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Analyzing Biographical Data – Different Approaches of Doing Biographical Research

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.18778/1733-8077.10.1.01>

Introductory Remarks

In 1998, as some other researchers having interests in biographical material, I was invited to participate in the session called “Doing biographical research,” organized by Gerhard Riemann in frames of the 38 Research Committee “Biography and Society” during the 14th Congress of the International Sociology Association in Montreal. Riemann asked us to show how we approach and understand the same text of autobiographical narrative interview with a Turkish migrant woman called Hülya (Riemann 2006:8-9). The novelty of his idea was related to the fact that the typical scenario of paper presentations

on a congress session was changed into a workshop-resembled meeting; although, still limited by time constraints, yet, giving a chance to show and see the process of working on the text. The presentations were supported by vivid discussions and Riemann’s encouragement to work on the material and analyze it with students. This suggestion could successfully spread and develop some time later when the volume of *Forum Qualitative Social Research* entitled *Doing Biographical Research* was edited by Gerhard Riemann in 2003 (published on the Internet), and three years later it also appeared in the paper version in *Historical Social Research* (2006). Both editions contain articles based on Montreal sessions, texts of other authors, and the interview transcript. From the perspective of about ten years, we can see that the interview with Hülya, translated by Gerhard Riemann into English, has become one of the so-called core or “portrait”¹ interviews showing the natural history² of various biographical and social

¹ I use this expression alluding to “portrait chapters” where a researcher selects a few interviews for presentation and discussion of the master cases which are the milestone of exhaustive analysis. They exemplify key biographical and social processes of a problem under study.

² I refer to one of the fundamental terms of the Chicago School of sociology. Natural history means certain series of events which, especially, from the point of view of the social actor, were impetuous and uncontrollable, but – at the same time – especially, from the researcher’s point of view – predictable and governed by certain regularities (Szacki 1981:649).

processes presented in the frames of autobiographical narrative. The transcript has also an instructive character due to dividing it into paragraphs that are most of the time narrative segments. It helps to do structural description and present the sequential links of segments, for example, to students during workshops or seminars.

Following Riemann’s idea, two years ago, I proposed a similar data session, this time, devoted to the analysis of an interview conducted with a woman called Natalia, who spent some of her adolescence time in a children’s residential care home. The material was discussed in the session entitled *Biography and Emotion – different approaches in dealing with the life story of Natalia* during the conference “Emotion, Ethics & Performative Praxis” organized in Lodz in 2012.³ This special issue of *Qualitative Sociology Review* contains the results of this session.

In my introductory remarks, I would like to stress the role that working sessions, workshops, seminars – when common work on material evolves – play due to their methodological, epistemological, and also formative (mainly for a researcher involved in a given project) power released by joint process of interpretation. This frame of reference introducing the first part of this volume also corresponds with the volume’s second part devoted to the 70th jubilee of Professor Fritz Schütze – the founder of autobiographical narrative interview and one of the scholars promoting collective style of work on (auto)biographical data.

³ The conference was organized in September 2012 in Lodz by the Department of Sociology of Culture, University of Lodz, and Durham University (UK) as the Midterm Conference of ESA (European Sociology Association) Research Network 03 Biographical Perspectives on European Societies.

Some Dilemmas Related to Biographical Research Proceedings

The analysis of biographical material is based on the process of its interpretation supported by elaborated analytical tools, as well as contextual knowledge needed to understand specific social, cultural, or interactional contexts. Although this statement seems to point to evident assumptions, in practice, when regarding widespread applications of biographical method, it loses its obviousness. Thus, I would like to refer to some critical arguments pertaining to biographical research, formulated from different perspectives. In the end, this criticism should lead to reflection on the significance of collective work on materials.

Firstly, we can point to a few elements constituting the stereotypical image of biographical approach: biographical research is easy to be done, though strenuous; its results are blurred, subjective, and not representative; it is not easy to estimate its accuracy and reliability; one does not need special skills in order to do biographical research and to analyze empirical data thus, everybody can do it.⁴ The stereotype constructed in such a way influences both “inner” (some scholars using biographical methods) and “outer” (those who criticize biographical approach) perspectives.

