

LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT

It has been a year since we met in Montreal for the XIV World Congress of Sociology. It was an unusually exciting and stimulating meeting and I think we can all be very proud of our research committee. I have heard many positive responses both during and after the conference from people who were impressed by how animated and qualitatively rich our sessions were -- an unusual accomplishment for a conference of such magnitude. As one participant put it, we were the only group who had full sessions in the evening when all the other sociologists were relaxing with a glass of wine in a terrace café. Even our 'graveyard shift' (the Saturday sessions) was lively and well attended.

Many new members have joined our research committee since the conference. I would like to extend a warm welcome to you all as well as to the new members of the board: Sue Fisher (secretary), Elena Haavio-Mannila, Matti Hyvärinen, Kaja Kazmierska, Elena Mechtcherkina, Robert Miller, Gabriele Rosenthal, Gerhard

Riemann, Elisabeth Tejero, Julia Vadja and Tom Wengraf. I hope that you will find inspiration and a sense of community in 'Biography & Society' and will, above all, feel inspired to support ongoing activities. The success of our research committee depends upon the enthusiasm and initiatives of its members.

The ISA has gone through some changes in the past year -- changes, which have some direct repercussions on our research committee. At present, we need to have at least 25 members in good standing in the ISA in order to maintain our status as research committee. The ISA has now decided to make the number of sessions available at the next World Congress to each RC dependent on how many of its members have also paid their ISA dues. At present, we can count on having roughly one half of the sessions we had at the congress in Montreal. Given the high quality of our sessions, it would be unfortunate if we had to relinquish some of our slots. I hope that this will serve as

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an incentive for those of you who are planning to attend the next World Congress to become ISA members, if you haven't done so yet. However, in the eventuality that we do not have the required number of members in good standing, we may need to begin thinking about how we will organize our sessions with fewer slots for paper presentations. One possibility is to devote the sessions to general theoretical and methodological issues, ongoing debates, and joint research projects. Contributions concerning the results of specific research projects could be relegated to the poster session. These are issues, which we need to think about in the next two years and constructive suggestions are welcome. They will be the subject of the next board meeting which will be held in August at the European Sociological Association conference in Amsterdam.

Thanks to a newsletter grant, which we received in 1998, we were able to continue the newsletter in the same attractive form (thanks to Henk van Alst). Helma Lutz and I have continued to serve as a clearing-house for articles, information and announcements. The present newsletter has many of the same features that earlier newsletters had. We have kept the section on Viewpoints, which has always been successful in stimulating discussion. This time, we have included an expanded version of Ruthellen Josselson's contribution to the session on the 'Narrated Turn' at the conference in Montreal. It addresses some of the shared commitments and concerns of the biographical research community without trying to flatten out our theoretical and methodological differences or squelch controversies. We think it will provide our readers with impulses for their own work as well as, hopefully, generate some discussion in future issues of the newsletter. As usual, you will find a few conference reports, a book review, calls for papers, and some announcements of

coming events. Two new features include a collection of reflections on the conference in Montreal from several of our members. We asked for subjective accounts of the conference – what they especially liked or didn't like and what direction they would like to see the research committee move in during the coming years. We have also included a piece devoted to biographical research in one country: Tabuko Kobayashi's thoughtful piece on biography and biographical analysis in Japan.

This will be the last time that we provide information on coming events. Most of you are already aware of coming conferences through your local organizations or through discussion lists on the internet. We would like to urge you all to join the biographical e-mail discussion list established by Robin Humphrey. (Send an e-mail to: malebase@mailbase.ac.uk, telling him your first and last name and label your mail: join biog-method). This list is not only a good place to make announcements, but it provides an opportunity for a more ongoing discussion than is possible through the newsletter.

We would like to encourage you to react to any of the pieces in this newsletter or bring up any new issues you would like to see addressed. Contributions for the next newsletter should be sent to either Helma Lutz (hlutz@uni-muenster.de) or myself (kathy.davis@let.uu.nl) by April 2000.

I look forward to hearing from you.

All best wishes,

Kathy Davis

Utrecht, June 1999

VIEWPOINTS

THE NARRATIVE TURN: REFLECTIONS AND CONUNDRUMS

Ruthellen Josselson, Towson State University, USA

For me, one of the most delightful and stimulating aspects of the 'narrative turn' has been the opportunity to engage deeply with colleagues in other academic disciplines. At present, no one field has a proprietary claim to narrative; indeed, a shared interest in the topic has led scholars in a variety of fields to turn to each other to see what the other might know that might shed light on this elusive but fascinating phenomenon. Thus, historians are talking to literary theorists who are talking to anthropologists who are talking to linguists. Physicists and biologists are thinking about narratives in physical phenomena and seeing what philosophers have to say about them. And here we even have a psychologist talking to sociologists.

Jacques Lacan tried to demonstrate for us how the unconscious is structured like a language. We, in a similar vein, are working with the idea that life is structured like a story. But with this shared starting point, we come together to explore such issues as the nature of knowing, the nature of causality, the relation between subject and object, the distinction between understanding and explanation and the centrality - to any system of interpretation - of language and its embeddedness in a historical and sociocultural context.

But how do we conceptualize this story – these narratives which form our lives? And how do we build theory that honors their complexity? As Jerome Bruner (1993) points out, there is no such thing as a 'life as lived...A life is created or constructed by the act of an autobiography. It is a way of construing experience ...Construal and reconstrual are interpretive. Like all forms of interpretation, how we construct our lives is subject to our intentions, to the interpretive conventions available to us, and to the meanings imposed upon us by the usages of our culture and language (p.38).'

