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Biographical research

Gabriele Rosenthal

It is now more than twenty years since I first came across biographical research in connection with my doctoral thesis. It was a time when this approach was beginning to re-establish itself after half a century, in German sociology in particular but also at the international level. Sociological biographical research began in the 1920s, in association with the migration study *The Polish Peasant in Europe and America* by William Isaac Thomas and Florian Znaniecki (1918–20; 1958) at the University of Chicago. Even then, empirical work was already concentrating on the single case study. Alongside documentary analysis on the migration process, this voluminous work contains only one biography of a Polish migrant, commissioned by the researchers. It was not so much the concrete biographical analysis that made this work so influential for subsequent interpretative sociology and biographical research, but rather the two authors' general methodological comments. One of the most important was their demand that 'social science cannot remain on the surface of social becoming, where certain schools wish to have it float, but must reach the actual human experiences and attitudes which constitute the full, live and active social reality beneath the formal organization of social institutions' (1958: II, 1834).

Biographical research, inspired by this study, blossomed at the Sociology Department in Chicago during the 1920s at the initiative of Ernest W. Burgess and Robert E. Park. Researchers motivated by realization of the necessity of 'getting inside of the actor's perspective' now recognized the advantages of the biographical case study for recording the subjective perspectives of members of various milieus. In the 1970s, sociology increasingly began re-examining the work of the Chicago School, leading to a veritable boom in interpretative biographical research. The first anthology of

biographical research was published in Germany in 1978 by Martin Kohli and an international reader by French sociologist Daniel Bertaux¹ followed in 1981. This research tendency is expanding to this day in the various specialist disciplines. In sociology today, biographies are increasingly considered and examined as a social construct of social reality in themselves (Kohli, 1986; Fischer and Kohli, 1987), whereas initially written or narrated biographies were used instrumentally as a source of specific information.

As well as in sociology, biographical research has become especially well established in oral history (Bornat, Chapter 2, this volume; Thompson, 1992; von Plato, 1998) and the educational sciences (Alheit, 1993, 1994; Krüger and Marotzki, 1999). Psychology – where the discipline also began putting down academic roots in the 1920s and 1930s through the work of Charlotte and Karl Bühler and their associates at the Psychological Institute of Vienna University (cf. Bühler, 1933) – has also begun rediscovering the biographical approach. Internationally, the work by Jerome Bruner (1990), George C. Rosenwald and Richard L. Ochberg (1992) and Dan McAdams (1993) – to name but a few – has led to a rediscovery of *verstehende* psychology and above all biographical research operating with narrative methods. Recently the concept of narrative identity has gained more attention and fairly elaborated versions of the concept have been proposed (Holstein and Gubrium, 2000). As Chapter 7 by Molly Andrews et al. (in this volume) clearly shows, this concerns above all 'the potential of narrative to function as a cornerstone of identity formation and maintenance over time'.

My own introduction to biographical research in 1980 came through an interest in social patterns of interpretation that was initially unconnected to biographical approaches. I was

studying the patterns of interpretation of a generation whose members were at that time increasingly defining the discourses of the various elites – including professors. My own parents belonged to this generation, the ‘Hitler Youth generation’ born approximately between 1920 and 1930. I was interested in the question of whether and to what extent the patterns of interpretation internalized under the Nazis had changed in the democratic Federal Republic. As the work progressed, it relatively quickly became clear that I had little chance of understanding their perception and interpretation of social reality and their processes of cognitive transformation unless I was familiar with the history and experiences of the generation – in particular their experiences under the Nazis in the Hitler Youth, during the Second World War, and during the collapse of the Third Reich. Unless I knew their background history, how could I explain why this generation identified so conspicuously with West Germany’s economic growth, and why it was at the same time so performance-orientated and so hard on itself and unforgiving of its own weaknesses? On the other hand, much could be understood if one knew the biographical background – their experiences in childhood and adolescence, their concrete experience of youth organization and school. I knew some of this biographical background from the stories told by my parents. For that reason there is a sense in which I have them to thank for my interest in my interview partners’ pasts.

So at that point I decided to adopt a life-story approach. At this time, the narrative interview method of Fritz Schütze (1976, 1983) was provoking a great deal of discussion in the field of qualitative research. Following this method, I asked my interviewees to tell me their biographical experiences during childhood and in the years following the collapse of the Third Reich (Rosenthal, 1987, 1989, 1991). Today, many years later, I have reflected on the theory and methodology of my empirical approach at that time, and no longer employ that degree of thematic focus. Instead – like many biographical researchers in Germany – I ask interviewees to tell me their whole life story (see below). This approach – and the associated bracketing of the research question during collection of data and a large part of analysis – involves a significant effort to put aside one’s acquired traditional methodological training.

At the outset, for the reconstruction of the life stories of members of the Hitler Youth generation, I drew up an analysis concept where the distinction between life story and life history (i.e., between the narrated personal life as related

in conversation or written in the present time and the lived-through life) plays a central role. This means I distinguish between the perspective of the biographer in the past and the perspective of the biographer in the present. This analytical distinction and its methodological realization in analytical steps was in part a result of the theoretical influence of the work of Wolfram Fischer (1982), who demonstrated so clearly the constitution of biographical narrative through the present perspective. It was, however, also a result of my chosen field of research. Narratives concerning National Socialism are characterized in the first place by denials, reinterpretations and formation of myths, so analysis demands that the researcher exercise a permanent methodological doubt and overcome his or her own West German socialization. If one wishes to avoid contributing to the reproduction of myths and denials, one has to pay attention to the difference between the account and the past experience. In my habilitation thesis (Rosenthal, 1995) I went on to develop a gestalt-theoretical-phenomenological concept of the dialectical interrelation between experience, memory and narration, and discussed this distinction as one that must be taken into account in all narrated and written biographies.

BIOGRAPHY-THEORETICAL ASSUMPTIONS

The methodological decision to ask for the whole life story to be told, regardless of the specific research question, is based on fundamental theoretical assumptions. Where we are dealing with questions of social science or history that relate to social phenomena that are tied to people’s experiences and have biographical meaning for them, these assumptions lead us to interpret the meaning of these phenomena in the overall context of the biography. The individual assumptions are:

- 1 In order to understand and explain² social and psychological phenomena we have to reconstruct their *genesis* – the process of their creation, reproduction and transformation.
- 2 In order to understand and explain people’s actions it is necessary to find out about both the subjective perspective of the actors and the *courses of action*. We want to find out what they experienced, what meaning they gave their actions at the time, what meaning they assign today, and in what biographically constituted context they place their experiences.

