977–1978. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Friebertshäuser, B. (1997a): Interviewtechniken. Ein Überblick. In: Friebertshäuser, B./Prengel, A. (eds.): Handbuch Qualitative Forschungsmethoden in der Erziehungswissenschaft. München: Juventa, 373–395.
- Friebertshäuser, B. (1997b): Feldforschung und teilnehmende Beobachtung. In: Friebertshäuser, B./Prengel, A. (eds.): Handbuch Qualitative Forschungsmethoden in der Erziehungswissenschaft. München: Juventa, 503–534.
- Friebertshäuser, B./Felden, H. von/Schäffer, B. (eds.) (2007): Bild und Text. Methoden und Methodologienvisueller Sozialforschung in der Erziehungswissenschaft. Opladen: Barbara Budrich.
- Froschauer, U./Lueger, M. (2009): Expert interviews in interpretive organizational research. In: Bogner, A./Littig, B./Menz, W. (eds.): Interviewing experts. Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 217–234.
- Fuchs, W. (1984): Biographische Forschung. Opladen: Westdeutscher Verlag.

- Fuchs-Heinritz, W. (2000): Biographische Forschung. 2nd revised and extended edition. Opladen: Westdeutscher Verlag.
- Garfinkel, H. (1986): Ethnomethodological studies of work. London: Routledge.
- Garfinkel, H. (1967): Studies in ethnomethodology. Oxford: Polity Press.
- Geertz, C. (1973): The interpretation of cultures. Selected essays. New York: Basic Books.
- George, A.L. (1959): Quantitative and qualitative approaches in content analysis. In: Pool, I. de Sola (ed.): Trends in content analysis. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 7–32.
- Glaser, B. G. (1992): Basics of grounded theory analysis. Emergence vs. forcing. Mill Valley, CA: Sociology Press.
- Glaser, B. G. / Strauss, A. L. (1967): The discovery of grounded theory. Chicago: Aldine.
- Goffman, E. (1963): Stigma. Notes on the management of spoiled identity. Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall.
- Goffman, E. (1974): Frame analysis. An essay on the organization of experience. London: Harper and Row.
- Goffman, E. (1989): On Fieldwork. In: Journal of Contemporary Ethnography, Vol. 18, 123–132.
- Gordon, T. (1974): Teacher effectiveness training. New York: Wyden.
- Gurwitsch, A. (1964): The field of consciousness. Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press.
- Gurwitsch, A. (1966): Studies in phenomenology and psychology. Evanston: Northwestern University Press.
- Haas, M. (2016): Caught between restrictions and freedom. Narrative biographies shed light on how gendered structures and processes affect the drop-out of females from universities. In: Current Sociology, Vol. 65 (7), 1–19.
- Hammersley, M. / Atkinson, P. (1983): Ethnography. Principles in practice. London: Tavistock.
- Hanses, A. (1996): Epilepsie als biographische Konstruktion. Eine Analyse von Erkrankungs- und Gesundungsprozessen anfallserkrankter Menschen anhand erzählter Lebensgeschichten. Bremen: Donat.
- Harrison, B. (ed.) (2009): Life story research. 4 Volumes. London: Sage.
- Hauck, G. (1991): Soziologie als positive Wissenschaft. In: Kerber, H. / Schmieider, A. (eds.): Soziologie. Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rowohlt, 444–472.
- Heinemeier, S. et al. (1981): Arbeitslosigkeit und Biographie-Konstruktion. Bericht über ein laufendes Forschungsprojekt. In: Matthes, J. et al. (eds.): Biographie in handlungswissenschaftlicher Perspektive. Nürnberg: Verlag der Nürnberger Forschungsvereinigung, 169–189.
- Herkner, W. (1974): Inhaltsanalyse. In: Koolwijk, J. van / Wieken-Mayer, M. (eds.): Techniken der empirischen Sozialforschung. Vol. 3. München: Oldenbourg, 158–191.



- Hermann, E. (2006): Korrelationen von Verschiedensein und Gleichsein als Ko-Differenz. Selbst und Ethnie bei den Banabans in Fiji. Habilitation thesis, University of Göttingen.
- Hermanns, H. (1987): Narrative interviews. A new tool for sociological field research. In: *Acta Universitatis Lodziensis, Folia Sociologica* 13, 43–56. Online: <http://hdl.handle.net/11089/9738>.
- Hermanns, H. (1992): Die Auswertung narrativer Interviews. Ein Beispiel für qualitative Verfahren. In: Hoffmeyer-Zlotnik, J. H. P. (ed.): *Analyse verbaler Daten. Über den Umgang mit qualitativen Daten*. Opladen: Westdeutscher Verlag, 110–141.
- Hermanns, H./Tkocz, C./Winkler, H. (1984): *Berufsverlauf von Ingenieuren. Biographisch-analytische Auswertungen narrativer Interviews*. Frankfurt/Main: Campus.
- Hettlage, R. (1991): Rahmenanalyse. Oder die innere Organisation unseres Wissens um die Ordnung der Wirklichkeit. In: Hettlage, R./Lenz, K. (eds.): *Erving Goffman. Ein soziologischer Klassiker der zweiten Generation*. München: Fink, 95–156.
- Hildenbrand, B. (1999a): *Fallrekonstruktive Familienforschung*. Opladen: Leske + Budrich.
- Hildenbrand, B. (1999b): Was ist für wen der Fall? Problemlagen bei der Weitergabe von Ergebnissen von Fallstudien an die Untersuchten und mögliche Lösungen. In: *Psychotherapie und Sozialwissenschaft*, Vol. 1 (4), 265–280.
- Hinrichsen, H. (2017): Toward a renewed marginalization of the Palestinian refugees? Transformations of we-images, patterns of interpretation and established-outsider relations in the Palestinian society of the West Bank since the 1970s. In: Rosenthal, G./Bogner, A. (eds.): *Biographies in the Global South. Life stories embedded in figurations and discourses*. Frankfurt/Main: Campus, 237–258.
- Hirschauer, S. (1994): Towards a methodology of investigations into the strangeness of one's own culture. In: *Social Studies of Science*, Vol. 24, 335–346.
- Hirschauer, S. (2001): Ethnographisches Schreiben und die Schweigsamkeit des Sozialen. In: *Zeitschrift für Soziologie*, Vol. 30 (6), 249–541.
- Hirschauer, S./Amann, K. (eds.) (1997): *Die Befremdung der eigenen Kultur. Zur ethnographischen Herausforderung soziologischer Empirie*. Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp.
- Hitzler, R./Honer, A. (1988): Der lebensweltliche Forschungsansatz. In: *Neue Praxis*, Vol. 18 (6), 496–501.
- Hitzler, R./Honer, A. (1992): Hermeneutik als kultursoziologische Alternative. In: *Kultursoziologie*, Vol. 1 (2), 15–23; Vol. 1 (3), 99–103.
- Hitzler, R./Honer, A. (1997a) (eds.): *Sozialwissenschaftliche Hermeneutik*. Opladen: Leske + Budrich.

- Hitzler, R. / Honer, A. (1997b): Einleitung: Hermeneutik in der deutschsprachigen Soziologie heute. In: Hitzler, R. / Honer, A. (eds.): *Sozialwissenschaftliche Hermeneutik*. Opladen: Leske+ Budrich, 7–30.
- Hitzler, R. / Honer, A. / Maeder, Chr. (eds.) (1994): *Expertenwissen. Die institutionalisierte Kompetenz zur Konstruktion von Wirklichkeit*. Opladen: Westdeutscher Verlag.
- Hoffmann-Riem, Ch. (1980): Die Sozialforschung einer interpretativen Soziologie. In: *Kölner Zeitschrift für Soziologie und Sozialpsychologie (KZfSS)*, Vol. 32 (2), 339–371.
- Holstein, J. A. / Gubrium, J. F. (1995): *The active interview*. Thousand Oaks: Sage.
- Honer, A. (1985): Beschreibung einer Lebens-Welt. Zur Empirie des Bodybuilding. In: *Zeitschrift für Soziologie*, Vol. 2, 131–139.
- Honer, A. (1991): Die Perspektive eines Heimwerkers. Notizen zur Praxis lebensweltlicher Ethnographie. In: Garz, D. / Kraimer, K. (eds.): *Qualitativ-empirische Sozialforschung*. Opladen: Westdeutscher Verlag, 319–341.
- Honer, A. (1994): Einige Probleme lebensweltlicher Ethnographie. In: Schröer, N. (ed.): *Interpretative Sozialforschung*. Opladen: Westdeutscher Verlag, 85–106.
- Hopf, Ch. (1978): Die Pseudo-Exploration. Überlegungen zur Technik qualitativer Interviews in der Sozialforschung. In: *Zeitschrift für Soziologie*, Vol. 7 (2), 97–115.
- Hopf, Ch. (1979): Einleitung. In: Hopf, Ch. / Weingarten, E. (eds.): *Qualitative Sozialforschung*. Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 11–34.
- Hopf, Ch. (2001): Gewalt, Biographie, Medien. Qualitative Analysen zur subjektiven Bedeutung filmischer Gewaltdarstellungen. In: *Zeitschrift für Soziologie der Erziehung und Sozialisation (ZSE)*, Vol. 21 (2), 150–169.
- Hopf, Ch. (2004): Qualitative interviews. An overview. In: Flick, U. / Kardorff, E. v. / Steinke, I. (eds.) (2004): *A companion to qualitative research*. London: Sage, 203–208.
- Hopf, Ch. / Rieker, P. / Sanden-Marcus, M. / Schmidt, Ch. (1995): *Familie und Rechtsextremismus*. Weinheim: Juventa.
- Hurrelmann, K. (1989): *Human development and health*. New York: Springer.
- Hurrelmann, K. (1998): *Einführung in die Sozialisationstheorie*. Weinheim: Beltz.
- Hurrelmann, K. (2000): *Gesundheitssoziologie. Eine Einführung in sozialwissenschaftliche Theorien von Krankheitsprävention und Gesundheitsförderung*. Weinheim / München: Juventa.
- Husserl, E. (1931): *Ideas. General introduction to pure phenomenology*. New York: The Macmillan Company.
- Husserl, E. (1983): *Ideas pertaining to a pure phenomenology and to a phenomenological philosophy. First book. General introduction to a pure phenomenology*. The Hague: Nijhoff. Originally published in German 1913.
- Inowlocki, L. (2000): Doing being Jewish: Constitution of normality in families of Jewish displaced persons in Germany. In: Breckner, R. / Kalekin-Fishman,