Let me begin my remarks by telling you a story. Some months ago, a friend of mine, Dan McAdams, himself a narratologist, recommended to me a novel which he loved reading. But I didn't then have time to read. A month ago, he told me he had read it again and loved it even more, telling me that I simply must read it. Last week I finally read it. And I loved it, too. It was a simple story of a man and a woman's journeys. But so invested had I become in the main characters' struggles, that I was convinced that at the end they would have to reach their goal. But

alas, they do not. The story is a tragedy. So I wrote to Dan, thanking him for recommending such a wonderful book. But, I asked in jest, 'If I read it again as you did, would it have a happy ending the next time?' Dan wrote back and said that yes, such was the skill of this author, that indeed on second reading it did have a happy ending. More seriously, he went on to tell me, he had heard from a friend of his who ran a bookstore, that many readers who had come back to the bookseller to speak of their enjoyment of the book had not understood that the hero died in the end and did not in fact reach his goal.

Now what does this simple story tell us about narrative? First of all, in life, unlike in fiction, a life story can have both a tragic and a romantic ending. Narratives, as Prof. Matti Hyvärinen so cogently argues in his paper, are far from unitary, made up of diverse elements that can be combined and recombined to create different – and often discontinuous - plots. Frequently, as we interview people over time, we hear the same life events recounted in very different narrative forms. A woman, for example, at age 33, told me the story of her happy marriage. When I interviewed her again at age 43, she was now divorced and remarried and narrated the story of her first marriage as an utterly unsatisfying event, the horrors of which she, by her own report, hadn't allowed herself to be aware of until much later. Thus, like identity, the narrations of life are not fixed – they change as the person changes. 'We live life forward and understand it backward,' said Kierkegaard. Or, as Peter Brook, the literary theorist points out, the narrator always knows the ending. This is a phenomenon that has continued to plague biographers in search of a reified subject. People who have tried to write biographies of people such as Simone de Beauvoir or Beryl Markham, for example, are bedeviled by the fact that both of these women wrote multiple and contradictory autobiographies. Are we then required to discount one or the other of these versions as self-serving or phantasmagoric – as though there is only one 'true' biography? Or can we imagine a theory of narrative that can contain their necessary mutability? Like physicists struggling with chaos theory, those of us that would look for truth in life story must find ways to contain narratives which change their shape and form. To cite Prof. Hyvärinen again, narratives serve to negotiate discordance and plurality.

A second implication of the story about the book I

just read derives from the fact that many readers misunderstood the story the author told, so great was their wish for all to come out well. The point here is that even a fixed story may not be understood as it was told. The narrator's meaning, even when explicit, is subject to the apperception of the one who receives the story. Now, in the case of this book, the evidence is indisputable. The hero dies, quietly, but his death is there on the page. In this case, we can return to the text to resolve this question. But as narrative researchers, we operate like readers of this book. We construct a narrative about the narratives we have studied and our conclusions about them will differ – sometimes radically. And consulting the text rarely settles disputes. We bring different horizons of understanding, different master narratives, different immanent narratives, different biases – you see, even the language that I employ to talk about just this one difference is itself encased in pre-existing narrative frameworks. This is one of the lessons – and dangers – of postmodernism. There is no consensual reality. Only meaning-making frameworks – and it is these very meaning-making frameworks that we aim to study.

But this is precisely what draws most of us to narrative study and why I think it has attracted such excitement in a variety of fields. Only from this hermeneutic perspective can we truly engage with and contain paradox. Unlike linear, positivistic approaches to understanding, the narrative turn requires that we absorb contradiction. There used to be an old joke in psychoanalysis where, regardless of what the patient would say, the analyst would respond, 'But the opposite is also true.' In many ways, I have seen the upsurge of interest in narrative as a paradigmatic heir to psychoanalysis, wherein we try to merge levels of understanding, to contain multiplicity, to find the social world in the individual even as we locate the individual in the social world. In this sense as well, good narrative work is essentially dialectic.

Recently, psychoanalysis has been discovering that the person of the analyst and the relationship she or he creates with the analysand is much more a part of the analytic story than was formerly understood. Many people in narrative research have called our attention to similar processes in the narrative interview: we researchers are part of the very experiential field that we wish to study. People's autobiographies do not pre-exist. We coax them into existence by asking people to shape them for us in a particular interpersonal situation at a particular time. It is not only our emotional reactions that are of importance here, but how we are constructed by our interviewees, what meanings we may have for them. We are, in this new terminology I

learned from Professor Rosie, immanent in our own research. We are inescapably part of what Schliermacher has termed the hermeneutic circle from the moment we make contact with our interviewee.

Now, there is a third implication of the story I told you about this wonderful novel that I read. And that is that now I can't tell you its name. Why? Because I have given away the ending and in doing so, have spoiled the pleasure you would have in reading it. Tension in narrative derives from the fact that we do not know the ending and this is another phenomenon that plagues narrative researchers. Just imagine that some celestial being would arrive and give you a full account of how your life would be in ten years. Few of us, I think, would want to know. Most of us would probably respond by discounting the possibility that this celestial being could possibly be correct. This is because the not-knowing is the point of narrative. Narratives not only relate the past, but also construct the future, only to be reshaped in light of experience to continue their dual role of molding the past and directing the future. The challenge for narrative researchers is to unearth and contain these tensions.

When a person tells us their life story, they tell us largely finished plots which have embedded in them outlines of future plots. But the discussion of the past in narrated form is ordered to lead to the ending that the person has already chosen. Therefore, the ongoing tension of the many possible narratives that might result is omitted. Did the author of this book, I wonder, always know that the hero would die or were there hours, days, perhaps even months where he considered another ending? If I accept a new job, for example, I might tell you, as part of my life story, why I chose to do this, but I would be unlikely to be able to reconstruct the complexity of my decision-making process before I had made this decision. For then, I would have been caught among various plotlines, spinning them out in my imagination, filled with feeling about each one, with each potentiality equally real. This is an example of what Adorno calls the tension between the possible and the real.

