

# On Social Emergence: A Non-Dichotomous Approach to Qualitative Tool Design<sup>1</sup>

**Kamila Biały**   
University of Lodz, Poland

**Piotr F. Piasek**   
Central China Normal University

<https://doi.org/10.18778/1733-8069.20.1.03>

## Keywords:

reproduction,  
emergence,  
inflections,  
biographical  
narrative interview,  
interview about the  
present

**Abstract:** The narrative biographical interview is a research tool that has been successfully used to study the reproductions of the overall constellations of social life that occur within an individual life. The entire methodological proposal as well as the issue of reproduction are based on a dichotomous epistemology. In the presented article, we analyse this issue of reproduction as it appears in Fritz Schütze's work. Next, we describe a proposal for an alternative narrative interview – interview about the present based on a non-dichotomous epistemology. In our opinion, this epistemological perspective addresses the issue of reproduction in a completely different way. And, more importantly it introduces in the field of sociology an issue of emergence. To illustrate this non-dichotomous logics, we are using the material from one of the interviews from the research data collection.

## Kamila Biały

Sociologist (Department of Sociology of Art, University of Lodz), Gestalt therapist; her area of interest is epistemology, methodology, and ethics as pertaining to sociological problems inspired by contemporary phenomenology.

e-mail: [kamila.bialy@uni.lodz.pl](mailto:kamila.bialy@uni.lodz.pl)

## Piotr F. Piasek

Sociologist and philosopher (the Central China Normal University); his scientific interests include the ontological and epistemological problems of social sciences (phenomenology, systems theories).

e-mail: [piotr.franciszek.piasek@gmail.com](mailto:piotr.franciszek.piasek@gmail.com)

1 The article was written as part of the grant of the National Science Center (Opus 14 competition) "The shaping of subjectivity and biography of individuals in the face of changes in neo-modern society" (UMO2017/27/B/HS1/00462).



## Introduction

The following article, delving into the matter of the epistemology and methodology of social sciences, looks at – for exemplification purposes – the tool of narrative interview. It consists of two main parts. The first one juxtaposes the classic narrative biographical interview, developed by Fritz Schütze, with the proposal – developed in this research project – of an interview about the present, based on non-dichotomous epistemology. This juxtaposition refers primarily to the differences in both methodologies, founded on essentially different epistemological assumptions. Our aim is not to predicate which approach is more appropriate, but, rather, to point to a problematic issue regarding one of the primitive concepts of sociology, namely reproduction, and to compare it with the concept of emergence, which we use according to phenomenology (M. Merleau-Ponty and B. Waldenfels) (cf. Biały, Piasek, 2022) as well as the theory of Gestalt psychotherapy (especially field theory: G. Francesetti and J. Roubal).

The second part, in turn, presents in detail what these theoretical inspirations as well as epistemological assumptions imply for the methodology and methods of the narrative interview that we have constructed about the present. On this occasion, just like Schütze himself, we refer to Gestalt psychology, though transfer its guidelines from the individual level to the situational level. In this step we use the theory of Gestalt psychotherapy, the contemporary version of which, within the framework of the figure-ground concept, particularly emphasizes the importance (and possibilities) of the ground component, i.e. it is interested – similarly to certain trends in phenomenology – in the level of source undifferentiation, an undifferentiated ground. This means adopting other onto-epistemological assumptions, non-dichotomous assumptions, according to which the reality (examined) is not based on dichotomies or divisions, but constitutes a certain whole, a certain **field** of interaction of various forces. And it is only from them that a specific and situational organization emerges. The figure that emerges from this undifferentiated background in the analyzed case is the subjectivity of the narrator, Marzena.

At this point, the purpose of the second part of the article coincides with the intentions of the first part. We do not stop at decoding socio-cultural tropes both in the narrative and in the life of the narrator, which on the one hand a critical sociological analysis assumes, but, on the other hand, it may lead to the reproduction of sociological theses and the scientific discourse regarding, in this case, late-modern subjectivity (fluid, fragmented, short-term, and immature). By introducing this new epistemological perspective, we want to sensitize to the potential of what is new in this interview, in this particular life, which subtly emerges. The methodological proposal – an interview about the present, including its structure, rules, manner of conducting, and data analysis (see the other article of ours in this volume) – focuses on the (non-divided) research situation, traditionally dichotomized into the narrator and the researcher. We are interested in a certain quality of presence and contact between Marzena and the researcher, a certain relational background, a basis for reproducing divisions, tensions, discontinuities, fragmentation, as well as the emergence of a certain foundational concrete, something new, alive, spontaneous, integrated in this here-and-now of the research situation. In the case of our narrator, it is the aspect of her subjectivity.