- D./Miethe, I. (eds.): *Biographies and the division of Europe. Experience, action, and change on the 'Eastern Side'*. Opladen: Leske + Budrich, 159–178.
- Jäger, S. (2001a): *Kritische Diskursanalyse. Eine Einführung*. 3rd edition. Duisburg: DISS.
- Jäger, S. (2001b): *Discourse and Knowledge. Theoretical and methodological aspects of a critical discourse and dispositive analysis*. In: Wodak, R./Meyer, M. (eds.): *Methods of critical discourse analysis*. London: Sage, 32–62.
- Jahoda, M./Zeisel, H. (1974): *Marienthal. The sociography of an unemployed community*. New Jersey: Transaction Publishers.
- James, W. (1992): *Pragmatism*. In: Doris Olin (ed.): *William James. Pragmatism in focus*. London: Routledge, 13–130.
- Joas, H. (1985): *George Herbert Mead. A contemporary re-examination of his thought*. Cambridge: MIT Press.
- Josselson, R./Lieblich A. (eds.) (1993–1999): *The narrative study of lives*. Vol. 1–6. Thousand Oaks: Sage.
- Jüttemann, G. (1998): *Genetische Psychologie und Komparative Kasuistik*. In: Jüttemann, G./Thomae, H. (eds.): *Biographische Methoden in den Humanwissenschaften*. Weinheim: Psychologie Verlags Union, 111–131.
- Jüttemann, G./Thomae, H. (eds.) (1987): *Biographie und Psychologie*. Berlin: Springer.
- Jüttemann, G./Thomae, H. (eds.) (1998): *Biographische Methoden in den Humanwissenschaften*. Weinheim: Beltz.
- Kallmeyer, W./Schütze, F. (1977): *Zur Konstitution von Kommunikationsschemata*. In: Wegner, D. (ed.): *Gesprächsanalyse*. Hamburg: Buske, 159–274.
- Kaya, A. (2008): *Migration, migrant policies and changing cultures of belongings. Alevis from Turkey in Germany and the United States*. In: AICGS Advisor, June 27. Online: <http://www.aicgs.org/site/wp-content/uploads/2011/10/kaya.daad0608.pdf>.
- Kazmierska, K. (2002): *Narratives on World War II in Poland. When a life story is family history*. In: *The History of the Family*, Vol. 7 (2), 281–305.
- Kazmierska, K. (2012): *Biography and memory. The generational experience of the Shoah survivors*. Brighton: Academic Studies Press.
- Keller, R. (2001): *Wissenssoziologische Diskursanalyse*. In: Keller, R. et al. (eds.): *Handbuch sozialwissenschaftliche Diskurse. Theorien und Methoden*. Opladen: Leske + Budrich, 113–144.
- Keller, R. (2004): *Diskursforschung. Eine Einführung für SozialwissenschaftlerInnen*. Opladen: Leske + Budrich.
- Keller, R. (2005): *Analyzing discourse. An approach from the sociology of knowledge*. *Forum: Qualitative Social Research*, Vol. 6 (3), Art. 32. Doi: 10.17169/fqs-6.3.19.

- Keller, R. (2007): Diskurse und Dispositive analysieren. Die Wissenssoziologische Diskursanalyse als Beitrag zu einer wissensanalytischen Profilierung der Diskursforschung. In: *Forum: Qualitative Social Research*, Vol. 8 (2), Art. 19. Doi: 10.17169/fqs-8.2.243.
- Keller, R. (2011): The sociology of knowledge approach to discourse (SKAD). In: *Human Studies*, Vol. 34 (1), 43–65.
- Keller, R. (2013): *Doing discourse research. An introduction for social scientists*. London: Sage.
- Keller, R./Hirsland, A./Schneider, W./Viehöver, W. (eds.) (2001): *Handbuch Sozialwissenschaftliche Diskursanalyse*. Vol. 1. Theorien und Methoden. Opladen: Leske + Budrich.
- Keppler, A. (1994): *Tischgespräche. Über Formen kommunikativer Vergemeinschaftung am Beispiel der Konversation in Familien*. Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp.
- Kleining, G. (2001): Offenheit als Kennzeichen entdeckender Forschung. In: *Kontrapunkt*, Vol. 1: Methodologie qualitativer Sozialforschung. Münster: Kontrapunkt, 27–36.
- Knoblauch, H. (2004): Die Video-Interaktions-Analyse. In: *Sozialersinn*, Vol. 5 (1), 123–138.
- Knoblauch, H. (2005): Focused ethnography. In: *Forum: Qualitative Social Research*, Vol. 6 (3), Art. 44. Doi: 10.17169/fqs-6.3.20.
- Knoblauch, H. (2008): Wissens-Präsentationen. Zeigen und Wissen bei Powerpoint-Präsentationen. In: Lachmann, R. et al. (eds.): *Rhetorik als kulturelle Praxis*. München: Fink, 255–272.
- Knoblauch, H. (2013): *Powerpoint, communication, and the knowledge society*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Knoblauch, H./Baer, A./Laurier, E./Petschke, S./Schnettler, B.(eds.) (2008): *Visual analysis. New developments in the interpretative analysis of video and photography*. Thematic issue of: *Forum: Qualitative Social Research*, Vol. 9 (3). Online: <http://www.qualitative-research.net/index.php/fqs/issue/view/11>.
- Knoblauch, H./Schnettler, B. (2012): Videography. Analyzing video data as a 'focused' ethnographic and hermeneutical exercise. In: *Qualitative Research*, Vol. 12 (3), 334–356.
- Knoblauch, H./Schnettler, B./Raab, J./Soeffner, H.-G. (eds.) (2006): *Video analysis. Methodology and methods. Qualitative audiovisual data analysis in sociology*. Frankfurt/Main: Lang.
- Knoblauch, H./Tuma, R./Schnettler, B. (2014a): *Videography. Introduction to interpretive videoanalysis of social situations*. Frankfurt: PL Academic Research.
- Knoblauch, H./Tuma, R./Schnettler, B. (2014b): *Video analysis and videography*. In: Flick, U. (ed.): *The Sage handbook of qualitative data analysis*. London: Sage, 435–449.

- Köckeis-Stangl, E. (1980): Methoden der Sozialisationsforschung. In: Hurrelmann, K./Ulich, D. (eds.): Handbuch der Sozialisationsforschung. Weinheim: Juventa, 322–369.
- Koffka, K. ([1935] 1963): Principles of gestalt psychology. New York: Harbinger.
- Kohlberg, L. (1976): Moral stage scoring manual. Part I. Introduction to interviewing and scoring. Harvard University, Center for Moral Education. Cambridge/Mass.
- Kohli, M. (ed.) (1978): Soziologie des Lebenslaufs. Darmstadt: Luchterhand.
- Kohli, M./Robert, G. (eds.) (1984): Biographie und soziale Wirklichkeit. Stuttgart: Metzler.
- Kohli, M. (1986a): Biographical research in the German language area. In: Dulciewski, Z. (ed.): A commemorative book in Honor of Florian Znaniecki on the centenary of his birth. Poznan, 91–110.
- Kohli, M. (1986b): Social organization and subjective construction of the life course. In: Sorensen, A. B./Weiner, F. E./Sherrod, L. R. (eds.): Human development and the life course. Hillsdale: Lawrence Erlbaum, 271–292.
- Kon, I. S. (1991): Universale und gesellschaftsspezifische Determinanten der Lebensphase Jugend in der Sowjetunion. In: Melzer, W./Heitmeyer, W./Liegle, L./Zinnecker, J. (eds.): Osteuropäische Jugend im Wandel. Weinheim: Juventa, 28–35.
- Köttig, M. (2004): Lebensgeschichten rechtsextrem orientierter Mädchen und junger Frauen. Biographische Verläufe im Kontext der Familien- und Gruppendynamik. Gießen: Psychosozial Verlag.
- Köttig, M. (2005): Triangulation von Fallrekonstruktionen: Biographie- und Interaktionsanalysen. In: Völter, B. et al. (eds.): Biographieforschung im Diskurs. Wiesbaden: Springer, 65–83.
- Köttig, M. (2009): Constructions of collective belongings through art by migrants from Cuba in Germany and South Florida. In: Forum: Qualitative Social Research, Vol. 10 (3), Art. 31. Doi: 10.17169/fqs-10.3.1386.
- Köttig, M. (2016): The causes of violent actions by young women. In: Santos, H./Köttig, M. (eds.): Mulheres e violência. Special issue of: Civitas – Revista de Ciências Sociais, Vol. 16 (1), 8–25. Doi: 10.15448/1984-7289.2016.1.24051.
- Köttig, M./Bitzan, R./Petö, A. (2017): Gender and far right politics in Europe. London: Macmillan Palgrave.
- Köttig, M./Rätz, R. (2017): Rekonstruktive Fallbearbeitung in der Kinder- und Jugendhilfe. Dialogische Biographiearbeit in institutionellen Kontexten. In: Völter, B./Reichmann, U. (eds.): Rekonstruktiv denken und handeln. Rekonstruktive Soziale Arbeit als professionelle Praxis. Opladen: Barbara Budrich, 95–109.
- Kracauer, S. (1942): Propaganda and the Nazi war film. New York: Museum of Modern Art Film Library.

