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Toward a New Interdisciplinarity: Integrating Psychological and Humanities Approaches to Narrative

1. The Interdisciplinary Potential of Narratological Inquiry

Recent developments in narratology have paved the way for a closer interdisciplinary cooperation between narrative research in literary studies on the one hand and psychology—especially psychotherapy research, psycho-trauma studies, and developmental psychology—on the other. Although cross-faculty research projects such as the one outlined in this paper are still a rare exception,¹ the advent of interdisciplinary (including psychological) narratology coincides with a hermeneutical turn in psychological and social research which used to be predominantly quantitative and statistical. Thus qualitative-empirical research methodology employs narratological sequence analysis to interpret and analyze the oral narratives given by individuals—an approach that is hermeneutical in essence, albeit in a more systematic and methodologically rigorous manner than is common in literary studies.

Hence, a potential for cross-disciplinary collaboration comes into sight that may bridge the traditional gap between the text-theoretical humanities, the interaction-theoretical social sciences, and qualitative approaches in psychology. The particular approach of narratological Literary and Media Interaction Research (LIR), which I have developed over the last couple of years, might lend itself as an example of such cross-disciplinary undertakings.

2. LIR: Core Research Questions, Theoretical Assumptions, Societal Relevance

In the following, I will lay out LIR's basic scientific objectives and research questions, with particular reference to its interdisciplinary methodology. For an approach that is truly interdisciplinary—and inter-narratological with re-

¹ The Berlin School of Mind and Brain, funded by the German Excellence Initiative, might be an example of truly cross-faculty cooperation between the neurosciences and the humanities.

spect to the narrative theories of different disciplines—will enable us to pursue culture studies in a way that is more immediately applicable and relevant to the questions of contemporary society and its citizens than may have generally been the case with humanities scholarship.

The essential goal of narratological Literary and Media Interaction Research is to better understand what people actually do when they interact with fictional narratives. What precisely happens over the course of a lifetime in mental, psycho-biographical and developmental respects when people read novels, engage in aesthetic experience, and/or consume or produce fictional media narratives?

Hence, LIR's core research questions are: How do individuals—given their personal and biographical dispositions—mentally interact with literary texts, aesthetic objects and media productions, in particular with those which they identify as having been (or still being) of high personal significance? How does the experience of reading and media interaction relate to a person's life history and to the patterns of coping that have resulted from it? More specifically: How does media interaction correlate with the mental identity construction that people constantly and unwittingly perform in their everyday life, and through which they consciously and/or unconsciously meet the particular biographical challenges of their personality development? This also implies asking the quite difficult question: To what effect—be it therapeutic, educational or the opposite—do people employ aesthetic interaction in their identity forming processes? And to what extent are they successful in using it in their continuous efforts to achieve sustainable personal development?

In the second main dimension of LIR the research question is: What role does media narrative itself have in this interaction, given its specific content and form? How does a fictional narrative that has been singled out by an individual as having been personally significant function in interactive terms? More precisely: What are this narrative's textual interaction potentials (regardless of how the person who identified it—or any empirical person—actually interacted with it)? How can we—while studying people as readers or hearers/viewers—avoid losing sight of the media narrative as text, and vice versa? How can we avoid taking the text as a mere trigger of reader response, as previous empirical literary and media research tended to do? How can text analysis and media interaction research be systematically integrated?

It is evident already from these basic research questions how much a program like LIR is occupied with issues of immediate societal importance. For asking how literature and media interaction really works in psycho-social respects—both on the level of the text and on that of empirical persons—and asking what effects it has, or may potentially have, for an individual in educational and/or therapeutic respects, also always means asking how me-

dia and literature come into play on the level of societal integration—which means also of societal conflict and its resolution. In this respect sustainable personal development is intrinsically interwoven with sustainable societal development. Hence, one main perspective of any LIR project will always be: What specific kinds of pedagogic and didactic intervention may be profitable in teaching and/or other forms of cultural social work?

More specifically in psychological terms, touching upon the issue of media interaction and societal interaction/integration means asking: How does aesthetic interaction contribute to tackling the quite challenging task of working through the long-term psycho-social consequences of violence, as well as other forms of psycho-social stress? How can the transgenerational effects of violence be neutralized? These have, after all, been found to be both pervasive and lasting, and tend to propel unwitting cycles of violent and (self-)destructive behavior. Put slightly differently this question means: How can literary and media interaction and teaching contribute to building up a person's or a group's mental resilience against stress and violence? And this genuinely educational and therapeutic vector may remind us of what was envisioned as the 'aesthetic education of mankind' in the 18th century—by which Friedrich Schiller and others meant the inherent potential of art and literature to effectively support civilization and culture by instilling humanistic "Bildung". Thus, interdisciplinary narratological research touches upon one of the humanities' most long-standing and enthusiastically advocated objectives.

The second characteristic of LIR, which is again immediately evident from its basic research questions, is the complexity of the task. Asking to what effect and how successfully individuals employ media interaction in striving to cope with aspects of their life-history, both past and present, and attempting not only to reconstruct but also to qualitatively distinguish the phenomena concerned, is a challenging task. It implies estimating in a methodologically secure fashion how an individual's mental media interaction and aesthetic practice may support and/or hamper their personal development in the sense of sustainable individual growth and development of personal skills.

Successfully tackling such complex questions requires input from various disciplinary fields. LIR projects therefore combine resources from the humanities (especially text-linguistics and recent narratological literary and media studies), from qualitative-empirical interaction and social research (especially recent biography studies), and from developmental, clinical and psychodynamic psychology and psycho-trauma studies, as well as qualitative-empirical research in psychotherapy.