- 3 In order to be able to understand and explain the statements of an interviewee/biographer³ about particular topics and experiences in his/her past it is necessary to interpret them as part of the *overall context of his/her current life* and his/her resulting present and future perspective.

So in biographical research we look at the experiences preceding and following the phenomenon in question, and the order in which they occurred. The point is to reconstruct social phenomena in the process of becoming. This applies both to processes of creation and reproduction of established structures and to processes of transformation. When reconstructing a past (the life history) presented in the present of a life narrative (the life story) it must be considered that the presentation of past events is constituted by the present of narrating. The present of the biographer determines the perspective on the past and produces a specific past at times. The present perspective conditions the selection of memories, the temporal and thematic linkage of memories, and the type of representation of the remembered experiences. This means that in the course of a life with its biographical turning points – points of interpretation (Fischer, 1978) that lead to a reinterpretation of the past and present, and also of the future – new remembered pasts arise at each point. This construction of the past out of the present is not, however, to be understood as a construction separate from the respective experienced past. Instead, memory-based narratives of experienced events are also constituted through experiences in the past. (Rosenthal, 1995). So narratives of experienced events refer both to the current life and to the past experience. Just as the past is constituted out of the present and the anticipated future, so the present arises out of the past and the future. In this way biographical narratives provide information on the narrator's present as well as about his/her past and perspectives for the future.

The theoretical presumptions discussed above imply particular requirements of the data collection and analysis methods:

- 1 the requirement to allow insight into the genesis and sequential gestalt of the life history;
- 2 a proximity to the courses of action and to the experiences, and not only to the present interpretations of the investigated persons; and
- 3 the reconstruction of their present perspectives and the difference between these present perspectives and the perspectives that were adopted in the past.

In the following I will first present the instrument of the biographical-narrative interview and

then discuss the method of biographical case reconstruction using an example case study.

BIOGRAPHICAL-NARRATIVE INTERVIEW

The biographical-narrative interview meets these requirements particularly well. Fritz Schütze (1976, 1983) introduced this interview method in the 1970s; in the meantime it has also become an established interview method in fields other than sociological biography research and has been developed further in terms of an increase in questioning techniques (Rosenthal, 1995: 186–207).

Today most people who pursue this type of research first take into consideration, independent of their social science questions, the entire life story both in terms of its genesis and how it is constructed in the present. That is why when one first conducts interviews and reconstructs life stories, one does not restrict oneself to parts or individual phases of the biography. Observing individual areas of life or individual phases in life in terms of the biography's entire context can take place only after the entire life story's structure or gestalt and the whole life narrative has been taken into consideration.

The sequences of a narrative interview are:

- 1 *Period of main narration*
Interviewer: initial narrative question
Interviewee: main narration or self-structured biographical self-presentation
Interviewer: active listening and taking notes
- 2 *Questioning period*
(a) internal narrative questions
(b) external narrative questions

The initial question

As I indicated above, I started my biographical research with thematically focused narrative interviews. In fact, I conducted my first narrative interview with a completely closed initial question:

Can you still remember when you first thought about the possibility that Germany might lose World War II? Please tell me about this phase, and your personal

experience of the war, the end of the war, and the years following it, until you felt your life was 'back to normal'.

The answer was: 'Yes, well I have to start much earlier' and the interviewee, who had been a full-time leader of the Nazi youth organization, began to relate her career in the Hitler Youth. She told me how greatly she had identified with National Socialism and her work, and how strongly she had denied all the contradictions between theory and practice. In this biographical self-presentation she attempted to explain to me, but also to herself, why she had been absolutely convinced of the *Endsieg*, the German final victory, right up until the collapse of the Third Reich. This interview was an important lesson for me. In subsequent interviews I changed my initial question and asked my interviewees to talk about their experiences in the Hitler Youth and then about the last years of the war, etc.

Nonetheless, I was still convinced that the interviewees needed a thematic orientation. In my PhD I argued – in opposition to Fritz Schütze – that asking interviewees to tell their life story would be asking too much of them, because they would not know what they should talk about and what they should leave out. I first met Fritz Schütze after publication of this work (Rosenthal, 1987). He had read my criticism of his open method, and simply said: 'Why don't you just try it out with an absolutely open question?' Schütze did not want to argue with me about my objections. Instead, in keeping with the 'grounded theory' approach,⁴ he wanted to motivate me to gain an insight through practical experience of my own. I did this, and had to discover that none of the objections drafted at my desk passed the test of empirical practice. Quite to the contrary, an open request to tell his/her life story makes it much easier for the biographer to talk without other considerations and planning. Also, this method opens up new fields and thematic connections to our research question that we had not previously suspected. My failure, in the work on the Hitler Youth, to give sufficient attention to the political attitudes of the parents and their activities in the Nazi Party was an expression of my own blind spots. A subsequent empirical investigation of First World War veterans – the generation of the fathers of Hitler Youth members – made me very aware of the biographical relevance of the background family history (Rosenthal, 1991). This marked the beginning of my interest in multi-generation family studies and in generally integrating the life story in the family history (Rosenthal, 1997, 2002).

The initial question I work with now avoids any thematic restriction. At the beginning of

each individual interview, we⁵ generally requested the following of the biographer:

Please tell me/us your family story and your personal life story; I/we am/are interested in your whole life. Anything that occurs to you. You have as much time as you like. We/I won't ask you any questions for now. We/I will just make some notes on the things that we would like to ask you more about later; if we haven't got enough time today, perhaps in a second interview.

In some contexts, however, I recommend working with a more structured form. This relates to situations where an initial question relates to particular research contexts that are not tied to the history of a person. Let us consider, for example, a qualitative study of a particular institution, in which the residents of this institution are interviewed. Here the initial question could be:

We are interested in your personal experience in this institution. Perhaps you might start by telling your experience when you came to this institution, tell us what you experienced since then until today. You have as much time as you like... (see above).

One intermediate structured form that stands between these two forms of initial question and to an extent offers a compromise between the very open and fairly closed approaches combines the life history with a thematic focus. It reads:

We are interested in the life stories of people with a chronic disease (or: of people who experienced *perestroika* in Russia), in your personal experience. Please tell me your life story, not just about your illness (not just about the *perestroika* years), but about your whole life story. Anything... (see above).

