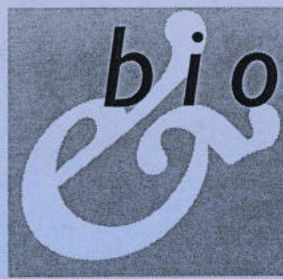


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LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT

I am delighted to send off the 1996 newsletter - a bit late this time, but hopefully well worth the wait. I have received many enthusiastic reactions about the last newsletter. Sociologists from all over the world have expressed interest in joining the research committee. The newsletter has been widely disseminated and Wolfram Fischer-Rosenthal's article 'The Problem with Identity' has even been translated into two languages!

The board of the research committee had an interim meeting in Amsterdam last June which combined business with a very inspiring conference on 'Life Story Approaches and Biographical Methods in Social Sciences and History' which was organized with the Belle van Zuylen Institute in Amsterdam (see Conference Reports). We discussed topics for the next World Congress in Montreal (see World Congress) as well as ways to encourage a more active participation of our members. We were so pleased with the results of this meeting that we have planned another, similar meeting to be held in Moscow in July 1997.

One of the issues which we discussed at length was the financial situation of the research committee. At present, we have 486 interested sociologists from 44 different countries on our mailing list. While this attests to the enormous interest in biographical research, it has not resulted in an increase in 'official' membership, most notably, in the payment of dues. The research committee has traditionally tried to maintain a broad mailing list, but the administration as well as the costs for putting out the newsletter have begun to take their toll. It is becoming increasingly difficult to bear the costs of making and distributing the newsletter with so little money coming in. Moreover, our eligibility for a grant from the ISA for the newsletter is dependent on the percentage of RC38 members who are also dues-paying members of the ISA. If you are interested in receiving a newsletter in between World Congresses, we would like to urge you to become an official member (see Membership form) and pay your dues.

It was my hope that the newsletter would become a platform for discussing theoretical or methodological issues of interest to social scientists working in the field of biographical research. The present newsletter attests to the success of the endeavor. Daniel Bertaux has written a passionate rejoinder to Thierry Kochuyt's paper,

'Biographical and Empiricist Illusions: A Reply to Recent Criticism' in which he reopens the debate on what the 'linguistic turn' means for biographical research. The second article by Jan Coetzee and Geoff Wood was written for the conference in Amsterdam and returns to some of the issues raised in the last newsletter: the biographical method in the context of modernity. This time, however, the work of Georg Simmel and Walter Benjamin are taken as a starting point. And, last but not least, Wolfram Fischer-Rosenthal has written a moving tribute to Anselm Strauss whose work has undoubtedly been a source of inspiration to most of us.

I would like to encourage you to react to these pieces or to introduce any other issues which you feel strongly about or want to see addressed in the next newsletter. Please feel free to send us any information on conferences, events or publications. Submissions for the next newsletter should be sent to me or to Helma Lutz by September 1, 1997.

I look forward to hearing from you.

All best wishes,
Kathy Davis

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VIEWPOINTS

A RESPONSE TO THIERRY KOCHUYT'S 'BIOGRAPHICAL AND EMPIRICIST ILLUSIONS: A REPLY TO RECENT CRITICISM'

Daniel Bertaux, EHESS, Paris, France

Thierry Kochuyt's short essay, which is part of a larger work, is supposed to be a defense of the use of life stories in sociology against the recent narrativist criticisms. In fact, it transports an anti-realist ideology, especially with statements such as 'All of us would question the naive realism which uses the life history as a documentary method to grasp external realities' (p. 6). With such defenders, who would need enemies?

I do not doubt the intentions of our colleague. Rather, I believe that he is not familiar with 'realist' research which has been done since the 1960s, and that he is, most of all, a victim of contemporary intellectual fashions. Postmodernism takes a neo-idealist turn when it is carried over from philosophy, literature and psychology to sociology, history and anthropology, i.e. to the sciences which demand a realist orientation.

Every life story contains a large proportion of factual data which can be verified (e.g., dates and places of biographical events). Life stories can be used - and, in effect, have been used - as a documentary source to know about realities 'out there'. However, the condition for a sociological use of life stories is the collection of multiple life stories from the same social category or milieu; an isolated life story may be the delight of psychologists, narrativists, or sociolinguists, but it has no sociological value whatsoever.

Other than simply claiming this, I will trace the background of some of Kochuyt's assumptions.

Some historical rectifications Kochuyt assumes a phase of enthusiastic rediscovery of life history methods in the 1970s, followed by a phase when 'success also fuelled skepticism' (p. 5). Contrary to Kochuyt's reconstruction, I do not believe that the aim of those who were active in this rediscovery was 'to reintroduce the subject into sociology' (ibid.). At least, this is not what I had in mind with my empirical research on bakeries in France in the 1970s (Bertaux and Bertaux-Wiame 1981a; 1981b), which contributed to the renewed interest in the biographical approach and also to the foundation of the international research committee 'Biography and Society' in 1978. It also does not correspond to the empirical work of other researchers like Paul Thompson, Glen Elder, Martin Kohli (who were all contributors to the volume *Biography and Society* which I edited in 1981), and Tamara K. Hareven. Rather than

reintroducing 'the subject' (which is more of a philosophical category) into sociology, our aim was to reintroduce concrete experiences of persons who are immersed in social relations and in historical time. We addressed the persons we interviewed as informants on social (or rather, socio-historical) milieux whose life stories were embedded in these contexts in a particular time (albeit not necessarily for their entire life-time). We were aware that our informants did not tell us the whole truth and nothing but the truth, but we thought that by collecting many life stories from the same milieu, we would be able to discover recurrent patterns concerning collective phenomena or shared collective experience in a particular milieu. And, indeed, for the first time we were able to describe certain social milieux and collective experiences.

Our approach was realist; we thought that socio-historical realities existed independently of the conscious minds of actors and that it was possible to obtain relatively objective knowledge about them. What most of us rejected was quantitative positivism which pretends that only survey research gives access to objective knowledge. On the contrary, we thought that people acquired knowledge concerning how the workings of the milieux in which they were involved. This knowledge of social processes and structures would be partial, to be sure, but also unobtainable elsewhere (in books or archives, for example). It, therefore, seemed epistemologically sensible to ask people about their knowledge - something which anthropologists had always done. Moreover, proceeding in this way seemed to us a way to revalue 'indigenous' knowledge and, therefore, indirectly, its carriers. We believed this to be useful 'politically', from a perspective of social justice and the moral reintegration into collective consciousness of members of lower socio-economic classes. (This is perhaps the 'authenticity' of witnesses mentioned by Kochuyt.) Some of us did not refrain from criticizing socio-historical realities, nor did we found objectivity with political neutrality.

Contrary to what Kochuyt writes, we did not reject theoretical schools as such, but rather abstractions which were cut off from empirical realities. Personally, I was at that time still very much influenced by the structuralist marxism of Poulantzas as well as Bourdieu and Passeron. This perspective inspired my research on the bakeries, or, at least the theories which I developed on the

basis of these life stories. It is true that the idea to turn to life stories which came to me from reading Oscar Lewis' *The Children of Sanchez* seemed in complete methodological contradiction with structuralist marxism. If I deserve credit, it is perhaps for taking on this contradiction and following it through. In contrast, Bourdieu and Passeron, as empiricists of the hard hypothetical-deductive type, continued for a very long time to look for perfect coherence between theory and method, relying almost exclusively on surveys (see Bourdieu's major studies).