The as-yet-unwritten future cannot be identical with the emerging plot and so narratives must be revised. The future expressed in biographical narratives contains the loose ends, the beginnings which expire, the desires that fade or fall by the wayside. Both continuity and change are enfolded in narrative form. A 'good-enough' narrative contains the past in terms of the present and points to a future which cannot be predicted although it contains the elements out of which the future will be created. This is narrative as process which, as Bakhtin (1981)

says, has always been the hardest matter to capture in language since narrative time is never real time.

This issue of not telling has other implications for the narrative researcher as well. And here I have in mind the ethical requirement to honor the privacy of individuals before all else. What constrains us is the very thing that intrigues us. When we do narrative research, we are often dealing with core meaning-making systems of real people. The truths inherent in personal narrative issue from real positions in the world – the passions, desires, ideas and conceptual systems that underlie life as lived. We may analyze their socially-constructed aspects, but to the people who tell us their life stories, they are very real. People's personal narratives are efforts to grapple with the confusion and complexity of the human condition. Our intellectual task as social scientists is to write a super-ordinate narrative that encompasses them. But as narrative researchers, we retain a responsibility to protect those who inform us even as we return to our colleagues to relate our own narrative of what we believe we have learned. The limits that we must impose on ourselves here reflect the fact that the data that we are dealing with is core, central, and important. These are not aggregated peripheral variables we are studying, but the axes on which people's lives turn. We are ourselves the variables in other people's lives. And we are then left with the challenge to talk about identity while disguising identity, often having to change the central details of what we want to describe – just as I have, of course, disguised this book's identity so that you could not guess which it is.

I would conclude my remarks by saying that I think that the narrative turn is a larger revolution than we have imagined, at least in the social sciences. It is an effort to turn toward meaning-making in people's lives and to study it

directly and holistically rather than to sample it in discrete units – and to do this reflexively, meaning that we are ourselves meaning-makers operating in a relativistic universe who are ourselves a part of both the very phenomena and processes we aim to study. I think that we remain in a nonparadigmatic domain. I had wondered about saying pre-paradigmatic here. I didn't because I realize that it is my hope that this field of narrative study of lives does not become paradigmatic. I believe that what is exciting in this field is that we have not developed an orthodoxy – a 'right way' of doing things. As Clifford Geertz observed in 1983, 'To turn from trying to explain social phenomena by weaving them into grand textures of cause and effect to trying to explain them by placing them in local frames of awareness is to exchange a set of well-charted difficulties for a set of largely uncharted ones'. This leaves us to the richness of our coming together at meetings such as this and sharing our efforts to make meaning of others' meaning-making, in hopes that some larger meaning will emerge.

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MONTREAL MEMORIES

Montreal Revisited

Matti Hyvärinen, University of Tampere, Finland

When you come from a small and possibly peripheral country, your conception of the field you believe you know may somehow still be drastically local. No matter that this Newsletter has been a real success in engendering discussion and debate. I still think I used to read the debates from a particularly local perspective. So it was a sobering experience to attend my first RC 38 sessions in Montreal.

The first impression was to realize what a strong sense of history this research committee on Biography and Society has. If you read articles and books, you may be able to construct some threads and paths of the field's intellectual history. Nevertheless, it is totally different to meet a group in which most of the participants seem to have known each other for years. A strong sense of a particular mission within the ISA and outside mainstream research seemed to characterize the identity of the group. Sometimes I was hearing echoes of a political program – we know the people and their suffering, not just

their numbers – in the self-definition of group. Before you break the windows of today, you better remind yourself of what it was like in 1978...

All of you must know the two basic categories of conferences. Workshop, the ideal model for a limited group of scholars, has been my life-long favorite. You certainly get to know the people, at least if you sit, talk and eat with the group for a week. On the other hand, we have the conferences of the category of 'window-shopping': give a talk of 20 minutes, please, listen to others for the next two hours and then run on to find something new. If you, as a native speaker of the conference language, are quick and eager to adopt all of the latest nuances of study, this is surely the thing for you.

What amazed me in the Montreal sessions was that they succeeded so well in being between these extremes. Within the world-wide show for window-shopping, the RC maintained its distinct profile and continuity. A full program for the week offered both a good overview of ongoing research in the field, or of the limits of the field, and a good opportunity to get to know people, their argumentative styles, and pieces of the history of the RC. And one should not forget the cosy and basically no-nonsense atmosphere of the event.

However, a few times I was slightly irritated by paper-givers who straightforwardly disregarded the title of the session, that is, the jointly agreed topic, in order to read their papers on their ongoing study and so took away the time and the opportunity of discussion from others. It is understandable that participants need to give a paper somewhere in order to get financing, still I do not see the point of speaking in the wrong context. Would a one page statement on the objectives of the session help the prospective speakers to address the topic more accurately? Or, are we doomed to a competition between separate papers without an attempt for them to meet and discuss?

Of course, it was in part disappointing to realize the social and technical difficulties in continuing the methodological debates this Newsletter has so creditably introduced. It is a pity and possibly an issue worth further study that the realist/constructivist/narrativist divides seemed so quickly to assume an aspect of disturbance in personal relationships. But chiefly the sessions offered a welcome variety of shades in actual study instead of methodological purism. It is good to know that we do not need to believe in one truth or one valid concept of biographical research. A couple of times some veterans of the RC 38 made me smile with their fairly normative

comments on how to conduct interviews or organize research proper. Is this RC really administrating the field in a world that some irresponsible people call postmodern? Possibly the RC is suffering from some kind of identity problems. The old and mostly valid mission increases coherence and purpose in the RC but seems to me also to build mental obstacles to fresh debates.