This form of request is particularly suitable for research contexts (e.g. in my interviews with Holocaust survivors) where we have to state our specific research interest, and where it is not enough simply to refer to an interest in life histories. Furthermore, this allows us to state our topic and ensure that the interviewees speak about it, while still leaving enough room for relating other biographical strands. The subsequent narrative could clearly show what role the illness (or the experience of everyday politics) plays in the biographers' lives, where they link it to other biographical strands, and where they attempt to locate the beginning, for example, of the illness in their life history. Nevertheless, there are reasons to choose the most open form even here if possible. Life stories of chronically ill people who are not initially asked about their illness, and who fail to mention the illness in their self-structured biographical self-presentation, are of particular theoretical interest. This can, for

example, be an expression of a difficulty to integrate the illness in the biography.

The main narration and narrative questions

This request to hear the interviewee's life story is generally followed by a long biographical narration (i.e., biographical self-presentation), often lasting for hours. This so-called main narration is at no time interrupted by questions from the interviewers, but instead is only supported by paralinguistic expressions of interest and attentiveness like 'mhm' or, during narrative interruptions, through motivating encouragement to

continue narrating, such as 'And then what happened?', through eye contact, and other gestures of attention. During this phase the interviewer must listen carefully, making notes on the subjects referred to, and noting in particular which parts are not plausible or not told in enough detail. These notes are then used in the second questioning period.

Narrative-generating questions are not posed until the interview's second phase. A narrative question does not mean asking questions about opinions or reasons ('Why did you ...?', 'Why did you do that?', 'Why did you want to ...?'); it instead means encouraging people to talk about phases in their life or particular situations.

Questions are oriented in the following ways:

1 Addressing a phase of the interviewee's life.

'Could you tell me more about the time when you were ... (a child, in school, pregnant, etc.)?'

Or, indicating interest in the process:

'Could you tell me more about your time in the army, perhaps from the first days until the end of your training?'

2 Addressing a single theme in the interviewee's life by opening a temporal space.

'Could you tell me more about your parents? Perhaps from your earliest memories until today.'

3 Addressing a specific situation already mentioned in the interview.

'You mentioned situation X earlier, could you tell me/narrate in more detail, what exactly happened?'

4 Eliciting a narration to clarify an argument already made before.

'Can you recall a situation when your father behaved in an authoritative way (when you stopped believing in justice, peace, etc.)?'

5 Addressing a non-self-experienced event/phase or transmitted knowledge.

'Can you remember a situation when somebody talked about this event (how your father died)?'

We first limit ourselves to *internal narrative questions*, meaning questions regarding that which has already been discussed. It is not until the interview's next phase that we orient ourselves according to our own scientific criteria and pose *external narrative questions* regarding topics that interest us and have not yet been mentioned. The internal questions we formulate are based on the notes taken during the main narrative; that means they do not introduce a topic the narrator has not already mentioned. Keeping the narrative-external questions for the last phase of the interview is important so that the interviewer does not impose his/her own relevance system upon the narrator. In the reconstruction of the interview this also simplifies answering such questions as why certain thematic areas or

biographical phases were not covered by the biographer himself or herself. Did he or she assume that these would not interest the interviewer, or did it not fit with the image she or he wants to present, or did he or she find it too embarrassing or too painful to elaborate on this? This can only be clarified in the thematic field analysis (see below).

Since the biographers are first encouraged to give a longer account of their own experiences, they can structure the narration according to the criteria they themselves find relevant and the memory process is supported. Via cognition, feelings or subjects, we listeners also do not experience the narrators at a remove from what they are telling about; it is rather the case that they are embedded in their narrations about

biographical experiences. In contrast to argumentations and descriptions, self-lived experiences additionally have the advantage of being closer to what concretely happened and was experienced in the past in the narrated situations. Apart from restaging past situations, telling a story is the *only way to come close to* an integral reproduction of what happened at that time or the past experience's gestalt. However, it is rather the case that argumentations are formulated from the present perspective and from the standpoint of their social desirability. While, in telling about experiences, it is the case that we interact more with our memories than with the listeners, our explanations regarding what we experienced are directed at the interlocutors. If we are able to support the biographers in their narrations without posing any additional questions, and if many memories easily surface in their memory that they can tell about, then what can clearly be seen is how the narrations become more and more detailed, the orientation with respect to the listeners lessens and the physical memories become stronger. While, at the beginning, the biographers perhaps reflect on how they are going to present their life story, on which areas in their life they should talk about, this effort subsides as the narration starts to flow. The narrators increasingly find themselves in a stream of memories; impressions, images, sensual and physical feelings, and components of the remembered situation come up, some of which do not fit in their present situation and which they have not thought about for a long time. The narrations' proximity to the past thus increases in the course of the narration, and perspectives entirely different from the present perspective show themselves, which become clear in the argumentation parts or also in the narrated anecdotes.

BIOGRAPHICAL CASE RECONSTRUCTIONS

The principles: reconstruction and sequentiality

I developed the biographical case reconstruction method presented here over many years in combination with various other methods (Rosenthal, 1993, 1995; Rosenthal and Fischer-Rosenthal, 2000). I – and in the meantime many of my colleagues⁶ too – work with a combination of the objective hermeneutics of Ulrich Oevermann et al. (1979, 1987⁷), the text analysis method of Fritz Schütze (1983) and the thematic field analysis of Wolfram Fischer (1982, prompted by

Gurwitsch, 1964). Biographical case reconstructions are characterized – as already mentioned – by the particular attention paid to structural differences between what is experienced and what is narrated.

Biographical case reconstruction shares the reconstructive and sequential approach of other hermeneutic methods. 'Reconstructive' means that the text is not approached with predefined categories – as in content analysis – but rather that the meaning of individual passages is interpreted through the overall context of the interview. 'Sequential' in this context means an approach where the text or small text units are interpreted according to their sequential gestalt, the sequence of their creation. The analysis reconstructs the progressive creation of an interaction or the production of a spoken or written text step by step in small analytical units. In this method, development and testing of hypotheses is based on the abduction procedure introduced by Charles Sander Peirce (Peirce, 1933/1980) where, in contrast to deduction and induction, how the hypothesis is generated is as important as how it will be tested. 'Peirce's theory of abduction is concerned with the reasoning which starts from data and moves towards hypothesis' (Fann, 1970: 5). According to Peirce, the first stage of inquiry is 'to adopt a hypothesis as being suggested by the fact' (para. 6,469). The next stage is 'to trace out its necessary and probable experimental consequences' (para. 7,203) and in the third stage we test the hypothesis by comparing our predictions with the actual results. Both scientific theories and everyday theories have a heuristic value in the development of hypotheses. So unlike in deduction it is not a matter of following and testing a particular theory. Instead a range of concepts are taken as possible explanations of an empirical phenomenon – in other words for forming several possible hypotheses. 'The act of adopting an hypothesis itself, at the instant, may seem like a flash of insight, but afterwards it may be subjected to criticism' (Fann, 1970: 49). In other words: abduction imposes on you to give reasons for your suggestions and to prove them in the concrete individual case.