## I

As part of the research grant, we conducted a narrative interview about the present – present life interview and a biographical interview – both unorthodox variants of the interviews initiated by Fritz Schütze. The latter's work was an important point of reference for us. In the method of analyzing narrative interviews that he developed, the German researcher used terms developed on the basis of research by Gestalt psychologists (Koffka, Köhler, Wertheimer). As Schütze wrote: “[l]ife history is a narrative ‘gestalt’ that must be envisioned as an ordered sequence of personal experience, and that orderliness implies the inner identity development of the biography incumbent” (Schütze, 2016: 11). The figure emerging in the process of conducting the interview is understood by him as a self-ordering and self-linking “concatenation of chunks” of events and experiences. What is linked together and the binding mechanism itself belongs to the internal process of the person reporting on his/her biography. Furthermore, by using the term “Gestalt” in this way, Schütze implies a teleological understanding of emergence: what emerges in the narrative tends toward order. The issue of “inner identity development”, in effect, equals the internal reproduction of order (including its location in the reproduction of broader structures transcending the individual self) and not the process of emergence itself. This is a point that distinguishes our view of the interview from Schütze's approach. The research task we set before us made us look at the Gestalt-situational and not the Gestalt-individual nature of the interview, in such a way as to avoid focusing on the order that is being reproduced, or which would be ontologically – in a teleological way – inscribed in the development of the narration.

According to Schütze, holistic Gestalt, as a result of drawing attention to the dependence on the unique connection that happens “here and now” in the presence of the researcher motivating the story is described as situational; however, its ontological horizon is limited to what can be bound between the building blocks of the experiences of a single self. This is what the concept of biographical work, which this author uses, refers to:

Biographical work [...] is done by autobiographical recollection, reflection about alternative interpretations of one's life course tendencies, self critical attempts of understanding one's own misconceptions of oneself and self-chosen or self-erected impediments, a circumspect assessment of impediments superimposed by others and by structural conditions, imagining future courses of life that support the overall “gestalt” of the unfolding biographical identity as essentially one's own, deciding on the next concrete steps of that unfolding and permanently evaluating the outcomes in terms of the overall distinguished gestalt worked out by recollection, analysis and imagination (Schütze, 2016: 6).

In Schütze's works, the figure is at the center of interest, which thus emerges from a certain concreteness. Biographical work is done within some (social) whole that precedes it. This can be contrasted with the social dynamic, at the center of which stands the undifferentiated, preceding every particular. However, what is undifferentiated can be more felt than understood. It is worth noting that Schütze's way of analyzing the biographical interview coincides with the overall picture of sociology as a science

interested primarily in the recreation of order and reproduction of structures. Doing biographical work on the prompted experiences material, as described in the above quotation, being the performance of ordering work, boils down to introducing order into the often initially disorganized space of past experiences. Such introduction of order, making life an individual cosmos, can also be contrasted with the introduction of what is alien, as Bernhard Waldenfels wrote. The introduction of alien is enabling the voice of a destabilizing ambiguity which is already present, but often functioning silently, inhibited by the reproducing order (cf. Waldenfels, 2011: 128). The perspective of the sociological search for basic undifferentiation as a way of practising this science is introducing precisely such alien into its sphere.

The ability of self-narrative, reflecting one's own life in a narrative interview, results to a large extent not only from the narrator's competence, but also from the structure of the statement imposed by the genre of the biographical story itself. The entire history of life and reflections on it are largely motivated by the diachronic nature of the statements. The narrators' stories are arranged in advance by subordinating them to the generic structural feature of the story, namely the cause and effect of events and the search for reasons for what happened in the narrator's life. In order for the narrative to not be subordinated to the reproduction of orders, but to show the emergence (of subjectivity, social institutions, etc.), the subject of the narrative should be shifted from biography – cause-and-effect diachrony, which is a cultural form of order – to the narrator's here and now.

On the basis of the ongoing project work, we have developed just such an alternative narrative interview. We were guided by the desire to report on the process of the emergence of situationally-understood identities, and then entire social structures. On the one hand, the present life interview is an invitation to recreate the typical filters or, as we call them, sectors through which the subjects perceive themselves; there is personal life, work, passions, etc. On the other hand, in the introduction to the interview, we inform the reader that the mechanics, the way in which we invite the respondents to talk about their present, is to talk about things, thoughts, feelings as they become apparent. And, even if these sectoral structures are initially reproduced, there comes a moment in the interview when they become saturated. That is when the possibility arises – abstract or concrete, from the level of understanding or from the level of feeling – to broaden the perspective of looking at one's own life in the situational here-and-now.