This joint project in advancing a new interdisciplinarity requires, first of all, *trans-disciplinary theory-building*. For instance, it needs to be spelled out and

discussed how LIR's underlying theoretical notion of interaction can be understood to comprise both the social and the mental dimensions of the concept, for interaction is taken here to refer to both intra-psychic and extra-psychic processes. And the more one thinks about this distinction with respect to the main task of theory—which is to guide the operationalization of questions for empirical research—the more one wonders whether this is a reasonable distinction at all. For individuals interact socially with other people in real-life contexts; and at the same time they interact mentally with associations and memories of past occurrences and encounters that are psychically activated by the present interactive situation. Hence, interaction—being both a mental and social phenomenon—always has the dimension of time and biographical memory (Weilnböck 2009b), more precisely: of lived-through experience in the course of one's personal development. In a way, a person's whole life-history and its major guiding principles is co-present in all of her/his interactions: interaction is biographically embedded.

Another basic theoretical assumption about interaction is immediately relevant to narratology: A privileged mode of (biographically embedded) media interaction is *co-narration*. Co-narration brings a personally experienced event (and the accompanying personal associations and memories) into a narrative form, complete with chronological order and subjective logic, and into a psycho-affectively charged situational context designed to elicit particular responses from the co-narrative interlocutor. As opposed to factual report, description and argument (modes of self-expression which may, however, be part of an unfolding narrative), narrating an experienced event is privileged in that it best serves one of the most important functions of human media interaction: to help the individual understand and come to terms with their lived experience, to develop personal knowledge and capability, and to better anticipate future occurrences and condition future interactions. This seems to be what humans live for—and why they tell stories (Weilnböck 2006a).

Since this pivotal function undoubtedly holds true for co-narrative interaction, both with real-life people and occurrences and with fictional media representations of such people and occurrences—notwithstanding modal differences between the two (see below)—one additional theoretical ambition of the LIR approach will be to re-evaluate the distinction between *fictional* and *factual* narrative in order to better take into account the parallels and interrelations between these two modes of narrative and the interactions they elicit. Remarkably, this synoptic perspective only comes into play at all if one systematically adverts to the fundamental psychological dimensions of narration.

With literary studies and the humanities—which almost exclusively handle the area of narratology proper today—this theoretical assumption needs

to be explicitly underlined. Interaction with both fictional media narrative and factual real-life narrative contributes to the developmental and narrative processes of biographical identity construction as well as societal discourse. The LIR approach is based on the—I think genuinely narratological—assumption that interaction with fictional media narratives may have profound and lasting impact on a person's—and a society's—patterns of actual real-life interaction and biographical decision-making. And this theoretical assumption is, of course, the basis of LIR's claim to be able to approach issues of societal relevance.

Most importantly, however, the joint effort of advancing a new interdisciplinarity on a narratological basis requires *the creation of a solid methodological framework* and the development of a multi-method research design which is adequate to the task. The question is: How can LIR's highly challenging research questions be approached in a methodologically rigorous way which at the same time allows for intersubjective evaluation? And how can the new narratological interdisciplinarity play a pivotal role in this endeavor?

3. LIR: Methodological Approach

3.0 Methodological Considerations

The question of what qualitative-empirical interaction research is all about, how it is narratological and, above all, how it can contribute to inaugurating a new narratological interdisciplinarity, will now be discussed in more detail.

The object of qualitative social research is oral narration: the impromptu storied accounts and spontaneous narratives given by individuals in interviews. Qualitative research is thus essentially narratological. Its basic assumption is that in (oral) narration individuals express themselves in ways that are subjectively felt to represent the most authentic and thorough account of what they experienced in the past and think about in the present interview situation. Therefore, (oral) narration is considered the prime resource for anyone aiming to understand how individuals operate in their subjectively organized worlds—which, of course, are always intertwined in specific ways with fictional worlds from the literary and media narratives which these individuals consume.

The aim of the qualitative interaction research derived from such interviews is to reconstruct a person's guiding interactive principles, i. e. isolate the basic principles of individual biographical development and decision making, past, present and future. In a way, it is neither more nor less than asking: 'What makes that person tick?'—a question that qualitative research asks, however, in a systematic manner and with methodological rigor. The

reason why qualitative and/or biographical research strives to understand how individuals ‘tick’—and also how types of individuals and particular social groups function—is that it wants to find out how people and societies may best be assisted in arranging their individual and social lives in a sustainable manner.

Literary research’s complement to this cannot easily be defined with any sufficient degree of conceptual precision. But much of what is done in thinking about and interpreting literary works might be paraphrased as asking: What makes the text tick? What are its guiding principles? However, while in literary studies these questions are generally asked only of the formal and structural principles of the text, the impetus of LIR is precisely to reconstruct its interactive principles as well, following the assumption that the concept of ‘ticking’ for a text also implies some sense of interaction between author and reader.

The guiding interactive principle of a person’s life history and mode of arranging their present biographical situation is, however, not easily detectable; it is certainly not something they themselves, or any analytic specialist for that matter, might be able to spell out right away—or indeed at all. Such principles are sometimes heavily concealed; and their biographical effects may take various guises and emerge in many unexpected areas. Hence, the analysis of these principles implies much intricate and laborious work in systematically probing a multitude of hypotheses, weighing different assessments, and extracting the most operative and influential biographical vectors from the array of actions, occurrences, intentions, fantasies, impulses, and opinions that an individual may present in her or his narrative and that have evolved from the complex web of their history.

