

Kann qualitative Medien(biografie)-Forschung den interdisziplinären Sprung ...

(Harald Weilnböck)

Abstract:

The author appreciates the handbook's remarkable achievement of constituting the young field of qualitative media studies within the German speaking area. It aptly assembles different theoretical approaches, subject matters, research methods and designs, which are currently used in order to reconstruct the media users' processing of media interaction and her/his appropriating media experiences. The comparable volume of Ruth Ayas, & Jörg Bergmann (ed.) is discussed too. Both books present an array of theoretical traditions from sociological hermeneutics is quite comprehensive (2.) which sometimes causes redundancies with the handbook.

Then the author adds some basic considerations about what the study of media-biography may achieve when put into the systematic methodological context of an interdisciplinary program of culture- and media-interaction research, which, he stresses, needs to be developed in the future. Here the author points out various theoretical and methodological challenges to be tackled (4.): amend the almost entire absence of psychology, i.e. of any systematic thought about the mental dynamic of interaction with media and/or literature; make use of the option to position oneself on a wider theoretical platform of interdisciplinary narratology; above all: overcome the pervasive methodological cleavage – indeed, the *surreal mirror divide* – which is to be found throughout various disciplines and which splits the two main domains of subject matter: text analysis and reader response research.

Further methodological target and desiderata are (4.1, 4.2): Realize that the most helpful systematic distinction between “quantitatively connoted and qualitatively connoted approaches” also implies the difference between approaches which may operate within a psychological concept of subject matter and those which may not, and expand the latter by concepts of human psyche and mental (inter-)action; correspondingly, take into account those few voices from literary and film studies which – while steering free from poststructural traditions – integrate various resources from current developmental and psychodynamic psychology into text analysis and which refer to psychoanalytic transference models in order to conceptualize aesthetic and/or media interaction; enhance the development of research methods which are specific to media research and not just apply methods from qualitative social research without adjusting them; expand and consolidate the procedures of data analysis which currently stick to content analysis and discourse analysis mostly and thus are bound to miss out on important aspects of mental media interaction.

The author adds two biographical notes from his own research experience in the field which help elucidate to what extent the anti-psychological aversion which is prototypical of the philological disciplines in general have calamitous effects even reaching into qualitative media studies which most often is carried through by researchers originally trained in the philologies/humanities. The notes also demonstrate what detrimental impact it may have if qualitative methods are not specifically adapted to media studies and if reader response research is not combined with an analysis of the media narrative.

Subsequently, the author focuses on issues of media-biography research (3.), because there the necessity of a developmental psychology perspective is most evident. Drawing on two

exemplary studies the pitfalls and potentials of this area of research is highlighted, that more often than not seems to be caught in an inextricable conflict between restraining oneself to historical description on the one hand and engaging in truly reconstructive media-biography research which is unequivocally based on a foundation of (inter-) action theory. However, in comparison with main-stream humanities the laudable and hopeful impetus of qualitative media research is underscored, which aims to reconstruct “the interconnection of media, subjective intra-psychic worlds, and socio-cultural realities”, i.e. study texts, readers/viewers and their mental interaction in an integrated research design.

Referring to approaches (mostly in cultural studies) which demand that already the research process may have political impact in the sense of empowering the participants, fostering the recognition of non-conventional social practices, as well as analysing structures of ideology and power, the author urges to better protect the all too vulnerable quality of qualitative research (3.4). For, qualitative researches’ esteem is unduly endangered if reconstructive investigation “ought to transmute from a hermeneutical to a political project” and if in the interest of “performativity” conceptual coherence and methodological transparency is compromised. The author accentuates his appeal by taking a little „performative turn“ himself.

With respect to approaches of discourse analysis the question is posed whether its methodology is not still more textualist and content-analytic than interactional and psychological and therefore describes semantic fields, sets of propositions, and orders of knowledge, and whether it thus is not bound to fail its target to also conceptualize and account for human subjectivity and for the subjective appropriation of discourse by individuals (4.2.1).

Asking what media-biography research may attempt to achieve in future (3.3), the author gives a rough draft of the newly developed method of *media-experience interviewing* which follows a biographical interview and focuses on individually chosen texts or media products. Referring to some issues from interview materials collected by this method the complexity of the subject matter is emphasized, which is best described as the media-based biographical and mental work of individuals and which takes into account that individuals are biographically and psycho-dynamically positioned and thus use media experiences to mentally work to integrate lived-through real-world experiences. In this approach subjective associations, remote and semi-conscious memories, fantasies and affects, which occur during and after the personal appropriation of the media narrative, are documented and reconstructed. In doing so, it becomes evident how much both classical biography and social research as well as classical culture and literary studies might profit from psychologically informed media-interaction research.

Key words: media-biography research, media psychology, qualitative inter-disciplinarity, media-specific methodology, narratology, transference-based object-relation psychoanalysis, literature psychology, discourse analysis, the media-experience interview