Just like deduction and induction, the method of abduction comprises three stages of inquiry; only the order of the stages is different. Whereas deduction starts with a theory and induction with a hypothesis, abduction begins by examining an empirical phenomenon. For a sequential analysis this means:

- 1 *From an empirical phenomenon to all possible hypotheses.* Starting from an empirical

phenomenon in a given unit of empirical data, a general rule is inferred with respect 'to the supposition of a general principle to account for the facts' (Fann, 1970: 10). This step is the actual abductive inference. The important thing is to formulate not only one hypothesis, but all the hypotheses that are possible at the time of consideration and might explain the phenomenon.

- 2 *From hypothesis to follow-up hypothesis or follow-up phenomenon.* Follow-up phenomena are deduced from the formulated hypotheses, i.e., from this rule other phenomena are inferred that confirm this rule. Or put differently: for each hypothesis a follow-up hypothesis is considered according to what comes next in the text, if this reading proves to be plausible.
- 3 *The empirical test.* This is where empirical testing is carried out in the sense of inductive inference. The concrete case is investigated for indices to match the deduced follow-up phenomenon. In a sequential procedure this means that the follow-up hypotheses are now contrasted with the text sequences or the empirical data that follow. Some of them gain plausibility whereas others are falsified. The interpretations that cannot be falsified in the process of sequential analysis – that are left over after hypothesis testing has excluded the improbable readings – are then regarded as the most probable.

In biographical case reconstructions, sequential analysis represents a procedure where the temporal structure of both the *narrated* and the *experienced* life history is analysed. Based on the given text, we try to reconstruct the sequential gestalt of the life story presented in the interview and in a subsequent step the sequential gestalt of the experienced life history is also analysed. As well as the question of the sequence and textual sort used by the biographers to present their biographically relevant data, this approach also examines how the individual biographical experiences have layered chronologically in the experienced life history. So in the reconstruction of the life history we try to break down the genesis of the experienced life history and in the analysis of the biographical self-presentation to break down the genesis of the representation in the present, which differs in principle in its thematic and temporal linkages from the chronology of the experiences.

In the approach presented by the author (cf. Rosenthal, 1995) it is crucial to investigate the two levels of narrated and experienced life history in separate analytical steps. That means that

the goal of reconstruction is both the biographical meaning of past experience and the meaning of self-presentation in the present.

The procedure

Biographical case reconstructions of interviews, which are selected for deeper analysis after a global analysis of all interviews according to the model of theoretical sampling (Glaser and Strauss, 1967: 45–78; Gobo, Chapter 28, this volume), are based on a full transcription of the audiotape.

The steps of analysis are:

- 1 Analysis of the biographical data.
- 2 Text and thematic field analysis (structure of self-presentation; reconstruction of the life story; narrated life).
- 3 Reconstruction of the life history (lived life as experienced).
- 4 Microanalysis of individual text segments.
- 5 Contrastive comparison of life history and life story.
- 6 Development of types and contrastive comparison of several cases.

In the following I will first briefly describe these individual steps and then outline the application of the method using an empirical example.

Sequential analysis of biographical data

This step of analysis (see Oevermann et al., 1980) starts by analysing the data that is largely free of interpretation by the biographer (e.g. birth, number of siblings, educational data, establishment of own family, change of place of residence, illness events, etc.) in the temporal sequence of the events in the life course. This data is taken from the transcribed interview as well as from all other available sources (archive material, interviews with other family members, official files such as medical records). The individual biographical datum is initially interpreted independently of the knowledge that the interpreters have from the narrated life story – independently of the further course of the biography. The interpretation of one datum is followed by the next, which tells the interpreters which path

the biographer actually took. The interpretation is initially independent of the self-interpretations and accounts in the biographical interview.

This sequential abductive procedure – like the other analytical steps too – demands a degree of methodological discipline, i.e., we always have to bracket out our knowledge of the case. Critics often reject this as unachievable. Experience shows, however, that this is not only possible, but also that we cannot normally memorize either the precise sequence of the data or the fine structure of the corresponding interview passages. Biographical data often gains its significance only after analysis has begun, so when the first data is interpreted it has often not received attention at all or its significance has not been realized. Nonetheless, in this approach great advantages are offered by interpretation in groups where the co-interpreters are not familiar with the interview.

Another critical question directed at this method is why we should consider all the possible interpretations of a datum, when the interviewee made his/her own statements about it thus allowing the meaning to be discovered. Here we can respond that on the one hand the interviewee's self-interpretations are constituted from his/her present, while on the other, as social scientists we strive in particular to reconstruct latent structures of meaning, in other words the meanings to which the interviewee has no access (see Oevermann et al., 1987). Here in particular it is a great advantage to initially avoid looking at the interviewee's self-interpretations and their plausibility, but instead to first investigate other possible interpretations. When we later examine the text with this spectrum of possible interpretations in mind we will be able to find many more possible interpretations between the lines.

The analysis of the biographical data thus serves as preparation for the third step of analysis – the reconstruction of the life history – where we contrast our hypotheses on the individual biographical data with the biographer's statements. However, before we attempt to reveal the past perspectives in the various life phases, it makes sense to first decipher the interviewee's present perspective using text and thematic field analysis. This helps us to adopt a source-critical perspective, so that we avoid satisfying a particular presentation need in the present or naïvely interpreting the perspective reconstituted by the present as a representation of the experience in the past. For example, if we know at the end of analysis that – although she is probably not herself aware of this – the biographer's self-presentation in the thematic field 'I live my life independently and autonomously of my family' serves to avoid talking about family bonding and associated

distress, or possibly also the expression of a socially required self-presentation, we are receptive to other interpretations at the level of experienced life history.

Analysing the biographical data *before* the text and thematic field analysis, on the other hand, serves as a contrast for the analysis of the biographical self-presentation. So we can see which biographical data are blown up narratively in the main narration, which are not mentioned at all, and in which temporal order they are presented.

BIOGRAPHICAL DATA OF GALINA'S FAMILY AND LIFE HISTORY Before I turn to this next analytical step, I would like first to demonstrate – at least in outline – the procedure for analysing the biographical data. I use an interview that I conducted in English in Russia in 1992.⁸ I called my interviewee Galina.