One possible way to facilitate discussion in future events might be to profile the different sessions further. In Montreal, I liked the 'research session' with the joint material. In a similar way, it might be reasonable to arrange 'discussion sessions,' say on major books or debates in the field, in addition to the topically arranged 'papers sessions.'

The fairly independent organizational life of the ISA (this should be an oxymoron but I am afraid it is not) seems to lead the research committees into a dilemma because only the more experienced (a nice word for middle-aged) scholars seem to be able to pay the ISA membership fees, and yet the recruitment of younger scholars to the membership and work of the RC is absolutely necessary. Who could find a solution to the membership fee problem of the younger scholars? In other words, how not to understand the RC and the ISA only as projects of one generation? In terms of technical organization of the further session I suggest that the RC assumes more independence in the World Congress. The centralized ISA Congress office appeared to be categorically incapable of producing copies of the papers, or finding the originals. I suggest that in future the RC should encourage the participants to carry along and circulate a reasonable number of copies of their papers.

All in all, the Montreal meeting left a good feeling. Not just the sunny mornings, with the opportunity to run into the Park Mont Royal and look over the city, but also the people with a real devotion to life, life stories, and research.

THE ISA CONGRESS IN MONTREAL: DEVELOPING A GLOBAL PERSPECTIVE

Noga Gilad, Open University, Tel-Aviv, Israel

Soon after the congress ended, I was asked to write about my impressions from the Biography and Society RC sessions in the 14th World Sociological Congress, and perhaps give some suggestions for the future. This 'forced' me to sit down and helped me to acquire a general picture of what I went through during the congress. Well, I enjoyed it very much; I will tell more about it later. I will start by presenting one problem I

detected. It shall serve as the background for the ideas and suggestions I came up with, during writing my 'story' for you.

How to assign topics to sessions? This seemed to be the most important question. Can we understand 'Why this contribution is in this session and not in the other?' In many cases the topics were possibly too general, when, for instance, not only in the specific session about Gender papers dealt with lives of women, or Migration, or Ethnicity for that matter. In another case ('Life Experiences in Russia and Eastern Europe'), East-European people preferred to present their contribution outside that 'ethnic' (will that be a working definition?) frame, because they didn't identify themselves with that category. What makes a good title for the session, then? Can it be neither 'too general,' nor 'too specific?' I'm not sure. I guess a good title should be tempting, bringing new meanings to existing categories, or new fields to the research.

Looking back to my experiences at the congress, I realized that I did get several new directions and themes. So I would like to tell you about them, according to the narrative tradition: tell them in order to show, that they all produce (for me) a new understanding for the notion of 'Globalization.'

It was my first time in such a huge, international congress, and I had vague expectations: looking forward to meet keen researchers, other methods and new themes. I was eager and even desperate for that refreshing experience. I am an Israeli Sociologist. This eagerness resulted not only from it being my first World Congress, but mostly from the Israeli sociological climate. Especially during the summer, the sun is hot, people are nervous and politics are 'burning.' Every day resembles Doom Day. And it is so especially in my new field of research: the ideological identity of Jewish settlers in the occupied territories. I was going to present a paper about it during the congress. The course of interviewing and reconstructing life-history strongly pulled me into my interviewee's perspective. It is the utopian compliant life along Jewish traditional values, in a new form: settling Samarian mountains. These utopian hopes were broken down for my interviewees with the recent Israeli withdrawal from that territory. Until the plane took off to Montreal, I struggled between the need to perceive the settlers' inner-world, and the confusion it caused in me, disagreeing politically with them. Stronger than political disagreement, stood the settlers' claims for exclusiveness of their story: 'Settling these lands is a written delegation given to us in our sacred scripts. That territory is exclusively Jewish. Our role to re-settle it. It is leading Israel to an approaching

redemption.' I felt trapped by that Exclusiveness Claim: is the conflict about authentic roots of Judaism, or the opposite description of colonization? How can this conflict be settled? When I had arrived in Montreal, the thought struck me: this is the opportunity to look for other cases around the globe, where the 'objective term' of colonization vs. 'subjective term' of redemption might come up. It encouraged me.

My first days as a tourist in Montreal taught me about the deep conflict between Anglophones and Francophones, its history and current dynamics, approaching a war - or at least, a Culture War. It was a new experience to be an outsider of such a conflict, which sounded so familiar!

During the RC sessions I met many cases, where identities struggle with their religious-written roles. I will only mention a few of them. Sonia Frias shared with us the case of Muslim Mozambique women who emigrated to Catholic Lisbon, Portugal. There they struggle between complying to tradition and criticizing it from a new Catholic perspective they undertook, following their migration. Joonok Huh from Colorado (USA) described the inter-generational process Korean women go through between tradition and modernity. She had realized how her tradition had silenced and discriminated her as a woman; while her immigration and struggle to absorb in the new society separated her from that tradition and her family. Jean Daniels from California (USA) told us briefly about the struggles of Afro-American women in their discriminating society of birth, and the empowering role religion plays in that struggle. These and other cases helped to develop a global understanding of the roles religion and traditional values play in modern lives, and perhaps the role ideology plays in religious narratives. I would like to learn more about that.