- Kracauer, S. (1947): *From Caligari to Hitler. A psychological history of the German film.* New York: Princeton University Press.
- Kracauer, S. (1952): The challenge of qualitative content analysis. In: *Public Opinion Quarterly*, Vol. 16, 631–642.
- Kris, E./Speier, H. (1944): *German radio propaganda.* London: Oxford University Press.
- Labov, W./Waleztky, J. (1967): Narrative analysis. Oral versions of personal experiences. In: Helms, J. (ed.): *Essays on the verbal and visual arts.* Seattle: University of Washington Press.
- Laclau, E./Mouffe, C. (1985): *Hegemony and socialist strategy. Towards a radical democratic politics.* London: Verso.
- Lamnek, S. (1995): *Qualitative Sozialforschung.* 2 Volumes. München: Psychologie Verlag-Union.
- Lasswell, H. D. (1927): *Propaganda technique in the World War.* London: Kegan Paul.
- Lasswell, H. D./Leites, N./Associates (1949): *Languages of politics. Studies in quantitative semantics.* Cambridge: M.I.T. Press.
- Leiprecht, R./Inowlocki, L./Marvakis, A./Novak, J. (1997): Racism in the new Germany. Examining the causes, looking for answers. In: Hazekamp, J. L./Popple, K. (eds.): *Racism in Europe. A challenge for youth policy and youth work.* London: University College London Press.
- Lewin, K. ([1927] 1992): Law and experiment in psychology. In: *Science in Context*, Vol. 5 (2), 385–416.
- Lewin, K. (1931): The conflict between Aristotelian and Galileian modes of thought. In: *Contemporary Psychology. Journal of General Psychology*, Vol. 5 (2), 141–177.
- Lindner, R. (1990): *Die Entdeckung der Stadtkultur. Soziologie aus der Erfahrung der Reportage.* Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp.
- Lindner, R. (1996): *The reportage of urban culture. Robert Park and the Chicago School.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Lindner, R. (2000): Robert E. Park (1864–1944). In: Kaesler, D. (ed.): *Klassiker der Soziologie*, Vol. 1, 213–229.
- Link, J. (2003): Kulturwissenschaft, Interdiskurs, Kulturrevolution. In: *KultuR-Revolution. Zeitschrift für angewandte Diskurstheorie*, Issue 45/46, 10–23.
- Link, J. (2005): Warum Diskurse nicht von personalen Subjekten ‚ausgehandelt‘ werden. Von der Diskurs- zur Interdiskurstheorie. In: Keller, R./Hirsland, A./Schneider, W./Viehöver, W. (eds.): *Die diskursive Konstruktion von Wirklichkeit. Zum Verhältnis von Wissenssoziologie und Diskursforschung.* Konstanz: UVK, 77–100.
- Link, J./Link-Heer, U. (1990): Diskurs/Interdiskurs und Literaturanalyse. In: *Zeitschrift für Linguistik und Literaturwissenschaft (LiLi)*, Vol. 77, 88–99.

- Lisch, R. (1978): Geschichte der Inhaltsanalyse. In: Lisch, R. / Kriz, J. (eds.): Grundlagen und Modelle der Inhaltsanalyse. Bestandsaufnahme und Kritik. Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rowohlt, 15–28.
- Litvak-Hirsch, T. / Bar-On, D. / Chaitin, J. (2003): Whose house is this? Dilemmas of identity construction in the Israeli-Palestinian context. In: Peace and Conflict. Journal of Peace Psychology, Vol. 9 (2), 127–148.
- Loch, U. (2004): Sexualisierte Gewalt und Nationalsozialismus. Biographien von Töchtern aus nationalsozialistischen Täter- und Mitläuferfamilien. PhD. diss, University of Kassel, Faculty of Social Work and Social Welfare.
- Löwenthal, L. (1944): Biographies in popular magazines. In: Lazarsfeld, P. / Stanton, F. (eds.): Radio Research, 1942–1943. New York: Duel, Sloan and Pearce, 507–548.
- Luckmann, Th. (2006): Some remarks on scores in multimodal sequential analysis. In: Knoblauch, H. et al. (eds.): Video analysis. Methodology and methods. Frankfurt/Main: Lang, 29–34.
- Lüders, Ch. (1995): Von der teilnehmenden Beobachtung zur ethnographischen Beschreibung. In: König, E. / Zedler, P. (eds.): Bilanz qualitativer Forschung. Vol. 2: Methoden. Weinheim: Deutscher Studienverlag, 311–342.
- Lüders, Ch. (2004): Field observation and ethnography. In: Flick, U. / Kardorff, E. v. / Steinke, I. (eds.) (2004): A companion to qualitative research. London: Sage, 222–230.
- Luff, P. / Hindmarsh, J. / Heath, Ch. (eds.) (2000): Workplace studies. Recovering work practice and informing system design. Cambridge: University Press.
- Lutz, H. (2011): The new maids. Transnational women and the care economy. London: Zed Books.
- Malinowski, B. (1948): Magic, science, and religion, and other essays. Boston: Beacon Press.
- Mamul, N. (2009): Fragmented collective memory and negative Belarusian identity. In: Rosenthal, G. / Bogner, A. (eds.): Ethnicity, belonging and biography. Ethnographical and biographical perspectives. Münster: LIT, 145–160.
- Mangold, W. (1960): Gegenstand und Methode des Gruppendiskussionsverfahrens. Frankfurt/Main: Europäische Verlagsanstalt.
- Mannheim, K. (1928): Das Problem der Generationen. In: Kölner Vierteljahreshefte für Soziologie, 7 (2), 157–185; 7 (3), 309–330.
- Mannheim, K. (1952): The problem of generations. In: Mannheim, K. / Kecskemeti, P. (eds.): Essays on the sociology of knowledge. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 276–320. Originally published in German 1928.
- Mannheim, K. (1995): Wissenssoziologie. In: Mannheim, K.: Ideologie und Utopie. 8th edition. Frankfurt/Main: Klostermann, 227–267.
- Marotzki, W. (2004): Qualitative biographical research. In: Flick, U. / Kardorff, E. v. / Steinke, I. (eds.): A companion to qualitative research. London: Sage, 101–107.

- Matthes, J./Pfeifenberger, A./Stosberg, M. (1981) (eds.): *Biographie in handlungswissenschaftlicher Perspektive*. Nürnberg: Sozialwissenschaftliches Forschungszentrum.
- Mayring, Ph. (1983): *Qualitative Inhaltsanalyse*. Weinheim: Beltz.
- Mayring, Ph. (1996): *Einführung in die qualitative Sozialforschung*. Weinheim: Beltz.
- Mayring, Ph. (2004): *Qualitative content analysis*. In: Flick, U./Kardorff, E. v./Steinke, I. (eds.): *A companion to qualitative research*. London: Sage, 266–269.
- Mayring, Ph./König, J./Birk, N. (1996): *Computerunterstützte Qualitative Inhaltsanalyse von Berufsbiographien arbeitsloser LehrerInnen in den Neuen Bundesländern*. In: Bos, W./Tarnai, Ch. (eds.): *Computergestützte Inhaltsanalyse in der Empirischen Pädagogik, Psychologie und Soziologie*. Münster: Waxmann, 105–120.
- McAdams, D. (1993): *The stories we live by. Personal myths and the making of the self*. London: Guilford Press.
- McCall, G./Simmons, J. L. (eds.) (1969): *Issues in participant observation*. Menlo Park: Addison-Wesley.
- McGoldrick, M./Gerson, R. (1985): *Genograms in family assessment*. New York: Norton.
- Mead, G. H. (1934): *Mind, self and society. From the standpoint of a social behaviorist*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Meltzer, B. N./Petras, J. W./Reynolds, L. (1975): *Symbolic interactionism*. London: Routledge.
- Merton, R. K./Kendall P. L. (1946): *The focused interview*. In: *American Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 51 (6), 541–557.
- Meuser, M./Nagel, U. (1991): *ExpertInneninterviews. Vielfach erprobt, wenig bedacht. Ein Beitrag zur qualitativen Methodendiskussion*. In: Garz, D./Kraimer, K. (eds.): *Qualitativ-empirische Sozialforschung*. Opladen: Westdeutscher Verlag, 441–471.
- Meuser, M./Nagel, U. (2009): *The expert interview and changes in knowledge production*. In: Bogner, A./Littig, B./Menz, W. (eds.): *Interviewing experts*. Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 17–42.
- Miethe, I. (1999): *Frauen in der DDR-Opposition. Lebens- und kollektivgeschichtliche Verläufe in einer Frauenfriedensgruppe*. Opladen: Leske + Budrich.
- Miethe, I. (2002a): *Womens movements in unified Germany. Experiences and expectations of East German women*. In: Roth, S./Lennox, S. (eds.): *Feminist Movements in a Globalization World. German and American Perspectives*. Washington D.C.: AICGS, 43–59.
- Miethe, I. (2002b): *East German dissident biographies in the context of family history. Interdependence of methodological approach and empirical results*. In: *The History of the Family*, Vol. 7 (4), 207–224.



