

**ERC-II Manuscript: Methodology section II of the ERC-Grant proposal 2008**  
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**5.2 The second of LIR's two basic methodological research dimensions is: psychologically informed narratological fiction text analysis (NTA)** of the literary and/or media narratives, which the interviewees have chosen (after the NBI). Here, LIR's guiding research questions turn from the reader to the narrative – from *person* to *text*, and, here, also from *factual oral* to *fictional textual* narrative. However, there are significant modal differences between a *fictional text* given in a medium and a *factual narrative* given in an interview. Surely, both represent modes of personal self-expression, which is why they are not entirely incommensurable phenomena theoretically, as literary theory sometimes tends to assume – and which also is, why I decidedly encompass both in my concept of 'mental (inter-) action'. Yet, it is not admissible nor would it be advisable at this point of methodological development to treat fiction texts exactly the same way as narrative interview transcripts. For, the latter is in a more immediate way embedded in a co-narrative interpersonal situation; also, it much more directly refers to a concept of shared reality experience. Thus, having an aesthetic/ fictional 'text' at hand, we may not as easily speak of analyzing '(inter-)action' (of author and reader). Rather, what is to be identified by NTA are **the 'textual (inter-) action potentials'**, which are inherent in a particular fiction narrative due to its content and form and due to the socio-cultural context of the audience it appeals to (HW 2006e, 1, 2008s). Hence, NTA is designed to reconstruct potentials of psychological impact, which the narrative may plausibly be expected to exert on readers.

Methodically, NTA builds on an approach, which has recently been developed by Stein/Jesch (Hamburg) and which draws from the fields of *linguistics/ pragmatics* (5.2.1) and of *psychodynamic clinical psychology* (5.2.2).

**5.2.1 From text- and discourse-linguistics** NTA obtains methodical guidelines, which allow to assess (1) the 'informational choice and completeness' of a narrative text and (2) the 'incoherencies' therein.

**5.2.1.1 The 'informational choice and completeness'**, in which the author of a fictional narrative depicts the characters and actions of her/his story-world is – quite straightforwardly – assessed along the basic sequential phases of human action: i.e. with regard to (a) the subjectively perceived 'causal situation' of the character (before any action), (b) the character's build-up of 'personal motivation' and 'specific intention to act' in response to the causal situation, (c) the concrete 'implementation' of this intention in form of concrete action, and (d) the 'effects' of the action both intended and unintended. Hence, in a narrative, any character's action may, firstly, be described in terms of the completeness and choice, in which the elements of cause/ intention/ action/ effects are represented. (And it seems fair to assume that any reader striving to follow and understand an account of events and actions in a story-world will spontaneously and unwittingly look for the most complete information possible with regard to these phases.)

**5.2.1.2** Secondly, the text may be systematically looked at with regard to **phenomena of 'narrative incoherence'**. 'Incoherence' is understood to represent a verifiable deviation from an expectable order of occurrences and actions within a narrative. 'Expectable' and 'verifiable' such order/ deviation is with reference (a) to the *internal* logic of the narrative as well as (b) to its *external* logic.

**Instances of internal incoherence** are methodically identified in three distinct dimensions of coherence: (i) in the order of space and time in a narrative, along the linguistic relations of "first"/"then" and "there"/"there also", (ii) in the order of correlations and conditions in the narrated world, along the linguistic relation of "if/then", and (iii) in the order of cause and

effect, of intention and result, as well as of finality, along the linguistic relations of “because”, “in order to”, “to the effect that”.

**Instances of external incoherence** are identified with reference to the cultural frames/patterns and the general world knowledge of the historic period and socio-cultural sphere, in which the author and her/his readers operate. The verification of such incoherence may be given by other wide-spread cultural narratives of the time, which significantly deviates from the logic of the narrative at hand. Literary and media narratives take their specific ‘informational choices’ as to the degree of completeness and the kind of internal/external coherence in which the events/ actions are presented. More precisely speaking: These choices, of course, are taken by the text’s ‘composing subject’ (i.e. the author in the moment/s of writing the text to be read by readers, about whom s/he has certain [un-]conscious preconceptions). And the way they are taken, of course, does have consequences for the narrative’s potential impact – i.e. its ‘textual (inter-) action potentials’.

