

**ERC-I Manuscript: Methodology section I of the ERC-Grant proposal 2008**  
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**5. The LIR-program's methodological approach**

LIR employs an approach of reconstructive media research, which builds upon and further develops methods from qualitative social and biography studies and draws from resources of text-linguistics, psychology, psychotherapy research, and interdisciplinary narratology. LIR encompasses two dimensions: **(5.1) qualitative-empirical reader- (and author-) interaction research** (formerly called 'reader response research'), and **(5.2) psychologically informed narratological fiction text analysis** of the literary or media narratives, which were chosen by readers as having been or being personally significant. **(5.3)** Reader research and text analyses of the respective narrative are then integrated, i.e. actual empirical variants of 'reader text interaction' are reconstructed.

The LIR-approach places particular emphasis on **methodological rigor and transparency** in order to respond to what – in part rightly so – has been discussed as 'legitimacy crisis' and 'credibility gap' in qualitative methods; also: in order to avoid repeating methodological predicaments, as they are experienced of literary studies' hermeneutics. Here, LIR profits from the high standard of quality control and inter-subjective validation in recent biography research and from text linguistics (HW 2008m, r, s).

**5.1 Qualitative interaction research: 5.1.1: Data acquisition** employs two novel methods of narrative interviewing, which follow the principles (a) of maximal openness, i.e. maximal freedom for the interviewee to design and arrange her/his story-telling, and (b) of maximal elaborate case study analysis by way of abductive hypotheses building. Each interview is conducted by two (male/female) interviewers and may take up to three hours; a second appointment may follow. In each of the LIR-program's projects the number of interviewees is kept small for reasons of "feasibility". 4 to 5 fully worked-out case studies are envisioned per project/ monographic presentation. Recruiting proceeds as long as enough promising sets of case materials have been acquired (also for the Ph.D.-theses). The interviewees are contacted by public calls and field-specific networks within the respective social area targeted by the project (A1 "violent-prone, political extreme young adults"; A2 "psycho-therapy clients" ...). The individuals responding are contacted by a – audio-taped – telephone conversation. Brief profiles are produced on the basis of which the LIR-team ranks the first five candidates for interviewing.

**5.1.1.1:** Each interviewee first undergoes a state-of-the-art '**narrative biographical interview**' (NBI) (G.Rosenthal 1995, 2004). The NBI is set off by a 'narrative initial question' which – in a maximally non-specific way – asks the person to recount her/his life-history. After the interviewee gave her/his 'main narration', 'internal narrative follow-up questions' are posed, which aim at generating further narration of lived-through experiences. These questions set in, wherever the interviewee utters argumentations, subjective theories, or detached forms of description. In the last phase of the interview 'external narrative follow-up questions' are posed. They may confront the interviewee with instances of narrative incoherence or conspicuous deviations from a standard reality perception; they may also bring in external issues pertaining directly to the study's specific interest. Here the NBI – in a significant methodological innovation – may include key questions from the OPD diagnostic interview (see below 5.1.2.2) in case the pertaining issues have not already been sufficiently covered during the biographical interview. (The OPD is the second type of interviewing in which the team received training; see below 6.) At last the interviewee is asked to identify a literary or media production which has been and/or still is of high personal significance to her/him. Thereafter the LIR-team produced 'research memos', a 'sequence protocol' and a 'preliminary analysis' of the NBI.

**5.1.1.2:** In a second step the interviewee undergoes the ‘**narrative media-experience interview**’ (MEI) which I have recently developed (HW 2008m, r, s) because firstly, the standard modes of qualitative and/or biographical interviewing do not lend themselves to grasping media experiences, and second, what has been employed by some as so-called ‘media biography interview’ does neither sufficiently grasp ‘media experiences’ itself nor does it really get to fathom out the biographical dimension of an individual – let alone the aspect of life-long psychological development (HW et al. 1999a, b, HW 2003e, 2006d, 2008n, o).