The above duality – the ease of sectoral description of life by the narrators and our constant invitation to talk about what emerges here and now – is reflected in the double name of the tool. In “interview about the present”, “present” means “here and now” and an invitation to constant sensitivity and attentiveness to the process expressed in the interview situation. In contrast, in the “present life interview”, “present life” refers to a broader (social) constellation that the narrator articulates situationally. It may seem that the present life (constellation) stands in opposition to the very emergence (here and now), which we are looking for during the analysis of the collected material. We would say, however, that this constellation emerges precisely in this situation, which is not so much in opposition as it is in an inflexible position, i.e. in an ever-present resource – in the structures and

meanings available to narrators and researchers<sup>2</sup>. Besides this, the very possibility of such a social situation as participation in an interview results from the presence of this constellation resource. The latter, however, exists in a flickering and opalescent way, i.e. subject to constant transformations, just as the arrangement of colors in a petrol stain depends on the point from which it is viewed. As a result, the existence of this hardened resource is indisputable, but its concrete realization has yet to emerge. It is not so much a potential as a virtuality: it appears in the constant assumption that a new emergence may destroy the existing interpretive relationships or ways of understanding one's own life situation<sup>3</sup>. Most often, novelty is possible with the existence of such rigidity that means the safety of reproduction, i.e. in the feeling of the existence of a familiar ground. Then we can talk about what must be inflexible and that it should be so to some extent, thus laying the foundation and, perhaps paradoxically, enabling this foundation to be rebuilt. In Gestalt psychotherapy, this is referred to as a personality function, one of its aspects; the aim of this aspect is to support deeper contact through a system of values, ongoing relationships with other people, own commitments and interests. The other side of this function is fixed personality, which avoids the unknown, new contact by reproducing specific ways of being (Philipson, 2022), inflection, more on which we write below.

## II

The scenario of an interview about the present can be divided into three parts: a longer introduction, an improvised main part, and an ending, which may be appropriately modified depending on the research needs. The introduction – although it contains information about the members of the research team, as well as a reservation that the material will be fully anonymized – is primarily an invitation to freely express oneself about various elements of the narrator's current life. We usually use a generalized structure of such an invitation, each time adapted to the situation and the interviewee. It consists of two parts which, for example, may sound as follows:

### A.

This is not a standard sociological interview in the style of a survey and follow-up questions, but it is more about you telling me about various things from your current life. What you say is as important to us as how you say it. That's why it's important to speak freely and not to wonder what it might be useful for or how it will sound (whether syntactically or chaotic). Rather, let yourself say things as they come to mind.

---

2 The list of semantic bundles contained in this paragraph, referred to on the one hand by "interview about the present" and on the other by "interview about present life", brings associations to the phenomenological instrumentation, going back to Husserl. Epoché assumes bracketing the so-called natural attitude, i.e. all judgments, beliefs, but also feelings and perceptions, confirming the existence of the world, as already given so that in the next step – phenomenological reduction – the "purified" consciousness could focus only on the content emerging in a given topicality. This does not mean, however, that after reduction the world disappears altogether; the phenomenological attitude still takes place within it.

3 On the distinction between potentiality and virtuality, cf. Meillassoux, 2012.

B.

Everyone has different things in their lives, and we just want you to talk about these different things from your current life. These can be specific things, thoughts, events, feelings – anything related to your current life. When I'm done talking now, take a moment to see what comes to mind and when you feel there's a topic, just start telling it as it comes to mind. If that topic reaches an end, then take a moment again and when something new comes up, talk about it.

Between these two parts there is a moment to relieve the tension that may have already appeared in the narrator in the face of receiving information that he/she will be the support for the structure of the interview here rather than follow a pre-prepared questionnaire. It is also important during the introduction to normalize in advance any moments of silence, the moments needed for reflection, for some new issue or topic to come to mind. In this way, the duality described above has been operationalized – we invite the narrators to speak freely about current aspects of life, convincing them at the same time to allow themselves a free stream of thoughts, for these issues to emerge in the speech itself.

After such an invitation to narration, the improvised main part follows. The issue of improvisation refers not only to the narrator's story, but also to the attitude of the researcher, who – unlike in a narrative biographical interview – has the opportunity to intervene and ask the interviewee questions during the main statement. This difference between the two types of interview, related to the role and activity of the researcher, results from certain assumptions we made. While in the biographical interview the focus is no less on decoding the process of reproducing institutional patterns and values attributed to them by the narrators, the role of the researcher is, to a large extent, to remain neutral or transparent. In an interview about the present, we are interested in the emergence process of what is new (even if in direct connection with the reproduction of what has been hitherto). And if the situation of the interview makes it possible to capture the emergence process of figures that are important in the narrator's life, then – in our opinion – it always takes place relationally; in the presence<sup>4</sup> of another person, whether a significant other or a researcher.

The researcher's interventions may follow two non-exclusive strategies. Both are based on the mechanism of supporting the emergence of the figure of speech/contact. The first strategy refers to supporting a figure which, in the understanding of the researcher, is related to the research issues. The support provided by the researcher at that time does not interfere with the autonomy of the narrator's statement so much as it allows for a more complete extraction of any of the emerging threads. This must be done mindfully of resistance to emerging matter, to which we will return in detail when introducing the inflection. The second strategy relies on supporting a figure that is not connected with the research problem but which, at the level of the researcher's feelings, leads them to something interesting. The assumed interest is the medium of "something important" in the life of

---

4 On the category of presence as one of the key parameters of the field perspective in Gestalt psychotherapy referring to the origin of experience, to what is defined as the pathic dimension cf. Francesetti, Roubal, 2020.

the narrator, which cannot often come completely freely, requiring the researcher to be fully attentive to the needs of the situational ground.