**5.2.2 The second level of NTA** following the text-linguistic description is: to formulate hypotheses and come to conclusions about how and in what way the specific phenomena of textual incoherence and/or (in-)completeness may ‘potentially impact’ on the readers (which to certain extents implicates the question of how they may potentially be caused/motivated on the side of the text’s ‘composing subject’ [i.e. the author in the moment/s of writing]).

On this – more challenging – second level of inquiry one needs to muster scientific assistance from those fields which are most knowledgeable about issues of mental impact: **clinical and psychodynamic psychology**. Here too, the OPD psychodynamic manual is the first reference for orientation followed by other more specific psychological resources (see above 5.1.2.2). As with transcript analysis, however, these interdisciplinary resources may only be introduced by way of strictly abductive – and not deductive – modes of hypothesis-building. And they may only be brought in late and in a separate methodical step of reconstruction, after the text-linguistic analysis has been completed – and left uncompromised by premature off the cuff psychological hypotheses. NTA’s end-product then is: the reconstruction of the literary/ media narrative’s ‘**textual (inter-) action potentials**’ – in other words: conclusions about what sorts of impact the narrative may plausibly be expected to have on readers in general, notwithstanding the subjectivity of individual reading acts.

NTA thus goes well beyond any philological (narratological) text interpretation, in that it does not limit itself to form-descriptive and historic perspectives and to hermeneutical exegesis of a text’s supposed ‘meaning(s)’. Rather it studies **fiction narratives as products of mental and communicative acts of (inter-) action** which – however (un)consciously – intend to relate to and impact on their readers. While humanities’ “conventional wisdom” generally holds that impact is mostly a factor of the readers’ subjective views and thus cannot be dealt with on the level of text, LIR takes a different position: It deems it more appropriate and scientifically productive to assume, that, while empirical readers, of course, do read in highly subjective and intentional manners, the text, in turn, may be reconstructed as a subjective and intentional act, too, the author’s act of fiction writing. Hence, NTA is a straightforward method of reconstructively analyzing textual interaction. And contrary to hermeneutical exegesis NTA may bear up to the **scrutiny of inter-subjective validation**: For, the two-step analytic procedure is buttressed both by sources from text-linguistics and from psychology.

Moreover, following a reconstructive epistemology, NTA as method of fiction text analysis seems most compatible with qualitative-empirical research on acts of reading (and composing). With respect to interdisciplinarity it is most remarkable, that the NTA method of analyzing fictional (literary) narratives unwittingly responds to questions, which most recent empirical psychotherapy research has formulated as one of its “major challenges” for future methodological endeavors: “to further develop methods for describing, exploring, and measuring narrative coherence and incoherence” (Angus/McLeod 373).

**5.3 The integration of reader and text analysis** is key to any LIR project. Any such integration, however, may not compromise the specific methodical *modus operandi* applied in 5.1 and 5.2 (as has sometimes occurred when hypotheses on reader-responses and observations about the text were prematurely lumped together). No text analysis may definitely anticipate what impact the text will have on any individual reader, and no single reader-response case study may definitely explain how a text works inter-actionally. Rather, LIR's final step of integration aims at reconstructing **the 'actual variant of reader-text-interaction'** in this particular case. It clarifies which of the narrative's 'textual interaction potentials' this reader has actually responded to. In other words: it draws conclusion as to the issues and processes of biographical/mental identity work, in which both the *reader* and the *text* have been implicated.

