



Media Memories in Focus Group Discussions Methodological Reflections Instancing the Global Media Generations Project

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Medienereignisse wie auch die Einführung und Verbreitung neuer Medientechnologien und Formate bringen mannigfaltige Wege des „Eintretens von Medien ins Leben“ mit sich. Im Projekt Globale Mediengenerationen (GMG) wurden Medienerinnerungen aus der Kindheit im Kontext von Gruppendiskussionen am Beispiel dreier Generationen aus verschiedenen Ländern aller Kontinente untersucht. Dabei wurden medienbezogene Wissensbestände von drei Alterskohorten globaler Generationen analysiert. Der Artikel diskutiert methodologische Aspekte des Projekts und komplexe und selektive Prozesse des Erinnerns vergangener Ereignisse. Er untersucht Gemeinsamkeiten und Unterschiede des GMG-Ansatzes mit dem dokumentarischen Ansatz von Ralf Bohnsack, die beide in der Wissenssoziologie von Karl

Mannheim verwurzelt sind. Darüber hinaus wird Medialität als basale methodologische Kategorie in Erwägung gezogen, nicht nur im Hinblick auf die Klärung begrifflicher Grundlagen, sondern auch als inhärente Dimension von Forschungsprozessen.

Media events in general and the introduction and divulgence of new media technologies and formats in particular implicate various (new) ways of "media entering life." In the Global Media Generations (GMG) research project, articulation of individuals' memories of childhood experiences with the media was afforded by context of focus groups of three generations in different countries of six continents. In this project media related knowledge segments of different age cohorts have been analyzed and interpreted. The article deals with methodological questions of the project and complex processes of 'remembering' past events. It explores commonalities and differences of the GMG approach with Ralf Bohnsack's documentary approach, both rooted in the sociology of knowledge of Karl Mannheim. Furthermore, mediality is taken into consideration as a basic methodological category, which means that it is perceived not only as subject matter to be clarified in terms of concepts, but is also seen as an inherent dimension of research processes.

Introduction

The question of “literature entering life” (Andringa & Schreier 2004) can easily be modified to the question of “media entering life,” with ‘media’ referring to media events, media technologies, and media products. It is obvious that the complexity of related issues such as the interplay of individual and social processes, the relationship between facts, fiction and life or the relationship of media and societal dynamics increases when we enhance the question of “literature entering life”.[1] Given the advanced stages of media development, changing communication cultures and global flow of content and formats, it is obvious as well that there is a need to understand the impact of the new media infrastructure and the dynamics to current media developments. The Global Media Generations (GMG) research project (Volkmer 2006) is an attempt to deal with this complexity and to explore ways in which the question “how media enters life” can be investigated. In this international research project, participants articulated memories of childhood experiences with the media in the context of focus groups spanning three generations in different countries in six continents. In this project media related knowledge segments of different age cohorts have been analysed and interpreted. What was the personal and social context when new media or media events entered life? How do respondents describe their experiences and the social, cultural and political situations? How can we examine individual and collective aspects of the process of ‘remembering’?

The paper describes some methodological aspects of the GMG-project and discusses some aspects of the complex and selective processes of

'remembering' past events. It explores commonalities and differences between the GMG approach and Ralf Bohnsack's documentary approach, both rooted in the sociology of knowledge of Karl Mannheim. Furthermore, mediality[2] as a result of processes of media production, mediation, and mediatization is taken into consideration as a basic methodological category, that is, not only as a subject matter to be clarified conceptually, but also as an inherent dimension of research processes.[3]