- Miethe, I. (2003): Vom Ende der Parteilichkeit zur Parteilichkeit ohne Ende. Forschungsethische Probleme bei der Arbeit mit hermeneutischen Fallrekonstruktionen. In: Hilbig, A./Kajatin, C./Miethe, I. (eds.): *Frauen und Gewalt. Interdisziplinäre Untersuchungen zu geschlechtsgebundener Gewalt in Theorie und Praxis*. Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 231–248.
- Miethe, I./Soremski, R. (2016): Educational advancement in three generations. East and West Germany in comparison. In: *Journal of Education and Human Development*, Vol. 5 (4), 55–64. Doi: 10.15640/jehd.v5n4a6.
- Mikl-Horke, G. (1997): *Soziologie*. München: Oldenbourg.
- Miller, R. (ed.) (2005): *Biographical research methods*. 4 Volumes. London: Sage.
- Moore, Y. (2010): The family dialogue. A family who do not ask. In: Rosenthal, G. (ed.): *The Holocaust in three generations. Families of victims and perpetrators of the Nazi regime*. 2nd revised edition. Opladen: Barbara Budrich, 113–121.
- Moustakas, C. (1994): *Phenomenological research*. Thousand Oaks: Sage.
- Nedelmann, B. (2002): Georg Simmel (1855–1918). In: Kaesler, D. (ed.): *Klassiker der Soziologie*. Vol. 1. München: Beck, 127–149.
- Nunner-Winkler, G. (1989): Wissen und Wollen. Ein Beitrag zur frühkindlichen Moralentwicklung. In: Honneth, A./McCarthy, Th./Offe, C./Wellmer, A. (eds.): *Zwischenbetrachtungen. Im Prozess der Aufklärung*. Jürgen Habermas zum 60. Geburtstag. Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp, 574–600.
- O'Reilly, K. (2005): *Ethnographic methods*. London: Routledge.
- Oevermann, U./Konau, E. (1980): *Struktureigenschaften sozialisatorischer und therapeutischer Interaktion*. Unpublished manuscript. Frankfurt/Main.
- Oevermann, U. (1983): Zur Sache. Die Bedeutung von Adornos methodologischem Selbstverständnis für die Begründung einer materialen soziologischen Strukturanalyse. In: Friedeburg, L.v./Habermas, J. (eds.): *Adorno-Konferenz 1983*. Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp, 234–289.
- Oevermann, U. (1988): Eine exemplarische Fallrekonstruktion zum Typus versozialwissenschaftlicher Identitätsformation. In: Brose, H.-G./Hildenbrand, B. (eds.): *Vom Ende des Individuums zur Individualität ohne Ende*. Opladen: Leske + Budrich, 243–286.
- Oevermann, U. (2000): Die Methode der Fallrekonstruktion in der Grundlagenforschung sowie der klinischen und pädagogischen Praxis. In: Kraimer, K. (ed.): *Die Fallrekonstruktion. Sinnverstehen in der sozialwissenschaftlichen Forschung*. Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp, 58–156.
- Oevermann, U./Allert, T./Konau, E. (1980): Zur Logik der Interpretation von Interviewtexten. In: Heinze, Th./Klusemann, H.-W./Soeffner, H.-G. (eds.): *Interpretationen einer Bildungsgeschichte*. Bensheim: PÄD extra, 15–69.
- Oevermann, U./Allert, T./Konau, E./Krambeck, J. (1979): Die Methodologie einer objektiven Hermeneutik und ihre allgemeine forschungslogische Bedeutung in den Sozialwissenschaften. In: Soeffner, H.-G. (ed.): *Interpre-*

- tative Verfahren in den Sozial- und Textwissenschaften. Stuttgart: Metzler, 352–434.
- Oevermann, U. / Allert, T. / Konau, E. / Krambeck, J. (1987): Structures of meaning and objective hermeneutics. In: Meja, V. / Misgeld, D. / Stehr, N. (eds.): *Modern German sociology*. New York: Columbia University Press, 436–459.
- Oevermann, U. / Allert, T. / Gripp, H. / Konau, E. / Krambeck, J. / Schütze, Y. (1975): *Die Beobachtung innerfamiliärer Interaktionen als Methode der Sozialisationsforschung*. Unpublished manuscript.
- Oevermann, U. / Schuster, L. / Simm, A. (1985): *Zum Problem der Perseveranz in Delikttyp und modus operandi*. Wiesbaden: BKA-Forschungsreihe.
- Peirce, Ch. S. ([1933] 1980): *Collected papers*. In: Hartshorne, Ch. / Weiss, P. (eds.): *Collected papers of Charles Sanders Peirce*. Cambridge: Belknap.
- Pette, C. (2001): *Psychologie des Romanlesens. Lesestrategien zur subjektiven Aneignung eines literarischen Textes*. Weinheim: Juventa.
- Phoenix, A. (2009): Transforming transnational biographical memories. Adult accounts of 'non-normative' serial migrant childhoods. In: Rosenthal, G. / Bogner, A. (eds.): *Ethnicity, belonging and biography. Ethnographical and biographical perspectives*. Münster: LIT Verlag, 267–284.
- Pineda Olivieri, J. H. (2017): *The transformational potential of higher education inclusion. Biographical trajectories of students from disadvantaged environments in Venezuela*. Göttingen: University Press.
- Plato, A. v. (1998): *Erfahrungsgeschichte. Von der Etablierung der Oral History*. In: Jüttemann, G. / Thomae, H. (eds.): *Biographische Methoden in den Humanwissenschaften*. Weinheim: Beltz, 60–74.
- Pohn-Weidinger, M. (2014): *Heroisierte Opfer. Bearbeitungs- und Handlungsstrukturen von ‚Trümmerfrauen‘ in Wien*. Wiesbaden: Springer.
- Pohn-Lauggas, M. (2016): *Biography and discourse. A biography and discourse analysis combining case study on women's involvement in National Socialism*. In: *Current Sociology*, Vol. 65 (7), 1094–1111.
- Polanyi, M. (1967): *The tacit dimension*. New York: Anchor Books.
- Pollock, F. (1955): *Gruppenexperiment. Ein Studienbericht*. In: *Frankfurter Beiträge zur Soziologie*. Vol. 2. Frankfurt / Main: Europäische Verlagsanstalt.
- Popitz, H. / Bahrtdt, H. P. / Jüres, E. A. / Kesting, H. (1957): *Das Gesellschaftsbild des Arbeiters*. Tübingen: Mohr.
- Psathas, G. (1995): *Conversation analysis. The study of talk in interaction*. London: Sage.
- Psathas, G. (2005): *The ideal type in Weber and Schutz*. In: Endress, M. / Psathas, G. / Nasu, H. (eds.): *Exploration of the life-world. Continuing dialogues with Alfred Schutz*. Dordrecht: Springer, 143–169.
- Raab, J. (2008): *Visuelle Wissenssoziologie. Theoretische Konzeptionen und materiale Analysen*. Konstanz: UVK Verlagsgesellschaft.
- Raab, J. / Tänzler, D. (2006): *Video hermeneutics*. In: Knoblauch, H. et al. (eds.): *Video analysis. Methodology and methods*. Frankfurt / Main: Lang, 85–97.