Let us, therefore, dwell for a moment on inflections which are directly related, in particular to the first strategy of supporting the emergence of figures. Their existence and operationalization are at the same time a response to a potential accusation of the possibility of various attitudes and prejudices affecting the researcher's activity. Inflections are the phenomena that are included in the process of creating a figure not accidentally and, therefore, responsible for the above limitations.

As we have already written in another article (Biały, Piasek, 2022), we are interested in taking on the relationship between the self and the world as the subject of sociological research, which in Gestalt psychotherapy is defined as the process of contacting. This is natural for sociology as long as it is focused on the search for what is supra-individual – whether as an emergent entity or the sum of individual decisions each time. Each inflection, the modality of contact, is a specific way of the I-world relationship emerging. Inflections were called – in the post-Freudian nomenclature of the creators of Gestalt psychotherapy – disturbances/mechanisms of avoiding contact (Perls, Hefferline, Goodman, 1951). While the way they described them had much of a dichotomous/binary epistemology, in spirit their founding text went beyond a simple subject-object division. This text founded a whole further upheaval taking place within the epistemology of Gestalt psychotherapy today. It is based on a critique of individualistic psychology and psychotherapy, including Freudianism, within which there are unambiguous binary divisions between illness and health. In the new model, we go beyond these dichotomies toward the polyphony of contact styles that emerge in a social situation (here related to the therapeutic relationship), are experienced, reflected on, and become the subject of experimentation (cf. Francesetti, 2015; Spagnuolo Lobb, 2017). In other words, it is not aimed at curing the neurosis assigned to the patients, but treats it as a phenomenon of the field (situation), which is primarily allowed to emerge, expand, deepen, and not close, pacify, heal. Even those inflections that recur in life over a longer period of time are invariably and visibly associated with the experience of suffering, i.e. they happen as long as their function does not run out.

The distinction in question can also be related to our research practice. Although it is not obvious, it is the classic biographical interview, where the narrator's social background is reproduced and where he/she is treated as a certain holistic being characterized – as in Freudianism – by a certain fixed structure, is closer to this less flexible approach. An approach in which the structure of pathologization is still inscribed, or the desire to position differences (between the client and the therapist or the narrator and the researcher). On the other hand, both when constructing the theoretical background, conducting the research, and creating the analytical apparatus looking for a language to describe the process taking place during the interview, we followed the maxim of co-created experimentation. In fact, the entire onto-epistemological basis forced upon us the ethics of the experiment, and, thus, improvised intervention during the interview was inevitable. The practice of conducting an interview in its factuality played out on both poles – fixing and experimentation. Therefore, it was not only worth inviting the narrators to some form of “transgressing” their current style of contact, but also accepting fixed elements of the process that was happening in the interview.

Let us first, however, take a brief look at these ways of reproducing the relationship between the self and the world (after Robine, 2013). It is worth noting that while the content of being/living is most likely also subject to reproduction, inflection describes primarily the formal side of ways of being, ways of solving the issue of the boundaries of the I-world.

**Confluence** is maintaining the lack of differentiation between the self and the world, related to the fear of becoming aware of all issues that lead the self to adopt the first-person perspective, i.e. one's desires, needs, etc. The measure of confluence, sometimes specified as a separate inflection, is desensitization, i.e. remaining in bodily unconsciousness.

**Deflection** is related to ignoring or turning away from the emotional impulse that would necessitate acknowledging or realizing the acquired material. The individual resists such direct contact with the environment and instead diverts attention to some other topic, or often uses humor to avoid conflict. People deflect from their feelings by constantly talking or by laughing, as opposed to taking themselves seriously.

**Introjection** is a phenomenon of grasping the world and strenuous, mechanical assimilation of some element (e.g. preferences or character traits) without its full integration. This is the first inflection that assumes a reference to the world: confluence or desensitization act as if there was no Self-world difference. As a result of this bringing the world into itself, the Self replaces its potential desires or appetites with those of others.

**Projection** is already associated with affect and emotions, with going outside (*e*→*motion*). However, in order for the emotion to occur, it is necessary to accept the arousal and face the environment; in other words, to associate the appetite with the newly created object. Projection, however, is an unconscious rejection of the sense of having one's own affect, which is consequently attributed to other people/the environment/the world.

**Retroreflection** is related to the forward movement to make full contact. This forward movement in Gestalt therapy is referred to as (healthy) aggression, which is the beneficial human power to cause certain events, to give to the world and to receive something from the world. Retroreflection allows one to avoid the fear of aggression, being an action that stops the impulse (statement, emotional reaction, or behaviour) and turns toward the only harmless object available in the field, i.e. one's own body and personality. Under normal circumstances, it allows engagement to slow down, allowing emotions to adjust.