1. Global Media Generations – A Project Outline

Current trends in media development, and even more so the intense competition for attention and recognition in public life, implicate changes in the individual and social organization of knowledge. The new forms of 'being-in-the-world' correspond to new forms of orientation and knowledge of the world. On the doorstep to the 21st century it has become clear that factors like the coalescence of markets, satellite communication, increasing mobility and the supra-regional dimensions of different risks and crises, such as global warming, humanitarian catastrophes in consequence of international conflicts (e.g., in the Central African Republic [CAR] or in Somalia) or more recently exploding food prices, have gradually enabled a new awareness of global networking and 'virtual community.' This connection is studied in the course of the GMG-research project by analyzing media events of the 20th century and taking them to be building bricks of collective memories (Volkmer 2000, 2006). One of the project's aims was describing the architecture of knowledge of different global generations in a family and intercultural context. In contrast to older interpretations of global unification, which assumed the

'world' to be a homogeneous ensemble, this project reveals those dimensions which consider the simultaneity and proportionality of globalization processes that run parallel (cf. Robertson 1992). This means (a) to think to think of globality as a flexible model and to take "strongly into account changes in each of the four major components (societies, individuals, international relations, and humankind) in tandem with shifts in the relations between them" (Robertson 1992: 26), and (b) to think of a central dynamic of globalization which "involves the twofold process of the particularization of the universal and the universalization of the particular" (ibd.: 177-178). Our analysis of the reception of global media events is inspired by this concept of glocalization by Robertson (1992: 173-174). It emphasizes the interdependency and the co-presence of both universalizing and particularizing tendencies by focussing on the simultaneousness of the dissimilar in the interplay of local, culture specific and global dimensions.

This initial situation of the GMG-project was illustrated and concretized in a qualitative pilot study (cf. Volkmer 1998). Its aim was to explore and find an approach which enables the description of generations in relation to dimensions of collectivity within specific biographical periods in which knowledge of the world is built up as an important element of generational identity. In this pilot study, which was carried out in 1993 at the University of Bielefeld (Germany), seven students, three male and four female, from Morocco, Japan, Turkey, China, Korea and Taiwan were interviewed. The questions focused on how – in spite of considerable spatial and cultural distances – the same media-imparted events are remembered in the 'period of life' that is childhood. In addition, it aimed to clarify the differences and the specific knowledge profiles of the different regions of the world as represented by the interviewees. In the course of these interviews it turned out that two news events were brought forward by all interviewees, suggesting their centrality in a collective knowledge of the world, as it were. These two events were Kennedy's assassination and the first landing on the moon.

As a result of the analysis of the interviews, Volkmer provides the following impression of the findings:

"Apart from these 'global' media events which can be remembered by almost all of the interviewees, the world events taken from the International Almanac are only situated at the periphery of this 'news generation'. Although the interviewees often know the names of people involved in these news events, they have mostly acquired this knowledge in biographically later periods of their lives (e.g. during their studies). Further questioning about the context knowledge reveals that even fragments of the events are only vaguely known and the course of the event can only approximately be retold." (Volkmer 1998: 176)

The findings of the pilot study were remarkable with respect to cultural similarities and differences in the ways interviewees talked about their early childhood media environments and about global media events. The participants recalled the same events in different ways and with meanings for themselves. These findings were taken as starting points for the designing process of the international cooperation project that the Global Media Generations (GMG) research project is. The findings were discussed and followed up in terms of methodology and putting together the conceptual framework the theoretical background research in the starting phase of the project. Various types of data, such as desk studies of diverse almanacs, informal investigations, personal experiences of the researchers, and numerous critical considerations about, for example, "Commonwealth-events" vs. global events, and chart of events were all integrated. In preparation for the GMG-project, the chart was complemented with region specific details in each of the participating countries, leading to the following overviews:

Events during 1935 – 1945	Events during 1965 – 1975	Events during 1989 – 1999
1. War in Spain	1. Photos of Mars	1. Gulf War
2. Abdication of Edward VIII	2. Cultural Revolution in China	2. Fall of Eastern Block
3. Berlin Olympics	3. 1968 Student Revolutions	3. Beijing Massacre
4. Kristallnacht	4. Prague Spring	4. Reunification of Germany
5. Beginning of World War II	5. Independence movements in Africa	5. Economic Crisis in Asia
6. Salt March in India	6. OPEC Crisis	6. Princess Diana's death
7. Fall of Singapore	7. Vietnam	7. Liberation of Nelson Mandela / South Africa's return to international fold
8. Pearl Harbour	8. Rise of PLO	8. OJ's trial / Rodney King
9. Atom Bombs	9. Watergate	9. Closer - European Monetary-Union
10. Auschwitz	10. Woodstock	10. Clinton's personal life

Table 1: Chart of events in the GMG-project

With an eye on the age structure three groups were chosen taking into consideration media-technological developments and assumptions about the relevance of the listed examples of events. Furthermore, we assumed that each generation experienced particular media-types during their “formative years” (cf. Mannheim 1952). In simple terms, group 1 (born 1924-29) was characterized as the “print media- and radio-generation”, their formative years being 1935-1945; group 2 (born 1954-59) was referred to as “black-and-white-television generation,” their formative years being 1965-75; and group 3 (born 1979-84) was specified as “Internet generation,” their formative years being 1989-99. Figure 2 shows an overview of the age structure of the groups studied:

Group	Age (in 1999)	Formative Years
1	70 – 75	1935 – 1945
2	40 – 45	1965 – 1975
3	15 – 20	1989 – 1999

Table 2: Age of the groups studied

The study, which was being carried out at the same time in eleven countries in six continents, aimed to investigate if and how media events can be described as part of biographical memories of the interviewees. In doing so, we not only perceived generations as demographic average distance between the birth years of parents and their children (25-30 years) and as a conglomerate of neighboring age groups with characteristic behavior which can be distinguished from other age group, but we also referred to Karl Mannheim's (1952: 276-322) concept of generations, which are discussed in his books as early as 1928. Mannheim (1893-1947) criticizes the one-sided romantic-historical and even more so the positivistic approaches of simplifying and schematizing psychology and the search for laws following statistical distributions. His largely qualitatively oriented efforts aim at the description of communities of experience (Erfahrungsgemeinschaften) and groups of contemporaries (Zeitgenossenschaften). He understands "generation units" as follows:

"The *generation unit* represents a much more concrete bond than the actual generation as such. *Youth experiencing the same concrete historical problems may be said to be part of the same actual generation; while those groups within the same actual generation which work up the material of their common experiences in different specific ways, constitute separate generation units.*" (Mannheim 1952: 304; originally italicized)

In his view, the social phenomenon 'generation' "represents nothing more than a particular kind of identity of location, embracing related 'age groups' embedded in a historical-social process" (Mannheim 1952: 292).

He sees the generational connection as a special type of social location (Lagerung) that puts limits on the scopes of experience, thought, feeling and action, but, on the other hand, displays a specific, concrete and describable tendency towards certain ways of behaving, feeling and thinking (cf. Mannheim 1952: 291).

With regard to socio-cultural contexts, Strauss and Howe (1991) further differentiated Mannheim's concept of location of generations (Generationenlagerung). They characterize the concept of generation in relationship to cultural typing, social and collective psychological parameters and introduce the categories "generational biographies" and "generational life cycles" in order to describe the "knowledge of the world" within a culture specific age group.

The approach of the GMG-research project is based on these conceptualizations of generations and related developments of the concept of generations according to Mannheim (cf. Schumann & Scott 1989, Strauss & Howe 1991, Volkmer 1998). Furthermore, as mentioned above, Robertson's (1992) concept of glocalization has been taken into consideration as well.

2. Methodological considerations

The innovative characteristics of the GMG-research project are above all matters of explaining the approach in detail and localizing it methodologically (cf. Volkmer 2000, Volkmer 2006). In contrast to other qualitative research projects within the fields of communication and media studies, the GMG-project is not only taking transnational flows of information into consideration, but also recognizes new dimensions of

time and space related to these flows, generational entelechies,[4] and new global public spheres (cf. Volkmer 2006). The selection of three generations from different countries and cultures offers possibilities of cross-cultural as well as cross-generational analysis of data collected on various levels.