Considering the outer point of view, the contrast that is, first of all, built between qualitative and quantitative methods in terms of their reliability, is based on the false conviction that within biographical research analytical procedures, if there are any, cannot

⁴ I also dwell on this topic in another text where I discuss the problem of teaching biographical methods within the university context (Kaźmierska 2010).

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be recognized as really scientific. Whereas, as Marek Czyżewski noticed (2013:22), elaborated analytical tools can be considered the real epistemological achievement of biographical approach. Analytical tools, based on sociolinguistic knowledge, as well as theoretical assumptions rooted in interpretative sociology, enable undertaking a subtle analysis of biographical constraints influenced by social barriers. In contrast to quite typical social explanations pointing at schematic circumstances (i.e., social class belonging, pathology, poverty) as the source of various social behaviors, biographical analysis based on circumstantial reconstruction of processual sequences of biographical experiences shows how and in what ways they might have happened (Czyżewski 2013:15). In this context, when showing achievements of biographical method, Czyżewski accuses biographical research of losing analytical and epistemological power due to inflation of biographical studies and incorporation of the biographical method into mainstream sociology. To some extent it is true, the presupposition of easiness often leads to a situation when biographical research is trivialized. If, sometimes even in the eyes of a person using biographical approach, it does not require any specific skills (e.g., knowledge of statistics and/or sophisticated computer programs), it means that no particular methodological education is necessary. As a result, we are confronted with research where the analysis stops at intuitive, commonsense, self taught explanations, which can be defined as a “homemade” sociology, yet alluding to the repertoire of notions well attached to biographical approach.

This attitude may be contrasted with theoretically grounded interpretative approaches where different

ways of doing biographical analysis have been developed.⁵ So, on the one hand, we have lots of projects resembling a biographical method, and, on the other, elaborated studies based on theoretically grounded procedures. Thus, we may pose a question whether each study that is called, by a researcher, a biographical one really belongs to biographical analysis. Nowadays, such questions should be put forth more often because, I would risk a statement, biographical research is one of the most “disordered” fields in social sciences – in terms of methodological reflection – although its *raison d'être* is data analysis. By disorder I do not mean the absence of methodological thinking as such but the lack of common stock of knowledge that would be recognized as a sort of basic biographical research input which those who do biographical research should be familiar with. As a consequence, the diversity of approaches and schools within biographical approach is not supported by acquainted input of possible analytical frames and theories that lay behind them. The lack of shared stock of knowledge (being both the reason and the result of the mentioned disorder) leads sometimes to misunderstandings or, even worse – trivializes the discourse among users of the biographical method. The concept of trajectory of suffering may serve here as an example. The theory of the biographical and collective trajectories, developed by Fritz Schütze and Gerhard Riemann (1991), deriving from Anselm Strauss' work on interactions between institutional processes and terminally ill patients (Strauss 1991), can be considered as one of the best elaborated theoretical concepts based on biographical analysis. However, it is not known, especially, in the context of

⁵ Just to mention the biography-oriented sociology of Fritz Schütze, structural-realist approach of Daniel Bertaux, objective hermeneutics of Ulrich Oevermann.

American sociology.⁶ This type of ignorance can be the source of attitude described by Ursula Apitzsch and Lena Inowlocki (2000:53): “while biographical research has become of interest to a number of sociologists, a certain impatience with methodological aspects of biographical analysis, as well as a seemingly weak theoretical benefits from such efforts, have led to some critical judgments” which are supported by the picture of strenuousness of biographical proceedings, including the stage of collecting material, as well as what critics would call subjectivity and what – from the perspective of qualitative analysis – is the process of interpretation.

When commenting on the tension between the fascination and the widespread use of biographical materials and quality of biographical researches, Gerhard Riemann (2003; 2006) focuses on a slightly different aspect, still, in my opinion, also related to the discussed issues. He exposes the process of presenting findings based on biographical analysis when the text is being introduced to the readers: “[they] are at loss for further specifications about how the authors really work on the data, how they gain substantive insights, and arrive at theoretical conclusions” (Riemann 2006:8). This difficulty related to veiling the analytical cuisine may be rooted in two different reasons. Firstly, presenting the data and analytical proceedings in biographical research is a real problem. Accurate descriptions, explanations, interpretations based on references to the very material require long, elaborated text analysis that does not meet, as Riemann fairly noticed, “the conventional requirements of publications” (2006:8). But, this veiling may also be caused by various kinds of methodological concerns, especially, if a so-called

⁶ See the interview with Fritz Schütze in this volume of QSR.

analysis is based on commonsense knowledge, or is reduced to descriptive and idiographic perspective or just social psychology assumptions. In such a case, it is not the author's story but his/her psychosocial profile that counts (Czyżewski 2013:24).