In combining life stories with a structuralist approach, I discovered that there is a way out of the intellectual straight-jacket as developed by Bourdieu and Passeron, without denying the immense contributions of Marx and, more generally, of 'structural' paradigms. While this way out seemed at first improbable, it proved a true exit 'through the top', as C. Wright Mills had already intuited in his *Sociological Imagination*. (It was an exit which irritated Bourdieu, as evidenced by his violent attack in his all-too famous text, 'L'illusion biographique', written in 1986). This text remains within the deductivist cage in which Bourdieu had enclosed himself and which he is only beginning to leave now. However, his 1986 article is written from a realist point of view (which I share), and this is why Kochuyt confuses Bourdieu's criticism with that of the narrativists, who have a diametrically opposed ontological concept of socio-historical realities.

It was with the aim of sociologizing or even macro-sociologizing the biographical approach that I stopped working with single life-stories in the early 1980s and instead began to collect family histories through interviews in order to study processes of social mobility. This attempt at opening up biographical approaches in a more *sociological* direction has proved successful (Bertaux and Thompson, 1997). To Kochuyt's characterization of the reaction to the biographical approach in the 1970s as 'success also fuelled skepticism', I would say that, on the contrary, skepticism against qualitative methods may have been absolute, but that it diminished after our first wave of publications. However, the generation of sociologists who had been educated in the spirit of quantitative research and had invested their careers in its elaboration, did remain skeptical.

It is true that the breach we instigated with the hegemony of quantitative sociology was not sufficient - as I had hoped - to produce an impressive series of empirical studies of high quality. As potential explanation, I would suggest that the (many) students who prepared their theses in the 1980s on the basis of life stories did not have the means - time and money for transcriptions - to

collect sufficient accounts to reach the saturation point. In some cases they had to rely on a single life story. This distracted their attention from collective phenomena and processes specific to social milieux or categories and focused it instead on the subjective meaning contained in a particular life story - a question which was secondary to our interest in the knowledge of objective socio-historical relations in which experiences are embedded. This psychological, linguistic or narratological approach, which became more and more 'idealist', was contrary to the ethno-sociological (ethnographical in method, sociological in aim) approach we had been following since the 1970s. It is impossible for a student and very difficult for a researcher to 'rise' above the individual to the collective (sociological) level within an isolated life story.

Considerable socio-historical knowledge about one's society has to be mobilized in order to find traces of structural or collective symbolic (socio-historical) phenomena based on one case. Retrospective sense-making of an individual's account is an operation which differs depending on the individual as well as the historical period, thereby conflating the problematic with the individual speaker and making it much more difficult to generalize. Our interest in the life story was not the totality of the subjective sense-making endeavor, but rather the discourse of an alter ego as a social subject, who shares his/her life experiences with an interviewer who has identified his/her interests as a sociologist. As 'pioneers' in the 1970s, we did not pay much attention to what was problematized later in the 1980s: the defaults of memory, the phase in which a subject find him or herself within his/her life, the interview situation, or the desire to present a positive self-image. However, through multiple testimonies and a cumulative intersubjectivity, we could arrive at objective knowledge concerning the social phenomena being studied, as the exterior reality of subjects: events, facts, situations, interactions, actions, and practices concretely encountered. We could take account of the systematic *bias* in the production of life stories through the useful findings of empirical studies which were conducted in France, for example, by Martine Burgos and Marie-Francoise Chanfaul-Duchet.

What Kochuyt calls 'the recent criticism which disqualifies the method' (p. 5) appears to him as a continuation of this earlier critique. In fact, it is something else entirely: a fashionable, extremely powerful phenomenon, a kind of neo-idealism which denies all possibility of objective, or even approximately objective, knowledge of reality, whereby the conclusion becomes that the term 'reality' cannot be used at all. Everything becomes a matter of perception, of discourses and mirrors, of languages, texts and intertextuality.

The heart of this neo-idealism resides in the ontological notion of reality as devoid of any reality, that is, any 'objective' or 'material' reality. One can no longer even use the concept of reference (to extra-linguistic realities, as the linguists would say) because this presupposes a concept of reality. All varieties of realism are, thus, thrown overboard; we seem to be living in a postmodern world consisting of pure signs.

Every epoch has the idealism it deserves. Until the 18th century, it was of a religious kind; in the 19th century, of a humanist inspiration. Psychological and, finally, psychoanalytical interpretations followed. Since the 1960s, semiology has superimposed itself and today narrativism is in charge. But under its new demeanor, the old light of absolute idealism continues to shine. That we would not know reality except through our perceptions, representations and theories is one thing; equally true is that perceptions, representations, theories, including ideologies (also 'great narratives') and symbolic systems, have relative autonomy in relation to socio-historical realities (i.e., class relations, economic, or political formations). But to affirm that these symbolic phenomena would constitute the only 'reality' one can know and talk about is to turn to a neo-idealism which is as speculative and sterile as the inverse reduction of ideologies and cultural forms to relations of production. No empirical justification whatsoever is given for this, but only a repetition of the same arguments, over and over again. While speculative disciplines like philosophy, literary criticism, and theoretical psychology might be content with such an approach, for disciplines such as sociology, history, and anthropology, which aim to describe and understand socio-historical realities, this is nothing short of suicide. It means that a world subject to very powerful material interests can continue to function in all tranquillity, as the social scientists have given up describing, understanding and making public the real ways that the world works.

Truth and life stories The assertion that life stories do not faithfully describe lived experiences is speculative and lacks empirical justification. What we do need is a reasonable number of cases in order to compare instances of how accounts of lived experiences are systematically deformed after a period of ten years. Eight of the older bakery workers we interviewed in 1969/70 were re-interviewed by Isabelle Bertaux-Wiame several years later about their apprenticeships who discovered that they had not changed their accounts. Having remained workers throughout their lives, they retained their resentment against the physical and verbal violence they suffered from their masters. Isabelle Bertaux-Wiame also interviewed seven

older bakers who had passed their apprenticeship in the same period and had then become bakery workers. Unlike the first group, however, they later succeeded in establishing their own bakeries. They talked about their apprenticeship in altogether different terms, describing which tasks they had learned in which order. Their was no spontaneous mention of either abusive language or beatings. When questioned on this subject, however, they acknowledged having undergone such violence, laughing about how 'there is no other way to learn!'.

The key to these systematic differences obviously lies in the different life course of these two groups. A tough apprenticeship takes on a different sense retrospectively if one has been able to establish oneself independently ten or fifteen years later, especially when told from a position in which one has, in turn, mistreated apprentices and reproduced one's own suffering. Thus, the long gone past is seen through the eyes of the masters they have themselves become.