As far as the starting point is concerned, the approach can by and large be described as social-phenomenological with reference to the sociology of knowledge of Karl Mannheim (1952). Besides the obvious problems that come with labeling in general, the particular constellation of international co-operations in this project, its inter- and trans-cultural orientation, the semi-structured strategies of open designs, including researchers' individual orientation and positioning is to be taken into account in the context of this kind of global research. This means, among other things, that the research strategy adopted is marked by reciprocal learning- and adapting processes and not by a rigid concept.^[5] Research questions, steps, and routines were formulated in such a way that there was space for adaptations and local interpretations of methodological details. When I outline some affinities with (my) constructivist orientations, this shows primarily my own view of things rather than an authorized perspective of the group of researchers as a whole.

The qualitative orientation of the GMG-research project in terms of research methods is based on the decision to include group discussion processes in the data collection and qualitative content analyses as means to analyze the data. An important reason for working with focus groups was the assumption that collective memories can be easily and mutually induced in the course of the discussion. Moreover, focus groups can act as a means of staging and performing collective processes of remembering. A taste of past situations can be reactivated, so to say, and the group dynamics can offer indications which are relevant for the analysis and interpretation of data.

For the group discussions a guideline has been produced which suggests six sequences:

1. Beginning, outlining of research motives, introduction round;
2. Presentation of personal background (family context, education, profession and level of familiarity with others in the discussion group);
3. Description of media products (including the accessibility to media products in childhood and memories of media use);
4. Spontaneous memories of media events (including social context of these memories and international events);
5. Memories according to a list (see fig. 1, selected "prompted events," including social context of memories);
6. Final round.

In the course of the group discussions—each with three male and three female participants—and the first steps of data processing—that is, the creation of group discussion protocols—, it became clear rather immediately that the dramaturgy was quite different in the diverse countries participating. According to the viewpoints of research culture and research experience, there turned out to be noticeable differences between the researchers, the cultural context of selected interviewees ("socio-economic middle class"), generational and gender specific aspects, as well as situation specific dimensions of the different countries. For instance, group discussions with young people and with the group of 40-45 year-olds in Austria and Germany possessed characteristics of group conversations and tendencies towards non-directive, participating leading styles of the moderators. Group discussions with 70-75 year-olds in India or Japan, however, bared resemblance to group interviews or even individual interviews in the group. The spectrum of group dynamics ranged from almost "unstoppable" flows of words and collective productions (including spontaneous singing) to more hesitating or caution-dominated interaction sequences (for example, turning off the recorder during 'problematic' parts).^[6] While gender equality in the discussion groups caused no problems for young people in all countries, some 70-75 year-olds had difficulties with it.^[7] In spite of these differences, the first interpretations of the results showed that there are collective orientation patterns to be observed. As assumed at the

beginning, common experiential spaces or – in terms of Mannheim – conjunctive spaces of experiences (konjunktive Erfahrungsräume) can be found (cf. Bohnsack & Schäffer 2001: 329).

Here at the latest, we have to consider the question about the appropriateness of the methodological assumptions. While qualitative sociologists who prefer impressionist and intuitive approaches might think the methods adopted in the GMG-project are already too much of a corset, others, who would like to support a stronger standardization of qualitative research, might see some requirements unfulfilled, in spite of it being a pilot study. In my opinion the aim cannot be to find better instruments or technologies, since this would result in an attempted elimination of contingencies (cf. Nassehi & Saake 2002), a futile undertaking which reminds us of the story of Sisyphus. On the other hand, there are of course certain research designs that fit a particular type of question better than others.