Even when an interviewee’s oral narrative presents a clear and convincing idea of how they tick, qualitative biographical research will employ reconstructive means which are likely to substantially augment or even correct the person’s own assessment—if, indeed, any such underlying personal principle has been explicitly volunteered at all (which is certainly not what a narrative interview expects). Almost all social and psychological research asserts the possibility—in fact the imperative probability—of significant differences between the subjective and the analytic perspective, or to put it more precisely and in the terms used in biography studies: a difference between the *experienced life history* of a person and their *narrated life story* (Rosenthal 1995; 2004). All these approaches abundantly corroborate the assumption that intuitive human self-perception and awareness is generally too unreliable and incomplete—as well as too ambivalent and conflicting—to secure accuracy in evaluating anything as complex as the guiding interactive principles of any person, let alone of oneself.

Hence an interviewee's narrative will generally be less reliable and factual than one might assume. And yet any information relating to the more elusive *life history* and its *principles* will—in however unwitting and unconscious a way—also be given by the subject themselves. Such implicit information will be intrinsic to the narrative account, unless it has been subtly imposed by the researcher—overwritten as it were, by the researcher's own narrative—in an unsuspecting and involuntary dynamic of co-narrative interference. Effective methodological precautions must be taken to prevent this from happening.

Even without an intrusive research narrative, however, the interviewee proper—the person functioning as narrator of their own life story (or of any other personal, subjective experience)—cannot necessarily be viewed as the absolute agent of their narrative in any consistent sense. For on some important levels of the story the interviewee may—for whatever reasons of conflict, ambivalence etc.—convey key personal issues unwittingly, between the lines of the explicit narrative. As a result, in conceptualizing the interviewee as the object of qualitative research, it might be advisable to distinguish two agents: the narrator and the narrating persona—or, more precisely, the actual interview narrator and the narrative composition subject of the interview—and to see these as co-narratively intertwined but operating on two different levels of subjective awareness (Stein 2007, Jesch/Stein 2007). Qualitative social and biographical research has not yet explicitly adopted this distinction, but the twin concepts of *life history* and *life story* implicitly reflect it. Moreover, when Rosenthal repeatedly insists on the need for biography studies to pay "particular attention [...] to structural differences between what is experienced and what is narrated" (Rosenthal 2004: 53), and when she insists on "latent structures of meaning" (Rosenthal 2004: 55), she touches upon phenomena which in psychodynamic approaches are conceived of as being unconscious—i. e. as being situated in sectors of mental activity outside the subject's awareness—and which are, moreover, frequently associated with conflict.

The same implication applies to the biography studies notion of a co-present issue, i. e. of a biographical issue which is co-narratively and semi-consciously associated with a given narrative sequence, while not being mentioned by the interviewee in any explicit manner. One still quite young area of qualitative research, psychodynamic psychotherapy (whose methodological importance to the field has not yet, perhaps, been fully recognized) is firmly based on a concept of selfhood that assumes different more or less unconscious sectors of the self—and, above all, differently situated vectors of the self's interactive principles. What is relevant to the present argument is that this field studies the co-narrative processes in psychotherapy and how they correlate with lasting changes in the subject's state of mind (From-

mer/Rennie 2001; Boothe 1994; 2005; Jesch et al. 2006; Weilnböck 2006a; 2006b).

Hence, qualitative research has, it seems, intuitively developed analytic methods which lend themselves to reconstructing how more or less unconscious conflict-ridden or ambivalent vectors of experience and interaction work in a person's life, and the ways in which they show themselves in self-expression. Crucial here are the points of divergence between what is narrated today and what was experienced then, and what impact these vectors have on the subject's biography. To say that qualitative research has intuitively developed these insights is to suggest that it has done so without having read much—and maybe even without having wanted to read much—about psychodynamic, psychoanalytic, and clinical research (which, in fact, constitutes an unexpected parallel between this field and literary studies).

All schools of literary studies would certainly agree that a text's guiding principles are not easily detectable. There is also widespread awareness of the need to differentiate between various levels of agency in literary narratives. In fact, the distinction between narrator and persona, i. e. the text's narrative voice and its author, is something literary scholars are acutely aware of (see Jannidis 2004). Possibly, this awareness is even a bit too acute, since it usually correlates with the assumption that while the narrator, narrative voice or implied author etc. (see Kindt/Müller 2006) may be a legitimate object of literary study, the author as empirical person is not really of much interest for the interpretation of literary texts. Conceptualizing a double narrative agency might, therefore, also be advisable here. This would imply not only making the distinction between the narrator and the composition subject of the text but also viewing both narrative instances integratively and taking them equally seriously in methodological respects. The need not only to distinguish the narrator from the author on the one hand and from the composition subject on the other, but also to take the author effectively into account, and thus make the theoretical distinctions fully operational in research design and interpretation methodology, raises important issues both in qualitative research and in literary studies.

When qualitative research reconstructs the difference between the lived-through, *experienced life history* and the *narrated life story*—and thus unwittingly anticipates a conceptual distinction between persona or composition subject and narrator—it not only touches upon phenomena that psychodynamic approaches conceived of as unconscious and beset with conflict, it also quite unexpectedly touches upon an element of the imaginary, almost of the fictitious, in what is generally referred to as factual interview narrative, since what someone in their subjective view holds to be their authentic life experience might not prove factual, and what they consider their main principles of interaction might not prove accurate or complete at the analytic level; and

even some hard facts in a truthfully given and authentically felt account of the self may prove incorrect. These incorrect, incomplete, or in other ways partially erroneous or misleading parts of a factual narrative may, therefore, in some sense be viewed as fictitious—unintentionally fictitious, as it were. And surely, thinking about literary narration, one cannot be certain that fiction writing, in turn, is not always also in some sequences and/or aspects, as it were, unintentionally factual.