This example shows that it is not the life story as a whole which is a reconstruction, but rather that what is reconstructed is (in part) its sense, the meaning of a certain life period, its color, if you like. But at the heart of these reconstructions one can - if one looks - find a hard kernel of truth. Places and dates of events, situations defined by outside constraints, moral commitments, relations of production, norms of action, and practices (the abuse in the example above) all constitute the factual profile of an existence. Contrary to what Kochuyt asserts, life stories can, therefore, provide an excellent documentary source, especially for the contribution of socio-structural and socio-symbolic relations to how the facts of individual lives take shape. These relations can only be discovered progressively, and not through a focus on the individual, but rather on the historically situated matrixes of social relations in which life courses and practices have been embedded. This is precisely what distinguishes the realist disciplines (which attempt to describe and understand, i.e., to know as objectively as possible, a fraction of socio-historical, cultural and ideological realities) from those disciplines which work only with symbolic phenomena (and their psychic representations) without tracing their concrete genesis.

When Kochuyt writes, 'what the life story represents is a history of the present or of the anticipated future, but not necessarily of the past' (ibid.), I would have agreed if he had added 'history as seen from the perspective of the present or the anticipated future'. Even historical research on the objective past is always an account written in the present. However, it is not entirely dependent on the present, but rather anchored in

dates, facts, and sequences of events. In short, it sketches an outline of given facts which cannot be changed even when the meaning is continually being reworked.

An object - such as an apple, a monument, a face - can yield an infinity of photographic representations, one as 'objective' as the other (Bertaux, 1997) with the additional paradox that a gifted painter can give a more 'essential', more meaningful and even more 'objective' representation than any photographer ever could. How could one, therefore, be surprised that a history with its complexity of interactions would give way to a diversity of accounts? Each account constitutes an interpretation, with some being more loyal, more clarifying, or more profound than others. But to conclude that objective historical truth does not exist would be an error of the most elementary sort.

If witnesses' accounts did not have documentary value, how could we know about the genocide perpetrated by the Nazis, or, more recently, about genocides in Central Africa or Ex-Yugoslavia? Lies and oblivion are accomplices of the oppressor, while truth remains silent, on the side of the victims. To claim that objective truth does not exist and all is fiction - as a cursory reading of Derrida might suggest to some - is irresponsible. Let me be clear: I am not suggesting that the hypothesis is wrong because it is politically incorrect. Rather I am suggesting that before one advances such a speculative hypothesis, one should allow one's awareness to be enhanced reflexively by its effect on the victims. A life story account can contain different kinds of truth; factual truth, relative truth (i.e., richly detailed descriptions), as well as plausible interpretations on how facts are linked to one another. The critically disentangling of what is true from what merely seems to be true - is this not an everyday task undertaken by each and every one of us?

Bad Faith Sociologists who write about life stories seem to feel under an obligation to refer to Bourdieu's 'L'illusion biographique' (1986) and Kochuyt's reference only adds to the confusion. While Bourdieu's text might be dismissed as ill-humored, uninspired and best forgotten, its recent reprinting gives cause for discussion. The text contains both original and correct ideas, which are, unfortunately, not the same. An original idea is that a name would be the only objective and constant measure of identity. (But what about women and men who change their name? Or their body, for that matter?) A correct idea, on the contrary, concerns biographical illusion. But this is hardly an original one, as I had advanced it ten years earlier with my term 'biographical ideology' ('to save the biographical approach, one has to get rid of the

biographical ideology') in a research report which widely circulated and whose existence Bourdieu - contrary to Kochuyt - could not have ignored (Bertaux, 1976:197). There I emphasized that life lines are 'fragmented' in a geometrical sense of the word but that subjects attempt to rediscover and fabricate ('bricoler') a hidden coherence. Ideological bricolage is not an illusion, but rather an existential need, which becomes real in its consequences. 'Biographical ideology' is a collective phenomenon (and not a psychological one, an illusion). No French sociologist who has worked with life stories since 1976 would be taken in by it. Therefore, it is in bad faith that Bourdieu has set up a strawdog which could so easily be shot down. A critical reading of the language of this essay as well as Bourdieu's later explanations for using the biographical approach (for, example, 'La misère du monde' in 1993), would provide a more adequate perspective.

The realist approach in France Contrary to the hegemony of the life-story-as-narrative approach which I find strongly reflected in the last Biography and Society Newsletter, there has been an increase of researchers who work with life stories in a realist perspective in France. This is evidenced by the fact that forty, high quality research proposals were submitted in response to a state secretary's call for research on trajectories of precariousness, exclusion or 'disaffiliation'. Surveys cannot reveal the dynamics of such phenomena, which concern millions of families and individuals. Field workers are likely to ask inhabitants 'where they are from' rather than looking for the rhetoric of a semantic repertoire of 'identity strategies' or 'narrative identities'. Within two or three years, the first results will enable us to form an opinion about which research orientation best advances knowledge of social phenomena.

Conclusion I believe that Kochuyt is of good faith: he wants to defend the use of life stories in sociology. However, because he begins with a concept of life stories prompted by the discursive disciplines which does without a notion of reality, he has lost his point before he can make it. Every life story is simultaneously an informative document and an interpretive account and these aspects to not need to be regarded as in opposition to one another. A life story is, of course, much more. For example, it is an account of a totally singular history in which others may, nevertheless, find themselves reflected. It is a mystery which constantly renews itself. And it is a collective, ideological and even transcultural phenomenon.

My point here, however, is that sociology cannot do without an ontological concept of social-his-

torical reality, however different these concepts may be. My own concept returns to Marx for the simply reason that the world has never before been so clearly and brutally structured by the logic of grand capital (what the economists and preachers in a world without religion shamefully call 'market economy'). Other sociologists may see things differently and that is their right. But a sociologist who is afraid to use the term reality would be like a pastor without faith, a psychoanalyst who does not believe in the unconscious, a soldier who has lost morale, or a politician who has no contact with the public domain. Without a concept of reality, be it ever so provisional, one cannot do sociology. Moreover, if one does not believe in the capacity of each and everyone of us to describe, understand, practice and criticize those realities that surround and touch us, their can be no humanist approach in sociology.

(translation: Lena Inowlocki)

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THE FRAGMENTARY METHOD IN LIFE HISTORY RESEARCH: REVISITING GEORG SIMMEL AND WALTER BENJAMIN

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There can be little doubt that the central debate within sociology today is that surrounding the question of modernity. A key feature of modernity is that individuals engage in a range of transactions and move between a wide variety of social circles. Because of this, people's experience of social reality is often fragmented. To understand social reality and the way in which people experience social reality, the social scientist will often have to employ a fragmentary method when it comes to collecting and analyzing data. In this article the fragmentary method in life history research will be situated within the broad theoretical framework of phenomenology, although other theoretical positions might also be recognized in aspects thereof.

In this time of theoretical uncertainty, there has been renewed interest in the works of the 'modern radicals', of the early Frankfurt school, in Walter Benjamin, and above all, Georg Simmel. Its strong emphasis on the cultural dimension, and on the 'micro foundations' of experience seems to have increasing relevance in a period characterized by the implications of globalization and similar objective forces, yet also by the rise of particularism, and renewed emphasis on the individual, the local and the need for localized autonomy.