By expressing these remarks I would like to pay attention to the paradox of contemporary biographical research. The biographical boom apparently changed the position of the biographical method, which is, at least sometimes, placed within the mainstream of sociology. This is the criticism expressed by Marek Czyżewski (2013) in his paper “Interpretative Sociology and Biographical Method: Change of Function, Anti-Essentialist Reservations and the Problem of Critique,” where he states that the more popular (influential), for instance, the more mainstream biographical method is, the more it is endangered by being trivialized and/or instrumentalized. When accepting this criticism, I would say that it is directed towards this kind of methodological (not)thinking which, actually, should not be considered as biographical research. In other words, the paradox refers to the fact that gaining more influence, thanks to its popularity, biographical research has lost its epistemological and methodological power being flooded by “the outcomes of patient, yet, talentless erudition” (Chałasiński 1979:40 [trans. KK]).⁷

⁷ I allude to the following quotation of Józef Chałasiński (1979:39-40 [trans. KK]): “[c]omplex personal, social experience and the ability to conduct its interpretative analysis, as well as the construction that is built upon it, constitute the basic precondition for sociological aptitude. Without this aptitude, a sociologist remains no one but a skilled technician who gathers the external facts of the collective life. Therefore, sociology is not merely a science and partially a philosophy but also an art of a kind. This is why so much of sociology can often be learnt from outstanding novelists, and just as much can be found repelling due to the outcomes of patient, yet, talentless erudition. And verily there is no other written source that would broaden and enrich our personal social experience equally to the autobiography.”

Nevertheless, theoretically grounded, systematic analytical tools of biographical method exist, after all, and they are still positioned in a niche stream of biographical research, although they play pivotal roles for its development, scientific status, and real input to social sciences.⁸ One of the means of this kind of proceedings is joint work based on discussion and interpretation.

What Are Workshops and Data Sessions Needed for

So-called “data sessions,” in which researchers jointly analyze primary materials, like interview transcriptions, field notes, and other data, have turned out to be very valuable events in many conferences in biographical research and other approaches to qualitative analysis – valuable because colleagues make their specific ways of looking at things visible to each of them and thereby, reveal a lot of the analytical processes of discovery, which usually stay hidden in standard presentations of results. The atmosphere of such working sessions is often surprisingly cooperative; people often forgo the habitual tendency to celebrate the putative strengths of their own approach while creating a simplified or even stereotypical image of the other persons’ pitiable ways of understanding their data. (Riemann 2014:20)

I start this paragraph with the quotation of Gerhard Riemann’s first words in the article that is published in this volume of QSR because he perfectly describes the idea and spirit of data sessions. In his text, he exposes the meaning of conference data sessions, yet, his remark can be extended to other types of meetings devoted to the analysis of empirical material, like student seminars and workshops, project

⁸ Work of Fritz Schütze and his achievements in this field may serve as good examples, see the second part of this volume, especially, Marek Czyżewski’s text.

workshops of research teams, seminars/workshops for scholars presenting their data to others.

For me, as a sociologist doing biographical research and being “brought up” in the style of work introduced to me by Fritz Schütze and Gerhard Riemann (thanks to their publications, joint data sessions, and work in the projects), common work on material is a pivotal element of each qualitative research. In texts devoted mainly to students’ education (e.g., Riemann and Schütze 1987; Riemann 2005; 2010), especially, in the field of social work and sociology, we may find not only the description of such practices but also realize that it is not easy to convince students to undertake the effort of joint interpretation, reflecting and self reflecting, “making one’s own practice strange” (Riemann 2010:79). Also Fritz Schütze – in the interview presented in this volume – underlines the meaning of such workshops:

[a]nyway, I think it is an extremely important feature of a productive university setting to let students undergo open and cooperative research experiences. Such a social arrangement is not restricted to interpretative or qualitative sociology proper; it can be a productive arrangement within all types of social and cultural sciences. It is a very Humboldtian idea: that you would have a social arrangement for a joint research action schema that the students would freely embark on, that it is totally open regarding the results searched for, that the students as research partners would be principally equal to the docents, although they are much more inexperienced, they have lots of fresh ideas, and that all the participants would work together cooperatively. (p. 317-318)

and points that it was not easy to put them to student curriculum.