This, however, is not to say that many literary critics are really interested in the interface of fictional and factual/biographical elements in a literary narrative, or even consider this interface to be researchable by any standards of philological scholarship (Weiböck 2007). The only ones who would support such an approach are psychoanalytically oriented scholars. They, however, have never had much lasting impact on mainstream literary text analysis, nor have they been able to provide the necessary methodological rigor to claim the status of reconstructive empirical research (Weiböck 2008a; Kansteiner/Weiböck 2008)—which is what the LIR approach is aiming at. Conceptualizing a twofold agency for literary narration as well, and thus defining two different dimensions of a literary narrative—be they labeled fictionally versus factually oriented, or manifest versus latent, or in narratological terms: narrative perspective versus focalization (in the sense of Jesch/Stein 2007)—is a characteristic feature of LIR and one of its basic principles—one that might also be of help in enhancing literary narratology's interface with interdisciplinary research.

Consequently, one of the most—if not *the* most—important and challenging methodological tasks of narrative analysis today (be it in qualitative social/interaction research or in literary studies) seems to be to reconstruct the interplay of the fictional and the factual aspects of a narrative, whether oral/factual or literary/fictional. In more precise terms this once again means to reconstruct the interrelation and mental interaction between what an individual has actually experienced in the past in their real life on the one hand and what they give as storied account about these experiences in the present before a listening interviewer on the other (or else what the individual as author of a fictional text may create as a personally inspiring story before a literary audience). In other words the basic task is to reconstruct the interplay of the narrator and the persona (author/composition subject) of a given narrative—in a psychologically informed sense of these terms.

It is the core objective of Literary and Media Interaction Research to take on this challenging task and realize its inherent potential for interdisciplinary research, which first of all means to effectively integrate the two hitherto largely separated academic areas of studying the *world of (fictional) texts* on the one hand and the *world of so-called real-life and empirical persons* on the other.

LIR thus encompasses two methodological dimensions: qualitative-empirical interaction research with readers, formerly called ‘reader response research’ (section 3.1), and interactive theoretical, reconstructive analysis of fictional literary or media narratives (section 3.2). Eventually the reader/author research case studies and the textual analyses will have to be integrated to reconstruct empirical variants of author-text-reader interaction—or at least of reader-text interaction. The aims and benefits of this research, which forms the core of the LIR program, will be outlined in the conclusion of this paper (section 4).

3.1 Qualitative-Empirical Interaction Research

How does qualitative-empirical social research go about reconstructing an individual’s guiding interactive principles, the factors that make that person tick both in their real-life interactions and in those with literary and fictional media? Using the methodology of biography studies as a springboard, LIR employs state-of-the-art qualitative interviewing for data acquisition, and narrative transcript analysis for data analysis. For specific procedural phases of case study work, however, LIR has developed a substantial supplementary methodology of its own, for the most part in two directions: first systematically integrating psychological knowledge—particularly from psychodynamic resources, which lend themselves to better understanding how biographically molded mental interaction, and in particular its psycho-affective dynamics, functions (biography research itself has not yet tapped these resources in any systematic way); and secondly, developing methods of qualitative interviewing suitable for reconstructing media experience and media interaction—these are also not yet fully established in biography studies, and the methodological questions related to them have not been satisfactorily solved by qualitative media research.

3.1.1 Biographical-Narrative Interviewing

Biography research’s strict methodology for conducting narrative interviews reflects the fact that there are many things that can be done wrong—or, put positively, there are many technical rules which, if aptly observed, permit the acquisition of interview materials containing the kind of narrative self-expression that facilitates successful reconstructive case study analysis. But biographical-narrative interviews substantially differ from natural conversations or journalistic interviews, so conducting them requires an expertise which needs to be trained (a fact that isn’t always adequately accounted for in qualitative research).

In essence, qualitative interviewing procedures follow one basic principle: that of maximum openness, providing conditions which secure the utmost freedom for interviewees to design and arrange their story-telling. Methodological precautions are taken to ensure this openness and reduce as far as possible any unwitting influence by the interviewer. The interview starts with a general narrative question directed not to a specific topic or period of life but to the person's life history as a whole (and increasingly also to their family history; Rosenthal 1995). Rosenthal (2004) herself tells how in the course of her methodological development she came to realize that with almost any research question it is necessary (or at least desirable) to ask the interviewee to give their whole life history and "avoid any thematic restriction", no matter what the particular topic and scope of the research project is (*ibid.*: 51).

The interviewee may then begin to tell their life story, i. e. give their main narration in an individual fashion. I have conducted interviews in which the main narration took just two minutes and others in which the interviewee took two hours and more. Whatever happens in this first phase of the interview, it is essential with respect to the principle of openness that the "narration is at no time interrupted by questions from the interviewers" (*ibid.*: 52). Instead, they should give nonverbal support by means of various paralinguistic expressions and body language which signal personal interest, attentiveness, and empathy—and give encouragement when the interviewee pauses (for instance by simply interjecting "and then what happened?"). Unaccustomed as this self-restraint might feel at first, it is a technique that enables the interviewee to arrange their narration in the richest possible way and to tap into distant and estranged sources of personal memory. In this space the narration will "start to flow" (Rosenthal 2004: 52), become increasingly detailed, and unfold in ways which are sometimes unexpected and surprising even for the interviewee—and which touch upon issues invested with personal emotion which are not easily attainable in an everyday conversational situation.