Much of this current interest in Simmel's works has been in terms of the broader modernity debate. However, an equally important dimension, a dimension that was further developed by Walter Benjamin, is Simmel's distinctive method, a method that highlights both the importance of developing qualitative tools of analysis, and the need to directly link theory with actual goings-on in the streets. In this article, we argue for a broad phenomenological basis for life history research.

The Micro-Methodological Basis of the Fragmentary Method Conventional quantitative (as well as some qualitative) methods of sociological research have often tended to focus on a single dimension - either attitudes and values with regard to a specific issue, or a particular manifestation of human behavior. In other words, they have tended to give primary attention to general tendencies, rather than the individual actor and her/his interaction with the social whole.

As Simmel (Frisby, 1992:3) notes, a key feature of modernity is that individuals engage in a range of transactions and move between a wide variety of social circles. There is little doubt that a contemporary trend is towards even greater fragmentation, making Simmel's work of still greater relevance. For example, a political activist's life experience is not just about actual political defiance, but also about everyday life, including family and personal ties and basic economic concerns. One can physically record, say, many aspects of political protests that have taken place during a specific time period, but still have little understanding of the individual participants thereto. Whilst a quantitative approach may accurately record a particular attitude, or a clustering of transactions, it cannot capture the entire life experience.

The underpinning epistemological assumption is using micro foundations as means of understanding (Coetzee and Graaff, 1996:148-152). Cognisance is taken of the most direct empirical reality in the constitution of the social world, namely the individual. Although essentially individual experiences, these specific experiences must be seen against the background of a totality of experiences and are closely bound to it. It is not possible to understand the collective, all-encompassing reality without viewing it through the individual contributing parts, and the manner in which they constitute the general tapestry of society (Turner and Collins, 1989:118-123).

The use of individual life histories implies using methodological situationalism. Individual experiences and interactions can never be seen separately from the interrelationship of intentions and very seldom occur entirely in isolation. Methodological situationalism implies both a geographical (place and circumstances within which action occurs) as well as an emotional locale (intention with which it is done). Events are then linked because of the reciprocal expectations, ascription of interests, communication, fears, grievances and actions (see Coetzee and Graaff, 1996:152-153). As Benjamin argues, there is a constant interplay between individual and community, between which, and acting as a source of identity, are the traditions of a society (Benjamin, 1989:128).

Georg Simmel and the Subjective/Objective Nexus in Past and Present

The micro approach coincides with the view expressed by Georg Simmel and Walter Benjamin that history is only possible under conditions of selection, emphasis and synthesis. It is not possible to develop any understanding of the totality of history and, thus, of contemporary social relations. Rather, aspects of historical experience are like books on the shelf in a library, to be reshuffled, unpacked and rearranged (La Capra, 1985:90). One can record a set of fragments of information, and, depending on how they are ordered, develop radically different perspectives of the whole. Social analysis is of necessity selective and largely represents designs to suit a particular program (Simmel in Crook, 1991:59).

For Simmel sociology was not the 'history of society', but rather a method of acquiring knowledge. At the same time, any analysis of key sociological concepts must have an historical component (Frisby, 1994:340), and aspects of the present can only be understood through recourse to history. History allows for a general view of the totality of reality, albeit an incomplete view that can never fully be grasped. History cannot be subsumed under 'general concepts' as per the Marxist project - laws of history cannot be found, owing to the extreme complexity of social life. Thus, historical analysis is about extracting and reconstructing fragments, about the incomplete, yet about obtaining some conception of the whole.

Consequently, Simmel asserts that social analysis should seek to focus on what is truly social - the individual's passage through life and her/his interactions with others. In other words, Simmel believed that the building block of social analysis should be the individual. Society is only real in terms of people's actions and social analysis should seek to uncover the delicate, invisible threads of social interactions (Frisby and Sayer, 1986:61).

In addition, Simmel asserts that history's threads and categories are very different to those exhibited in concrete reality (Crook 1991:59). In other words, one's understanding of the past is framed by present realities and conceptions, which make for a composite vision that is somewhat removed from what actually happened. Because history is only possible under conditions of selection, emphasis and synthesis, no completely accurate vision is ever possible. Rather, the only feasible approach is to select fragments, details, and piece them together into an overall mosaic, which will provide a picture of selected events from a very specific perspective.

It is not enough to gather the accounts of one individual, but rather it is necessary to see experiences as relative to each other. A single individual's life story has little meaning other than in the context of social interactions with others. Through the gathering together of a collection of individual accounts, the sum of which will reveal much about the spirit of the age, a general vision of social goings-on may be pieced together (Mandelbaum, 1967:113). Reconstructing the past is, *inter alia*, about piecing together creative outpourings, constructing a synthesis of history into cognitive forms (Levine, 1994:320). In this sense, a collection of fragments will in the end, tell something about broader objectivities, the role of objective forces in social life.

Above all, Simmel's understanding of society focuses on the interplay between social processes beyond the control of the individual, and the individual's interaction therewith (La Capra, 1985:57). Simmel describes this interplay as that between the objective and the subjective, the individual's search for identity and autonomy in the face of the massive, seemingly anonymous 'great systems' of society. There is little doubt that Simmel's conception of the subjective and the objective has important methodological ramifications. It highlights the complexity of individual experience and the importance of mapping all its nuances, yet provides some framework for placing accounts collected together, to construct a more general conception of social life.

It could be argued that an adoption of Simmel's method would, with its somewhat imprecise nature, allow for too great a bias on behalf of the researcher. However, to Simmel, recognizing the impact of the researcher's personality within the fragmentary method would contribute to constituting basic intellectual honesty. Furthermore, the collecting of micro experiences should not simply record individual accounts based on varying subjective interpretations. The researcher should also take account of broader objective forces, which can often be best assessed through supplementary research methods, such as document studies.

Frisby (1989:57) asserts that, in terms of Simmel's method, the researcher is depicted as a wanderer or 'flâneur', seeking to piece together aspects of the seemingly unique, be it an individual's life experiences, or specific social phenomena (ibid.:79). Whilst piecing together fragments may result in a somewhat incomplete final picture, such a final picture will provide unique insights, in contrast to a scientifically imposed order (Axelrood, 1994:42).

In practical terms, what the individual seeks to present, as well as the piecing together of the

findings by the researcher, may be considerably less precise. Indeed, Simmel (1976:76) argues any understanding of reality tends to be a highly subjective affair, and it is extremely difficult to develop a universal understanding of social life. In the end, an overall vision can only represent a juxtaposition of a number of accounts, which may at times be inconsistent, yet together provide a rich vision of the complexity of the human experience.

Walter Benjamin's Contribution:

The Mosaic of Rubble Simmel's concept of a 'fragmentary methodology' regarding sociological analyses was echoed by Walter Benjamin, who argued that social reality could really only be understood through a scrutiny of the constituent portions ('rubble'). These could then be pieced together through a process of reconstruction, somewhat akin to the construction of a mosaic. By the term 'rubble', Benjamin asserts that the social researcher should not just seek to focus on the 'precious', the unusual and the exceptional, but rather on the full complexities of a selected aspect of existence. The primary objective of this method is not to seek so much to construct an overall inventory of social happenings, but rather to make individual accounts and experiences more understandable and usable (Mandelbaum, 1967:51). In other words, it is an attempt to capture both the unusual and the extraordinary, and place them in a setting where they may be more readily appreciated.