**Egotism** – while retroreflection is associated with prudence, spontaneity is crucial for this phase of figure development, enabling the “final contact” to occur. It is related to relaxation, letting go, finishing the actions taken and opening up to the moment when the I-you changes temporarily into “we”. Egotism as a specific form of retroreflection closes this final contact. Characteristic of this inflection is the separation of the self from the world and the reduction of the world to knowledge that can be used to increase one's sense of power and control.



### III

In order to show the function of the intervention within the narrative interview and the role of inflection in the emergence of what is new in the interview about the present/present life, below we present a longer fragment of the exchange between the researcher and the narrator, derived from the empirical material we analyzed. It must be pointed out that this empirical case is used in a loosely, speculative way to illustrate a theoretical concept and, most importantly, the methodology and method. We are aware of the fact that a systematic analysis would require another article. The narrator, Marzena, is a 30-year-old PhD student of the polytechnic and activist working for the LGBT+ community. The excerpt below starts in the 142<sup>nd</sup> minute of the interview. The reproduction of various motifs taking place over the course of that time, i.e. the narrator's inflexibility and the modality of contact, allowed for the emergence of a new figure both in the statement itself and in the narrator-researcher relationship.

Marzena tells her story in a generalized way and when she refers to herself, it is mediated by a narrative about social movements, groups, and collective events. You could say that it tells a story, but it does not explain what it is about. In this way, the material is collected without breaking the collection mechanism, which in the case of this statement would be a direct reference to the subject of this story, to itself. Her story is a field of chaotic elements, inconclusive and not very personal. Although it would seem that her statement concerns issues of high intimacy, to a large extent she quickly jumps between threads and dilutes the story with anecdotes, thus discharging the tension that would be generated by a longer, broader, and, above all, deeper focus on a single problem. This means that the inflection characteristic of the interview with Marzena is deflection (cf. above).

Before deciding to intervene, the researcher remains for a relatively long time (142 minutes) in listening, taking in, and containing various threads and topics, which unfortunately is not possible to illustrate in the article. Thus, it gives space for reproduction of the inflection/styles of being in the world familiarized by the narrator, which lays the foundation for the emergence of novelty. He also focuses less on the individual content and more on the background, i.e. slowing down, waiting and empathizing with the situation. It is from this existing, undifferentiated (but felt) background that the novelty emerges over time, here a special aspect of the narrator's subjectivity. Speaking in the language of field theory within Gestalt psychotherapy, the researcher adopts the attitude of being open to what comes, not reacting hastily, being aware that the so-called first wave of statements, self-references bears the hallmarks of reproducing a certain fixed pattern, i.e. it comes from a dichotomous order, where the subject and the researcher are separate from each other (Francesetti, Roubal, 2020). The so-called second wave assumes attuning to the non-dichotomous dimension, according to which something is about to emerge, there will be a situational surprise, e.g. a clear different understanding or a vague but strong feeling that something has changed.

**But do you have such a, such a desire to remain on the margins with your actions? (.) Do you think that inevitably, what you are interested in is simply (.) being pushed a little to the margins?<sup>5</sup>**

– You mean, in a sense of being pushed to the >margins< a little...?

**I mean more niche stuff.**

– I didn't really understand the question.

**Aha.**

– Because-I-don't-know if you are asking in the context of (.) Association xx?

**No, in general such >different< (.) organizations.**

– >Stuff<. Do I... do I (.) want to do niche stuff? (.) Yes?

**Mhm.**

– =I mean= (.) I don't know, I often do things that concern me =directly. (.) I think so. (.) Well, because I'm in an association=, (.) I mean I don't know what it would be like >if I wasn't a queer person<. (.) Cause I remember how...

**What I meant was that you just deal with certain things (.) and they are pushed to the margins. And is that how you experience it?**

– But in a sense, +okay, you mean things+ that I do (.) are >systemically<, shall we say, (.) >marginalized by society< +or by the people I work with+?

**Well, you know what, because you also said that you experience such loneliness in that, for example, let's say that people (.) start to cross over to the other side,**

– Ah right! Yeah, yeah.