LIR's key scientific gains thus are: (1) Reconstructing **empirical constellations/ variants of aesthetic interaction** contributes to overcoming the compartmentalization of literary and media studies – which are largely divided in *text exegesis* versus *reader research*. This, particularly, will be the case if **'matching constellations of author-text-reader interaction'** are reconstructed (in which a reader case study refers to a media narrative, the author of which consents to taking part in author research; see A3). These constellations may then be sought for in areas of high societal relevance (as with violence prone adolescents, therapy clients, multi-cultural spheres etc.). (2) It **creates valuable inter-methodological synergies and feedback options** between reader- and text-research. For instance, fiction text analysis (NTA), i.e. the reconstruction of a media narrative's 'textual inter-action potentials' is likely to prompt new kinds of hypotheses for sequential transcript analysis (see above 5.1.1.2, the 'MEI hypotheses memo'). Vice versa, the reconstructive case study may produce new and promising analytic questions which might not have been observed in the NTA. (This synergy, however, is not systematically used in the LIR-program.)

(3) The integration of reader- and text-research facilitates new modes of presenting cultural studies' knowledge to the wider public. **A novel form of publishing is envisioned**, in which the text analysis of a certain literary and/or media narrative is immediately accompanied by and integrated with reader-interaction analyses of two or more readings and also, possibly, by the respective author-interaction case study (see the A3-project). Thus, different empirical variants of mental media (inter-) action – within the complex constellation of author-text-reader relationships – become recognizable in a multi-focus perspective. Such a form of publication may contribute to significantly expanding the modes of what is considered 'cultural discourse'. At any rate it will help to avoid two problematic traditions in mainstream **culture and literature teaching**: to either impose fixed, academically acclaimed interpretations of literary works or/and introduce abstract and mostly descriptive techniques of text analysis which remain largely detached of the students' personal reading experience.

Issues of teaching bring us back to the **over-all purpose and strategic target, which LIR's integrative approach** is aiming at: to assist the humanities to become more accessible for interdisciplinary and multi-method collaboration with empirical and psychological research – and thus also become more 'applicable' for questions of high societal relevance. This also means: to strengthen the humanities' position within the increasingly competitive area of **international higher-education services** see GATT of WTO. For, offering not only 'canonical cultural knowledge' and 'philosophical thoughtfulness' but also at the same time supply the students with current psychological expertise and present an opportunity to – while doing culture studies – develop personality skills, such as communicative and emotional intelligence, means to answer to a much wider and more complex range of educational demands.

Therefore, LIR is linked to my initiative to establish a **post-graduate training program** of 'Psychologically Informed Culture Teaching'. This program will be offered to teachers and instructors of literature/ language, culture and media, who come from different sorts of schools and institutions and wish to become more successful in their teaching and pedagogic work in

terms of inducing skill development. The methods are drawn and adapted from qualitative research, counselling, and (group) psychotherapy (HW 2002c, f, g, 2003d, 2007c.). The program will be installed in an out-side university institute (“Cultures interactive e.V.”, Berlin) as long as I don’t hold a tenured university position.

The spectrum of institutional policy making within which these strategic targets in the humanities are to be placed today extends between two poles: (1) The humanities’ traditional self-concept as it has recently been re-articulated in a powerful manner by the German government’s ministry for education and research when announcing **the “Year of the Humanities”** in 2007. For, the respective internet-website stresses emphatically, that the humanities should “not be defined by their immediate societal usefulness”. Moreover, neither psychology nor social studies and qualitative research are included in the wide array of fields, which the website identifies as being immediately relevant for the humanities. (2) Contrary to this traditional stance a more advanced concept of humanities has recently been articulated in the context of the EU’s 7<sup>th</sup> frame program and its section **„Socio-economic Sciences and the Humanities“** (SSH) (also 2007). Here, it is expressively emphasized that fields like „literature“ and „philosophy“ should work together with „social sciences“ and „psychology“ and “establish new interdisciplinary approaches”, which may eventually contribute to tackling societal challenges on an European scale. The LIR-program intends to do this.