While impressionist and intuitive approaches have to deal with the problem of distinguishing themselves from literary approaches, highly standardized concepts of qualitative research tend to orientate themselves on quality factors of quantitative research. In my view, there are degrees of freedom in terms of standardization and sticking to rules within qualitative research. It makes more sense to try and make the reduction of complexities comprehensible, to adjust levels of exactness to the aims and purposes and to reflectively include contexts of all kinds, than to try to strictly stick to a predefined set of rules. Each displacement or change on whichever level of data collection, preparation, interpretation or application, will inevitably amount to the management of new complexities. Even a gesture or the intonation of a statement can open or close topical horizons, promote or prevent ways of expression, support the forming of patterns or dissolve them in chaos, in short: contribute to the creation of new constellations. If the contingencies and complexities of global media research make anyone think of a methodological set of rules to optimize efforts to objectify, to assure global intersubjectivity or to precisely define trans-cultural phenomena,

they do not only underestimate the scope of such an opus magnum, but they might even lose track of the topics and research questions. Moreover, exactness and precision are no values as such. The level of exactness has to be defined adequately in relation with the project.

This makes clear that we are not so much dealing with the explication of long-term basic methodological rules or guidelines about research methods but rather with a temporary, more or less successful communicative stabilization of discourse coherence while considering relevant contexts. Research results are seen as interaction products which are produced in a discursive and context-related way.

Overall, the approach presented here shows several parallels and agreements with reconstructive social research (cf. Bohnsack 2000), even if content analyses in the GMG-research project are not oriented towards characterizing the documentary method (cf. Bohnsack 2000, 2001, 2002), but towards describing contextual and categorical dimensions of the media environments (accessible media technologies and media products), media use, memories of media events, as well as sources of knowledge. These parallels refer to the focus on HOW-questions,^[8] development-oriented (genetical orientations), the distinction of observations of first order (e.g., initial descriptions of participants) and second order (e.g., descriptions of researchers), and to conceptual aspects of Mannheim's "Sociology of Knowledge" (1952). It is possible, for instance, to classify global media generations according to the ways of modelling collective memories and the significance of mediatization processes. In addition, globalization theory needs to be incorporated in characterizing these generations.

Furthermore, in contrast to the "existence linkage" (Seinsgebundenheit) of thinking in Mannheim's work and the tendency to use ontologizing ways of speaking in sociology of knowledge, the GMG-project considers the phenomena human memory and remembrance as dynamic, as a *process* of remembering. As such, it considers conceptions which assume the possibility of more or less completely retrieving a more or less authentic version of an original once saved: "Memory Ain't No Fridge" (cf. Riegler

2003) to be inappropriate. The development of building bricks for an integrative theory of the construction of memory and memories (cf. Kumar et al 2006) calls for constructivist orientations on the one hand (cf. Rusch 1996, 1991) and social, temporal and political dimensions on the other hand. Especially significant is the dynamic interplay of cognition, social aspects (socio-economic status, social situation of the initial experience of the event, and the group discussions), spatio-temporal distances and overlaps ("chronology and geography of memory") and memory politics with the double meaning of "memory of politics" and "politics of memory." In this way, the one-sidedness of material explanation attempts of collective memories and the seeming shortcuts of an immediate phenomenological "entity inspection" (Wesensschau) can be avoided.

Moreover, the distinction *through* the media and *of* the media plays a role in the documentary method in connection with image interpretation (cf. Bohnsack 2003: 565). Such distinctions and their respective figure-ground-relationships^[9] are incorporated in epistemological considerations of the GMG-project as well. The fact that experience is mediated is conceived much more consequently here. This can be seen in the example of structural features of "knowledge of the world." Considering its fragmentary, simple, spontaneously oriented and easily understandable character it can be seen as *instant* knowledge (cf. Hug 2003). This seems reasonable since the "fragments of knowledge of the world" are characterised by keywords and stereotypes. And these stereotypes suggest a global temporal frame of the parallelism of actions and thus create a frame of reference for the image of a global community.