**don't they? (.) And I wonder, because also (.) from the perspective of society, let's say, these are such (.) niche things. I mean, do you experience this as (.) a kind of marginalization?**

– =Aah, I understand you now= [laughs]. +I guess, (.) it will turn out soon+, (.) I mean, >when it comes< to, because-like-you-say (.) that people disconnect, (.) that they switch to the other side, (.) I don't know, (.) I don't want to judge either, in the sense I don't want to judge it by any >conformist way, because< somewhere there (.) for some such way, let's say more, (.) more (.) common, >I don't necessarily want to<. >And< when it comes to this kind of >marginalization<, I mean I generally-feel-like I'm getting =more and more marginalized=. (.) Such-a-lack-of-understanding, but, really, (.) it's rare for >me< that >I present my< assessments to someone, that I tell someone (.) that they are like this (.) and do something wrong. It very rarely happens, I rather try not to do it. (.) Even if someone (.) just kind of (.) just-crossed-over or something like that, they're doing something wrong. But-I-often =come across comments (.) in my direction=. And these are all kinds of comments, (.) just about the fact that (.) it's not fully... (4)

5 Indications used in transcription:

<u>all kinds of</u>	emphasis
because-like-you-say	speaking faster in a group of a few-word fragment
>conformist way, because<	slower
(.)	micropause
[laughs]	non-verbal behavior
+ okay, you mean things+	louder
= I mean=	quieter

Thus, the beginning of the second wave in the case of the analyzed narrative is marked by this awkward exchange between the narrator and the researcher (Marzena's misunderstanding of the question and the researcher's inability to clearly express the question), which, however, causes Marzena to start – with an unprecedented in her narration 4 seconds' long break – talking differently, in a new, more intimate way about herself. Perhaps it is – after a more than two-hour monolog – the researcher's marking his presence in this full of absence, misunderstanding, and painful experience of the narrator. In this fragment, one can hear fluctuations in the tone of the narrator's voice and her breathing. Both speaking softer and suddenly loudly are signs of a greater feeling for the narrator and a reduced narrative distance, by which we mean a reflective multiplication of threads, anecdotes, etc., shifting attention to the form of the story and limiting the development of its content. After anger, frustration, quoting her activist worldview, and certain reproduction of this kind of narrative about herself and the world, there is a moment for the emergence of sadness, grief, a sense of loneliness – for the intimacy of experience. That is, something the lack of which is signaled – not without reason but also with a certain reproducing automatism – by the discourses of late modernity. The novelty is the differentiation of the narrator in a given moment and space of this research situation. It is a missing element of identity rather than something accidental, something that could find its articulation in a specific presence, here the presence of a researcher.

Let us return to the interrupted empirical illustration; it starts again – after this 4-seconds-long break – as befits its typical inflection/typical narrative pattern – from a series of anecdotes (concerning her wardrobe, the way of addressing her in offices – as a teenager) in which one can sense anger and frustration. The deflection of these anecdotes does not, as before, serve to avoid contact – in this case leading to a weakening, limiting the feeling of oneself – but to something diametrically opposite: it is the basis for expressing oneself in a new way. In other words, these deflective anecdotes no longer have a chaotic dimension, they add up at that moment to a certain totality of experience. The anger in this passage can be said to be more personal. For clarity, we have bolded the fragments most symptomatic of the above thesis:

– [...] >in general it's really cool that I'm< (.) experiencing (.) something that, for example, people (.) in high school age experience. (.) Because, for example, I don't know, (.) it's not like I'll buy a beer without an ID, so people treat me that way too. (.) And in >healthcare and (.) everywhere<. Just because =if I wore, for example, >sweaters<, (.) >suits<, and I don't know, anything else=, I have, you know, (.) various >tattoos< here and (.) I also dress so often, (.) I don't know, (.) mainly I have (.) T-shirts of various bands. I don't wear makeup and so on. These clothes have been with me, (.) I don't know, for 10 years. =You know, I wear the same clothes over and over= and people just treat me like I'm younger. >Whether it's a doctor, or, or, or anywhere else<, or at xx [language school], >in the secretary's office (.) and so on<, or when going to the university to my room, where I have a key, (.) anyway, (.) it's-the-same =room that [name] has=, then the lady doesn't believe me. I mean =this key=. I say check it out, =[her name]=. Because I (.) stopped, in the sense of no, (.) I'm just talking about appearance now (.) and maybe also about behavior, right? =As if (.) I also (.) behave (.) like this, (.) as if (.) without exaggerated >savoir-vivre<. So, well=, (.) respect

is the basis, you know, (.) but I'm not (.) like that sometimes. (.) For example, the last time I had this (.) examination for occupational medicine, there was a girl, more or less my age. (.) >That's< what I'd say the average >27 year old< looks like. And how they were addressing her, (.) and me, me, like in a child's playroom. +Sit down+, please, something, and to her, please sit down Madam, something. +Totally crazy right? I don't know+, >earrings<, something like that.

**I understand.**

– So far, I mean, people (.) still take =people who have some of these things too less seriously,  
**mhm**

– earrings, (.) or tattoos, (.) or >some< I don't know, some different pins (.) on backpacks and= I do frivolous, these-are-frivolous-things

**mhm**

– =for many people=. =Non-team play= is a frivolous thing. The fact that I (.) sometimes stay up late at night >for< work, some kind of organization, (.) sometimes checking projects, doing things that sometimes, (.) often-people-get-jobs in their professions, well, that's (.) also not taken seriously. **It is also that (.) I, (.) I specifically call it work, because I believe that when someone (.) works, they work. This is a verb, (.) you do something, (.) you work. Right? >You get tired doing< it, it has some >result< and so on. If I >wanted< to, I could also do it (.) professionally.**

**mhm**

– **But-I-do-it-for-free. That doesn't mean it's not work.**

**mhm**

– **But people >treat it as if<, as if I have totally free time.** As if I'm not doing anything. +And then there's a doctorate, where the-doctoral-candidate-is just sitting+ and fucking around for >4 years< and writing a month before, (.) you know

[both laugh].