Indeed, Benjamin argued that a proper understanding of social processes was only possible through detailed micro research (Jameson, 1992:51), the gathering of the details from which, ultimately, a more general picture could be drawn - rather as an artist accumulates sketches prior to the final masterpiece. He further argued that '...history can only understand material which already falls under the category of direct experience' (Benjamin in Crook, 1991:58), what has been seen, remembered, or recorded by witnesses in the past.

Despite a heavy emphasis on micro research, Benjamin's method transcends traditional concepts of abstraction between the general and the particular. Instead, it seeks to '...weave a fabric out of fragments of material that have been transformed by the process of emphasis and omission' (Benjamin in Crook, 1991:59). This is as a result of its focus on unique individual experiences, which, however, still represent a reflection of the entire (Jay, 1984:56). It is not just a case of gaining an understanding of the general from the particular, as the details and texture of the overall 'montage' will draw us back into looking more closely at selected micro issues.

Thus, the overall picture constructed will, in turn, facilitate the development of a more nuanced analysis of the particular (Mandelbaum, 1967:8). Benjamin believed this 'montage principle' could enable one to instill a new vividness into historical analysis, or, indeed, one's understanding of contemporary social 'happenings' as they unfold. Hidden, yet key, aspects of history could, through such an approach, be accorded their rightful place (Frisby, 1981:212).

Expanding on his method, Benjamin refers to the need '... to employ a constructive principle' (Benjamin in Bronner and Kellner, 1989:261), namely the fragmentary methodology - this in opposition to the conventional approaches which seek to fill a homogeneous notion of time with data. Rather, through the gradual accumulation of evidence, distinct periods or discontinuities will become apparent. This contrasts sharply with both the functionalist and orthodox Marxist conceptions of history.

Building on Adorno's notion of the dialectic of affirmation and negation, of the potential of the individual being, Benjamin developed the concept of 'chips of messianic time' (Dallmayr, 1991:67). Time is not seen as linear phenomenon, but rather made up of distinct, yet overlapping social happenings. From individual accounts, a vision may be reconstructed, but it is not possible to exactly replicate what has happened or to predict the future. Although it should be stressed that Benjamin's work partially reflected his conversion to Marxism (see Roberts, 1982:157), the concept of 'messianic time' demonstrates how far he subsequently departed from orthodox historical determinism. Benjamin's approach is directly relevant to the use of life histories in that he specifically argues that instead of an issue driven approach, it is necessary to '...blast specific lives out of an era' (Roberts, 1982:262). The era (in terms of one's vision of the past) is at once demolished and preserved (Benjamin, 1989:262).

In this sense, attempting to understand the past, is not the recording of a strange and remote time, but rather of the richness of social interactions, concerning both the powerful and their victims, that has relevance to comprehending the present and what the future possibly holds.

In order to more fully explain the relationship between the past and the future, Benjamin developed the concept of the 'monad', the fragment of time that moves forward irrevocably, taking with it the fragment of remembrance (Roberts, 1982:208). Not only does Benjamin provide fresh insights into the concept of time, but he also takes greater account of the cultural dimension, and, like Simmel, objective social forces.

Although the individual's autonomy and creative constitution of meaning are emphasized, one should not lose sight of objective forces such as the individual's personal situation, the money economy in all its complexity, the powers of the state, the existence of globalized norms and values, and other factors inhibiting freedom of action.

Towards a Fragmentary Method:

Piecing Together the Whole Drawing on the works of Simmel and Benjamin, one can now move towards developing an overall fragmentary methodological approach, encompassing a number of central characteristics.

- The combined approach stresses the need for social enquiry at micro level, to construct a useful picture of the whole, by gathering distinct fragments of the general social experience.
- It has been widely noted that, in contemporary society, there has been a rapidly-accelerating general trend towards the globalization of culture leading to, as noted above, an enhanced loss of meaning, and, in response, to the rise of often ethnically or locally based particularism. This makes the task of the fragmentary methodologist at once easier and more difficult. The piecing together of a general picture is very much more difficult as societies fragment, and it may be virtually impossible to construct a general account of selected social 'goings-on'.
- It can be argued that through recording the unique, it is possible to capture individual details from a uniformity of preconceptions surrounding a particular time period, to gain some insights into what prompted the decisions of individual social actors, and the possible relationship between their actions and objective tendencies. On the one hand, such an approach is inherently destructive of conventional wisdom understandings of social reality, and, even, of the underlying assumptions of the research act itself. On the other, it enables the preservation of the unique, the special, the concealed and the everyday.
- Nonetheless, both Simmel and Benjamin indicated that it was possible to seek to develop a sympathetic understanding, to attempt to see things from the point of view of the subject and how she/he relates to broader happenings, and localized struggles for meaning. It may be argued that attempting to develop a sympathetic approach is a somewhat unrealistic and imprecise project, but there are few realistic alternatives.
- In both Simmel and Benjamin's work, the past and present are seen as interlinked. Historical enquiry is also about researching the present, and will reveal much about contemporary social attitudes - where society is at present will shape how

the past is understood. The fragmentary method takes the individual's passage through life as the basic building block of social analysis, actions being a meshing of present realities and what is given by the past. In the end, the fragmentary method is about attempting to construct a montage, an overall vision, from micro details, reflecting all the richness of social existence, even if it encompasses a number of competing sub-dimensions.

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IN MEMORIAN OF ANSELM L. STRAUSS

Wolfram Fischer-Rosenthal, TU, Berlin, Germany

On 5 September, 1996, Anselm L. Strauss died in San Francisco of a heart attack at the age of 79. His family and friends, his colleagues and the community of sociologists are in shock and mourning. Because Anselm had had a heart condition for several decades and had managed several severe crises well - the last one at the end

of 1995 - one tended to see only his immense vitality, his ever vivid spirit and wit, his endless ability to listen and talk, his seemingly unending working capacity, well balanced with daily periods of rest and leisure. With Anselm Strauss the sociological community loses one of its finest and most active scholars, who created a substantial body of knowledge, initiated research in a wide range of areas, and motivated a large number of students of the social world to observe, listen, and ask, find their way and pursue their desire to decipher the social order.

Anselm was born December 18, 1916 in New York and spent his childhood in the Bronx. His father was a physical education teacher. As a little child Anselm already made acquaintance with illness; he caught a severe ear- and pulmonary infection which left its traces, eventually culminating in a chronic condition in his adult life. At the age of five, the family moved to rural Mount Vernon. After high school he attended pre-med college in Charlottesville, Virginia. A young man who liked to read a lot and who preferred to contemplatively observe rather than intervene, he obviously was not much attracted to the option of becoming a medical doctor. Having completed his B.S., he switched to sociology.