This is not the end of the story, however, because this knowledge of the world cannot just be described as a kind of elusive "instant knowledge." In the sense of condensed, "sedimented" knowledge, it can also be described as "world knowledge" serving as a basis for all kinds of action. The knowledge of the world of global media generations would then be that part of collective, conceptual assumptions and imaginations (Rusch 1987: 243) that plays an important role in a generation's image of the self

and the world and interpretation of reality. If we see the “general knowledge of the world” as the embodiment of our ideas about the “real” constitution of the world, our concepts of objects, events, and our ideas about space and time, then generations’ knowledge of the world consists of mediatized, partially synchronised concepts of reality in mediated cultures. This is the basis of a generation’s feeling of “being-in-the-world,” its understanding of regularities in the world, and its modalities in distinguishing relevant from non-relevant events. In the sense of a figure-ground-relation, knowledge of the world can thus be conceived as fragmentary instant knowledge of global media events, and as conceptual background and tacit knowledge which makes up the topical and medial horizons of a generation and which contains the typical ways of creating references to reality, subjective relevance, and orientation patterns.

With regard to the second aspect (background knowledge), the relevance of what we might call “generational world knowledge” should not be underestimated. The reflexivity of social and cultural studies is different in many ways from the reflexivity of everyday thinking and knowledge (form, claims, and degrees of abstraction, systematisation, constructivity etc.), but is itself not based on firm ground and remains a medialized and communicatively stabilized kind of reflexivity. The analysis of symbolically organized forms of perception, action, and knowledge, which are related to common-sense orientations, may include awareness of its own prejudices and discursive localisations *ex ante* or *ex post*. However, it does not happen beyond the constitutional mediality of communication.

Both types of reflexivity, the everyday and the academic type, are decisively relevant for what we call the results of our research. When I said that focus groups can act as a means of staging and performing collective processes of remembering, the academic working groups are acting likewise on a second order level. Looking at the process of negotiation with regard to the selection of generations, events, theoretical concepts, methods, modes of documentation and transcription, categories for analysis, etc., the research group is inevitably challenged to elaborate on elaborations of memories. The social dimension seems to be

an inherent dimension and not an additional set of constraints which can be overcome by adopting a more standardized approach in terms of data gathering techniques. In the context of conversational elaborations (of elaborations) of memories, we have to be aware of at least four social dimensions (cf. Kumar et al 2006):

1. The social situation in which the events were experienced for the first time as well as subsequent social situations in which the experiences were shared;
2. The socio-economic status of the participants;
3. The social contexts of the focus group discussions regarding, for instance, new and/or established relationships between the participants, group dynamics, and styles of conversation and guidance;
4. The research context which is relevant in terms of what is remembered in the focus group discussions, as well as with regard to the interpretation and analysis of the documents.[10]

Kumar et al (2006) point out further constraints with regard to processes of remembering in research settings of focus-group discussions:

"Some of these include: (1) the formality of a group setting where the discussion is recorded on tape for the purpose of research; (2) the competition among the participants (who remembers most/best); (3) the collective elaboration of events (for instance, through continued prompting; answers provoke memories that drive people to further answers, which in turn lead to reinforcement or inhibition); (4) the social pressure to be politically correct and to act according to one's status; (5) the non-spontaneous nature of the discussions; and (6) the fact that the focus-group discussion is a planned social event for invited participants who may be relatives, acquaintances, or strangers." (Kumar et al 2006: 216)

Especially in all cases of international and intercultural research projects, we have to be aware of limits to all attempts of standardizing research processes. It seems that an acceptable way of dealing with this problem is to describe the case related ways of communicative stabilization processes, for example, negotiation of understanding of the subject matter or collaborative and iterative reframing processes on second-order levels. Furthermore, the description of corresponding problems on the way to formulate and present results can be helpful in the service of better understanding.