Following the main narration, interviewers may begin to pose internal follow-up questions on the basis of notes taken during the interview. These questions aim at generating more detailed information about the interviewee's experience. Technically speaking this means avoiding both the sort of factual questions frequently posed in conversation ("When was that?" "Where was that?"), and drawing parallels to the interviewer's own experience ("I felt that, too ..."). Above all it means not asking about reasons, adducing arguments, or discussing opinions ("Why did you do that?"), because such questions effectively thwart narration. During the main narration interviewers will in any case have taken note of any such arguments and opinions, just as they will of the interviewee's detached reports and descriptions of

issues and contexts. In this follow-up phase they use the interviewee's arguments for further narrative questions aiming to tap into the personally experienced events that lie behind the interviewee's account. So, if an interviewee expresses the opinion that they don't like foreigners, for example, the follow-up question will not ask about reasons or discuss opinions, which might well produce an abstract evaluation or argument, but simply remark: "You mentioned that you don't like foreigners. Tell me about a moment or event in your life in which you clearly felt that you didn't like foreigners." This will produce further narrative, to which the interviewer will respond with the same attitude of attentiveness and empathy as before, and which may be further expanded ("What happened before that?", "What happened later?", "How did that happen?").

Listening attentively in this way, interviewers will have noted many points that seem promising for generating further narrative. And while there are certain formalized rules for spotting such cues (for instance when arguments, opinions, contradictions, lacunas occur in the narrative, see Rosenthal 2004; Lucius-Hoene/Deppermann 2002), there sometimes seems an instinctive element in an interviewer's choice, when it taps into a content-rich experience which the interviewee had not thought of mentioning.

This and other techniques of interviewing have proven effective in stimulating an interviewee's narrative to flow freely. People who have been interviewed frequently report that they had not expected to come up with so much personal history or to touch upon this or that issue, and often also not to experience this or that feeling. In fact, interviewees have often gotten into a quite elated mood, as if creatively inspired by the experience. And since a biographical interview is usually conducted by two closely interacting interviewers, and may take up to three hours, with a possible second appointment to follow, the end product will often be a rich, complex artistic creation containing both factually oriented and imaginative narrative vectors. For the interviewee the experience will seem at times to resemble the state of creative enthusiasm and aesthetic elevation which authors are sometimes reported to have experienced during the writing process. Conversely, training and initial experience in conducting narrative interviews frequently have an existential impact on researchers, changing their interactive style even in everyday life and resulting in a more open and perceptive attitude vis-à-vis their social environment. This too has sometimes been described as akin to the effect of reading belletristic literature: an aesthetic as well as interactive enhancement of sensibility.

After the internal follow-up questions are finished it is only in the last phase of the interview that the principle of openness is suspended and external narrative follow-up questions may be posed. These confront the interviewee with instances of narrative incoherence or conspicuous deviations

from a standard perception of reality; as well as involving external issues pertaining to the specific focus of the study. In the LIR approach this is also the place where a significant methodological innovation is introduced, with key questions from psycho-diagnostic interview techniques being included if the relevant issues have not already been sufficiently covered during the biographical interview (Operationalized Psychodynamic Diagnosis: <http://www.opd-online.net>). Finally the interviewee is asked to name a literary or media production of high personal significance, which will then be used in the second phase of LIR narrative interview (3.1.3).

3.1.2 Reconstructive Narrative Analysis

This high degree of methodological rigor which—aside from its creative elements—characterizes the interview technique also holds true for data analysis. Here a novel method of reconstructive interdisciplinary transcript analysis (ITA) is employed, applying standard procedures of transcript analysis as practiced in qualitative biography studies, and systematically integrating the results with psychological resources.

In the first phase, transcript analysis as known from biography studies follows a well laid-out path of methodical steps which, for reasons of brevity, cannot be described here in detail (see Rosenthal 2004: 50). Suffice it to say that the key analytic procedure is *adductive* (as opposed to deductive or inductive) sequential hypothesis building, which means that every hypothesis produced by the analytic team to explain a specific narrative sequence or biographical fact is taken into account. It is only in the chronological course of hypothesis building along the consecutive sequences of the interview transcript that certain hypotheses are excluded and others retained. Methodically formalized, the five steps of transcript analysis are:

- Extraction and interpretation of basic biographical data, including key events and decisions. These are isolated in the interview transcript as quasi-objective information (place and social milieu of birth, siblings, education, illnesses, change of residence, historical events) and looked at separately, abstracting as much as possible from the specific form and subjective viewpoint of the narrative. Here the guiding question of sequential hypothesis building is: What are the probable turns of this life history and the respective states of mind of the subject, given these biographical data? Or in other words, what consequences would be expected from each of these hypothetical turns if they were to occur? Asking which of the different hypotheses actually comes true in the next biographical phase then leads to the construction of new and more refined sets of hypotheses about what might possibly happen in the phases that follow.

- Text and thematic field analysis of the narrative by adductive verification-falsification procedures. Here the structure and dynamics of the subject's self-presentation are analyzed chronologically in line with the sequences of the transcript (which were drawn up according to thematic shifts and changes in text type, such as description, argumentation, report, and narrative). The guiding question of sequence-by-sequence text analysis is: How does an interviewee view the world in terms of their own life history and their personal agency in it? How do they choose to portray themselves?
- Reconstruction of experienced life history—aims at illuminating the lived-through experience of the interviewee, independently of how it is presented as a story.
- Microanalysis of transcript segments—focuses on interview passages that seem particularly pertinent to the life history and promise to further “decipher [the transcripts] latent structures of meaning” (Rosenthal 2004: 60).
- Concluding contrastive comparison of experienced *life history* and narrated *life story*—aims at finding explanations for the difference between the two levels and how they impact the subject's way of coping with life.