The place to go then was - and still is - Chicago. At the famous department of sociology there, he caught the spirit of the late 'Chicago school'. He studied with Louis Wirth, Herbert Blumer and was highly influenced by Everett Cherington Hughes. His later work bore the mark of this tradition and further developed it: a principal interest in social problems and maintaining high theoretical demands; starting from the notion of a symbolically ordered and self-ordering social world which cannot be measured but must rather be discovered, observed and comprehended by diving into the 'field'; cultivating the 'sociological eye', especially for the sphere of work.

At the age of 26, he completed his master degree in sociology and began his doctoral work under the supervision of Ernest Burgess, who made him follow a quantitative research design. Frances Strauss, who married Anselm in 1940, well remembers the piles and boxes of questionnaires as a part of the 'baggage' of their early shared years, quite literally, as Anselm had to 'shlepp' this paper-burden along when he worked in a Japanese relocation camp in 1944 in Utah as a social worker for a couple of months. He received his Ph.D. in 1945 and spent two years at Lawrence College in Appleton, Wisconsin, followed by six years of teaching at Indiana University, Bloomington. There, with Alfred R. Lindesmith, he co-authored the future classic, two volume *Social Psychology* which first appeared in 1949 and is today in its 9th edition. In 1952

he returned to his 'home' department at the University of Chicago. During this six year appointment, he was also a visiting fellow at the University of Frankfurt a.M. in 1955/56 and, in his later years, he still remembered with amusement that nobody really seemed to be interested there in his kind of 'Chicago style', interactionist sociology. Anselm had just then edited a selection of papers by George Herbert Mead under the title *The Social Psychology of George Herbert Mead*, which initiated a vivid Mead reception, if not revival, in the United States and later in other countries, e.g. in Germany. Nobody of the Frankfurt school would have anticipated then that in the early 1980s Jürgen Habermas would rely so heavily on Mead in his discourse and action theory.

In 1958-1960 Anselm moved from the sociology department in Chicago to the Psychosomatic and Psychiatric Institute at the Michael Reese hospital. Three important works mark this later Chicago period: *Mirrors and Masks* (1959), his renowned and widely translated monograph on identity; *Boys in White* (1961)(with others), a study on the professional socialization of medical students, and *Psychiatric Ideologies and Institutions* (1964)(with others), initiating critical studies on medical institutions and their impact on care and professional work.

In 1960 he was appointed at the University of California San Francisco, School of Nursing, the institution where he would teach and do research for the next three and a half decades. In his early years there he and his colleague Leonard Schatzman started to develop a format for qualitative field research which became well known well beyond the field of nursing. The approach was strengthened and turned into a methodology in cooperation with Barney Glaser during the next years. The basic ideal was to develop sociological theory from the act of observation and data gathering in an ongoing process of research and theorizing. This approach of 'grounded theory', as laid down in *The Discovery of Grounded Theory* (1967) became a framework used by many qualitative researcher up til today in which they could legitimately develop theoretical sensitivity and creativity as learned in interaction with the 'field' as opposed to testing hypotheses by means of questionnaires. The research praxis and material context of this methodological concept was elaborated by Anselm and others in the next decades in an extended study on the process of dying under modern medical conditions, i.e. in the hospital. *The Awareness of Dying* (1965) and *Time for Dying*(1968), both co-authored with Barney G. Glaser, more than exemplified how fruitful the method was; both in terms of developing substantive theory on the process of dying (also presented in a single case study, 'Anguish' in 1970

which was critical of institutionalized dying) and in terms of formal theory. 'Status passage' (also a book under the same title, written in 1971) and 'trajectory' are just a few, important general concepts developed by Anselm Strauss for dealing with the temporal order of work and sociality. All these writings inspired research in many other material fields and continue to do so.

In the 1970s Anselm's main concern was the increase of chronic diseases in a medical context which did not seem to take account of this development in its organizational structures of care and training. *Chronic Illness and the Quality of Life* (1975), *Politics of Pain Management* (1977), *Negotiations* (1978), and *Where Medicine Fails* (1979) - all written in collaboration - mark this new interest. In the late 1970s and early 80s, when the author of this memorial was able to spend two years in Anselm's working group, his main concern was medical work, resulting in *The Social Organization of Medical Work* (1985), also written with others. In addition, some more explicit work on method was presented in response to the obvious need in the field of research in *Qualitative Analysis for Social Scientists* (1987). At the age of 71, Anselm retired from his position at the University of California, but continued his research. The cooperation with Juliet M. Corbin since the early 1980s resulted in several co-authored works on kin-work (*Unending Work and Care*, 1988), methods, the body and biographical work, the latter of which resulted in a manuscript which was just finished this summer.

During the last two decades, international recognition for Anselm's work continually increased. Despite his fragile health condition and dedication to doing research, he openly received scholars from all over the world and during the last years kept up a buzzing e-mail correspondence. He was a highly influential scholar for many qualitative researchers from different parts of the world. Within the community of biographical researchers, his concepts of trajectory and body and biographical work and, more generally, his methodological approach were widely adopted. Those who had the opportunity to meet him in person and work with him for some time felt enriched and thankful, not only by what they learned professionally, but even more through his own humanistic and creative attitude towards life against the backdrop of continued and severe health problems. He shared generously with others what he had loved himself in life. In our grief and loss, we still feel honored and enriched at having met him. For almost six decades, Anselm's wife Frances provided care and support with the problems and needs resulting from his health struggle. To her our warmest and most respectful condolences.

Wolfram Fischer-Rosenthal

CONFERENCE REPORTS

COMMUNICATING

EXPERIENCE IN RETRO-

SPECT

Gertrud Blauwhof, Belle van Zuylen Institute, Amsterdam, Netherlands

On June 13-16, 1996, the IX International Oral History Conference took place in Göteborg, Sweden. The conference ran under the title 'Communicating Experience' and this report, accordingly, is self-referential, communicating both personal experiences and communicating on 'communicating experiences'. Because of being individually based, experiences are manifold, by definition. The conference reflected this variety of experiences and, in turn, made it a lively, world-wide happening. Participants came from over 30 different countries and their contributions related to the experiences of people, particularly women and ethnic or local minorities, all over the world.

Attempts to systematize these experiences and to bring them together constituted another characteristic of the conference. In the form of sessions on ethnic identity, political movements, religion, and experiences related to war, violence and oppression, participants sought to establish and discuss correspondences among the variety of these experiences. In many of the sessions, the rise of constructivism during the past decade was evident. For example, in sessions on migration and ethnic identity which I attended, participants agreed on the limited use of the notion of identity and pleaded for analyses of the processes through which identities are constructed and (re)produced. This shift towards questions concerning the (re)construction of identity seems especially interesting when seen in the light of present-day tendencies towards globalization. For example, several contributions concerning migrant cultures pointed to the rise of multiple identities and to migrants switching identities according to their whereabouts at any particular moment in time. A different yet related theme of the conference concerned the issue of the transmission and (re)construction of identities in the course of time. Organized into sessions about issues such as 'working lives', 'health and caring' and 'family, generations, and relationships', many contributions highlighted the changes in the identity of social groups across generations as well as the processes by means of which parts of identities are transmitted and remain stable.