**The MEI is conducted** after the interviewee has individually re-read/re-viewed the text/film s/he identified as being personally significant. The LIR-team has read/seen the narrative, too, and produced two sorts of memos in preparation for the MEI: (1) a ‘sequence protocol’ for the interviewers’ immediate orientation, in which the plot-turns and characters are chronologically registered, and (2) the ‘MEI hypotheses memo’ (see below). At the beginning of the MEI the person is asked by way of a maximally open narrative ‘initial question’ to talk about the recent re-reading/ re-viewing and about the personal associations during and shortly after this experience; also about the first-time media experience in the more distant past. After the main narration a set of **novel techniques of ‘internal follow-up questioning’** is applied, which basically goes into two directions alternately: (a) For one, the questions aim at prompting the interviewee to narratively elaborate on her/is spontaneous perceptions, thoughts and imaginations about the plot events and their causalities as well as about the characters’ motivations and biographical pre-histories. (b) Secondly, they prompt the interviewee to articulate personal associations and memories from her/is own biographical experience, which resonate with her/is thoughts/ imaginations about plot and characters. Passages from the media narrative may directly be brought in (re-read/ re-screened) pending the path of the interview (HW 2008m, r). This process goes, as it were, top-down into the media narratives’ world as is subjectively perceived by the interviewee, and then again bottom-up into her/is personal biographical memories triggered by the media narrative (and to certain extents also vice versa).

Then the ‘**external narrative follow-up questions**’ are posed (only in the last phase of the MEI !) on the basis of the ‘MEI hypotheses memo’. This memo consist (a) of a collection of hypotheses about how and to which particular text sections/ plot-turns the interviewee might respond, given the ‘preliminary analysis’ of the biographical interview (NBI), which – with the LIR-approach – includes hypotheses of a psychological and psycho-biographical nature (see below data analysis 5.1.2.2). Furthermore (b), by this time the ‘preliminary narratological text analysis’ is drafted (according to the NTA-method; see 5.2), but not yet fully worked out for research-economic reasons. This draft contains hypotheses about the narrative’s ‘textual (inter-) action potentials’. Both sorts of hypotheses (a and b) assist the interviewer in producing external follow-up questions.

The ‘preliminary narratological text analysis’ constitutes **the methodological link** at which LIR’s two dimensions – *reader research* and *text analysis* – interconnect. (In addition, for the A3-project the ‘author’s media experience interview’ [A-MEI] will be developed analogously, which is based on a recent re-reading of the own text and pertaining notes and materials. In A4.f and possibly in A1 the ‘narrative group-analytic media experience interview’ [NGI] [HW 2002f, g, 2003d, 2007c] is employed.) With the NBI and MEI being completed, the team decides which case materials will receive full analysis (i.e. full transcription of audio tapes and full narratological fiction text analysis).

**5.1.2 For qualitative data analysis** a novel method of ‘**interdisciplinary transcript analysis**’ (ITA) is employed, which systematically integrates psychological resources. ITA thus responds to the *double complexity* of LIR’s guiding research question – for one: a person’s mental interaction with a media narrative, and second: this interaction’s long-term function for her/is psycho-biographical development.

**ITA's first phase (5.1.2.1)** applies standard reconstructive transcript analysis, as practiced in **qualitative biography studies**: i.e. narration analysis by abductive 'sequential hypothesis building' aiming at reconstructing the particular "difference between the narrated *life story* and the experienced *life history*" (G.Rosenthal 1995, 2004) and formulating the individual's 'guiding (inter-) actional principle(s)' of long-term biographical development and decision-making (G.Lucius-Hoene, W.Marotzki). Biography studies' transcript analysis follows a well laid-out path of methodical steps (HW 2006d, 2008m, r): (1) Extraction of basic biographical data; (2) text and thematic field analysis of the interviewee's narration by abductive verification-falsification procedure (i.e. analysing the structure and dynamic of the person's narrative self-presentation); (3) 'reconstruction of the *life history*' (i.e. of the lived-through pre-/semi-narrative experience of the person); (4) microanalysis of particularly pertinent segments; (5) contrastive comparison of experienced '*life history*' and narrated '*life story*'; and finally (6) writing out the case-study.

**In its second phase (5.1.2.2)** the 'interdisciplinary transcript analysis' (ITA) systematically refers to resources of **clinical and psychodynamic psychology** and formulates an estimation of the person's principles of coping and mental defence. To begin with, ITA refers to the Operationalized Psychodynamic Diagnosis, OPD (<http://www.opd-online.net>). The OPD represents a multi-axis diagnostic tool which has been developed since 1994 in Germany from various more recent approaches in psychodynamics/ psychoanalysis, psychosomatic medicine and psychiatry, in order to expand the purely descriptive ICD-10 classification (International Code of Diseases of the WHO) by the 4 axis of 'experience of illness', 'interpersonal relations', 'personal conflicts', and 'mental structure') The OPD today has become a widely and internationally acknowledged common denominator in psychodynamic diagnosis and thus lends itself to setting the grounds for trans-disciplinary collaborations. Beyond the OPD manual ITA may refer to further and more elaborate psychological sources as, for instance, qualitative psycho-trauma studies (G.Fischer, G.Seidler, A.Maercker), approaches of narratological, relational/ attachment psychology (L.Luborsky, Angus/McLeod) and psychiatry (O.Kernberg et al.) whenever these sources appear promising for understanding the case material at hand.