- Ransiek, A. (2016): Zum Verhältnis von Interaktion, Narration und Diskurs. Implikationen für eine Verbindung von Diskursanalyse und biographischen Fallrekonstruktionen. In: Bosancic, S./Keller, R. (eds.): *Perspektiven wissenssoziologischer Diskursforschung*. Wiesbaden: Springer VS, 279–297.
- Rätz, R./Völter, B. (2015) (eds.): *Wörterbuch Rekonstruktive Soziale Arbeit. Rekonstruktive Forschung in der Sozialen Arbeit*, Vol. 11. Opladen: Barbara Budrich.
- Reddemann, L./Sachsse, U. (1996): Imaginative Psychotherapieverfahren zur Behandlung in der Kindheit traumatisierter Patientinnen und Patienten. In: *Psychotherapeut*, Vol. 41, 169–174.
- Reichertz, J. (1986): Probleme qualitativer Sozialforschung. Zur Entwicklungsgeschichte der Objektiven Hermeneutik. Frankfurt/Main: Campus.
- Reichertz, J. (2003): Die Abduktion in der qualitativen Sozialforschung. Opladen: Leske + Budrich.
- Reichertz, J. (2004): Objective hermeneutics and hermeneutic sociology of knowledge. In: Flick, U./von Kardoff, E./Steinke, I. (eds.): *A companion to qualitative research*. London: Sage, 290–295.
- Reichertz, J. (2014): Induction, deduction, abduction. In: Flick, U. (ed.): *The Sage handbook of qualitative data analysis*. London: Sage.
- Reichertz, J./Schröer, N. (1994): Erheben, Auswerten, Darstellen. Konturen einer hermeneutischen Wissenssoziologie. In: Schröer, N. (ed.): *Interpretative Sozialforschung*. Opladen: Westdeutscher Verlag, 56–84.
- Ricœur, P. (1971): The model of the text. Meaningful action considered as a text. In: *Social Research*, Vol. 38, 529–562.
- Riemann, G. (1987): *Das Fremdwerden der eigenen Biographie*. München: Fink.
- Riemann, G. (2006): An introduction to ‘doing biographical research’. In: *Historical Social Research*, Vol. 31 (3), 6–28.
- Riemann, G./Schütze, F. (1991): ‘Trajectory’ as a basic theoretical concept for analyzing suffering and disorderly social processes. In: Maines, D. R. (ed.): *Social organization and social processes. Essays in honor of Anselm Strauss*. Hawthorne: de Gruyter, 333–347.
- Ritsert, J. (1972): *Inhaltsanalyse und Ideologiekritik*. Frankfurt/Main: Athenäum.
- Rogers, C. R. (1951): *Client-centered therapy*. Boston: Houghton-Mifflin.
- Rosenthal, G. (1981): Prosoziales Handeln. Entwicklungspsychologische Pilotstudie bei elf- bis sechzehnjährigen Schülern. In: Briechle, R./Väth-Szusdziara, R. (eds.): *Interpersonale und politische Kompetenz*. Universität Konstanz, *Forschungsberichte* 40, 330–360.
- Rosenthal, G. (1987): ‚Wenn alles in Scherben fällt...‘. Von Leben und Sinnwelt der Kriegsgeneration. Opladen: Leske + Budrich.
- Rosenthal, G. (1988): Leben mit der soldatischen Vergangenheit in zwei Weltkriegen. Ein Mann blendet seine Kriegserlebnisse aus. In: *Bios*, Vol. 1 (2), 27–38.

- Rosenthal, G. (1991): German war memories. Narrability and the biographical and social functions of remembering. In: *Oral History*, Vol. 19 (2), 34–41.
- Rosenthal, G. (1992): Antisemitismus im lebensgeschichtlichen Kontext. Soziale Prozesse der Dehumanisierung und Schuldzuweisung. In: *Österreichische Zeitschrift für Geschichtswissenschaften / Austrian Journal of Historical Studies (ÖZG)*, Vol. 3 (4), 449–479.
- Rosenthal, G. (1993): Reconstruction of life stories. Principles of selection in generating stories for narrative biographical interviews. In: *The Narrative Study of Lives*, Vol. 1 (1), 59–91.
- Rosenthal, G. (1995): *Erlebte und erzählte Lebensgeschichte*. Frankfurt / Main: Campus.
- Rosenthal, G. (1997): Zur interaktionellen Konstitution von Generationen. Generationenabfolgen in Familien von 1890–1970 in Deutschland. In: Mansel, J. / Rosenthal, G. / Tölke, A. (eds.): *Generationen-Beziehungen: Austausch und Tradierung*. Opladen: Westdeutscher Verlag, 57–73.
- Rosenthal, G. (2000): Social transformation in the context of familial experience. Biographical consequences of a denied past in the Soviet Union. In: Breckner, R. / Kalekin-Fischman, D. / Miethe, I. (eds.): *Biographies and the division of Europe*. Opladen: Leske + Budrich, 115–138.
- Rosenthal, G. (2002): Erzählte Lebensgeschichten zwischen Fiktion und Wirklichkeit. Zum Phänomen ‚falscher‘ Identitäten. In: Diekmann, I. / Schoeps, J. H. (eds.): *Das Wilkomirski-Syndrom. Eingebildete Erinnerungen*. Zürich: Pendo, 216–235.
- Rosenthal, G. (2003): The healing effects of storytelling. On the conditions of curative storytelling in the context of research and counseling. In: *Qualitative Inquiry*, Vol. 9 (6), 915–933.
- Rosenthal, G. (2004): Biographical method. Biographical research. In: Seale, C. / Gobo, G. / Gubrium, J. F. / Silverman, D. (eds.): *Qualitative research practice*. London: Sage, 48–64.
- Rosenthal, G. (2005): Veiling and denying the past. The dialogue in families of Holocaust survivors and families of Nazi perpetrators. In: Steinert, J.-D. / Weber-Newth, I. (eds.): *Beyond camps and forced labour*. Hamburg: Körber, 478–490 (Reprint from 2002).
- Rosenthal, G. (2006): The narrated life story. On the interrelation between experience, memory and narration. In: Milnes, K. / Horrocks, C. / Kelly, N. / Roberts, B. / Robinson, D. (eds.): *Narrative, memory and knowledge. Representations, aesthetics and contexts*. Huddersfield: University of Huddersfield, 1–16.
- Rosenthal, G. (ed.) (2010a): *The Holocaust in three generations. Families of victims and perpetrators of the Nazi regime*. 2nd revised edition. Opladen: Barbara Budrich.
- Rosenthal, G. (2010b): National Socialism and anti-Semitism in intergenerational dialogue. In: Rosenthal, G. (ed.): *The Holocaust in three generations*.

- Families of victims and perpetrators of the Nazi regime. 2nd revised edition. Opladen: Barbara Budrich, 305–314.
- Rosenthal, G. (2010c): Passing the guilt on to the grandchildren: The Sonntag family. In: Rosenthal, G. (ed.): The Holocaust in three generations. Families of victims and perpetrators of the Nazi regime. 2nd revised edition. Opladen: Barbara Budrich, 315–332.
- Rosenthal, G. (2010d): Veiling and denying. In: Rosenthal, G. (ed.): The Holocaust in three generations. Families of victims and perpetrators of the Nazi regime. 2nd revised edition. Opladen: Barbara Budrich, 361–372.
- Rosenthal, G. (ed.) (2016a): Established and outsiders at the same time. Self-images and we-images of Palestinians in the West Bank and in Israel. Göttingen: University Press.
- Rosenthal, G. (2016b): The social construction of individual and collective memory. In: Sebald, G./Wagle, J. (eds.): Theorizing social memories. Concepts, temporality, functions. London: Routledge, 32–55.
- Rosenthal, G./Bahl, E./Worm, A. (2017): Illegalized migration courses from the perspective of biographical research and figurational sociology. The land border between Spain and Morocco. In: Rosenthal, G./Bogner, A. (eds.): Biographies in the Global South. Frankfurt/Main: Campus, 103–159.
- Rosenthal, G./Bogner, A. (eds.) (2017a): Biographies in the Global South. Life stories embedded in figurations and discourses. Frankfurt/Main: Campus.
- Rosenthal, G./Bogner, A. (2017b): Introduction. In: Rosenthal, G./Bogner, A. (eds.): Biographies in the Global South. Life stories embedded in figurations and discourses. Frankfurt/Main: Campus, 9–14.
- Rosenthal, G./Köttig, M./Witte, N./Blezinger, A. (2006): Biographisch-narrative Gespräche mit Jugendlichen. Chancen für das Selbst- und Fremdverstehen. Leverkusen: Barbara Budrich.
- Rosenthal, G./Stephan, V. (2009): Shifting balances of power and changing constructions of ethnic belonging. Three-generation families in Germany with ethnic German members from the former Soviet Union. In: Rosenthal, G./Bogner, A. (eds.): Ethnicity, belonging and biography. Ethnographical and biographical perspectives. Münster: LIT, 347–370.
- Rosenwald, G. C./Ochberg, R. L. (eds.) (1992): Storied lives. The cultural politics of self-understandings. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
- Rossi, P. (1987): Vom Historismus zur historischen Sozialwissenschaft. Heidelberger Max Weber-Vorlesungen 1985. Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp.
- Sachsse, U. (1999): Selbstverletzendes Verhalten. Psychodynamik. Psychotherapie. Das Trauma, die Dissoziation und ihre Behandlung. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht.
- Sacks, H. (1992): Lectures on conversation. 2 Vols. Edited by G. Jefferson, with an introduction by E. A. Schegloff. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Santos, H. (2010): Adolescents and experiences with violence. Making sense of subjective interpretations of *life-world*. In: Vibrant – Virtual Brazilian An-