As I noticed, the published texts mainly refer to the situation of students’ education. But, as we know, the process of data interpretation should be undertaken not only with the help of certain procedures but also treated as a communicative activity (Riemann and Schütze 1987). Therefore, this type of analysis requires collective work in all research contexts. Exchanging interpretations, which are results of biography analysis, discussing meanings given to a biographer’s experiences is aimed at exchanging different perspectives and frames of references. This activity is supported by assumptions of interpretative approach underlining social construction of reality (Berger and Luckmann 1991), as well as the conviction that interpretations are negotiable and the very process should be open according to the thought that “reality over and again surpass our expectations. Whereas we are sometimes so attached to our ideas that we miss reality”⁹ [trans. KK].

In this context, I would like to share my experiences gained thanks to the cooperation with German colleagues.¹⁰ Apart from numerous students workshops¹¹ and small seminars, especially, at the beginning of my work, I have recently taken part in two projects based on autobiographical narrative interviews. The first one was a big international project engaging teams from seven countries, called “EuroIdentities: The Evolution of European Identity: Using biographical methods to study the development of European

⁹ The quotation comes from “Vademecum of the general” of one of the monastic orders. It is addressed to newly chosen superiors and it is subtitled “What to do and not to do when power is in your hands” (*Tygodnik Powszechny* 2009 [see Kaźmierska 2010]).

¹⁰ Apart from Fritz Schütze and Gerhard Riemann, I should mention Ulrike Nagel, Anja (Schreder) Wildhagen, Lena Inowlocki, Bärbel Treichel.

¹¹ Andrzej Piotrowski writes about it in the second part of this volume.

identity (2008-2011).¹² Working in such an extended (about 20 people during each seminar) and varied team was very challenging. Although we agreed to use analytical procedures of autobiographical narrative interview, the teams had various methodological and theoretical backgrounds, different knowledge about qualitative research and biographical method, in particular. In addition, we came from different cultural contexts, lived in different societies, and had either Western or Eastern European roots. All these made the situation of data sessions very demanding. The process of data analysis was accompanied by the process of cultural learning, exchanging perspectives, patient interpretations of various contexts.¹³ The project lasted for three years and, apart from the very research results, I think that one of its main achievements was the dynamic of collective work, sometimes difficult or even emotional, nevertheless, in the end, showing the value of joint interpretations and the meaning of reciprocity of perspectives.

In another, still ongoing, project *The People’s Republic of Poland and the German Democratic Republic in memory and biographical experiences of people born between 1945-55. Sociological comparison based on biographical comparison*, only Polish and German teams¹⁴ are engaged.

¹² Seven teams took part in the project, scholars coming from universities in Germany, Poland, Italy, Bulgaria, Estonia, Northern Ireland, and Wales. In the Polish team there were: Andrzej Piotrowski (in charge of research), Katarzyna Waniek, and Kaja Kaźmierska; in German team: Fritz Schütze, Gerhard Riemann, Ulrike Nagel, Anja (Schreder) Wildhagen, Lena Inowlocki, Bärbel Treichel.

¹³ The results of the project were published in *Przegląd Socjologiczny* (Kaźmierska 2011) and *The Evolution of European Identities. Biographical Approaches* (Miller and Day 2012).

¹⁴ The project is conducted by the Department of Sociology of Culture at the University of Lodz (Kaja Kaźmierska, Katarzyna Waniek, Joanna Wygnańska) in cooperation with the University of Magdeburg (Fritz Schütze, Ulrike Nagel, Anja Wildhagen, Carsten Detka) and History Meeting House – Warsaw (Piotr Filikowski, Maciej Melon) – funded by the Polish-German Foundation for Science (2012-2014).