3. Conclusion

The media events discussed and analyzed in the GMG-project show a Janus-faced structure: on the one hand, they enter lives of individuals and life worlds "unquestioned," often serving as "life markers" (Strauss & Howe 1991) – for example, in terms of children's books or cassettes which – over and above – may contain storyboards for many later processes; on the other hand, they may also enter lives in terms of political events which were given prominence by gate-keeping media institutions. Often, media devote more attention to political issues rather than to cultural or economic issues (cf. Jensen 1998). Moreover, news is for the most part concerned with reporting of "events" rather than with background information and in-depth analysis. As such, media events are always "there," reported, described, discussed, re-iterated and diffused according to the media formats, structures and technologies available. They are always there as parts of our symbolic worlds.

The role of the media and especially of the news media as information platforms and active 'mediators' of 'world' representation, have gained complexity within the advanced globalized media infrastructure at the beginning of the 21st century. This complexity not only shapes political identity. It transforms life worlds as well as national public spheres, but also creates a new global public sphere (cf. Volkmer 2003a, 2003b).

Media (re)enter mediated life worlds. Following the observations that have led to the discussion of the mediatization of life worlds, a paradigmatic shift in media theory can be observed. It is almost beyond dispute that our life worlds have become media-worlds: we naturally use

media as means of communication (e.g., writing, chatting), as communication facilities (e.g., radio, weblogs), and as techniques (e.g., image editing). The different media products are omnipresent and the influences of media institutions are not to be underrated. What is much more questioned today is the possibility of a media-free primary socialization, a socialization that is not complemented, extended, or distorted by secondary media experiences. The clear distinction between mediatized and non-mediatized scopes for action and for thinking has become problematic. Mediality (cf. Margreiter 1999) is no longer just an optional dimension that can be added to the spheres of socialisation, communication, education, society, and culture. Rather, mediality has become an inherent dimension of thinking and acting.

Furthermore, mediality has to be considered as a basic methodological category. The dream of premedial innocence is over – also in methodological respects. Neither everyday experiences nor scientific experience tell us what they are by themselves or “inherently.” The descriptions are underdetermined by the experiences. They can always be framed and conceptualized in different ways. We are dealing with versions of mediated worlds and with their respective “ways of worldmaking” (Goodman 1978) rather than with authentic “mental entities” which can more or less correctly be registered or reconstructed. After all, cognition is determined by conceptual perspectives and not by a material or ideal reality outside cognition. It is one of the tasks of research to achieve iterative (re)formulations versions of worlds through empirical accounts. The scope of the complexity of intermedial connections and their importance for research is as yet not carefully examined. The results of the GMG-project provide exemplary insights into such connections, and also provide some preliminary indications for how to do empirical research that takes the mediality argument seriously.

And if we do take this argument seriously, the quest for appropriate meta-theories becomes automatically relevant. Some forward-looking ideas are offered by the media philosophy of the medial or “mediatic turn” (cf. Sonesson 1997, Margreiter 1999, Hug 2009; Binsbergen & de

Mul n.d.). Considering this shift, two questions have to be asked anew: "The question about the experience of reality and the reality of experience" (Margreiter 1999: 17). Both these questions are associated with the mediality of the construction of reality. And when we try to answer them we have to take notice of the respective historical constellations of interacting media.

As far as I can see, there is no strict disjunction between the relation between qualitative research strategies in their social-phenomenological specificity with reference to Mannheim's "Sociology of Knowledge" (1952) and constructivist discourse. In my view, at least in terms of designing qualitative empirical research, there is rather a complementary relationship between Bohnsack's (2000, 2001) approach and constructivist positions (Rusch 1996, Hug 2004, Kumar et al 2006). Constructivist positions can contribute to epistemological clarification and help to avoid self-misunderstandings (for example, regarding efforts to objectify); inversely, qualitative approaches can help bringing the horsepower of constructivism on the road of research practice. As a matter of principle, requirements of methodically tamed arrangements of scholarly views (cf. Reich 1998, Schmidt 1998) are needed, although they do not offer us chances to get beyond the tentativeness of research results.