- thropology, Vol. 7 (2), 135–165. Online: <http://www.vibrant.org.br/issues/v7n2/hermilio-santos-adolescents-and-experiences-with-violence/>.
- Santos, H. (2015): Biography and action. A Schutzian perspective to life-world. In: Società Mutamento Politica – Rivista Italiana di Sociologia (SMP), Vol. 6 (12), 231–243. Doi: 10.13128/SMP-17856.
- Santos, H. (2016): On biography. A Schutzian perspective. In: Schutzian Research, Vol. 8, 163–178.
- Schäfer, Th./Völter, B. (2005): Subjekt-Positionen. Foucault und die Biographieforschung. In: Völter, B. et al. (eds.): Biographieforschung im Diskurs. Wiesbaden: Springer, 161–188.
- Schatzman, L./Strauss, A. L. (1973): Field research. Strategies for a natural sociology. Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall.
- Schiebel, M. (2000): Extreme right attitudes in the biographies of West German youth. In: Chamberlayne, P./Bornat, J./Wengraf, T. (eds.): The turn to biographical methods in social science. Comparative issues and examples. London: Routledge, 214–228.
- Schiebel, M./Robel, Y. (2011): Using press photographs in the construction of political life stories. In Thomson, A./Freund, A. (eds.): Oral history and photography. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 115–130.
- Schneider, G. (1987): Interaktion auf der Intensivstation. Zum Umgang des Pflegepersonals mit hilflosen Patienten. Berlin: Michael Ernst-Pörksen.
- Schnettler, B./Knoblauch, H. (eds.) (2007): Powerpoint-Präsentationen. Neue Formen der gesellschaftlichen Kommunikation von Wissen. Konstanz: UVK Verlagsgesellschaft.
- Schröder, N. (ed.) (1994): Interpretative Sozialforschung. Opladen: Westdeutscher Verlag.
- Schuhler, P. (1979): Entwicklung sozialer Kognitionen in der Schule. Bericht über ein Forschungsprojekt. In: Schön, B./Hurrelmann, K. (eds.): Schulalltag und Empirie. Weinheim: Beltz, 131–143.
- Schuhler, P. (1984): Perspektivenübernahme im Handlungsvollzug. Konzeption und Evaluation eines Interventionsprogramms. PhD. diss., Technische Universität Berlin.
- Schulze, H. (2006): Migrieren. Arbeiten. Krankwerden. Eine biographietheoretische Untersuchung. Bielefeld: Transcript Verlag.
- Schulze, H. (2009a): Illness in the context of biography and migration. From biographical research to cross-cultural reflexions in social work practice. In: Fachbereich Sozialwesen (ed.): Migration and gender. Challenges for social work, communities and social policy. Wiesbaden: Fachhochschule, 19–27.
- Schulze, H. (2009b): From biographical research to cross-cultural competencies in counselling. Establishing cross-cultural professionalism in social work. In: Tiltai – Bridges – Brücken, Vol. 46 (1), 115–124.
- Schütz, A. (1945): On multiple realities. In: Philosophy and Phenomenological Research, Vol. 37 (5), 533–576.

- Schütz, A. (1962): Common-sense and scientific interpretation of human action. In: Alfred Schuetz, *Collected Papers*. Vol. 1. The Hague: Nijhoff.
- Schütz, A. (1967): *The phenomenology of the social world*. Evanston: Northwestern University Press. Originally published in German 1932.
- Schütze, F. (1976): Zur Hervorlockung und Analyse von Erzählungen thematisch relevanter Geschichten im Rahmen soziologischer Feldforschung. In: Arbeitsgruppe Bielefelder Soziologen. *Kommunikative Sozialforschung*. München: Fink, 159–260.
- Schütze, F. (1977): Die Technik des narrativen Interviews in Interaktionsfeldstudien. *Arbeitsberichte und Forschungsmaterialien No. 1*, Universität Bielefeld, Fakultät für Soziologie.
- Schütze, F. (1978): Was ist ‚kommunikative Sozialforschung?‘. In: Gaertner, A./ Hering, S. (eds.): *Modellversuch ‚Soziale Studiengänge‘ an der GhK*, Materialien 12: Regionale Sozialforschung. Kassel: Gesamthochschulbibliothek, 117–131.
- Schütze, F. (1983): Biographieforschung und narratives Interview. In: *Neue Praxis*, Vol. 3, 283–293.
- Schütze, F. (1987): Symbolischer Interaktionismus. In: *Sociolinguistics*, Vol. 1, Berlin: de Gruyter.
- Schütze, F. (2007a): Biography analysis on the empirical base of autobiographical narratives. How to analyse autobiographical narrative interviews, Part I. In: INVITE – Biographical counselling in rehabilitative vocational training. Further education curriculum 1, Module B.2.1. Online: <http://www.uni-magdeburg.de/zsm/projekt/biographical/1/B2.1.pdf>.
- Schütze, F. (2007b): Biography analysis on the empirical base of autobiographical narratives. How to analyse autobiographical narrative interviews, Part II. In: INVITE – Biographical counselling in rehabilitative vocational training. Further education curriculum, Module B.2.2. Online: <http://www.uni-magdeburg.de/zsm/projekt/biographical/1/B2.2.pdf>.
- Schütze, F. (2008): Biography analysis on the empirical basis of autobiographical narratives. How to analyse autobiographical narrative interviews. In: *European Studies on Inequalities and Social Cohesion* (1/2), 153–242, 243–298; (3/4), 6–77.
- Schütze, F. (2014): Autobiographical accounts of war experiences. An outline for the analysis of topically focused autobiographical texts. Using the example of the ‘Robert Rasmus’ account in Studs Terkel’s Book ‘The Good War’. In: *Qualitative Sociology Review*, Vol. 10 (1), 224–283.
- Seale, C. (1999): *The quality of qualitative research*. London: Sage.
- Sebeok, Th./Umiker-Sebeok, J. (1985): ‚Sie kennen ja meine Methode‘ – Ein Vergleich von Charles S. Peirce und Sherlock Holmes. In: Eco, U./Sebeok, Th. (eds.): *Der Zirkel oder im Zeichen der Drei*. München: Fink, 28–87.
- Shaw, C. R. (1930): *The Jack-Roller. A delinquent boy’s own story*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

- Sieder, R. (1999): *Brüchiges Leben. Biographien in sozialen Systemen*. Wien: Turia + Kant.
- Silverman, D. (1993): *Interpreting qualitative data. Methods for analysing talk, text and interaction*. London: Sage.
- Simmel, G. (2008): The problem of sociology. In: Frisby, D. P. (ed.): *Gesamtausgabe 18. Englischsprachige Veröffentlichungen: 1893–1910*. Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp.
- Simon, F. (1972): Sculpting the family. In: *Family Process*, Vol. 11 (1), 49–57.
- Siouti, I.: (2017): Biography as a theoretical and methodological key concept in transnational migration studies. In: Goodson, I. / Antikainen, A. / Sikes, P. / Andrews, M. (eds.): *The routledge international handbook on narrative and life history*. New York: Routledge, 179–189.
- Soeffner, H.-G. (1982): Statt einer Einleitung: Prämissen einer sozialwissenschaftlichen Hermeneutik. In: Soeffner, H.-G. (ed.): *Beiträge zu einer empirischen Sprachsoziologie*. Tübingen: Narr, 9–48.
- Soeffner, H.-G. (1989): *Auslegung des Alltags. Der Alltag der Auslegung. Zur wissenssoziologischen Konzeption einer sozialwissenschaftlichen Hermeneutik*. Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp.
- Spies, T. (2009): Diskurs, Subjekt und Handlungsmacht. Zur Verknüpfung von Diskurs- und Biografieforschung mithilfe des Konzepts der Artikulation. In: *Forum: Qualitative Social Research*, Vol. 10 (2), Art. 36. Doi: 10.17169/fqs-10.2.1150.
- Spradley, J. P. (1979): *The ethnographic interview*. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston.
- Spradley, J. P. (1980): *Participant observation*. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston.
- Stierlin, H. (1981): The parent's Nazi past and the dialogue between the generations. In: *Family Process*, Vol. 20 (4), 379–390.
- Straub, J. (2004): Telling stories, making history. Toward a narrative psychology of the historical construction of meaning. In: Straub, J. (ed.): *Narrations, identity and historical consciousness. The psychological construction of time and history*. Oxford: Berghahn Books, 44–98.
- Straub, J. (2008): Psychology, narrative, and cultural memory. Past and present. In: Erll, A. / Nünning, A. (eds.): *Cultural memory studies. An international and interdisciplinary handbook*. Berlin: de Gruyter, 215–228.
- Strauss, A. L. (1959): *Mirrors and masks. The search for identity*. Glencoe: The Free Press.
- Strauss, A. L. (1987): *Qualitative analysis for social scientists*. Cambridge: University Press.
- Strauss, A. L. / Corbin, J. M. (1990): *Basics of qualitative research*. Newbury Park: Sage.