This time, there is no need to negotiate common fields for methodological procedures. Having long, about twenty years, experiences of cooperation, we can appreciate joint work on the material. Yet, it appeared that during each meeting we are confronted with the situation of posing naive questions resulting from the lack of contextual knowledge enabling understanding subtle allusions in narratives. Interactive frames of the workshop activate opportunities for the perspective comparison that creates a chance for understanding obvious and partly unconscious mechanisms of inter-action in Harold Garfinkel's (1967) sense of "seen but unnoticed." Joint work on material helps us to extend the analytical context, already elaborated during the previous project, and enrich the process of the ongoing analysis thanks to the collaborative interpretation. This strengthens the analytical process by giving an opportunity to point to other basic relationships between the biographical identity and the society and its collective representations. Thus, thanks to activating reciprocity of perspectives, the reflection on one's own society may be enriched. The assumption that the process of the joint interpretation is accompanied by the process of mutual learning in the case of this project is not wishful thinking but one of real added values of analytical procedures.

At the end, I would like to refer to the workshop called "Biographical Research" which has been organized once a month by myself and Katarzyna Waniek since autumn 2011.¹⁵ Usually, each workshop lasts from 1.15 p.m. until 6 p.m. Anybody

¹⁵ Since we are both familiar with the way biographical workshops have been organized by Fritz Schütze and Gerhard Riemann, we wanted to implement this style of work. Thus, the described workshop is a form of application of those worked out procedures.

(M.A., PhD students or scholars) who does any kind of biographical research is welcome to present all sorts of biographical material (mostly, these are narrative interviews or autobiographical narrative interviews, memoirs, expert interviews, etc.). It is sent to participants in advance and discussed during the workshop. We start with the researcher's introduction into the investigated problem; then, we ask him/her questions since the researcher, being an expert in the studied field, can share with us the specific knowledge. This phase is very instructive for participants since they have a chance to learn about social problems, processes, phenomena, and social worlds to which they usually do not have access if not working in the field.¹⁶ At the same time, it is also educative for the researcher who, being an expert in the studied problem, has to face, sometimes, simple, naive questions, which help to realize what is, or has become, "seen but unnoticed" due to the researcher's familiarity with the studied topic. Here, the participants put themselves in the position of a Schützian stranger by "placing in question nearly everything that seems to be unquestionable" (Schütz 1944:502). Then we start exchanging comments inspired by different analytical perspectives. The floor is given to everybody by turn. Each participant, if one wishes to, is welcome to share first comments focused on main impressions coming from reading the transcripts, on specific methodological and theoretical problems, on the particular part of the interview that seems especially interesting in terms of text analysis or theoretical questions which we could

¹⁶ So far, researchers presented interviews which were conducted with, e.g., artists, prisoners, managers, refugees, transsexuals, workers, inhabitants of residential child care, etc.

carefully analyze. This phase, after Schütze and Riemann, is called "the round table." Sometimes, we manage to concentrate on a specific excerpt of the text and analyze it, but quite often, due to the lack of time, we stop at this phase, not reaching the text analysis. In such case, the researcher is encouraged to organize another seminar, in a smaller group,¹⁷ to undertake the analysis.

The main goal of the workshop may be described when referring to Riemann's remark:

[i]t would be much better if colleagues who do not share your presuppositions and routine ways of looking at things could help you – just by watching you at work, by wondering aloud, and by asking supposedly naive questions – to look at yourself and to find out what you are really doing and what you are up to. (2006:8)

Observing researchers' reactions and listening to their comments, I may say that the workshops really bring the described results. Very often the researcher is confronted with different analytical perspectives or different approaches to the data, influenced by other theoretical backgrounds or the lack of routine ways of looking at things due to the lack of knowledge about the topic under study. What is more important, people do not define this situation as "degrading" their way of interpretation but rather as enriching their analytical perspective. In such contexts we also discussed the interview with Natalia.

¹⁷ Usually, from ten to twenty people, approximately, take part in the workshop. If the researcher presents the project from a field that is empirically unknown to the audience, the phase of questions is quite long. Again, the more participants take part in the workshop, the longer the "round table" phase is.