Unlike my vague expectations most contributors came from familiar societies (European, both Americas, and Japanese). I was missing the Arab and African perspectives in our RC meetings. But silenced communities exist also in the 'First world'. Sally McBeth from Colorado, USA, described a co-writing process with an Amerindian woman. Sally assisted Essie in writing an auto-biographical book about her life as an Indian woman. Essie told her readers about the struggles she faced in her own traditional community as a woman, and outside it. Through the co-writing process emerged the question, whose book it was eventually? These many ways that scripts, religious or secular, shape our lives, write them or offer us a way to write ourselves, offer fruitful new directions to future sessions. Nora Sausmikat (Germany)

showed us how Chinese women who participated in the communist 'Culture Revolution' deal with their past by restructuring their life-story in the present. The structure is determined mainly by the role they had played in the revolution, and the collapse of that ideology. Ingrid Miethe (Germany) presented the case of East-German dissident women. She argued that their ideology of resisting the communist regime plays as a biographical-familial work to blocked questions about a former compliance with Nazi ideology. Here I learned about the ways current ideological involvement is strengthened by motivations stemming from a problematic past in various societies.

Brian Roberts (UK) observed the biographical work of the researcher. He talked about class-conflicts and education, and demonstrated how both 'formal' career and private domains correspond in the life of the researcher, how his own biography 'making it' from a low class childhood to his present academic career, determined his questions of interest. He showed how we are constantly attracted to themes that latently occupy us in the fields we study, and how our interviewees' stories help us review ourselves. I would like to note that our interviewees' stories also help us to view the lives we shall never have, which nevertheless influence the tracks we have chosen to live.

I gave my paper at the very end of the congress. I think at that point I managed to live much better with the choices I and my interviewees made. We are part of that giant text which is constantly produced and reproduced.

I have mentioned here few of the papers that enriched me during the week in Montreal. I would like to sum up and suggest possible ideas for the future.

First, to try to widen our ethnically-cultural scope, i. e. include more participants of silenced communities.

Second, try to balance the extensive female perspective already presented with more focused masculine perspectives. Which experiences constitute masculine perspectives and what are its consequential structures?

Third, let 'new' methods get more space, and compare 'classic' with 'new' biographic and narrative methods. For example, can we apply methods used for spoken text for use of media analysis?

Fourth, initiate reflection processes and look more into relations between the researchers and the audience. Here everyone can come up with interesting insights.

Fifth, regarding themes, I presented several along my story. I hope they will be tempting for some of you.

A FEW REMARKS ON OUR MONTRÉAL ACTIVITIES

Gerhard Riemann, University of Bamberg, Germany

I enjoy remembering July 26 to August 1, 1998: a good time and a good place. I don't want to sound disloyal and to become a befouler of my own nest, I just have to admit: Although I enjoyed my student days at the university of Bielefeld I definitely prefer Montréal as a site for a World Congress of Sociology. (I assume that those who attended the Bielefeld congress understand what I mean.) Montréal is a fascinating city and just a great place for an event like this. I wish I had had more time to explore a little bit more of the urban environment than just the Latin Quarter and Chinatown and a few other districts.

But it's not the stimulating place I want to deal with even though it was important for the whole atmosphere. I just want to write down a few impressions about what we did together in Montréal, what we might do together in the future and how we might do such things. 'Doing things together' is not confined to the official activities: giving, listening to and discussing the oral presentations which had been pre-announced and had become part of the written program. I also include all those things which happened in between - during breaks, during lunch and in the evenings. When I remember Montréal I especially think of these spontaneous, quite lively and serious conversations in between which often provided the background for a deeper understanding of what had been talked about in the sessions and which sometimes led us into totally different directions (dealing with problems which came up during current research activities, discussing ideas on new projects etc.). In trying to find out what I got out of the Montréal congress I particularly think of such 'in between'. The organizational format of such a congress should allow for as much spontaneity as possible: i. e., for things happening 'in between'.

Just a few catchwords which come to my mind:

I guess that in the organization of such a congress there is always a tension between time reserved for representative large scale events which are supposed to attract the attention of especially large audiences and time reserved for small scale activities which provide for more chances of involvement among the participants: in this case the contrast between the morning sessions of the six symposia („changing identities and social order' etc.) vs. the sessions of the research committees, working and thematic groups during the afternoons and evenings. I assume that negotiations of the organizers of the congress on how much time is reserved for what and for whom are not quite easy since they are shaped by

divergent interests (e. g., the interest in securing attractive time slots for the performance of respected colleagues who have achieved a high reputation in the world of sociology and will supposedly draw a large audience) and divergent conceptions of a what constitutes a fruitful sociological discourse. The more time is used for large scale symbolic events ('listening to Professor X lecturing on something which I have always longed to hear him or her lecture about') the less time can be reserved for 'grassroots' activities in the research committees. I assume that there are more *aristocratic* and more *egalitarian* conceptions of a world congress - and of the distribution of time at a world congress - and I am definitely more on the egalitarian side: I think that the time reserved for the activities in the research committees should be defended or even extended to allow for deeper discussions among the participants.

I enjoyed our sessions in Research Committee 38 and was impressed by the diversity of the topics which people investigate within sociological biographical research. There was just the disadvantage of a rather strict time schedule, i. e., individual presentations had to be quite short and condensed, and that means that it was not always easy for us to get across how we did the work which we reported on. I think that it easier for the audience to get a sense of the data, the research procedures and problems arising during the research if small pieces of data (segments of transcriptions of interviews or other materials) get distributed among the audience and are used for case specific illustrations of one's analysis. Such case materials would make it easier to get the others involved and would allow for spontaneous comparisons of ones respective approaches to analysis. That's a suggestion with regard to the *styles of presentation*. Making visible how one analyses a piece of data had been the common focus of the session ('doing biographical research') which I coordinated, I just think that such a component of analytical case illustrations makes sense in a lot of oral presentations in a research context like ours.

