

## Life History, youth and identity

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## LIFE HISTORY, YOUTH AND IDENTITY

### 1. Introduction

This paper is based on results and ideas from the Life History Project at Roskilde University and a Ph.D. thesis on how the life history affects the choice of education (Larsen, 2001). The paper refers to the third theme of the conference, 'collective experience and individual learning', the aim of which is to submit and discuss how the combination of two different life history approaches – a narrative biographical and a socialisation theoretical – enables us to understand the inherent dynamics of the young peoples' choice of education and career. Thus the analysis example with Tina below reveals that what at first glance appears to be a clear-cut wish to become a photographer and a question of a shortage of education facilities, becomes more basically and finally an issue of Tina having difficulties connecting her basic work subjectivity with an identity as a paid employee.

Hence, Tina's autobiographical, spontaneous narrative (Schütze, 1984) contains a course of events that in itself requires interpretation in that at the starting point Tina is decisive and determined, yet she ends up in an open and vulnerable situation. Obviously, this may be immediately explained by the frustration of not being able to enrol at the desired education and by the ensuing waiting position. However, the understanding and interpretation of when, why and how the clear educational and work-related orientation is split into directions characterised by desire and duty, respectively, is illustrated through the combination of an analysis of the narrative structure and the use of concepts of youth and work inspired by socialisation theory and psychoanalysis.

This paper thus pursues two problem areas: 1) The methodology with relation to the combination of the two life history approaches, and 2) A youth theory concerning the difficulties of some young people to combine creative and aesthetical involvement with paid work. In other words: work as a passion contra paid work. This entails that the analysis consists of two parts, where in the first part a narrative biographical perspective is adopted, and a socialisation theoretical perspective is adopted in the second part.

### 2. A narrative biographical perspective

Within that, which in this paper is termed a narrative biographical approach, the autobiography – i.e. the narrative on the life course – is perceived as containing elements of the production of identity, in that events and occurrences are reflected, linked and interpreted, and the relation of the narrative between the events as they happened then and how they are now told contains an important interpretive understanding of the perception of the interviewee of him/her self and his/her environment. This life historical position was primarily developed within German biographical research by Fritz Schütze and in continuation of this by Peter Alheit (Schütze, 1984; Alheit, 1994 and 1995). Schütze developed a foundation reflecting theory as well as methodology for the autobiographical spontaneous narrative, which is based on pragmatism and symbolic interaction. In this, the life history is perceived as a narrated story about a life course, through which a construction and a subjective interpretation of the life story is presented. Through the means of the narrative act, the interviewee subjects him/herself to the inherent dynamics of the narrative and he/she carries out a piece of spontaneous biographical construction work. The narrative autobiographical interview is based on the narrative as genre with the specific characteristic that there has to be a story to tell, there has to be a point, and it contains the pattern: orientation, complication, resolution. In the course of the narrative, a number of inflicted pull mechanisms are triggered off (Zugzwänge): 1) A narrative that has been started, must be carried through to the end – inflicted formal ending.

2) In order for the narrative to make sense, a sufficient amount of details has to be told – inflicted detailing. If there are not enough details, it is difficult for the listener to keep up, and if there are too many, the narrative becomes difficult to understand and the listener will lose the thread. 3) Hence, one has to concentrate on the important elements – establishment of relevance and inflicted condensing. Too many fragments or too long a story also makes it difficult to keep the listener's attention and for the listener to make sense of the narrative (Schütze, 1984).

Schütze distinguishes between narrative and reflective passages in the autobiographical narrative, which not only denotes different ways of narrating, but also different time schedules. The narrative passages parallel the way in which experience is lodged in the memory (the way one remembers it), and the reflective passages reflect back (as seen from the present). The narrative conforms to two types of rules. First of all the inflicted pull mechanisms mentioned above, which entail that not only does the narrator control the narrative, but the narrative also controls the narrator. The other type of rules is termed cognitive figures, which are the rules and principles that form the basis for sorting and communicating experience. Schütze works with four cognitive figures in the autobiographical narrative table:

1) *Introduction of bearer of biography and bearer of events and their mutual relationships*: In a life story, focus is primarily on the role the narrator plays in the events of the narrative. Courses of events may also occur in which the narrator loses the role as bearer of events and so other persons or institutions take on the role of bearer of events (e.g. one moves or starts school).

2) *Situations, environments and social worlds as precondition and orientation for social processes*. Here the social framework required in order to give the listener an insight into the inner world of the narrator – the bearer of biography – is stated.

3) *Linking events and experience*: In the life story each event and happening are linked in an overall structure, made up by the complete narrative. Through the concept of *process structure*, Schütze lists a catalogue of how the narrator links events and experience:

a) *biographical process structures* are seen as intentional activities in a life course, e.g. when the narrator puts across that he/she has been actively influencing his/her own life and describes how he/she acted in order to achieve a specific purpose.

b) *institutional process structures* consists of the acts of the narrator which are motivated by institutional and societal norms, i.e. one adapts one's life to the requirements and expectations of the society to e.g. school, education, career, family.

c) *contours of events* are processes in which the narrator is deprived of the opportunity to act intentionally but is instead governed by external influences that determine the opportunities in the individual's situation such as serious illness or unemployment. Contours of events may influence the life course in a positive as well as a negative direction.

d) *processes of change* are perceived by the narrator as a surprising development that has a huge impact on his/her self-perception and/or outlook. For instance, the discovery of a hitherto unknown talent or the discovery of new sides to one's personality.

