

INTRODUCTION

by Marcin Kafar & Monika Modrzejewska-Świgulska

We put in the hands of the Reader Volume 2 of the 'Biographical Perspectives'¹ book series. This series is a part of a broader project, initiated several years ago in the Department of Educational Studies, University of Łódź with a purpose—to put it in a nutshell—to promote multidimensional, transdisciplinary auto/biographical studies.²

The monograph *Autobiography—Biography—Narration: Research Practice for Biographical Perspectives* breaks down a one-way publishing trend associated with the translation of English and German works undertaking multithreaded auto/biographical research issues into Polish. This creates a paradoxical situation in which the Polish readers may easily track the achievements of their foreign colleagues, but—at the same time—here is a lack of works promoting the Polish research thought developed within the interpretive paradigm. To offset this disproportion, at least to a small extent, we have decided to prepare a publication that springs from our subsoil of social sciences and humanities. We hope that the locality, in its positive meaning, manifested in this manner will arouse interest in supra-local recipients, while introducing a 'fresh note' into the auto/biographical conceptual mainstream, and perhaps it will become an incentive to take up the challenge of inspired exchange of ideas in the subsequent volumes of 'Biographical Perspectives.'

¹ The whole book has been standardized in terms of inverted commas; we have used two types of quotation marks, single one for words and phrases that do not come directly from other authors, double one—in all other cases.

² For more details on the institutional, biographical and thematic context of the 'Biographical Perspectives' project cf. Kafar (2013).

This volume includes eight complementary articles that relate to the empirical, methodological, analytical, interpretive and theoretical aspects of the narrative-biographical research. The basic linking assumption of these works is a departure from the trend, still dominant in Poland and especially visible in the social sciences, modeled on the ideas taken from the natural sciences. The co-authors of *Autobiography—Biography—Narration*, positioning themselves between their source areas of knowledge (pedagogy, psychology, anthropology, sociology and literary studies) and a trans-disciplinary auto/biographical research plane, pick up as their starting point the processual perspective of the socio-cultural world, whose central element is the active subject as the creator of his/her own biography. Such assumptions (expressed explicitly and implicitly) provided the basis for reports on the Authors' own research projects (cf. in particular the texts by Karolina Dudek and Anna Kurpiel) and a framework for ordering the purely theoretical aspects of narrative-biographical studies (cf. the article by Katarzyna Gajek).

Some subjects were tackled using well-known methods and approaches, including the biographical method and the grounded theory method, but they were 'tailored' to the needs of individual research projects (e.g. Patrycja Trzeszczyńska reached for the life-study method of Fritz Schütze and applied it to analyze the existing texts). The authors, depending on the traditions behind their disciplinary affiliations, discussed different narrative material—literary works (dealt with by Katarzyna Olszewska), the literature of fact (analyzed by Wioletta Bogucka), historical narratives (interpreted by Joanna Bielecka-Prus) and narratives created as a response to research instructions/questions (as is the case in the studies presented by Karolina Dudek). The said researchers treat their narrators/interlocutors as 'wanderers' that interact with the socio-cultural world, thereby drawing the attention to the historical volatility, temporality, and relativity of human life and, consequently, human biography. In other words, the authors are interested in people 'immersed in life,' they 'listen to' the narrators in order to reach their visions of the world, the interpretation truth 'hidden' in the oral tales as well as letters, diaries, and memoirs. The conducted deliberations are centered around the issue of 'inter-mediating' dimensions of *individual* and *collective identity*. Personal stories, documented by specific representatives of various communities (e.g. national, professional—cf. Kurpiel and Dudek) and the generation experiencing the same 'space-time' (the Holocaust, labor camps, war and its consequences, forced migration—c.f. Bielecka-Prus, Olszewska and Ligus) are important *personally*, but eventually they become the contributions to the *collective* 'portraits,' which make specific testimony of their time.

Clifford Geertz introduced, after Heinz Kohut, the “experience-near” concept. The eminent anthropologist writes, “An experience-near concept is, roughly, one that someone—a patient, a subject, in our case an informant—might himself naturally and effortlessly use to define that he or his fellows see, feel, think, imagine, and so on, and which he would readily understand when similarly applied by others” (Geertz, 2000, p. 57). It seems that the research sensitivity of the Contributors to this volume pushes them towards such ‘experience-near’ concept. Thus, the panorama of utterances contained in this publication provides the foundations for a strong belief of the editors that there is no universal language, which can be used to describe the reality of human life. For this reason, among other things, we have decided to compose a volume that would be ‘language capacious’ in the literal and metaphorical sense. An inquisitive reader will easily find here a reflective practitioner (Anna Kurpiel), a theory-based lecturer (Katarzyna Gajek), a sensitive fellow researcher (Rozalia Ligus), a skilled methodologist (Patrycja Trzeczyńska), an expert in literature who can grab our hearts (Katarzyna Olszewska), an expert interviewer (Karolina Dudek), a dialogical interpreter (Wioletta Bogucka), a careful reader (Joanna Bielecka-Prus), as well as... an ordinary man wanting to share his story with us.

We hope that the volume elaborated in this way will prove helpful for both the seasoned and the novice researchers practicing the difficult art of qualitative research, and that—due to the general humanistic message contained on its pages—it will be appreciated among the ‘non-professional’ readers looking for friendly-to-read publications concerning the ‘vulnerable topics,’ such as the suffering lived to the bottom of existence, the breakthroughs of entering adulthood, coping with the stigma of the real and the imagined ‘emigrant’ or a struggle with the ambivalence that characterizes the identity of a ‘citizen of the world-a vagabond.’

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References

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