The Case of Natalia

Like in the case of Hülya and the role of Gerhard Riemann in promoting the idea of analyzing it, the interview with Natalia was neither conducted by me nor has it been related to my research. It belongs to the collection of my institute colleague, and a very good friend of mine – Agnieszka Golczyńska-Grondas – who did the interview for her habilitation project entitled *Institutionalized identity? The process of identity development on the basis of biographies rendered by adults raised in residential child care homes*. She proposed the interview with Natalia, as well as some other material to be analyzed, during one of our Biographical Research workshops in winter 2012. The very topic appeared to be extremely interesting let alone the presented interviews which impressed all the participants very much. Agnieszka's field knowledge deconstructed our vague and stereotypical image of residential child care homes. Additionally, Agnieszka, as the interviewer, described the situation of the interview as the most difficult and emotionally demanding in her research experience.¹⁸ A part of our discussion was devoted to the question of emotions and methodological issues related to the interview with Natalia. Since we were organizing the conference focused on problems of emotions and ethics, I thought it would be good to propose the data session on this case. The interview was translated from Polish into English and sent to the colleagues who accepted the invitation, what I am

¹⁸ Detailed description of the interview situation, Natalia's behavior, the interviewer reactions, and dilemmas are presented in introductory remarks in the text by A. Golczyńska-Grondas in this volume, as well as discussed in G. Riemann's text.

still very grateful for.¹⁹ The presented articles are the results of both the conference session and the Biographical Research meeting.

The first part of the volume consists of five articles and the interview transcript, both in Polish and English. Although *Qualitative Sociology Review* is the periodical publishing in English, I assume that it will also be read by the Polish social scientists and in such case, it is worth reading the original Polish transcription also because, as we know, the translation is not always able to transfer all subtle cultural, social, and linguistic contexts and meanings. The articles are presented in the following order. The first is Gerhard Riemann's text: "A Situation, a Narrative, and a Life History. The Case of Natalia." It contains crucial methodological commentaries of the narrative situation, especially, in respect to Agnieszka's behavior as an interviewer and her methodological decisions regarding the very process of interviewing. It also contains a piece of analysis concentrated on identifying background constructions and interpreting their meaning in the narrative. It is not only an example of text analysis but it also shows the possibility of applications of this type of formal analysis to empirical data, which are not methodologically "pure" (the interview with Natalia is a mixture of a narrative interview and an in-depth interview). The second paper is written by Agnieszka Golczyńska-Grondas:

¹⁹ Unfortunately, one voice is missing here. We also invited David Divine from Durham University whose PhD dissertation is devoted to inhabitants of one of child care home in Scotland. He tried to reach the eldest inhabitants of this institution and to reconstruct their history. Additionally, he himself was inhabitant of such home. His analysis, "triangulated" by research and biography perspective, might have been very interesting. Due to health problems caused by accident he was not able to prepare the text.

"Badges of Social Valuing and the Biography. Natalia's Interview in the Perspective of Sociologist of Poverty and Social Exclusion." Apart from her interpretation, she presents Natalia's case in a wider context of the research project, as well as she describes the very situation of the interview.²⁰ The next two papers by Katarzyna Waniek "Reversed 'Betrayal Funnel.' A Case of a Children's Home Inmate who Suffers from Being Disloyal to Her Alcoholic Family" and by Sylwia Urbańska "Is Apostasy from a Family Possible? The Apostasy from an Alcoholic-Abusive Family as a Variant of (Un) Becoming a Daughter – the Case of Natalia" are examples of sociological analysis undertaken from different analytical perspectives, though framed by interpretative approach. The last text by Johanna Björkenheim, "A Social Work Perspective on the Biographical Research Interview with Natalia," is the reflection expressed in the field of social work, the discipline in which biographies similar to Natalia's case usually constitute "the arc of work" (to use a term of Anselm Strauss) for social workers both in practical and theoretical dimensions. I would like to thank all the authors for their contributions and accepting the invitation for the joint analysis of the Natalia interview.

Following, once again, the idea expressed by Gerhard Riemann when he was publishing the volume on Hülya, I would like to encourage the readers for further methodological and epistemological discussion. The presented papers prove that the process of joint interpretation helps to build some common

²⁰ A good supplement of A. Golczyńska-Grondas voice is her other text on differences between the situation of autobiographical narrative interview and therapeutic meeting (Golczyńska-Grondas and Grondas 2013).

field of discourse but it is also a mosaic of voices influenced by scientific, social, and ideological *habitus* of the authors. It was quite clear on the stage of revising the articles and vivid discussion I had at the backstage with authors and reviewers as the volume editor. So, from my perspective, I can say that the discussion has already started, and I hope it will be continued.