It might be useful to think about *platforms of informal discussions* (during a future congress) in which colleagues participate who want to spontaneously share with others what kinds of problems they encounter during their research projects and who want to get some feedback on these issues. People could announce their specific thematic interest before the congress, so there could be a discovery and communication of common concerns (experiences of collecting data, analyzing data, problems of research ethics etc.), but such workshops would differ from the regular sessions since there would be no careful presentations, just a free exchange on problems

which might turn out to be common problems. These workshops should not compete with regular sessions, but could be held at other times. This idea is based on my recollections of conversations 'in between': talk on issues in research ethics, ways of analyzing group discussions etc.

I think it would be interesting for the discussions in RC 38 to learn more about the developments in *biographical research in other social sciences* like anthropology: to learn about common concerns and specific approaches. I especially enjoyed the presentation of an American anthropologist on her work with a Native American teacher with whom she worked on her autobiography. I think it would be very fruitful for sociologists to perceive more systematically traditions of biographical research which developed in anthropology.

REFLECTIONS ON THE XIV WORLD CONGRESS OF SOCIOLOGY

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I began attending the International Sociological Association conferences in 1986. At first, I situated myself amongst scholars in sociolinguistics, but by 1994 it became clear to me that my interests in gender, narrative, and life history did not fit with the traditions and perspectives of scholars in that field. In Bielefeld, Germany, I 'discovered' and attended sessions organized by Research Committee 38; when I left the world of Biography & Society to present a paper on a sociolinguistics session, my work seemed out of place, and my paper was met with silence. It was thus with a great deal of enthusiasm and energy that I subsequently became a member of RC 38, co-chaired a session on narratives of/on the body at the XIV World Congress of Sociology, and participated exclusively in sessions sponsored by RC 38 in Montreal, Canada. I attended the business meeting and three other sessions.

The spatial distribution of sessions at the Congress supported divisions within the International Sociological Association along the lines of Research Committees. All of the RC38 sessions were in the same room making it easy for people to find them. Beyond space, gathering together within Research Committee 38 was fostered by the high quality of the sessions. Each of the sessions I attended was coherent and well-attended. In each, the level of discussions between the audiences and panelists was lively. In addition, there was a sense of continuity of topics and debates from one session to the next. Not surprisingly, I had no incentive to seek out sessions in RC's in areas related to my research

interests (Body, Health, Gender, etc.), and in the end, I treated the 'World Congress' as a Biography & Society 'Conference'.

I was especially impressed by Session 06 ('Doing Biographical Research'), chaired by Gerhard Riemann, who invited six different interpretations of 'A narrative interview with Hulya, a Turkish woman living in a German city.' The 22-page English translation was sent in advance of the Congress to those who requested it, and distributed at the beginning of the session to those who had not yet seen it. Instead of papers connected thematically but exploring potentially unconnected sites, the audience at this session listened and responded to papers about the same 'site'. The format seemed a particularly fruitful way to engage an international group of panelists and audience about the panelists' topics of translation,

identity and ethnicity, trajectory, suffering, and migration.

From my partial and situated perspective, the XIV World Congress was extremely successful. I am grateful to Kathy Davis for the excellent program in Montreal. At the XV World Congress, I would like to see one or two invited sessions on selected topics, such as relationships and tensions between 'narrative' and 'biography' in social science, or 'authors meet critics' (the international outpouring of publications on biography and society begs for an opportunity for authors and critics to meet and talk in public settings). In the best of possible worlds, I would like to see a sharp reduction in the cost of attending World Congresses. Given the high cost of the Congress, I would like to explore ways to provide travel and/or registration assistance for scholars who have limited or no financial support from their home institutions.

BIOGRAPHICAL STUDIES IN JAPAN

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It can be said that innovation of biographical studies in Japanese sociology began with the October 1977 publication of the book *A Narrative Life History: The Love and the Curse of a Woman in Modern Japan*, by sociologist Takashi Nakano. Before this publication, there were few works in the social sciences dealing with life histories. One of the most important such works was Tadashi Ishida's *Anti-Atom Bomb* (1973) which analyzed the life histories of atom bomb victims in Nagasaki. In terms of folklore concerned with oral tradition, *Tosa Genji* (1960) by Tsuneichi Miyamoto, a folklorist, is renowned for its vivid narrative of a former cow dealer who had become a blind elderly beggar, and for its description of vanishing culture and life in a mountainous village.

These works were a minority, however. In Japanese sociology, until the late 1970s, structural functionalism and statistical research were the mainstream, and there was little biographical research; moreover even when it was done, it was considered to be supplementary. Given those circumstances, Nakano's 1977 book had two major impacts; one was that it focused attention on biographical research, and the other is that the style of his work aroused sociological controversy regarding the nature of life history. In this respect, I would like to introduce some trends in biographical studies in Japan.

Nakano's 1977 book consisted of a story narrated by an elderly woman born in 1893, who was living in a port village facing the Inland Sea. Although the area where she lived had prospered in the prewar period as

a fishing and marine transportation port village, during the postwar period of rapid economic development, it had suffered from air pollution caused by the petrochemical industry and saw its population decrease. Nakano met the woman while he was carrying out an attitude survey of the inhabitants of the community. Her life history was dramatic: by the age of twenty-one, she had married three times, and had gone to Manchuria with first husband and to Korea with her second. Her folk beliefs were very supernatural.

However, it was neither her dramatic life nor her religious beliefs nor the social influence of industrialization and pollution in the postwar period that aroused controversy among sociologists, but rather Nakano's style of presenting her oral life history. Although Oscar Lewis got his idea of 'Rashomon-like technique' from the movie *Rashomon*, directed by Akira Kurosawa, Nakano did not adopt the idea of compiling multiple narratives. The fact that he presented a single narrative stirred up a controversy in sociology.