4) *The complete construction of the life story* communicates a specific theme as a result of the life story being narrated from a given situation in life. The complete life story is not only influenced by the present interpretive horizon, it is also structured by previous interpretive horizons in the life to date. (Schütze, 1984; Andersen & Larsen, 2001).

From an interpretation aspect, a narrative structural, analytical perspective is adopted when identifying e.g. narrative lines, process structures and processes of change during the task of discovering the complete construction of the life story. That is, internal and external chains of events as well as inner reactions and the way in which they are processed are subjected to analysis in order to try to determine unity and cohesion. Schütze lists five phases in the analysis and interpretation: structural description (formal segmentation and a structural content-related description), analytical abstraction (each period in life is connected to the others), knowledge analysis (the theoretical explanations of the interviewee – theoretical self-reflection), comparative case analysis (contrastive comparisons with other interview texts) and construction of theoretical models (Schütze, 1983).

The narrative structural analysis of Tina below does not adhere strictly and completely to this procedure since the purpose of this paper is not to illustrate the procedure but to understand the inherent dynamics of Tina's biography through a narrative structural, analytical perspective. Thus, the aim of this first part of the analysis is to uncover the collective construction and the autobiographical thematisation through the means of identifying process structures and narrative lines, in an attempt to understand Tina's biographical development from a determined education and career orientation to uncertain future prospects.

## 2.a. Tina's life course

At the time of the interview, Tina is 21 years old and attending a production school. The production school is a school for young people, who do not take the direct path from ordinary school to university or vocational education. At the production school, the pupils work in different workshops with a view to becoming more motivated for education and for choosing the right education and career through practical work. At this school, Tina is able to take an alternative education where she composes her own training programme (this so-called "free juvenile training" has now been closed by the present conservative-liberal government). However, the education is not a recognised qualifying education.

Tina is born in a small provincial town in Denmark and she goes to kindergarten before going to school. Her parents move to an even smaller town when Tina is ten years old, and so she has to change school. After municipal school, she goes to technical college, but when she is unable to find an employer with whom she can have her practical training periods, she has to give up her training. She then stays at home and works part-time in a newsagent's store. When she is 18 years old, she goes to Israel to work in a kibbutz, which means giving up a boyfriend whom she was not sufficiently serious about anyway. She then moves to the capital city in order to study for her higher preparatory examination, but she misses the start of the school year. Instead, she enrolls at the production school, where she meets her present boyfriend. After approx. one year, she begins working in an electronics factory in order to earn some money for starting the education to become a photographer. A few months later, she stops working and returns to the production school, where she plans her training programme consisting of an initial period at the production school followed by a period of practical training with a business. After a while with practical training, she stops since she feels she is not learning anything, and she returns to the production school. A graphic illustration of her life story looks like this:

Tina is born

Changes school in fourth grade

Completes school  
Attends technical college and then stops again  
Works in a newsagent's store

Travels to Israel to work in a kibbutz

Moves to Copenhagen to study for her higher preparatory examination  
Stays at home for a very short period  
Enrolls at the production school

Works in an electronics factory

Returns to the production school

Starts the alternative education

Starts practical training with an advertising photographer

Stops practical training and returns to the production school

Based on the narrative pattern: orientation, complication and resolution, the orientation is Tina telling us where she was born and about her standard schooling up to and including tenth grade, and that since eighth grade she has known that she wants to be a photographer. The complication is made up by the difficulties in qualifying as a photographer owing to the lack of practical training facilities. The resolution consists of her closing the main

narrative by telling us how she intends to progress from now on. Perhaps she will travel with her boyfriend, extend her alternative education or perhaps something entirely different. The course of events spans the development from a very determined plan of action and a very determined Tina, who wants to be in charge and make her own decisions to finally finding herself in a very precarious and vulnerable situation. Hence, the narrative structure in itself points to a process of development and it contains important elements for understanding the essence of Tina's actual problems.

## 2.b. The hard struggle

Tina's autobiographical thematisation is expressed by a struggle metaphor that crops up in different situations and at different levels, and which is linked to a home-out-home impetus and metaphor. This is shown already at the beginning of the narrative, which goes like this:

*Tina: "I was born in X-town, at the hospital in X-town when this existed back in '75. And then I went to kindergarten; I went to a municipal school in the centre of the town. In the fourth grade ... well, it was at the end of fourth grade, my parents decided to move to a town called Y-town. Y-town, is kind of on the outskirts of X-town, you know the same post code and stuff, so it is only five kilometres away, but at any rate, I had to change school..." (p.1)*