**In procedural terms:** After the five steps of narratological sequence analysis are completed, the psychodynamic estimation proceeds in reverse order: starting with step 5 and confronting the conclusions (and the pertinent transcript material) with the following guiding questions: Are there psychodynamic phenomena – as defined by the OPD and other sources – which parallel the biographical phenomena reconstructed thus far? Do these parallels produce further and more in-depth hypotheses, when going farther back the path of biographical sequence analysis in reverse order? In consequence, what biography research usually described in quite generic terms as a person's guiding principle(s) of life-history development, is now also specified psychologically as '**the individual's psychodynamic principle(s)**' – as her/his particular '**challenge of personality development**'.

Phases one and two of ITA – biographical analysis and psychodynamic/ developmental estimation – are conducted consecutively and not simultaneously, because the first phase of analysis ought to be kept uncompromised methodologically; and premature psychological conclusions are to be avoided. The psychodynamic estimation profits from having included key questions from the OPD into the interviews (targeting 'relationship themes', 'interactional core conflicts', and/or 'core trauma compensatory patterns') (see 5.1.1). The ITA's methodical key steps will, as a matter of principle, be conducted in workshop sessions of the full team comprising researchers from different academic fields (psychology, social studies, humanities) (see below 6, 'Work Plan').

**(5.1.2.3)** The **transcript analysis of the 'media experience interview'** (ITA of MEI) proceeds analogously. Here the particular path of steps are: (1) 'thematic field analysis of the *media story*' (from the interviewee's statements on plot and characters), (2) 'contrastive

comparison with the ‘textual (inter-) action potentials’ of the media narrative, as analyzed by NTA (see below 5.2), (3) ‘thematic field analysis of the *personal references’ story*’ (from the interviewee’s statements on personal associations and memories triggered by the media narrative), (4) from 1, 2 and 3: ‘reconstruction of the *life history aspects* of the interviewee’s media experience’, (5) ‘contrastive comparison with the *life history*’, as reconstructed from the NBI, (6) ‘contrastive comparison with the person’s ‘psychodynamic principle(s)’ and ‘challenge(s) of personality development’ (also from the NBI).

Having thus analyzed (i) the person’s/ narrator’s account of her/is life-story (NBI) and (ii) her/is account of a key media experience (MEI) allows to eventually integrate the results and reconstruct an instance of **psycho-biographically driven ‘media interaction’**. It gives a picture of how the interviewee has mentally appropriated the media narrative, and whether and how s/he has – in large parts unwittingly – used it as a tool for working on and further developing her/is psychodynamic mechanisms of coping in light of her/is ‘biographical challenge’.

**The ITA’s “unconventional” approach** of reconstructing underlying ‘psychodynamic mechanisms’ and ‘developmental challenges’ in a person’s biography appears methodologically indispensable – in a “high-risk/ high-gain” logic – because there is no grasping the functional dynamic of a person’s style of mentally interacting with fictional media narratives, without any prior concept of what her/is biographically developed psychodynamic patterns of mental processing are.

An accompanying question during all reconstructive project work will be, whether and under which methodological circumstances the LIR-approach may allow for an **expansion of qualitative into quantitative research**, i.e. how categories and indices may be attained which are sufficiently applicable for procedures of rating and may thus lend themselves to conducting computerized content analysis of larger quantities of interview material. Hence, in the first instance, the complexity of LIR’s research topic and the methodological development it requires, will highlight the particular potential of qualitative methods for studying issues of culture and media studies (and for engaging in interdisciplinary collaborations with the humanities). Here, using and further developing qualitative methods appears vital, since answers to the intricate questions of ‘aesthetic and media interaction’, as posed in LIR, are hardly attainable by quantitative nor experimental settings alone – nor, of course, by humanities’ approaches of hermeneutical/ philosophical text interpretation. However, in the second instance, the LIR-program’s **options of mixed methods and qualitative-quantitative combinations** are investigated (see A4.f, “host institution”, A.Maercker, Ph.Mayring, Nigel/Schreier). Full anonymization of transcripts is conducted in order to allow for ‘secondary analysis of qualitative data’ (by other teams).