A Few Comments on the Second Part of the Volume: A Tribute to Professor Fritz Schütze on His 70th Jubilee

I would like to start from some personal comments connected with my research experiences. I remember the first lectures and workshops conducted by Fritz Schütze invited to the University of Lodz and my fascination with the method. I guess it must have been 1986, I was still a student looking for the topic of M.A. thesis and the method to be used. Actually, I cannot remember why I got so interested in those lectures, the difficulty to explain the reason from the present perspective lies, perhaps, in the fact that I was "raised" by this approach and I got acquainted with it in quite a "natural" way – it was neither a conversion nor the passage from one methodological perspective to the other; from the very beginning of my work, I have tried to apply the biographical method in my research. From the very beginning I have had two sources of intellectual inspirations – one coming from my colleagues from the Department of Sociology of Culture at the University of Lodz, the other coming from Fritz Schütze and some German colleagues. Although I have known Fritz Schütze for so many years, first as a student, then a young scholar participating in

his workshops, then co-organizer of student workshops and co-worker in research projects, from the very beginning our relationship has been the same since Fritz Schütze always treats co-participants of workshops and seminars, co-workers as equals. As he said in the interview:

[i]t was always done for students in order that they would get first experiences in research steps and we, in reverse, would learn from their new materials brought in and from their fresh thinking about it. We had always this "research *colleague*" relationship to our students; they would be treated as members of our research community on equal footing with participating scientific assistants (and later, even with participating professors). I kept doing this up to the end of my work time as professor. Sometimes, you get into some difficulties with it, for sure, when you have participants who were not socialized into the habit of taking the perspectives of the others participants involved. And the workshop arrangement is not something that you could do with big masses of students. Treating the students as equals. (p. 316)

This research *colleague* relationship is less related to fraternization more to having respect and a humble attitude towards others, even if they are not *equals* in terms of their knowledge and research experience.

I would like to thank Fritz Schütze for all the intellectual inspirations I have got and for showing how to be a social researcher not only in terms of professionalism but also in terms of specific, always personally oriented attitude towards those with whom we meet on our way.

I, and other Polish colleagues, have had a great pleasure to prepare and edit this part of the volume, which is devoted to the jubilee of the 70th birthday

of Fritz Schütze's. It consists of the following texts: first, in the short passage "Professor Fritz Schütze – Work and Output" we present basic information about Fritz Schütze's professional career and a complete (as we assume) list of his published and unpublished texts – the information was collected and edited by Katarzyna Waniek. Next is the article by Fritz Schütze, "Autobiographical Accounts of War Experiences. An Outline for the Analysis of Topically Focused Auto-Biographical texts – Using the Example of the 'Robert Rasmus' Account in Studs Terkel's book, *'The Good War.'*" This paper has never been published before, though, it was written in the mid 1980s. It was circulated among those who wanted to get acquainted with methodology of the biographical narrative interview. The article was originally written in English that gave the chance to be read not only by those who do not speak German but also by those who know it, yet, find it difficult to get through German texts by Fritz Schütze (he explains some reasons for his difficult style in the interview). The next chapter contains the interview that I conducted with Fritz Schütze in May 2013. My short introduction to the interview is placed at its beginning, here, I just would like to thank Fritz Schütze for giving his

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Berger, Peter and Thomas Luckmann. 1991. *The Social Construction of Reality. A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge*. London: Penguin Books.

time and sharing the story consisting not only of his biography but also constituting a rich part of (German) sociology.

The last part of this volume is completed by short statements about Fritz Schütze written by Polish colleagues working in the Institute of Sociology at the University of Lodz. Marek Czyżewski presents a general outline of Fritz Schütze's input in sociology and his specific, unique style of teaching, as well as formulating ideas. Andrzej Piotrowski presents the history of cooperation of the Polish team with Fritz Schütze and other German colleagues. Katarzyna Waniek (Fritz Schütze's PhD student) and Agnieszka Golczyńska-Grondas (co-worker in one of the projects) present personal statements.

The book review placed at the end can be seen as a very good supplement of both parts of this issue since the idea of the book is based on joint analysis of written autobiography and it also includes a chapter written by Fritz Schütze.

I would like to thank all my colleagues for contributing to this part of the volume and their help to construct it.

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