The first datum with which we begin the analysis is the date of Galina's birth. Here we take into consideration all the information we have – on the level of data – about the family constellation at the time when Galina is born into this setting. In this case it is:

- 1 Galina was born in 1968 in a small village near Krasnoyarsk, Siberia. She lives together with her paternal grandmother Olga and her great-grandmother Vera – Olga's mother. Galina's parents live and work – after completing university education – in Krasnoyarsk. Her father's family comes from the Ukraine. In the Ukraine Olga was a teacher of Ukrainian language and literature before and during the German occupation. Her political orientation was Ukrainian nationalist. In 1943, after the Red Army reconquered the Ukraine, Olga was imprisoned by the Soviets for alleged collaboration with the Nazis (under Article 58)⁹ and was sentenced to ten years' imprisonment and subsequent banishment to Siberia. Her son Vasily – Galina's father – was about five years old when Olga was arrested. In 1956 Olga was rehabilitated.¹⁰

Looking at this data we build up all the possible resulting hypotheses and deduce from each hypothesis assumptions about the further development of this family system and Galina's personal life history. The main question is: which effects will this family history have on Galina and on her later life? Here we must remember that in 1968 Olga's past was still subject to massive taboos in the social discourse in the Soviet Union. Depending on how openly families deal

with this in family dialogue, it will have very different effects on the biography of the granddaughter. Here I can reveal that during her childhood Galina was told nothing of this at the manifest level.

It would be beyond the scope of this chapter to present all the hypotheses I raised in analysing this case. Here I concentrate on two readings concerning the question of Galina's relationship to her grandmother and to her grandmother's past:

- 1.1 Because Galina grows up with her grandmother and great-grandmother she will probably develop a stronger bond to them than to her parents (Olga will probably take on the mother role). For that reason her past, even if it is passed on only latently, will be of great biographical relevance and will gain increasing significance in Galina's life.

On the basis of this hypothesis we can deduce a number of follow-up hypotheses as to how this could affect her subsequent life course:

- 1.1a Because of this identification she will, later in her life, grapple with the grandmother's past, in particular with the phases of suffering, and less with her life before her arrest and the time under German occupation.
- 1.1b In her later life Galina will attempt to deal with this family history in her biographical choices, for example choice of vocation or partner. This hypothesis is based on empirical findings from earlier studies (cf. Rosenthal, 1987).

As counter-hypothesis one could formulate:

- 1.2 Galina grows up longing for her mother or parents, and dreams of a better life with them in the city. She increasingly develops an aversion to village life with Olga and Vera.

Here, again, several follow-up hypotheses are possible. For example:

- 1.2a Galina attempts by all means to attract the attention of her parents. One possibility would be to fall ill often or, later, having serious difficulties in school.
- 1.2b Because she distances herself from the grandmother, when she is an adult she will probably grapple with the grandmother's time before her arrest and perhaps even reject her on grounds of suspicion of

collaboration with the Germans. In this context, in her youth she might also – disassociating from her grandmother – increasingly identify with socialism and become active with the Komsomol youth organization. This might also lead to her not calling into question the legality of Olga's conviction.

After raising all possible hypotheses we turn to the next datum to see how Galina's life history continues. For the sake of brevity I summarize two items of data together here:

- 2 When Galina is five years old (1973) she moves together with her great-grandmother and grandmother to the region of Bataisk near the Ukrainian border. The parents intend to follow later. One year later they move in with the family.

Again we build up all possible hypotheses one can develop from this data and deduce from each hypothesis assumptions about the further development of this family system and the personal life history of Galina. We can, for example, formulate the following hypothesis:

- 2.1 Galina finds herself in a serious conflict of loyalty. She will have to ask herself: who is my mother now, who do I look to? Here, in the same way as described in 1, there are various possibilities:
 - 2.1.1 Because of her previous closeness to her grandmother (cf. 1.1) she will reject her mother and continue to orientate on Olga.
 - 2.1.2 She will now be happy to have her mother with her at last (cf. 1.2) and devotes her full attention to her.
 - 2.1.3 She will attempt to escape from the conflict of loyalty and orientates more on her father or great-grandmother.

I will now skip the data on her school career and her career in the Komsomol youth organization, and conclude by examining a very important datum in connection with the family history. Until Galina was thirteen years old, she had no conscious idea of her grandmother's history of imprisonment. At this age she accidentally discovered a hidden document from which she learned that her grandmother had been sentenced to prison in 1943 and was not legally rehabilitated until 1956. Looking only at these data, we can assume that this is an experience of great biographical relevance for Galina. This not only casts doubt on the exact reasons and circumstances of the judgement, but also raises the question of

whether the grandmother may have been convicted unjustly. Furthermore, for Galina this discovery is associated with the question of why this past, which also has major implications for her father, has been kept secret from her. Depending on whether or not Galina identifies with her grandmother, she will experience this discovery in very different ways. So here we return to the hypotheses outlined at the outset (1.1a, 1.1b and 1.2). So the question arises as to whether she reacts more empathetically or more critically to her grandmother's history of persecution, or oscillates ambivalently between the two possibilities.

After finishing school, Galina studied history and at the time of the interview she was a lecturer in history. She conducted oral history interviews with a group that had been suppressed and persecuted in the former Soviet Union. Here we can surmise, for example, that this also served as a surrogate way of dealing with the family history.

I will now skip this analytical step and proceed to the text and thematic field analysis, based on the work of Aron Gurwitsch (1964), Wolfram Fischer (1982) and Fritz Schütze (1983).

Text and thematic field analysis

The general goal of this stage of analysis is to find out which mechanisms control selection and organization and the temporal and thematic linkage of the text segments. The underlying assumption is that the narrated life story does not consist of a haphazard series of disconnected events; the narrator's autonomous selection of stories to be related is based on a context of meaning – the biographer's overall interpretation. The narrated life story thus represents a sequence of mutually interrelated themes, which together form a dense network of interconnected cross-references (Fischer, 1982: 168). In the terminology of Aron Gurwitsch, the individual themes are elements of a thematic field. While the *theme* stood in the 'focus of attention', the *thematic field* is 'defined as the totality of those data, co-present with the theme, which are experienced as materially relevant or pertinent to the theme and form the background or horizon out of which the theme emerges as the center' (cf. Gurwitsch, 1964: 4).