In its second phase LIR's interdisciplinary transcript analysis (ITA) goes beyond these standard biography studies procedures and systematically taps into the resources of clinical and psychodynamic psychology, with a view to determining and formulating the subject's principles of mental coping and psychic defense. ITA begins with Operationalized Psychodynamic Diagnosis (OPD), a multi-axis diagnostic tool developed in Germany over the last fifteen years from various recent approaches in psychodynamics, psychoanalysis, psychosomatic medicine and psychiatry with a view to expanding and complementing the existing purely descriptive manuals of psychopathological symptoms. OPD has added various psychodynamic criteria of classification such as interpersonal relations, specific conflicts, and mental structure, and has today become a widely and internationally acknowledged common denominator in clinical diagnosis. It thus serves as a useful springboard for trans-disciplinary collaboration. Beyond the OPD manual, ITA may refer to further and more elaborate psychological resources such as qualitative psycho-trauma studies (Fischer/Riedesser 1998; Hirsch 2004), as well as the approaches of narratological, relational and attachment psychology (Bollas 1984; Angus/McLeod 2004) and psychiatry (Kernberg et al. 2000), whenever these appear promising for a better understanding of the case material in hand.

In procedural terms this means that once the five steps of narrative sequence (or transcript) analysis have been completed, psychodynamic assessment proceeds in reverse order, starting with step 5 and confronting the

conclusions with two questions: Are there any psychodynamic phenomena—as defined by the OPD and other sources—that parallel the biographical phenomena reconstructed so far? Do these parallels produce additional in-depth hypotheses? Phases one and two of TTA—biographical narrative analysis and psychodynamic/developmental assessment—are conducted consecutively and not simultaneously, because the first phase of reconstruction must not be methodologically compromised with premature psychological conclusions.

As a result, what biography research usually describes in generic terms as the guiding principle(s) of a person's life-history and development is now also specified psychologically as that individual's psychodynamic profile—a specification of the particular challenges inherent in their personality development. This psychodynamic profile profits from the inclusion in the last phase of the biographical interview of key questions from the OPD diagnostic interview directly targeting relationship themes, interactive core conflicts, and/or core trauma compensatory patterns.

3.1.3 Media-Experience Interviewing and Final LIR Case Study Reconstruction

Having reconstructed the interviewee's biographical and psychodynamic profile, researchers now turn to the second step in LIR data analysis, the narrative media-experience interview (MEI). This was recently developed on my initiative (Weirnböck 2008b; 2009a; 2009b) because, in the first place, standard modes of qualitative and/or biographical interviewing do not lend themselves to understanding media experience, and secondly, what has sometimes been called the 'media biography interview' neither sufficiently grasps media experience itself nor really fathoms the biographical dimensions of an individual—let alone the aspect of their life-long psychological development (see Weirnböck 2003; 2009b).

The MEI is conducted after the interviewee has re-read or re-viewed the text or film which they had identified at the end of the biographical interview as being personally significant for them. The LIR team will also have read or viewed the narrative and produced two sorts of memos in preparation for the MEI: a sequence protocol for the interviewers' immediate orientation, in which plot-turns and characters are listed in the order in which they occur, and the MEI hypotheses memo (see below). As in the biographical interview, the interviewee is asked at the beginning of the MEI—by way of a maximally open initial question—to talk about their recent re-reading/re-viewing and the associations it had for them, as well as about the original media experience in the more distant past. The narrative response to this question then becomes the focus of MEI internal follow-up questioning aimed in two

complementary directions. In this novel technique interviewees are first prompted to elaborate narratively on the spontaneous perceptions, thoughts and imaginations occasioned by the plot events and their causalities, as well as on the characters' possible motivations and biographical prehistories. Secondly, they are prompted to articulate associations and memories of their own which resonate with their thoughts and imaginations about the plot and characters. Passages from the media narrative may directly be brought in (re-read/re-screened) depending on which aspects of the narrative become important in the interview (Weilnböck 2008b; 2009b). This process moves, as it were, top-down into the media narrative world as it is subjectively perceived by the interviewee, and then again bottom-up into the personal biographical memories triggered by the media narrative.

In the final phase of MEI, external narrative follow-up questions are posed on the basis of the MEI hypotheses memo. This consists of a collection of hypotheses about how, and to which particular sections of the text or plot-turns, the interviewee might respond, given the analysis of the biographical interview, which—given the LIR approach—itself includes hypotheses of a psychological and psycho-biographical nature. Furthermore, by this stage of the LIR process, the narratological text analysis of the media narrative has been drafted according to the NTA method (see 3.2 below) but not yet fully worked out—for research-economic reasons. This draft contains hypotheses about the narrative's textual interaction potentials and may be used as an optional source of hypotheses to assist interviewers in producing effective external follow-up questions. The transcript analysis of the media experience interview proceeds analogously to the analysis of the biographical-narrative interview (BNI). However, it is more complex due to the fact that it deals with the biographical data both of the interviewee and of the media narrative characters. It eventually integrates the results from the BNI analysis and enters into the integrative case study reconstruction defining the person's psychodynamic principle(s) of media interaction vis-à-vis the particular challenges of their personality development. Here the steps are:

- Extraction and interpretation of the fictional characters' biographical data in the order and choice in which they were referred to by the interviewee, and their interpretation via sequential hypothesis building. This latter technique gives rise to the questions: What biographical issues might have arisen for a reader focusing on these narrative data? What other data might they then plausibly also focus on? How might they be expected to do so?
- Text and thematic field analysis of the interviewee's account of their subjective reading of the media narrative, also implemented by sequential hypothesis building; and from there, reconstruction of the narrated media plot.

- Contrastive comparison with the media experience database.
- Reconstruction of the experienced media plot and its contrastive comparison with the narrated media plot.
- Search for correspondences with psychodynamic phenomena—as defined by the OPD and other psychological resources (as above with the BNI).
- Formulation of the subject’s psychodynamic principle(s) of media interaction.
- Search for thematic and structural correspondences with the results of the BNI analysis, above all with the subject’s experienced life history and general psychodynamic principle(s).
- Conclusions about the subject’s media interaction in light of their personality development challenges (also from the BNI analysis).