The conference was attended by both historians and social scientists. It also included sessions on methods and theory. In addition to a reflection

on the state-of-the-art in oral history and the life-story approach, many of these sessions touched upon the future of the field and its products. From the latter point of view, the issue of multi-media, i.e.; media involving an integration of text, sound, and image, attracted particular attention. Discussions touched upon issues such as the (potential) use of multi-media for data-analysis, the presentation of life-stories, and, last but not least, the preservation and storage of life-stories. It was argued that in the near future multi-media may evolve into an alternative to museums and galleries and perhaps even outdo the latter in terms of accessibility. Appreciating the message of present-day research and exploring the potentials of multi-media for data-storage and archival purposes, others raised questions such as: 'How does one turn text; e.g., an old transcript, into (inter)textuality?' 'Does (inter)textuality arise during the interview, and if so, what are the implications for the (re)production of life-stories and for collection development?' 'Do multi-media (and Internet), in enabling large amounts of information, represent a revival of empiricist attitudes of the 1950s or do they represent a new and not yet fully explored way of communicating experiences?'

These and related questions also were among the main issues at the workshop 'Live Story Approaches and Biographical Methods in Social Sciences and History' organized in Amsterdam on June 17 and 18, 1996, by the Belle van Zuylen Institute and the Dutch Research School in Women Studies and the Research Committee 'Biography & Society' of the International Sociological Association. Relying on both the Göteborg conference and the Amsterdam workshop, oral history and multi-media appear to mutually challenge as well as to inspire each other.

Oral historians and scholars using the life-story approach know that the manner in which experiences are communicated is as important as the content of communication. In this respect the conference organizers proved to be among the best. Set in the shady environment of Göteborg University and including a grand sea-food evening at the harbor, the IX Oral History Conference at times proved an intellectual and social experience almost beyond communication and most certainly worthwhile attending.

THE 5TH CONFERENCE OF THE INTERNATIONAL SOCIETY FOR THE STUDY OF EUROPEAN IDEAS

Kurt Back, Duke University, U.S.A.

(University for Humanist Studies, Utrecht, the Netherlands, 19-24 August, 1996)

The conference included a session on Biography and Autobiography, combining three workshops: literary presentation, methodology and history, and personal and collective memories, chaired by Deborah Kelly (Romance Languages, University

of Westminster, UK), Kurt W. Back (Sociology, Duke University, USA) and Devorah Kalekin-Fishman, Haifa University, Israel) respectively.

The papers discussed personal, social, and historical influences on biography as well as the influence of media used, from letters to novels and operas to film, from an interdisciplinary and international perspective. Selected papers from the conference will be published on CD-ROM by MIT Press. Future conferences will be held in 1998 in Haifa, Israel, and in 2000 in Bergen, Norway. Further information is available from Ezra Talmor and Sascha Talmor, Department of Philosophy, Haifa University, Mount Carmel, Haifa, 31999, Israel.

WORLD CONGRESS

Preparations for the next World Congress to be held in Montreal in 1998 are now underway. In the past year, two electronic conferences were also held with the presidents from the various RCs, WGs, and TGs from the ISA. It was agreed that there will be fewer sessions for RCs at the next conference, in order to give participants a chance to meet informally or just to enjoy being in Montreal. Each RC can organize a maximum of 12 sessions (as opposed to 18 in 1994), whereby 8 sessions of 2 hours each, 1 longer session of 3 hours, and 3 joint sessions, including a business meeting. This means that we will need to be more selective in accepting papers for sessions than we have in the past. Lists of accepted papers which cannot be presented during the regular congress sessions for time reasons can be printed in the program book.

Many topics have already been suggested by the board and other members - although not necessarily accompanied by someone who wants to organize a session. These topics include substantive, methodological or theoretical issues.

Here are some examples:

- The Chicago School revisited
- Different 'Schools' of biographical research (Auto/biography; 'memory work', hermeneutic case analysis)
- Analyzing narration and argumentation in biographical interviews
- The 'Narrative Turn' in biographical research (the relationship between sociological biographical analysis and literary biographical analysis; biographies as documents or constructions)
- Cultural Models of Self/Cultural Differences in Biography?
- Theorizing the relationship between macro-structures, social processes, and individual actions

- Societies in transition (life experiences in Russia and Eastern Europe; the problem of multiple memberships since 1989; people in conflict zones - Israel/Palestine)
- The 'Fragilization' of Society (how processes of exclusion and disaffiliation work through individual and group biographies)
- Institutional Biographies (how institutions process people)
- Migration (migration processes, different migrant groups, trajectories of migration)
- Biographies and social activism (environmental movement, trade union, feminism, anti-racism)
- Gender, Ethnicity and Biography
- Families and generation (processes of transmission, continuity, and change)
- Families and Poverty
- Bodies and Biography (disability, health and illness, appearance, sexuality)
- Biographies of the Powerful (political, industrial, commercial, professional; elites and elite folklore)
- Life Histories of social scientists

A joint session has been proposed with RC 32 (Women in Society) on 'The Sociology of Harriet Martineau: Critique, Explication and Application'. A round-table has also been suggested on 'The heritage and future of biographical research.'

These topics are in the preliminary stage. The list is neither definitive, nor complete. If you have any ideas or proposals for topics or sessions, contact Kathy Davis or Helma Lutz. Final session topics and organizers must be submitted to the ISA by the end of 1997. This means that anyone interested in organizing a session needs to submit the title along with her/his name, affiliation, address and various numbers to us no later than October 1, 1997.

NEWS, ANNOUNCEMENTS, CALL FOR PAPERS

GERMANY

The section Biographical Research of the German Society for Sociology (Sektion Biographieforschung in der Deutschen Gesellschaft für Soziologie) is organizing its annual conference on the theme: Biography and Embodiment (Biographie und Leiblichkeit) in Bremen, February 7-9, 1997.

Contact: Andreas Hanses, Institut für angewandte Biographie- und Lebensweltforschung, FB11, Universität Bremen, Postfach 330 440, D-28334 Bremen, Tel. 0421/218 3163, Fax: 0421/218 7220, e-mail: ahanses@zfn.uni-bremen.de

The section Biographical Research in the Educational Sciences of the German Society for Educational Sciences (AG Erziehungswissenschaftliche Biographieforschung der Deutschen Gesellschaft für Erziehungswissenschaften) is organizing a conference on the theme: Historical Dimensions of Biographical Research (Historische Dimensionen der Biographie-forschung) in spring 1997.

Contact: Prof. Heinz-Hermann Krüger/Prof. Pia Schmidt, Institut f. Pädagogik, Martin-Luther-Universität Halle-Wittenberg, Franckeplatz 1, Haus 24, D-06099 Halle(Saale).

The Institute for Sociology (Institut für Soziologie) of the Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität, München has established a working group dealing with the phenomenon 'Techno as New Youth Culture'. Members interested in exchange and networking should contact: Prof. Roland Hitzler, Konradstr. 6, D-80801 München, Tel.: 089/2180 3221 or Fax: 089/2180 2922.

NETHERLANDS

The research group 'Biography and Identity' of the SISWO (Institute for Social Sciences, Amsterdam, Netherlands) meets for times a year. The next meeting will be held on February 21, 1997 and the topic is doing biographical analysis with young informants. In the Spring, a meeting will be held in which participants will discuss the 'ins' and

'outs' of analyzing biographical texts.