After Nakano completed his interview with the woman, he transcribed her tape-recorded narratives of her life history, edited them chronologically, and inserted several brief explanatory notes. He then published the book. The explanatory notes are limited to local culture, historical facts, or interview condition. Nakano presented no sociological analysis. Consequently, the book was said to be mere data. Immediately after the publication, Nakano was criticized for having merely transcribing data devoid of any analysis or interpretation. On the

other hand, Nakano's message, that humans should be sociologically understood, and his focus on a single idiosyncratic individual, created a stir among sociologists. Following this, in the early 1980s, Nakano published two individual life histories; one of an elderly man living in a southern island of Japan, and the other of a Japanese-American female in Hawaii.

In the 1980s, sociologists who had been affected to a greater or lesser degree by Nakano began to do biographical research on various themes; for example (at random): miners, shipbuilding workers, potters, local politicians, farmers, midwives, housewives, Korean residents of Japan, Japanese-Canadians, Japanese-Americans, Japanese-Brazilians, mentally disabled persons, Buraku (discriminated) people, highly-educated females, single elderly residents, and internal migrants living in urban areas. Generally, the life histories of these people were understood and discussed in terms of their life courses, identity problems, or their life worlds.

Since its founding in 1981, the Japanese Society for Life History has conducted regular sessions four times a year in Tokyo. Members present reports and discussions on their biographical studies. This shows how concerns for biographical studies have risen. It has a membership of about 100.

In the 1990s, Japanese biographical studies have reached a second stage. The first stage, from 1977 to the end of the 1980s, was characterized by an increase in the number of concrete studies using biographical research. In the second, what can be said is that life history has come to be theoretically examined. Japanese biographical studies have been most theoretically influenced by phenomenological sociology, in addition to hermeneutics and social history. Recently, the influence of ethno-methodology, constructionism and narratology have also been received gradually increased.

Nakano's 1977 work was not only the beginning of the first stage, but also became the object for the theoretical discussions and reflections of the second stage. *Sociology of Life History*, published in 1995, is a masterpiece of these discussions. It is an anthology of articles by eight sociologists, including Nakano as well as myself, where life histories were theoretically examined. Three of the articles concerned rethinking Nakano's 1977 work, and the others examined the relationship between historical facts and life history, dealing with identity crises through life history analysis, arguing the multiple dimensions of narratives from the perspective of phenomenological sociology and reanalyzing the case presented by Sigmund Freud. Harue Ode analyzed the transcript of Nakano's tape-recorded interview presented in the book in 1977, showing how the life history was edited by Nakano. It was the first case in which an interview tape became open to a third person, and where the process from interview to publishing was unveiled.

From another point of view, I have discussed the relation between narrator and sociologist in the interview situation, and analyzed how the sociologist interprets the experience and narratives, and constructs the narrated life. Since the early 1990s, it has come to be understood that oral life histories are produced from a collaboration between interviewer and interviewee, and that the interview itself is the arena of their interactions. The 1995 book provided further epistemological discussions on life history.

Finally, I would like to conclude with two recent points: one is that biographical research in its second stage is now recognized as 'qualitative studies,' synthesizing plural theoretical stands. These studies deal not always with the entire life histories, but also with various fragmentary narratives of experiences. The other point is that, and this is my interest, we can include within biographical studies, examining the social phenomena of writing autobiographies, or of expressing ones experiences oneself.

CONFERENCE REPORTS, BOOK REVIEWS

BIOGRAPHICAL METHODS IN THE SOCIAL SCIENCES

Tavistock Clinic, London, UK, September 1998

This two days conference, organized by the Center for Biography in Social Policy (BISP, University of East London), took place at the Tavistock Clinic in London. With 100 participants coming from England and some international guests it was a well attended event, showing a lively and

growing interest in biographical approaches in England. A variety of academic, socio-political as well as practical institutions were represented.

In the plenary sessions, applied methods in different projects and working fields were

presented and their methodological background discussed. The following contributions were included:

- from the EU project Social Strategies in Risk Societies (SOSTRIS) Michael Rustin (From individual life-stories to sociological understanding) and Roswitha Breckner (Just single cases? Procedures and methodological arguments for hermeneutic case-analysis)
- from the working context about social mobility and the experience of social exclusion in France Daniel Bertaux: (Life stories as testimonies about external, sociohistorical realities: a resource for realist sociology) and Catherine Delcroix (who unfortunately could not attend because of family reasons)
- from the ESSR project about crime and anxiety Tony Jefferson and Wendy Hollway (The fear of crime in biographical perspective)
- from clinical observations supervised by Margaret Rustin in the Tavistock Clinic (Family biographies in the making: a psychoanalytic perspective).

BIOGRAPHIES AND THE DIVISION OF EUROPE

Technische Universität, Berlin, Germany, February 17-20, 1997

All conferences are meant to be opportunities to reflect on certain questions. As always at such occasions, issues are raised, concepts discussed, models of analysis proposed, older theories attacked or alternately reinforced. This was the impression when I left after the conference 'Biographies and the Division of Europe.' Perhaps more implicitly than explicitly, this conference had decided to investigate the different public discourses concerning the division of the 'East' and the 'West' of Europe. Clearly, the organizers (R. Breckner, W. Fischer-Rosenthal, I. Miethe, and B. Völter) realized -- and quite rightfully -- that after the fall of the wall in 1989, the re-division of Europe inadvertently resulted in different national narrations, family biographies and social science orientations concerning research methods and paradigms dealing with biography. Each morning of the conference dealt with main issues in the form of plenary sessions, while the afternoons produced concurrent sessions, paper presentations, and fruitful discussions. Instead of trying to analyze single presentations -- itself a difficult problem since I was not able to attend all the sessions myself -- I will survey some of the main issues and research topics as suggested by reflection on the conference.