- Strübing, J. (2004): *Grounded Theory. Zur sozialtheoretischen und epistemologischen Fundierung des Verfahrens der empirisch begründeten Theoriebildung*. Wiesbaden: VS Verlag.
- Tenbruck, F. H. (1986): *Das Werk Max Webers. Methodologie und Sozialwissenschaften*. In: *Kölner Zeitschrift für Soziologie und Sozialpsychologie*, Vol. 38, 13–31.
- Tepecik, E. (2009): *Educational success and intergenerational transmission. Educational advancement among migrants of Turkish descent in Germany*. In: Rosenthal, G./Bogner, A. (eds.): *Ethnicity, belonging and biography. Ethnographical and biographical perspectives*. Münster: LIT Verlag, 371–386.
- Thomas, W. I./Thomas, D. S. (1928): *The child in America*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf.
- Thomas, W. I./Znaniecki, F. ([1918–1920] 1958): *The Polish peasant in Europe and America*. New York: Dover.
- Thompson, P. (1992): *The voice of the past. Oral history*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Thrasher, F. M. (1927): *The gang*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Tuider, E. (2007): *Diskursanalyse und Biographieforschung. Zum Wie und Warum von Subjektpositionierungen*. In: *Forum: Qualitative Social Research*, Vol. 8 (2), Art. 6. Doi: 10.17169/fqs-8.2.249.
- Uhl, H. (2001): *Das ‚erste Opfer‘. Das österreichische Gedächtnis und seine Transformationen in der Zweiten Republik*. In: Lappin, E./Schneider, B. (eds.): *Die Lebendigkeit der Geschichte*. Ingbert: Röhrig, 30–46.
- Viehöver, W. (2003): *Die Wissenschaft und die Wiederverzauberung des sub-lunaren Raumes. Der Klimadiskurs im Licht der narrativen Diskursanalyse*. In: Keller, R. et. al. (eds.): *Handbuch Sozialwissenschaftliche Diskursanalyse. Vol. 2. Forschungspraxis*. Opladen: Leske + Budrich, 233–269.
- Viehöver, W. (2012): *Narrative Diskurse, personale Identitäten und die ästhetisch-plastische Chirurgie*. In: Keller, R./Schneider, W./Viehöver, W. (eds.): *Diskurs. Macht. Subjekt. Theorie und Empirie von Subjektivierung in der Diskursforschung*. Wiesbaden: VS-Verlag.
- Völter, B. (2003): *Judentum und Kommunismus. Deutsche Familiengeschichte in drei Generationen*. Opladen: Leske + Budrich.
- Völter, B./Rosenthal, G. (2010): *We are the victims of history: The Seewald family*. In: Rosenthal, G. (ed.): *The Holocaust in three generations. Families of victims and perpetrators of the Nazi regime*. 2nd revised edition. Opladen: Barbara Budrich, 333–358.
- Waldschmidt, A./Klein, A./Tamayo Korte, M./Dalman-Eken, S. (2007): *Diskurs im Alltag. Alltag im Diskurs: Ein Beitrag zu einer empirisch begründeten Methodologie sozialwissenschaftlicher Diskursforschung*. In: *Forum: Qualitative Social Research*, Vol. 8 (2), Art. 15. Doi: 10.17169/fqs-8.2.251.
- Wax, M. (1972): *Tenting with Malinowski*. In: *American Sociological Review*, Vol. 37, 1–13.

- Weber, M. (1913): Über einige Kategorien der verstehenden Soziologie. In: *Logos. Internationale Zeitschrift für Philosophie der Kultur* IV, 253–294.
- Weber, M. (1949): 'Objectivity' in social science and social policy. In: *The methodology of the social sciences*. New York: The Free Press, 50–112.
- Weber, M. (1973): *Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Wissenschaftslehre*. Edited by J. Winckelmann, 4th revised edition. Tübingen: Mohr/Siebeck.
- Weber, M. (2013a): *Economy and society. An outline of interpretative sociology*. Vol. 1. Edited by G. Roth and C. Wittich. Berkeley: University of California Press. Originally published in German 1921.
- Weber, M. (2013b): Basic sociological terms. In: Weber, M.: *Economy and society. An outline of interpretative sociology*. Vol. 1. Edited by Guenther Roth and Claus Wittich. Berkeley: University of California Press, 3–62. Originally published in German 1921.
- Wernet, A. (2014): Hermeneutics and objective hermeneutics. In: Flick, U. (ed.): *The Sage handbook of qualitative data analysis*. London: Sage, 234–246.
- Wertheimer, M. (1928): *Gestaltpsychologische Forschung*. In: Saupe, E. (ed.): *Einführung in die neuere Psychologie*. Osterwieck im Harz: Zwickfeldt Verlag, 47–54.
- Wertheimer, M. (1938a): The general theoretical situation. In: Ellis, W. D. (ed.): *A source book of gestalt psychology*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 12–16. Originally published in German 1922.
- Wertheimer, M. (1938b): Laws of organization in perceptual forms. In: Ellis, W. D. (ed.): *A source book of gestalt psychology*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 71–94. Originally published in German 1923.
- Whyte, W. F. ([1943] 1955): *Street corner society*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Wiechers, C. (1998): *Schwangerschaftsabbruch. Eine Krise und ihre Bedeutung in der Biographie*. Diploma thesis, Fachbereich Sozialwesen, Gesamthochschule Kassel.
- Wiedemann, P. M. (1991): Gegenstandsnahe Theoriebildung. In: Flick, U. et al. (eds.): *Handbuch qualitative Sozialforschung. Grundlagen, Konzepte, Methoden und Anwendungen*. München: Psychologie Verlags Union, 440–445.
- Willems, H. (1996): Goffmans qualitative Sozialforschung. Ein Vergleich mit Konversationsanalyse und Strukturaler Hermeneutik. In: *Zeitschrift für Soziologie*, Vol. 25 (6), 438–455.
- Willems, H. (2004): Erving Goffman. In: Flick, U./Kardorff, E. v./Steinke, I. (eds.) (2004): *A companion to qualitative research*. London: Sage, 24–34.
- Wilson, Th. P. (1970): Normative and interpretative paradigms in sociology. In: Douglas, J. D. (eds.): *Understanding everyday life. Toward the reconstruction of sociological knowledge*. Chicago: Aldine, 57–79.
- Wirsching, M./Stierlin, H. (1982): *Krankheit und Familie*. Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta.
- Wirth, L. (1928): *The ghetto*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

- Witte, N. / Rosenthal, G. (2007): Biographische Fallrekonstruktionen und Sequenzanalysen videografierteter Interaktionen. Zur Verknüpfung von Daten und Methoden. In: Sozialer Sinn, Vol. 1, 3–24.
- Witte, N. (2010): Ärztliches Handeln im Praxisalltag. Frankfurt/Main: Campus.
- Witte, N. (2016): Palestinian voices from Haifa. In: Rosenthal, Gabriele (ed.): Established and outsiders at the same time. Göttingen: University Press, 159–180.
- Witte, N. (2017): Palestinian women in Haifa. Resistance as empowerment. In: Rosenthal, G. / Bogner, A. (eds.): Biographies in the Global South. Frankfurt/Main: Campus, 258–280.
- Wodak, R. (1996): Disorders of discourse. Harlow: Addison Wesley.
- Wodak, R. (2001): Freund- und Feindbilder. Diffamierung politischer Gegner oder berechnete und notwendige Kritik. In: Möhring, R. (eds.): Österreich allein zuhause. Politik, Medien und Justiz nach der Wende. Frankfurt/Main: IKO-Verlag, 124–144.
- Wodak, R. / Nowak, P. / Pelikan, J. / Gruber, H. / Cillia R. de / Mitten, R. (1990): ‚Wir sind alle unschuldige Täter‘ – Diskurshistorische Studien zum Nachkriegsantisemitismus. Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp.
- Wodak, R. / Cillia, R. de / Reisigl, M. / Liebhart, K. (eds.) (1999): The discursive construction of national identity. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- Wohlrab-Sahr, M. (1992): Biographische Unsicherheit. Formen weiblicher Identität in der ‚reflexiven Moderne‘. Das Beispiel der Zeitarbeiterinnen. Opladen: Leske + Budrich.
- Wohlrab-Sahr, M. (1999): Biographieforschung jenseits des Konstruktivismus. In: Soziale Welt, Vol. 50, 483–494.
- Wolff, St. (1986): Rapport und Report. Über einige Probleme bei der Erstellung plausibler ethnographischer Texte. In: Ohe, W. von der (ed.): Kulturanthropologie. Beiträge zum Neubeginn einer Disziplin. Berlin: Duncker, 333–364.
- Wolff, St. (2004): Ways into the field and their variants. In: Flick, U. / Kardorff, E. v. / Steinke, I. (eds.): A companion to qualitative research. London: Sage, 195–202.
- Worm, A. (2017): Civil war and the figurations of illegalized migration. Biographies of Syrian migrants coming to the European Union. In: Rosenthal, G. / Bogner, A. (eds.): Biographies in the Global South. Life stories embedded in figurations and discourses. Frankfurt/Main: Campus, 160–184.
- Wundrak, R. (2010): Die chinesische Community in Bukarest. Eine rekonstruktive, diskursanalytische Fallstudie über Immigration und Transnationalismus. Wiesbaden: VS-Verlag.
- Zorbaugh, H. W. ([1929] 1983): The Gold Coast and the slum. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.



## Subject index

- abduction, 52ff., 117
- and-sum, 23
- anonymization, 87f.
- archive research, 69, 201
- argumentation, 135ff., 177, 200f.
  
- biographical data, 82, 87f., 168ff., 181f.
- biographical research, 32, 124, 135, 155ff., 163ff.
  