Furthermore, the textual sort used by the biographer to present his analysis is crucial for the analysis. These considerations were introduced by Fritz Schütze (1983). Given that each textual sort is able to serve specific referential and communicative functions, one can ask: why did the interviewee choose this sort of text in this sequence and not another sort? The underlying

assumption is that 'reality' does not impose the sort of text a speaker uses, but the speaker himself or herself chooses the sort of text for particular reasons (which may or may not be known to himself/herself). The working hypothesis is that these reasons are related to the biographical concept, the lived life, and to the situation of relating his account (including the interviewer's influence) in ways to be found out empirically. From the sort of text and the sequential arrangement one draws conclusions about the narrator and how he/she wants to convey the world. In this analytical step close attention must be paid to the extent to which the selection of textual sort and also the presented themes are due to the process of interaction between interviewee and interviewer. The question of whether the interviewee is orientating more on the relevance system he/she ascribes to the interviewer or more to his/her own biographical relevances is investigated sequence by sequence.

In preparation for the analysis the whole interview text is first sequentialized, that is, briefly summarized in the form of a list of separate units that are divided up according to three criteria. The three main criteria to define the beginning/end of a textual sequence are:

- textual sorts
- thematic shifts and changes
- conversational turn-taking (changes of speaker).

Among the textual sorts we distinguish argumentation, description, and narration with the subcategories report and single stories. A narration refers to a chain of sequences of events of the past, and they are related to each other through a series of temporal and/or causal links. 'The decisive feature distinguishing' a narration 'from narratives is that descriptions present static structures' (Kallmeyer and Schütze, 1977: 201). An argumentation is a sequence of lines of reasoning, theorizing and declaration of general ideas. They show the narrator's general orientation and what he/she thinks of himself/herself and of the world. Let us look now to the first sequences of the sequentialization of the interview with Galina.

This sequencing, which is also used as a kind of table of contents for later analysis, is now itself subjected to a sequential analysis. The question here is no longer the biographical significance of an experience in the past, but instead why the experience is presented this way and not otherwise. In formulating hypotheses we orientate on the following sub-questions:

Sequentialization of the interview with Galina

1/1	initial question:	family history – own life story
1/7	description:	great-grandma – father's side Ukrainian, old when she died, 92
1/16	argumentation:	she had a very tragic story happy childhood stopped by something she liked to tell the family story
1/23	report about not-self-experienced family history	sister of grandfather told the story grandfather disappeared without news grandmother was in prison after occupation ten years in a camp, she never told it
1/37	argumentation:	mother told not much about her family – not exciting for her met grandparents from mother's side only when she was in the third class (11 years old)
1/43	description:	lived with great-grandmother and grandmother first language Ukrainian small town nearby the town where my parents lived
1/51	condensed situation:	'when I refused to eat' grandma told stories about my father in situation when he did not eat – about not having enough food – father childhood during war – father liked to invent words
	evaluation:	'I liked these stories very much'
2/18	argumentation:	past of grandma is not clear this produces a psychological barrier
2/29	non-verbal asking for turn-taking	
2/30	I: come to your life story	
2/33	global evaluation:	it is very long and very short
	description:	born in Krasnoyarsk in Siberia

End of main narration is on page 13

Thematic Field Analysis

General questions for developing hypotheses

- 1 Why is she or he presenting this sequence in such a way?
 - why at this place – and in this sequential order
 - why in this text sort
 - why in this length
 - why this topic or content
- 2 What does the biographer not present? Which biographical data is left out or not elaborated?
- 3 What is the thematic field? Which themes do not fit in this field?

TEXT AND THEMATIC FIELD ANALYSIS OF GALINA'S INTERVIEW

Let us now consider the first sequence in Galina's interview. When asked to tell the story of her family and her life, Galina begins with a description of her great-grandmother, a reference to her ethnic origins and age. At this point we can ask why she starts in this way. Are age and above all ethnic origin perhaps of great relevance for Galina today, especially when the Ukraine became independent just one year before the interview? If this hypothesis (1.1) were true, we would expect that one or both of these themes would be referred to repeatedly later in the interview or be constitutive for the thematic field of this main narration. So here, too, we formulate follow-up hypotheses for a fitting continuation of the text.

Another hypothesis (1.2) is that the great-grandmother is of great biographical relevance

for Galina, who will tell a great deal more about her as the interview progresses. We must also consider whether Galina starts with the family's ethnic origins because she assumes that this could be of particular interest to the German interviewer (1.3). A very different hypothesis (1.4) could be that Galina begins with a family member who is less associated with taboo subjects. In other words, she chooses the great-grandmother to begin the family history because she would prefer to avoid speaking about the grandmother's past.

As we see, the second sequence is also devoted to the great-grandmother. It is introduced argumentatively with the story of her suffering. We can ask whether there is a need for legitimization here, and formulate the hypothesis (2.1) that Galina feels the need to present her family history as a story of suffering or victimization in order to justify other elements of the family history. If this hypothesis is true, will she then also introduce the grandmother in this thematic field?

A brief 15-line report follows. We are told that she was told the family's story by the sister of her grandfather, that he went missing in the Second World War, and that the grandmother was imprisoned. The sequence ends with a remark that the grandmother never spoke about this. So at this point we have heard only about the difficult elements of the past (cf. 2.1). As well as the story of suffering, the topic of 'Who spoke about the family history and who did not' is also introduced in this sequence.

This subject becomes even clearer in the following argumentation, telling how the mother told little about her family. After just four lines describing her life with her grandmother and great-grandmother comes a longer sequence (24 lines) dealing with a condensed situation, i.e., a description of a frequently experienced situation where her grandmother told her about her father's childhood. It now becomes clear that one of the major themes of this main narration is 'telling versus silence'. According to Galina's description, the meaning of the silence and the unclarity about the grandmother's past produce a 'psychological barrier'. Here she indirectly accuses the grandmother of having been unable to talk with her about the conviction, and thus with having created this barrier. It is noticeable that Galina requires the interviewer's assistance after this explanation. So we can actually formulate the assumption that this subject also produces a barrier in the text, or blocks the narration of her own life story. This analytical step goes on to show that Galina's self-presentation is constituted by two themes, 'my grandmother's mysterious

and secret past' and 'my own life'. These two competing themes make it difficult for her to narrate her own life story and constitute the thematic field 'My own life is burdened and handicapped by the more or less unknown past of my grandmother'. This latent biographical overall interpretation is manifest in the structure of the text. Galina needs the interviewer's help several times in order to switch from talking about the family past to relating her own biography. Galina's present time and future projections are determined by her need to separate herself from this burdening family past and from the corresponding family dynamics. In the interview passages where she then talks about her own life story, she concentrates absolutely on her educational career. The analysis highlights Galina's need to lead her own life more freely and lightly as the dominant topic of her self-presentation. Why, however, does Galina feel this need, or put differently, which biographical experiences have caused this need – which presumes a bond to the family history and that the family exists at all – to arise? So we have to ask in what way Galina is actually bound to the family past. The next analytical step, the *reconstruction of the life history*, can give us an answer.