+>And< going to interviews+, for example, I used to go to xx all night (.) with a backpack, as I'm already saying, I'll go to the Bieszczady right away, with a backpack, all night long, with a change in Kraków at about 3:00. It's a vacation, (.) you know, I go, but it's great. (.) No, it's a very responsible thing in my opinion. Ask people about their story, (.) the more that they are from some >excluded< group, the more they want to share (.) their story with you. >As if< (.) they trust you more than anything else, that you'll do (.) something (.) like this,

**mhm**

– that you won't harm them with this material. Well, no, not at all, (.) not this PhD. XX [Marzena's girlfriend's name] you see, xx [Marzena's girlfriend's name] (.) totally always full, she-dropped-out of her doctorate, =no, she couldn't manage, she was also a doctorate=, but after two years she (.) quit. She, she, I don't know, maybe because she had such experiences, +she knows that it's+ difficult.

**mhm**

– Just the fact that you have a little bit of irregular hours,

**yeah**

– so >get together< (.) and so on. In fact, (.) you have (.) a very partnership relationship with your supervisor, =so= I try not to let her down, right? I-try-to-do-everything right. Well, it really requires self-mobilization, it's not like you have to arrive somewhere at 10:00

**mhm**

– =and someone is looking at your hands=. No, it is, that's what's great, (.) such a relationship of trust. **Yes, but totally (.) like nobody, (.) like I'm very frivolous, (.) even my mother says [laughs] that I'm frivolous. If I come home with a tattoo and she says I'm not serious so I'm not joking.**

[...]

– Well, I guess (.) I'm closer to xx [brother's name], who-is-also there, (.) I don't know if =people take him that seriously. >Because< if you don't get into this form, >then<=, I don't know, people try to =self-esteem= in this way, maybe, (.) right? I mean, I don't know, I'm guessing now, >but..<. because I'm glad that (.) I didn't necessarily go (.) >in such directions<, such normative ones. (.) I'm-even-glad-sometimes-that I'm a lesbian, >because< I don't know what it would be like if I wasn't.

This final conclusion of self-acceptance is preceded by these new anecdotes; however, articulated in a specific mode, they are no longer a joke that relieves the tension, but, rather, constitute examples that raise the importance of the discussed problem (otherness, disappointment, a sense of lack of acceptance), in which Marzena herself reveals the picture of her situation. However, this does not have the dimension of tragedy; it does not weaken, but strengthens her, which is what we can hear in these concluding words. During the conversation with the researcher, she was able to refer to herself, to her feelings, without alienating her profound experience of frustration and disappointment, but, on the contrary, merging them into a general understanding and experiencing of herself (queer, non-heteronormative, lesbian identity) in her current life.

## Conclusion

In a biographical interview, despite the assumption that the narration takes place *ex tempore*, i.e. on the spot, the request to tell the biography from the moment one remembers as its beginning to the present moment, by force – diachronic in its structure – introduces a certain order. This is consistent with other, more general assumptions of a biographical interview. Due to the fact that it is a sociological interview, immersed in symbolic interactionism, socially-generated meanings are at the center of its analytics. In research and analytical practice, this boils down – to put it somewhat simplistically – to identifying the meanings and codes of culture in their *a priori* nature: individuals using them are assigned a reproductive role and, ultimately, a reproductive and transforming one. This is important for the epistemological perspective of both the tool and its analytics, as the next step establishes a homology between the (biographical) narrative and life. Thus, the reproduction of cultural meanings and symbolic patterns of interactions leads us to the reproduction of society (social order). The identification of the reproduction of a social being with each communication and reception of meanings, entering into modeled interactions, is not neutral in itself, but translates into research practice, which itself has the nature of reproduction.