- case description, 187
- case history, 82f., 167
- case level, 55, 68, 82, 107, 132f., 139f., 186ff.
- case reconstruction, 49, 62f., 65ff., 76, 79, 81ff.
  - biographical, 82, 166ff., 186ff.
  - case structure, 64f., 87f., 148, 151ff., 167, 186ff.
- causal connection, 14, 21f., 67, 201f.
- cause and effect relations, 21, 164
- Chicago School, 25ff., 29ff., 36f., 90ff.
- coding
  - axial, 203f.
  - open, 202f.
  - selective, 204
- communication
  - principle of, 35, 39
- comparison
  - contrastive, minimal, maximal, 85ff.
- conservation
  - registering and reconstructing, 97, 108

- constraints of storytelling, 137  
 constraint to close the form, 137  
 constraint to condense, 137f.  
 constraint to go into details, 137
- construction  
 academic, 47  
 first and second degree, 36
- content  
 latent, 17, 133, 194, 202  
 manifest, 17, 149, 194f., 202
- content analysis, 49, 191ff., 209  
 qualitative, 17, 50, 132, 192ff.  
 quantitative, 194f.
- conversation analysis, 14, 25, 49ff.,  
 63
- critical theory, 26, 196
- decontextualization, 59
- deduction, 52ff.
- description, 135ff., 151, 177ff.  
 thick, 13
- discourse analysis, 158, 191ff., 205ff.
- empirical testing, 54
- ethnomethodology, 49
- expert knowledge, 131f.
- facts  
 social, 30f.
- falsification, 23, 87, 121
- family interview, 40, 48f., 55ff., 64,  
 72, 186
- field journal, 99
- field notes, 16, 81, 97f.
- field research, 15, 89ff.
- framing, 37ff., 165
- framing process, 42f.
- Frankfurt School, 26
- generalization  
 numerical, 24, 49, 56f., 66, 71,  
 163
- generalization (*continued*)  
 on the basis of an individual case,  
 13, 66, 77ff.  
 statistical, 49  
 theoretical, 46, 49f., 65f., 77, 84ff.,  
 163
- generation, 45f., 48, 70, 78, 80ff., 187
- genesis, 133, 135f., 159f., 166f., 175
- genogram analysis, 147, 189
- gestalt  
 overall gestalt, 17, 133, 148, 176,  
 191, 200
- gestalt theory, 50f., 161
- global analysis, 81ff., 99, 106, 120
- grounded theory, 14, 17, 23, 31, 191,  
 202, 204f.
- hypotheses  
 forming of, 43, 48, 52f., 105,  
 169ff., 179
- ideal type, 72f.
- individual case, 13f., 18, 21ff., 49ff.,  
 56, 65, 72, 76f., 85ff., 148f.,  
 153, 163
- induction, 50ff., 192
- inference process, 52, 57
- interaction, 16ff., 63f., 90, 94ff.,  
 101ff., 108ff., 134  
 courses of action, 160
- interpretive sociology, 14f., 25ff., 124
- intersubjective comprehensibility, 71,  
 87
- interview  
 biographical, 48, 146, 158, 186,  
 202  
 biographical-narrative, 45, 129,  
 140, 166, 170f.  
 client-centered, 41, 48, 127, 144  
 closing the interview, 146  
 conducting interviews, 38, 48,  
 124ff., 143ff., 148f., 152

- interview (*continued*)  
dilemma-interview, 129f.  
expert interview, 130ff.  
focused, 128f.  
guided interview, 123, 125f., 132, 148, 159  
narrative, 25, 44, 123, 132f., 138  
open, 124ff.  
questioning part of, 83, 138, 142f., 149, 201
- knowledge  
everyday knowledge, 44, 90ff.  
implicit, 15, 18f., 38, 96f., 108, 119, 131ff.
- law, 66, 72
- life story, 63, 133ff., 140ff., 151, 158f., 165ff., 178ff., 201  
experienced life history, 148, 166ff., 181, 185  
narrated life story, 166ff., 176, 185
- lifeworlds  
small, 93
- listening  
active, 41, 139, 144ff., 148, 153
- logic of discovery, 14, 49, 76
- logic of subsumption, 50, 149, 188, 202ff.
- main narration, 82f., 141ff., 147, 149f., 179
- making first contact, 16, 79ff., 141
- meaning  
latent, 18ff., 24, 142, 149, 185, 195, 199f.  
manifest, 17, 142, 194f., 202  
subjective, 18, 24, 28, 31
- meaning or context (of social actions), 31, 50, 160ff.
- memory, 161ff.  
scenic memory, 182
- memos, 79, 81, 97ff.
- method  
hypothesis-generating and -testing, 129  
microanalysis, 102, 105f., 121, 167f., 183ff., 188, 197ff.
- motive  
in-order-to motive and because-motive, 95
- objective hermeneutics, 14, 19, 25, 63f., 98, 101, 104, 114ff., 167, 185, 188, 212f.
- observation  
participant, 15ff., 20, 34, 47, 91ff., 101
- openness  
principle of, 12, 35, 40, 43f., 48ff., 75, 124, 133f., 191, 209, 211
- paradigm  
interpretive, 11, 15, 42, 133  
normative, 15
- participation, 89, 93ff., 97f.
- phenomenology, 14, 25, 203
- plausibility, 23, 53f., 60, 63, 102, 117, 183
- points of interpretation, 160ff.
- positivism dispute, 26
- pragmatism, 27, 30ff., 36
- presentation  
of a result, 79, 87f.  
self-presentation, 51, 139, 142f., 150f., 167ff., 175, 179ff.
- quality criterion, 87
- questions  
initial question, 128, 130, 134, 141, 147, 178  
narrative-generating, 142ff., 149
- reconstruction  
of the case history, 167f.

- reconstruction (*continued*)  
 on the basis of an individual case,  
 21, 24, 66f.  
 principle of, 50ff.
- reinterpretation, 20, 160, 164
- report, 135, 152, 177f., 180
- representativeness, 20, 24, 76
- research ethics, 80, 87
- research process, 43ff., 75ff., 87, 104
- research question, 43ff., 68, 76, 83,  
 85ff., 104, 106, 109, 114, 142,  
 149ff., 158, 185, 209ff.  
 bracketing of the, 68, 167  
 concrete, 68, 192, 202  
 vague, 15, 43, 48, 75, 78f.
- routines, 20, 38, 89, 93ff.
- sample  
 first, second, 79, 83ff., 106, 211  
 statistical, 78  
 theoretical, 43, 45, 48, 75ff., 83ff.,  
 113, 192, 210, 214
- sampling, 75ff.
- saturation  
 theoretical, 77f., 85
- scenes, 91, 98, 101, 103, 106  
 videographed scenes, 112f., 119f.
- sequencing, 177ff., 188, 212
- sequential analysis, 21ff., 39, 49,  
 63ff., 87, 93f., 97f., 101ff.,  
 106f., 168, 179f., 188, 200, 213  
 of videographed interactions,  
 113ff.
- sequentiality  
 principle of, 63, 191, 202, 209
- situation  
 condensed, 136, 178, 180  
 definition of the, 37ff., 165
- social anthropology, 20, 90
- social research  
 communicative, 40  
 reconstructive, 14
- sociology of knowledge, 14, 25, 31,  
 36, 63, 131, 205ff.
- symbolic interactionism, 14, 23, 30
- text analysis, 23, 49, 53, 167, 175,  
 212
- text types, 82f., 134ff., 167, 177ff.,  
 188, 212
- thematic field, 142, 161f., 179ff.
- thematic field analysis, 83, 167ff.,  
 175ff., 179ff., 212
- thematization, 58, 63, 71, 149, 165,  
 179, 213
- theme/topic, 47, 58, 61f., 79f., 83ff.,  
 125ff., 139ff., 149ff., 160,  
 165f., 176ff., 188, 201, 209f.,  
 213f.
- transcription, 79, 83ff., 103, 120
- transformation, 39, 87, 107, 164,  
 169, 187f., 208, 211
- types  
 development of, 23, 29, 65ff.,  
 70ff., 77, 83ff., 168, 185f.
- video analysis, 108ff.



## **Index of text boxes and tables**

Criteria for distinguishing different kinds of qualitative studies .....	14
What can interpretive social research do?.....	24
What can interpretive and qualitative social research not do?.....	24
Principle of openness in the research process and during data collection.....	48
Principles of data analysis .....	49
General principles of research .....	75
Differences between theoretical and statistical sampling .....	78
Transcription symbols .....	84
Research design .....	85
Theoretical generalization .....	86
Guidelines for writing participant observation memos.....	101
Guidelines for the sequential analysis of observation memos .....	106
Sequential analysis of the videographed interactions .....	113
Phases of a narrative interview .....	139
Narrative questions.....	145
Analytical steps for case reconstructions.....	168
Thematic field analysis.....	179

This volume is a clear introduction to methods of data collection and analysis in the social sciences, with a special focus on interpretive methods based on a logic of discovering hypotheses and grounded theories. The chief methods presented are participant observation, open interviews and biographical case reconstruction. The special advantages of interpretive methods, as against other qualitative methods, are revealed by comparing them to content analysis.

Empirical examples show how the methods presented can be implemented in practice, and concrete problems connected with conducting empirical research are discussed. By presenting individual case studies, the author shows how to apply the principle of openness when collecting empirical data, whether through interviews or observations, and she offers rules for analysis based on the principles of reconstruction and sequentiality.

Gabriele Rosenthal is Professor for Qualitative Methodology at the Center of Methods in Social Sciences, Georg-August-University of Göttingen, Germany. Her major research focus is migration, ethnicity, belonging, violence, collective and armed conflicts and trauma. She is the author and editor of numerous books, including *The Holocaust in Three Generations* (1998), *Established and Outsiders at the Same Time. Self-Images and We-Images of Palestinians in the West Bank and in Israel* (2016), and, together with Artur Bogner, *Biographies in the Global South* (2017).



ISBN 978-3-86395-374-4

Universitätsverlag Göttingen