Reconstruction of the life history and microanalysis

In this step of analysis we return to the biographical significance of individual experiences in the past and above all to the timeline of the life history, its temporal gestalt. We go back to the analysis of the biographical data and contrast it with the biographer's own statements. After approaching the text using text and thematic field analysis with the question of why the biographer presents this in the present of the interview in this way and not differently, we now re-examine the text for traces of past perspectives on the respective events. The hypotheses raised in the first analytical step are falsified or verified by analysing the interview texts, or other new readings are found. To put it in practical terms: following the logic of sequential analysis we move through the biographical experiences in the chronology of the life history, examining at each point the interview passages where the biographer speaks about them. In the process we will also discover further biographical experiences that we had not included in the data analysis. Furthermore we choose several text passages in order to do a *microanalysis of individual text segments*, orientated on the method of objective hermeneutics (Oevermann, 1983). These passages

are subjected to a more precise sequential analysis. The goal here is to decipher in particular the text's latent structures of meaning. Paralinguistic peculiarities such as long pauses, slips of the tongue and interruptions, as well as the general impression that the passage contains more meaning than is apparent on first reading, are important criteria for selecting text passages. This analysis also serves to test the hypotheses gained in the previous analytical steps.

GALINA'S LIFE HISTORY In this analytical step it now turns out that in Galina's case, until she was five years old she was very close to her great-grandmother Vera and to a somewhat lesser degree to her grandmother Olga. We had not specifically considered this possibility in the analysis of the biographical data. On the other hand, the text verifies and further differentiates the hypothesis of a closeness to her mother beginning at the age of five. When her parents moved in, the girl experienced growing conflicts of loyalty, especially because her mother and grandmother did not get along well. Galina experienced her mother as the weaker of the two and began to take her side. Today she says that at that time she developed a growing psychological barrier between herself and her grandmother. Here it can be seen that the reasons presented in the present for this psychological barrier – the grandmother's hidden past – is not the only possible one, or that there were other reasons for it in the past. There are also hints that this development in Galina's bonding also has something to do with the time before her fifth birthday and with a conflict-laden relationship between Olga and Vera. There is some evidence for this in the text, and especially in the background family history.

In Galina's life history it is now interesting to see how she experienced the discovery of the well-hidden family secret when she was thirteen years old. At this time, she was already allied with her mother. So we can also assume, in line with our readings in the analysis of the biographical data, that the insight into her grandmother's past did not just lead her to develop empathy for grandmother's past persecution, but also to begin viewing this from a critical perspective. Let us see what she experienced: in an English-Russian dictionary, which Galina wanted to use in learning English, she found the document concerning the rehabilitation of her grandmother, which merely stated that Olga had been convicted under some 'Article 58'. Galina read it and stared at the number of this article:

I was very surprised and I couldn't understand. Why? How? My grandma? I know her and she was convicted

of ... what crime? It was so strange because there was only the number of the article. And with this sheet of paper I ran to my father. (Galina, 1992: 19)

With the help of the interviewer she recalled the fantasies she had had when she first read the rehabilitation card. 'When I read this number I connected her guilt with her second husband' (Galina, 1992: 21). Her fantasy was that her grandmother had killed her second husband – even though Galina knew that this man, who was divorced from the grandmother before Galina was born, was still alive. How may we interpret this fantasy? First of all, we find here further evidence for a tendency to accuse her grandmother. However, in order to better interpret this fantasy we must at this point conduct a microanalysis of the passage in the text where she speaks about this man. We now look at the text more precisely, line by line, and once again in the sequential order.

Recalling this man whom she had feared, she begins her statement about him as follows:

It is one of the most – er (four-second pause) – frightening recollections from earliest childhood ...

Here we can ask which frightening experiences Galina actually had with this man. We can assume that these experiences still frighten her today and that her fear perhaps manifested itself again during the four-second pause. If this hypothesis is true there will be evidence of it in the subsequent text, probably at the paralinguistic level. Let us see how the text continues:

it's-, he is-, he is coming-, he is coming

Galina starts to stutter, speaks in the present tense and we practically gain the impression that she is returning to the scene. The hypothesis that it is still frightening for Galina today gains further plausibility. She continues:

and his voice and his- his presence in our home (3) I don't know

In her memory the man is present in the home again. Here, however, Galina hesitates and stops, saying, 'I don't know.' One possible reading here is that re-experiencing the most frightening recollection is too threatening and is rejected by Galina. The interviewer now responds to her and asks:

When you go back in this situation, he is coming to your home and he is crying loud (3) what can you see?

Galina responds:

Ah- I can't say that eh (2) I (2) I'm lying in my bed in my room and eh, I eh, I am seeing the same low table

and that cross and white (2) walls and I just, hear his eh-, very angry voice, very loud. (Galina, 1992: 22).

At the manifest level of the text Galina recounts here and in the following how she feared the ex-husband's visits to her grandmother, and their arguments. However, the text is also open to other readings. We can ask whether the frightened little girl lay in bed hearing scenes of violence between the grandmother and her ex-husband. The text also suggests the possibility that she might herself have become a victim of this man's violence. The hypothesis that she herself experienced violence during childhood gains in plausibility through other text passages. However, even if we cannot prove this on the basis of this text passage, we can at least suppose that Galina's fantasy of her grandmother as the murderer of this man is based on an unfulfilled wish. We may suppose that as a child Galina sometimes wished that her grandmother had been better able to defend herself and her granddaughter against this man.

Now let us return to the situation of her discovery of the document. Galina runs to her father, who tears the document out of her hand. Galina asks what it means and her father says: *'It is about Grandma, it shouldn't be talked about.'* She grabs his arm and tries to take the document back from him, and he hisses at her: *'It's none of your business; don't ask.'* Galina is startled at the violence of his reaction:

I was so surprised because I had a very close relationship with my parents, and I discovered that there is something he wants to hide, and I asked my ma and she was just as surprised as I, she said that she didn't know. (Galina, 1992: 24)

It then turned out that the mother, as she herself related in her interview, also knew nothing of her mother-in-law's conviction and thus also nothing of her husband's childhood. This experience, and the constellation that mother and daughter were excluded from the family's secrecy management, dramatically intensified the bonding between Galina and her mother. Another result is that Galina is unable to find an empathic approach to her grandmother's history of persecution.