Hence, in the first of its two basic methodological research dimensions—qualitative-empirical research—LIR applies narratological analysis both to an individual’s account of their life-story (BNI) and to their account of a key media experience (MEI), and reconstructs from this an instance of psychobiographically driven developmental media interaction. The case study in its entirety gives a picture of how the media narrative has been appropriated, and whether and how it has (even unwittingly) been used as a tool for working on and further developing psychodynamic mechanisms for coping with personal biographical challenges. This enables inferences to be drawn about the subject’s general pattern of biographical and developmental interaction with media. Working with several individuals from a particular social sector or age group will eventually enable a certain number of personality types—and types of real-world and media interaction—to be formulated in relation to that specific segment of the population. For qualitative research, it must be noted, does not build generalizations numerically or statistically, it works typologically, defining the types that characterize the biographically molded media interaction of a group, and how these types function in interactive terms. The group in question may consist of people undergoing psychotherapy, or young persons who are prone to violent behavior and political/religious extremism (see below), or any other relevant category.

Hence, qualitative research while “reconstructing an individual case [is] always aiming at [generalizable] statements” (Rosenthal 2004: 62). Its objective is to illuminate developmental types and the complex rules of the typical genetic processes in specific sectors of society, rather than proposing one-off cause-and-effect statements for individual cases. This kind of research is about more thoroughly understanding the laws of social becoming, without which scholarship may not be able to produce effective strategies of social intervention and thus exercise its underlying responsibility to society.

3.2 Narratological Text Analysis of the Literary/Media Narrative

The second of LIR's two basic methodological research dimensions is psychologically informed narratological text analysis (NTA) of the literary and/or media narratives selected by interviewees at the end of the biographical-narrative interview. NTA responds to LIR's ambition to integrate empirical reader research and text analysis in a single theoretical approach. Thus NTA derives from the phenomenon established in research that when people talk about their experiences with fictional literary or media narratives and about their personal life-history in a single interview, *the fictional* and *the factual* on the one hand, and social/psychological research and literary scholarship on the other, which have thus far been kept largely separate, eventually enter into an inextricable mutual relation.

This is not to say, however, that there are not significant modal differences between a *fictional text* conveyed in a technical medium and a *factual narrative* conveyed in a face-to-face interview. And with text analysis LIR's research questions turn from readers to media, from *person* to *text*, and from *factual oral* to *fictional textual* narratives. Both types of narrative can be regarded as modes of personal self-expression, which is why they are not entirely incommensurable or autonomous, as literary theory would sometimes assume; and this is also why the LIR approach encompasses both in its concept of mental media interaction. And yet, in methodological respects it appears inadvisable, as well as operationally impracticable—at least at this point in time—to treat fictional texts in exactly the same way as narrative interview transcripts.

The reasons for this methodological caution are that the interview seems in a more immediate way embedded in a co-narrative situation of interpersonal interaction; and it also refers more directly to a concept of shared reality experience. An aesthetic/fictional text, on the other hand, cast in a technical medium and directed at a larger impersonal audience, seems less amenable to the concept of interaction between author and reader. Nevertheless, the LIR approach—seeking to integrate empirical reader/author research and narratological text analysis—does require a method of analyzing literary and media narratives which is as interactively oriented as its empirical counterpart. LIR suggests the following solution to this theoretical predicament: Since analyzing a text cannot directly reconstruct interpersonal interaction proper, what narratological text analysis can do instead is to identify the interaction potentials inherent in the form and content of a particular narrative, as well as in the socio-cultural context of the audience to which it appeals (Weilnböck 2006a).

In this way NTA will reconstruct the psychological impact potential a narrative may plausibly be expected to exert on its readers. In methodologi-

cal respects NTA thus builds on an approach which in its first phase draws on the fields of linguistics, pragmatics and narratology, and in its second phase on psychodynamic clinical psychology. Consistently with this lineage NTA has recently been developed into a methodological interface between literary and clinical research (Stein 2007; Jesch et al. 2006).

From text and discourse-linguistics and narratology NTA obtains methodological guidelines which allow it to assess both the informational choice and completeness of a narrative text and its incoherencies. The informational choice and completeness with which the author (or composition subject) of a fictional narrative arranges and depicts the characters and actions in their story-world is straightforwardly assessed along the sequential phases of human action with regard to:

- the subjectively perceived causal situation of the character (before action),
- the character's build-up of personal motivation and specific intention to act in response to the causal situation,
- the implementation of this intention in the form of concrete action,
- the effects of the action, both intended and unintended (Stein 2007).

It seems fair to assume that any reader striving to follow and understand an account of events and actions in a story will spontaneously and unwittingly look for the most complete information possible with regard to these four phases, and will immediately attempt to reconstruct them according to their personal and biographically molded perception of the information given in the narrative.

Hence, any character's action within a narrative can be systematically described in the first place in terms of the completeness and choice with which the elements of cause/intention/action/effects are represented. Secondly, the text can be methodically scrutinized with regard to phenomena of narrative incoherence, whereby incoherence is understood to represent a verifiable deviation from a predictable order of occurrences and actions within a narrative—predictable and verifiable with reference to the *internal* as well as *external* logic of the narrative. Instances of *internal* incoherence can be methodologically identified in three distinct dimensions:

- in the order of space and time in a narrative, along the linguistic relations of *first ... then* and *there ... also there*,
- in the order of correlations and conditions in the narrated world, along the linguistic relation of *if ... then*, and
- in the order of cause and effect, of intention and result, as well as of finality, along the linguistic relations of *because*, *in order to*, *with the result that*.