In an interview about the present, due to the fact that in its formula it is not limited by the diachronicity of the story, the emerging elements of the story can come from different stages of life and have a common problem at their core. Instead of being guided by the desire to faithfully reproduce the biography in the narrative, the organization of the narrative of the interview about the present is based on one or other of the issues grouping the elements of the statement. On the one hand, we can still say that we are dealing with a kind of reproduction when people are asked to talk about their present life. On the other hand, as we have pointed out in this article, the request to talk about things as they emerge to the subjects invites a movement of a completely different nature. Describing emergence as introducing something alien into the story, we assume inducing readiness to activate the narrator's attitude of being open to surprise with what may be imposed on them narratively (and in terms of experience). As such, novelty will be different from the self, different from the self's narrative control over the storytelling process, including from self-enclosed theorizing about one's own identity. The emphasis in the interview proposed here shifts from acts wholly attributed to a single Self to the situation; to tell the researcher about oneself in the here-and-now. It is worth noting that the researcher should focus less on the individual content, i.e. successively reproducing figures of speaking. In the case of Marzena, the researcher allowed her to reproduce the reflective style of being. In the specific "silent" way of supporting the contact figure, he was more focused on the ground, the general atmosphere of the meeting, waiting, and feeling into the situation. From this "felt" presence in the face of what the background will bring, key figures of contact emerged – aspects of Marzena's subjectivity. Though quietly, yet clearly, she began to talk about herself so that she appeared as an embodied, sentient person. And, moreover, as a person surprising herself in a way, establishing her identity, or, rather, her alienness, which she calls "otherness".

## References

- Biały Kamila, Piasek Piotr F. (2022), *Towards Non-Dichotomous Sociology: A Phenomenologically Inspired Epistemological Analysis*, "Avant", vol. 13(2), <https://doi.org/10.26913/avant.2202214>
- Francesetti Gianni (2015), *From individual symptoms to psychopathological fields. Towards a field perspective on clinical suffering*, "British Gestalt Journal", vol. 24(1), pp. 5–19.
- Francesetti Gianni, Roubal Jan (2020), *Field Theory in Contemporary Gestalt Therapy, Part 1: Modulating the Therapist's Presence in Clinical Practice*, "Gestalt Review", vol. 24, no. 2, pp. 113–136.
- Meillassoux Quentin (2007), *Potentiality and Virtuality*, "Collapse", vol. II, pp. 55–81.
- Perls Frederic, Hefferline Ralph, Goodman Paul (1951), *Gestalt Therapy: Excitement and Growth in the Human Personality*, London: Profile Books.
- Philippson Peter (2022), *The "Active Principle" in Gestalt Therapy and Other Essays*, Manchester: Peter Philippson.
- Robine Jean-Marie (2013), *Anxiety Within the Situation: Disturbances of Gestalt Construction*, [in:] Gianni Francesetti, Michela Gecele, Jan Roubal (eds.), *Gestalt Therapy In Clinical Practice – From Psychopathology To The Aesthetics Of Contact*, Gestalt Therapy Book Series, Milano: FrancoAngeli, pp. 479–493.

Schütze Fritz (2016), *Biography Analysis on the Empirical Base of Autobiographical Narratives: How to Analyse Autobiographical Narrative Interviews*, [in:] W. Fiedler, H.-H. Krüger (eds.), *Sozialwissenschaftliche Prozessanalyse: Grundlagen der qualitativen Sozialforschung*, Opladen–Berlin–Toronto: Verlag Barbara Budrich, pp. 75–116, <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctvdf09cn.7>

Spagnuolo Lobb Margherita (2017), *From losses of ego functions to the dance steps between psychotherapist and client. Phenomenology and aesthetics of contact in the psychotherapeutic field*, "British Gestalt Journal", vol. 26(1), pp. 28–37.

Waldenfels Bernhard (2011), *Phenomenology of the Alien. Basic Concepts*, Evanston: Northwestern University Press.

Zinker Joseph (1977), *Creative Process in Gestalt Therapy*, New York: Vintage.

### Cytowanie

Kamila Biały, Piotr F. Piasek (2024), *On Social Emergence: A Non-Dichotomous Approach to Qualitative Tool Design*, „Przegląd Socjologii Jakościowej”, t. XX, nr 1, s. 40–55, <https://doi.org/10.18778/1733-8069.20.1.03>

## O wyłanianiu się tego, co społeczne. Niedychotomiczne podejście do projektowania narzędzia zbierania danych jakościowych

**Abstrakt:** Narracyjny wywiad biograficzny jest narzędziem badawczym, które z powodzeniem wykorzystuje się do badania reprodukcji całościowych konstelacji życia społecznego występujących w życiu jednostki. Ta propozycja metodologiczna oraz problematyka reprodukcji opierają się na epistemologii dychotomicznej. W prezentowanym artykule przeanalizowano zagadnienie reprodukcji w ujęciu Fritza Schützego. Następnie opisano propozycję alternatywnego wywiadu narracyjnego – wywiadu o terażniejszości, opartego na niedychotomicznej epistemologii. Zdaniem autorów z tej perspektywy zupełnie inaczej można podjąć do kwestii reprodukcji i, co ważniejsze, wprowadzić w obszar socjologii problematykę wyłaniania się. Aby zilustrować tę niedychotomiczną logikę, posłużono się materiałem z wywiadu pochodzącego z szerszej kolekcji danych badawczych.

**Słowa kluczowe:** reprodukcja, wyłanianie, fleksje, wywiad narracyjny biograficzny, wywiad o terażniejszości