The result of Galina's discovery was that she started tormenting herself with questions, and that the psychological distance from her grandmother grew because Galina did not dare to confront her with her questions. And this has remained so until today. As Galina says: *'The story of my grandma is not clear to me. I know only the plot ... and it is a big problem for me that I can't ask.'*

In fact, it is Galina herself who resists learning more about her grandmother's past. Although

she is a trained historian, she has never tried to find out exactly what Article 58 was about. We can suppose, on the one hand, that clarifying this past is still too threatening for her, but also that she is unconsciously still avoiding a possible rehabilitation of her grandmother.

Contrastive comparison of life history and life story

The concluding contrastive comparison of life history and life story aims to find possible explanations for the difference between these two levels, i.e., between past and present perspective and for the associated difference in temporality and thematic relevance of narrated life story and experienced life history. In other words, contrasting helps find the rules for the difference between the narrated and the experienced. The question of which biographical experiences have led to a particular presentation in the present is also pertinent here.

In Galina's case the life history level shows a bonding to her mother that strengthened over the years, an increasing accusation against the grandmother (probably based on early childhood experiences where she felt insufficiently protected by her) and an associated, increasing feeling of guilt. At the conscious level in the present this is, however, placed in connection with the grandmother's political past and her silence about it. This family history constellation led to a strong bonding to the family of origin. Galina, however, tries to present herself as leading her life independently of the family history. We may surmise that the need for separation is so strong because she still feels tied to the family and its past.

Development of types and contrastive comparison

The biographical case reconstruction leads, finally, to the development of types. On the basis of reconstruction of individual cases, we aim for theoretical rather than numerical generalization. Generalization from the single case and on the basis of contrastive comparison of several cases are required here (cf. Hildenbrand, 1991; Rosenthal, 1995: 208ff.). Here we do not infer to all cases, but to 'similar cases', as formulated in 1927 by Kurt Lewin in his definition of a law based on Galilean thinking: 'The law is a statement about a type that is characterized by its so-being' (1927/1967: 18), and a type comprises the similar cases. The frequency of occurrence is of

absolutely no significance in determining the typical in a case, in the sense used here. The rules that generate it and organize the diversity of its parts are determinant for the type of a case. The effectiveness of these rules is completely independent of how often we find similar systems of rules in social reality.

To develop types, we return to our previously formulated general research question and the explanation of the associated social and psychological phenomena *after* completion of the case reconstruction. If, for example, we are interested in the experience of everyday politics in the former Soviet Union during *perestroika*, we can consider the interviewee's statements on that in the context of his or her whole life. In Galina's case we find an accentuated description of political disinterest and the need '*to separate my life from the life of the state*' (see Rosenthal, 2000). On the basis of our case reconstruction we are now in a position – according to our research question and this one case – to construct a type that not only describes the superficial phenomena (such as an unpolitical attitude) but also explains the biographical course that leads to this presentation or defines the rules that produce this description. Thus we find that Galina's need to separate her own life from her family and the family history is also reflected in her attitude to everyday politics in Russia. We were able to see how the pattern of a need for resolution and at the same time bonding to the family history – which in this case is so closely linked to the social history – constituted itself over the course of this biography. Biographical case reconstructions thus allow the construction of development types that indicate the rules of the genetic process and/or allow 'How it happened that' narrations (Dausien, 1999: 228) as well as explanations – with respect to both the experienced life history and the narrated life story. In so doing, we are not following the causal relationship and cause-and-effect models borrowed from the natural sciences.

CONCLUSION

The methodological approach of biographical research described in this chapter aims to collect its 'data' by conducting a narrative course of conversation that allows the interviewee's perspectives and subjective relevances to become apparent and to generate texts that give social scientists the opportunity to reconstruct past experience. The procedure of biographical case reconstructions makes a strict distinction between the present perspective of the biographer and his

or her perspectives in the past. The contrastive comparison between life history and life story helps us to trace the rules differentiating the narrated from the experienced – the difference between biographical self-presentation at the time of narration and the experience in the past. In this process the general concern of biographical research is to understand social and psychological phenomena and to explain them in the context of the process of their creation, reproduction and transformation. In this tradition the phenomena on which the research question focuses are examined both from the subjective perspective of the individual and in the overall context of his/her life and the structuring of its processes. This makes it possible to discover the latent and implicit structuring rules. It must be emphasized that the life history, the interpretive review of the past and the manner of presentation of the life story are all constituted through the dialectic of the individual and the social. Biographical research allows us to reconstruct the interrelationship between individual experience and collective framework, so when we reconstruct an individual case we are always aiming to make general statements. Thus the goal of biographical research is not only to understand individual cases in the context of individual life histories, but to gain an understanding of societal realities or of the interrelationship between society and life history (see Rosenthal, 1998).

To conclude, I would like once again to quote two classic researchers, William Isaac Thomas and Florian Znaniecki (1958: II, 1832): 'In analyzing the experiences and attitudes of an individual we always reach data and elementary facts which are not exclusively limited to this individual's personality but can be treated as mere instances of more or less general classes of data or facts, and thus be used for the determination of laws of social becoming.'

Translated by Meredith Dale

NOTES

- 1 See the overview article by Bertaux and Kohli (1984).
- 2 Understanding and explaining are understood here in the sense used by Max Weber and Alfred Schuetz. According to Weber's postulate of subjective interpretation, scientific explanations of the social world must refer to the subjective meaning of the actions of human beings and thus explain their actions and the consequences of their actions through the interdependency with the actions of others. Schuetz (1962) is a prominent representative of insisting that sociological constructions should be based on constructs of everyday life.

- 3 We prefer to use the term 'biographer' instead of the term 'autobiographer' in this context. In our opinion, the latter term does not place adequate emphasis on the social construction of life histories and life stories.
- 4 As suggested by the title of the work by Glaser and Strauss (1967), *The Discovery of Grounded Theory*, this tradition is concerned with the discovery of theory in the empirical process of research (see Seale, 1999: 87–106).
- 5 Some interviews were conducted by two interviewers.
- 6 See also the contributions by Ingrid Miethe and Simone Kreher in Rosenthal (2002), as well as Roswitha Breckner (1998) and Bettina Völter (2002).
- 7 The English article of 1987 is merely a translated extract from the German article of 1979, which deals in detail with the analysis process.
- 8 Galina is the granddaughter of a three-generation family in the former Soviet Union, which I reconstructed. For details see Rosenthal (2000).
- 9 Article 58 of the Criminal Code of the Russian Soviet Socialist Federation deals with high treason. This paragraph was used rather arbitrarily in the Soviet Union.
- 10 She was one of many who were rehabilitated during the period of political moderation following Khrushchev's 'secret speech' at the Twentieth Party Congress (25 February 1956).

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