Instances of *external* incoherence are identifiable with reference to the cultural frames and patterns, and the general knowledge of the historical period and socio-cultural sphere, in which author and reader operate. Here inco-

herencies and deviations are verifiable with reference to other widespread cultural narratives (or representations of knowledge) of the time, which serve as predictable frames of reference and which indicate a logic of occurrence and action which may deviate significantly from the logic of the narrative to hand.

The second phase of NTA, which follows the text-linguistic assessment, serves to formulate hypotheses and draw conclusions about how the phenomena of textual incoherence and/or incompleteness might impact the reader—which to a certain extent implies the question how the reader might be motivated by the compositional subject of the text (i. e. the author) in the moment of text production.

On this—more challenging—second level of inquiry one needs to muster scientific assistance from those fields which are most knowledgeable about issues of mental impact, as well as of mental causes and motivation: clinical and psychodynamic psychology. Here too, the OPD psychodynamic manual provides the main guidelines, followed by other more specific psychological resources (see 3.1.3 above). Analogously, the leading questions here are: Are there any psychodynamic phenomena—as defined by the OPD manual and other sources—that parallel the textual phenomena reconstructed thus far, and do such parallels produce further in-depth hypotheses about the interactive dynamics of the story world, and of the narrative itself, vis-à-vis the reader? As with transcript analysis, these interdisciplinary resources should, however, only be introduced by way of a strictly adductive (rather than deductive) mode of hypothesis-building. And they should only be brought in late and in a separate methodological step of the reconstruction procedure, after the text-linguistic analysis has been completed. Finally, they should be left uncompromised by any premature off-the-cuff psychological hypotheses. The end-product of NTA, then, is the reconstruction of the (literary/media) narrative's textual interaction potentials—in other words, conclusions about what sort of impact the narrative may plausibly be expected to have on readers in general, notwithstanding the subjectivity of individual reading acts.

NTA studies narratives as products of mental and communicative processes of interaction which—however consciously or unconsciously—aim to relate to and impact on their readers. LIR takes a different position here from that of the more radical proponents of reader-response theories in literary studies, who hold that a text's impact is mostly a matter of the reader's subjective and even idiosyncratic views, and that it cannot therefore be dealt with on the level of text. In keeping with cognitive and contextual narratologies, LIR deems it more appropriate and scientifically productive to assume, that, while empirical readers may read in highly subjective manners, they are always somehow in touch with the text, and their readings are not entirely

idiosyncratic. Moreover, the text can also be legitimately reconstructed as a subjective intentional act, i. e. as the author's act of writing.

The two-step analytic procedure is buttressed by sources both from text-linguistics and from psychology—which defines its interdisciplinary position. In this respect it is remarkable that the NTA method of analyzing fictional (literary) narratives unwittingly responds to questions formulated in recent empirical research about the co-narrative processes of psychotherapy as one of that discipline's "major challenges": "to further develop methods for describing, exploring, and measuring narrative coherence and incoherence" (Angus/McLeod 2004: 373).

4. Conclusion: The Integration of Reader and Text Analysis within the LIR Project

The key to the LIR project is to eventually bring together reader and text analysis.² Such integration, however, must not compromise the specific *modus operandi* of the two elements (outlined in 3.1 and 3.2), as has sometimes occurred when hypotheses on reader-response and observations about the text were prematurely lumped together. For text analysis cannot fully anticipate the impact of the text on the individual reader any more than an individual case study can fully explain how a text works interactively. LIR's final step toward integrating the two strands of its inquiry aims rather at reconstructing the actual variant of reader-text interaction in the particular case. It clarifies which of the narrative's textual interaction potentials an individual reader has actually responded to—and how. In other words, it draws conclusions about the issues and processes of biographical and mental identity in which both *reader* and *text* have been implicated.

In seeking to reconstruct empirical constellations and variants of aesthetic interaction, the LIR project contributes to the task of overcoming the compartmentalization of literary and media studies—which are currently split along the broad lines of *text interpretation* versus *reader research*. It can do so most effectively if matching sets of author-text-reader interaction are studied, in which a reader case study refers to a media narrative whose author consents to take part in analogous author research. LIR actively encourages inter-methodological synergies and feed-back options between reader- and text-research. For instance, narratological text analysis (NTA)—i. e. the reconstruction of a media narrative's textual interaction potentials—is likely to prompt new kinds of hypothesis for sequential transcript analysis, as well as

² The LIR approach's methodology will soon be explicated at length (Weinböck 2009b).

new and promising analytic questions which might not yet have arisen in NTA.

LIR's integration of reader- and text-research also facilitates new modes of presenting cultural studies knowledge to the wider public. A novel form of publishing is envisioned, in which the text analysis of a certain literary and/or media narrative will be accompanied by and integrated with reader-interaction analysis of two or more readings, and possibly also by the respective author-interaction case study. Thus, different empirical variants of mental media interaction within the complex constellation of an author-text-reader relationship will become available in a multi-focus perspective. Such a publication may contribute to significantly expanding the modes of current cultural discourse. It will, at any rate, help to avoid two problematic traditions in mainstream culture and literary studies: on the one hand the imposition of fixed, academically acclaimed interpretations of literary works, and on the other the introduction of abstract descriptive techniques of text analysis which remain largely detached from students' own reading experience.

Abbreviations

LIR:	Literary and Media Interaction Research
OPD:	Operationalized Psychodynamic Diagnosis
ITA:	Interdisciplinary Transcript Analysis
MEI:	Media Experience Interview
NTA:	Narratological Text Analysis
BNI:	Biographical-Narrative Interview

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