Four paper presentations in particular -- that of W. Fischer-Rosenthal, E. Stölting, G. Rosenthal, and Devorah Kalekin Fishman -- tried to set the tone for the entire conference. As argued by these

In four workshops which followed the plenary sessions, material from the presented contexts was shown, interpreted, and the way of interpretation discussed. Unfortunately, there was not enough time to exemplify the different approaches and methods systematically and to start a comparative discussion based on the empirical work during the workshops. But this was made up in the friendly atmosphere of plenary discussions where basic assumptions, common and different theoretical contexts, the strength and limits of the presented methodical procedures were pointed out. In the course of this, some misunderstandings from preceding debates could be further clarified.

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authors, the European Enlightenment and modernity constructed and 'imagined' Europe in a definite historical and geo-political context. We were, then, reminded by a number of participants (both East and West) that much of the current division of Europe as well as its concurrent national ideologies need to be understood in their specific historical environments and national settings. It is noteworthy that most of the papers dealt with specific groups and cultural issues rather than taking up the challenging task of the title of the conference itself. Aside from a few notable exceptions (Kalekin Fishman, K. Kazmierska, I. Dietzsch), for instance, the question of border or border identity was little discussed either as to its meaning, its origin, or its implications for biography, an area that holds promise for research. Moreover, in presentations such as D. Kalekin Fishman, Y. Schütze, S. Kusa, G. Rosenthal, and M. Morokvasic, we were provided with an in-depth look into how current national 'narratives' serve as basis for a struggle for control of resources and those institutions (whether real or symbolic) which allocate and reallocate them. Interethnic (such as the Slovak, Hungarian and Yugoslav case-studies illustrated) and transnational cultural milieu (the Balkans, Middle East, Western Europe), has a significant instrumental component in reshaping family stories and individual and group biographies. This is, of course, even more true when such socio-cultural settings provide traumatic

experiences such as the Holocaust and the Balkan War. Much, for instance, was made of the role of traumatic events (exile, diaspora, loss) on the lives of individuals and families and, I assume, this is a central concern for biographical research not only among sociologists, but anthropologists and historians as well.

What was perhaps the single most noticeable aspect of the Berlin conference is the current obsession on focusing on selected groups such as workers, women, youth and ethno-national groups (V. Semyonova, P. Vodenicharov, E. Meshcherkina, E. Shafer, K. Popova, J. Hradilkova, E. Zdravomyslova). The controversy over remembering the Holocaust and the ensuing Jewish trauma were, without a doubt, other issues that surfaced -- if not explicitly, than implicitly -- in many of the presentations (J. Vajda, S. Redlich, B. Völter). Very little, however, was made of the key players and social groups that facilitated, consciously or unconsciously, the collapse of the East bloc, with the notable exceptions: W. Heuer's paper on the East Berliners' life histories; I. Miethe, who discussed East German women's peace initiatives; and V. Susak, who described life histories of Ukrainian political leaders by using the interpretative model of past narratives by Ricoeur. If these papers presented in this conference are an indication at all, then I can say with certainty that this area will prove a fruitful avenue of future endeavors.

THE HOLOCAUST IN THREE GENERATIONS. FAMILIES OF VICTIMS AND PERPETRATORS OF THE NAZI REGIME.

Gabriele Rosenthal (ed), (1998). London & Washington: Cassell.

This book is the result of a large research project on Jewish and non-Jewish German families which was carried out in Israel (twenty families) and Germany (eighteen families) under the leadership of Gabriele Rosenthal from 1992-1996. It examines the question how family histories in Israel, West- and East Germany that differ biographically after 1945, affect the process of transmitting the family past from one generation to the next. The process of passing family history down is the focus through which the intersection between collective history, family past and its reconstruction is elaborated. This project's starting point is the assumption that the way in which family dialogue between the different generations of Holocaust survivors and perpetrators is shaped makes all the difference for the perspective on the past of the individuals involved. First interviews were conducted with at least one member of each generation in every family studied, followed by family interviews with as many members as possible. Using

The need to determine whether narratives of the East provide radical departures from Western biographies also emerged. Many questions remain to be asked, however. Can we utilize the same theoretical apparatus and research models for these different, East-West experiences? Was the East, as we know it now in retrospect, a homogenous bloc or, on the contrary, should we recognize important cultural trajectories and differences? Furthermore, interpretations of the emergence of post-communist national and group identities are not all of the same type. Some, as we heard, rely on the radical break with the past: how do these new stories emerge and become reproduced? Others stress continuation with the earlier, communist selves and their significant impact for the creation of post-communist identities. What was clear, however, was that both conceptual clarification and empirical research in these areas are called for.

We need to know much more about the role of workers as well as intellectuals and artists in Europe in the creation of symbolic resources and in the mobilization of emotions and commitment as they are expressed in auto/biographies. Thanks to the organizers, the Berlin conference was an excellent step in the right direction.

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narrative-biographical interviews for the data collection and hermeneutic case reconstruction for the analysis, the research used and combined new methodological tools and the presentation of the family case studies provides very important new insights into the social processes of post-war families in the three countries. Not only are the stories impressive accounts of the struggle of the different members and generations in coming to terms with the past, it is, in particular, striking how much impact the Holocaust still has on the lives of people, even those of the younger generation. In other words, 'time is not healing' by itself. The book is very convincing in its structure and arguments. It shows that although the commonalities in family dialogue of perpetrators and survivors are striking, e.g. the role of silence and de-thematization of the Holocaust by members of the first generation, this silence has very different origins and is legitimized differently. While survivors wish to protect their children and

- including of biographical work itself
- Ethical issues: e.g. in community uses of biographical work
- Biographical methods in comparative policy-oriented research
- Therapeutic aspects of narrative interviewing and interpretation

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