For information, contact:

Bernard Kruithof, SISWO, Plantage Muidergracht 4, 1018 TV Amsterdam, fax.: +31-20-6229430, e-mail: kruithof@siswo.uva.nl.

NEW ZEALAND

There are two e-mail discussion groups in the field of biography and society. One is run by: Andy Lock, Department of Psychology, Massey University, Palmerston North,, New Zealand; Phone: (64) 6 356 9099 ext.4115; Fax: (64) 6 350 5673 or e-mail: A.J.Lock@massey.ac.nz [when calling please remember the TimeZone: GMT+12]. The name of the group is: psych-narrative@massey.ac.nz. If you want to subscribe, send an e-mail to: majordomo@massey.ac.nz and indicate in your message that you want to subscribe to psych-narrative. The other group is: biog-meth@mailbase.ac.uk

UNITED KINGDOM

The European Sociological Association hosts its Third European Conference on August 27-30 1997 at the University in Colchester, North of London. The conference theme is: 20th Century Europe: Inclusions/Exclusions. Sessions will be organized around the following themes: revisiting classical theory; work, welfare and citizenship; inequalities old and new; globalization; environment and communities; European processes, boundaries and institutions; cultures and identities.

Contact: Conference Organizer-EPA conference, Department of Sociology, University of Essex, Wivenhoe Park, Colchester, Essex CO4 3SQ, United Kingdom, Fax: 01206 873410, e-mail: ESA97@esse.ac.uk

UNITED STATES

The Center for Developmental Learning of the East Side Institute for Short Term Psychotherapy is sponsoring a two-day conference on progress and possibilities in creating a cultural, relational and performative approach to understanding

human life. The conference, titled 'Unscientific Psychology: Conversations With Other Voices,' will be held June 14-15, 1997, at the Edith Macy Conference Center, Briarcliff Manor, New York. Invited presenters are leading voices in the conversation about persons (not minds), about relationships and relationality (not environmental influences on self-contained individuals), about human activity (not behavior), about narratives and stories (not truth), and about creating new forms of life (not adapting to forms of alienation).

Contact: East Side Institute, 500 Greenwich Street, New York, NY 10013, Phone: (212) 941-8906, Fax: (212) 941-8340, e-mail: esiesc@aol.com or on the Internet: www.castillo.org

The Sixth International (Kentucky) Conference on Narrative will be October 10-12, 1997. The theme of the conference is 'Talking - Writing - Broadcasting.' Suggested topics include addressing the diverse ways in which narrative is used in general interpersonal, organizational, and mediated contexts. This year's special focus is on submissions that address popular formats of print and broadcast media narrative: news, features, talk show, sitcom, sports, dramatic programs, animation, human interest, and various other information and entertainment formats. The postmarked deadline for submissions is May 15, 1997.

Contact: Joachim Knuf, Conference Chair, Department of Communication, 127 Grehan Building, University of Kentucky, Lexington, KY 40506-0042, Phone: (606) 257-4102, e-mail: jknuf@pop.uky.edu or on the Internet: www.uky.edu/~jknuf/narrative_conference

An e-mail listserve has been set up to facilitate the conference organization. Mail the message 'sub narrate firstname lastname' to listserv@lsv.uky.edu to receive conference mailings. Individual inquiries should be directed to narrcon@pop.uky.edu

The Society for the Study of Narrative Literature is holding its annual conference April 3-7, 1997. Anyone with an interest in narrative studies is invited to join this international association of scholars dedicated to the investigation of narrative, its elements, techniques, and forms; its relation to other modes of discourse; its power and influence in cultures past and present. Membership in the Society includes a subscription to NARRATIVE (published tri-annually) as well as to the Society's newsletters which contain information about the Society's annual conference, its

sessions at the MLA meetings, and other activities. For more information about the Society, the journal, and the annual conference, contact: The Journals Manager, Ohio State University Press, 1070 Carmack Road, Columbus, OH 43210-1002, Tel: (614) 292-6930, Fax: (614) 292-2065

The American Anthropological Association will be holding its 96th annual meeting from November 19-23, 1997, in Washington, DC. The theme of the 1997 meeting is 'Toward an Anthropology of the 21st

Century.' Information about submitting a paper or panel abstract is published in the AAA Newsletter each January. For more information contact:

AAA Meetings Department, 4350 N. Fairfax Drive, Suite 640 Arlington, VA 22203 USA, Phone: (203) 528-1902, ext. 2, e-mail: liz@aaa.mhs.compuServe.com

PUBLICATIONS

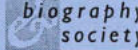
Semenova, V.; Foteeva, E. & D. Bertaux (eds) *People's Destinies: Russia. XXth Century's Family Biographies through Sociological Research*. Moscow: Institute for Sociology, 1996. This book is announced as the first to give a voice to ordinary people. It analyzes individuals' private lives during decades of authoritarian society. The first part of the book consists of first-hand family histories chosen from the audio archive of 70 families which has been collected by scholars. These histories are narrated by ordinary people and commented on by researchers. Since these narratives encompass three generations, they provide an opportu-

nity to follow private lives over time, beginning from the eve of the century until the present. The second part of the book is more analytic. The authors keep an eye on typical situations in different family stories and put them 'under the microscope' in order to make crucial issues of Russian history more comprehensible. Questions which are dealt with include: Who was successful in the extreme situation after the revolution? How did people, ruined by the revolution manage to transmit their cultural family heritage to their children in a hostile society? What were the approved patterns of men's and women's roles? What was the basis for the 'Homo Sovieticus' psychology? The appearance of this

book can be seen as an indication of growing interest in biographical methodology in Russia and an attempt to develop a humanitarian tradition in social sciences.

Marianne Gullestad: *Everyday Life Philosophers. Modernity, Morality and Autobiography in Norway*. Oslo: Scandinavian University Press, 1996. The author argues that there is no fundamental gap between the narrative reflections of ordinary people, 'everyday life philosophers' and the reflections of the literary critic or social scientist. Writing one's autobiography is a way of constructing images of self and society through the creative and reflexive narrative construction of the experiences of

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life. The author illuminates her thesis by focusing on case-studies from contemporary Norway.

E. Brähler & C. Adler (eds.)

Qualitative Einzelfallanalyse und qualitative Verfahren. Gießen: Psychosozial Verlag, 1996 including articles by T. Faltermaier, W. Fischer-Rosenthal & Ph. Mayring.

Bettina Dausien. *Biographie und Geschlecht.* Bremen: Donat Verlag, 1996.

Andreas Hanses. *Epilepsie als biographische Konstruktion.* Bremen: Donat Verlag, 1996

Antonius Scheuermann. *Sexualbiographien.* Bremen: Donat Verlag, 1996

Monika Wohlrab-Sahr (ed) *Biographie und Religion.* Frankfurt & New York: Campus Verlag, 1995

ERRATUM

The editors of the special issue of CURRENT SOCIOLOGY devoted to biographical research are Daniel Simeoni and Marco Diani. Our apologies for forgetting their names on p.12 of the last newsletter!

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RESEARCH COMMITTEE 38 of the ISA, dec. 1996

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