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[1] The article is a revised version of the paper given at the IX. International Congress of the International Society for the Empirical Study of Literature (IGEL) on “How Literature Enters Life, II” held in Edmonton, Canada: August 3-7, 2004. For a German version of the line of reasoning presented here see Hug (2004). Translated by Mag. Carmen S. Konzett.

[2] Mediality sensu Margreiter (1999) refers to the principle of historical constellations of interacting media (ibd.: 17) in the sense of a reevaluation of the Kantian transcendentalism. This “media-apriori” does not take media, mediation, or mediatization as peripheral or optional add-on’s when defining human thinking and acting; instead, it views them as being irreducible. So, mediality can be conceptualized as a result of processes of coaction of media production, mediation and mediatization. In doing so, the term ‘mediation’ can be understood as a technological and social term which describes the basic interactive processes in which institutionalized media of communication such as the press, television, and the world wide

web are involved in the production, transformation and circulation of symbols in everyday life, or, in other words, mediation is viewed as being “a transformative process in which the meaningfulness and value of things are constructed” (Silverstone 2002: 2). In contrast, mediatization refers to more general processes of transformation of society through media, transformations whose directions follow a particular transformative “logic” (cf. Hjarvard 2004). In the German-speaking world the term ‘medialization’ is more often used and worked with. The main reason for this may be due to avoidance of confusion with the historically informed meaning of mediatization in the sense of the process of annexing the lands of one sovereign monarchy to another, often leaving the annexed state some rights. Schulz (2004), for example, distinguishes the analytical concepts: extensions, substitutions, amalgamation, and accommodation (ibid.: 8). The interplay between these four aspects constitutes the processes of medialization in the sense of interacting media changes and social changes.

[3] For other aspects of the methodology as well as project results see Volkmer (2006).

[4] Mannheim stated that not every generation creates original collective impulses or formative principles. He also claimed that not every member of a generation, but specific generational units produce a generational entelechy. In “Problem of Generations” he writes, “Not every generation/ age group creates original collective impulses and formative principles. When it does happen, it is a realization of potentialities inherent in the location and connected with the tempo of social change. When the tempo moves so quickly that traditional patterns of experience can’t be used, there is a new generational entelechy (style).” (1952: 309) According to this, an important determining factor is the tempo of social change. Traditional patterns of experience become problematic and they sometimes can not be used anymore when developments speed up. Then a new generational style or a new “entelechy” has to be created.

[5] The brief description shall not distract from the fact that this kind of cooperative and development-oriented research designs are rare (cf. e.g.,

Jensen 1998). Furthermore, this project should neither be confused with international co-operations that adopt preliminarily standardized paradigms, nor with a-theoretical, politically motivated development projects.

[6] In one case, the use of the group discussion protocol, which had already been transcribed, was prohibited by the conversation participants. Two of the six participants referred to bad experiences with a political scientist and expressed their fear that the documents might be misused.

[7] Especially in group 1 (oldest cohort), there were many participants for whom it was hardly comprehensible that gender differences play a role in this kind of research. Explicit expression of this occurred rather seldom. Instead, some men articulated the opinion that discussing political events is "a male issue." More often gestures of astonishment were noticeable in view of the constitution of the focus groups (3 male and 3 female setting).

[8] For example, how are media environments described, how do participants refer to certain events, or how are certain events reconstructed collectively.

[9] The ambiguous pictures, known as "gestalt switches" described in design, gestalt theory, and philosophy (L. Wittgenstein) may act as prototypical examples for figure-ground-relationships. In simplest terms, if you notice a figure the ground is everything else around it. Depending on the perspective of the observer position the figure can turn into the ground and vice versa.

[10] For example, different understandings of media as markers, events as markers, media events as markers, or remediation processes as markers have been discussed and distinguished in the research group.