Consequently, Tina does not dwell on her early childhood or any part of her childhood that was not connected to school, but she lets this part of her narrative be governed by institutional process structures, and she soon comes to central events in her school years in her narrative. This is primarily her change of school in fourth grade, where her parents occupy the roles as bearers of events. The move in itself does not appear to have given rise to any difficulties or problems, yet since it involves a change of school it is not entirely without problems:

*Tina: "Things went all right, which I was actually rather happy about, There were some problems, because I had been taught one kind of handwriting in the old school and then had to learn a different kind of handwriting along with some other ways of doing arithmetic and stuff like that. I found that to be a problem, though it worked out OK, and in fact I was happier with the new school, because it was kind of a smaller school " (p.1)*

Her use of the phrase "in fact" indicates that after a certain amount of hindsight and in spite of the change in handwriting and ways of doing arithmetic she was happy with the change. She continues in this school up to and including ninth grade and then decides to take tenth grade (which is not obligatory), which meant that she had to return to her old school that taught all tenth grade pupils in the area:

*Tina. "So I came back there and ended up in the same class as some of my old classmates, which I thought was quite funny ... you know, quite peculiar. Tenth grade was ... also a very good year, where I, I learned a lot, and I, I finished up with far better results than I had in the exam after ninth grade. I was really happy about that, especially since I had taken the advanced exam in some subjects where I had only taken the standard course the year before. So I was really chuffed with that, it was a good year." (p.1)*

In other words, Tina is pleased with having taken tenth grade, since she learned a lot, and she speaks of the sensible thing in having improved her marks, and her pride in having taken the advanced courses. In this part of the narrative, the struggle theme is thus used in the shape of struggling with new ways of writing and doing arithmetic; struggles that she clearly wins and sees herself as the winner of, and she takes a home-out-home direction with regard to school.

In the beginning of the narrative, she also states the biographical outline that she wants to be a photographer:

*Tina: "I wanted, I, since eighth grade, I think it is in eighth grade that you can join the youth club, I think so, then I took a course in photography in the youth club, I really liked it, this was right up my street, and that was when I decided I wanted to be a photographer, well, that was, well, I didn't really know exactly what that entailed, that, that it was going to be such a hard struggle to become a photographer, I didn't know..." (p.1)*

Here, Tina herself communicates the struggle theme and the struggle element as a central driving force and the dynamics between wanting so much to become a photographer and the difficult struggle in order to achieve this

goal – i.e. that biographical process structures and institutional process structures struggle with each other, where at this point in the narrative it is undecided who is going to win the struggle.

Governed by an institutional process structure, Tina's application to the technical college is rejected since she has no arrangement with a business for her periods of practical training, which then makes her want to go to a kibbutz in Israel. However, she has to wait until she turns 18, and so she uses the time – over and above working in a newsagent's store – to “*work out for myself, like, what I was going to do next then*”. Again, a biographical process structure clearly emerges, and Tina decides to realise her plans about going to the kibbutz and ignores both her own and her mother's concerns about the unstable situation out there: “*I had made up my mind, that this was how it was going to be. So I did it.*” With that, a new home-out-home impetus is initialised, where the struggle is now between her and the hard physical work. Consequently, the stay in the kibbutz creates a process of change, in that afterwards Tina wonders about the fact that she has worked hard all the time and that for a measly wage, which is in sharp contrast to her idea of work as being “*something like eight to four, and Saturdays and Sundays off*”. She describes the stay like this “*it was those two and a half months, they were the best in my life because I had, I, so many things were happening around me, so many new things, I met a lot of new people ...*” In other words, she returns home as an obvious winner.

Following the stay in the kibbutz Tina moves to the capital city – and so she moves away again – which is the only place where courses on photography and media are included in the higher preparatory examination curriculum. However, the deadline for enrolling is passed and she is strictly unemployed. After having stayed at home for a very short time, she starts at the production school, and a few months later, she begins working at the electronics factory. The work is boring and monotonous and despite having some nice colleagues, she is fed up with it after a while and so she returns to the production school. Back at the school she begins to plan her alternative education, and the struggle against the huge societal institutions, education and career continues. A central element in this struggle is the struggle to learn.

One important theme throughout Tina's narrative is exactly her desire and need for learning. This is seen already at school. Moreover, it is characteristic of Tina's narrative, that she uses positive phrases and reaches positive conclusions “*very happy about*”, “*it was good*”, “*I benefited a lot from that*”, which is in direct proportion to whether or not she has learned anything. Hence, learning proves to be a central part of Tina's biographical process and it is linked to the struggle metaphor as in the struggle to learn.

The first part of the education takes place at the production school, where, among other things, she makes an information video about a rare disease. She is very involved with her work, work and interest come together for her, and she feels that she is learning a lot:

Tina: “*It was all about coming home at night and being exhausted from having learned so much and ... I thought this was great, this was exactly what I wanted....*” (p.10)

This is followed by a period of practical training, which she is very much looking forward to, but she is disappointed and she has a hard struggle to do something meaningful:

Tina: “*And then I pulled myself together, pulled myself together, that now I am really going out there and I am just going to learn something, today I want to be totally exhausted from learning, and I arrived there in a brilliant mood and ... now I was going to learn something*” ... “*but he ... was like ... always gave me the kind of answers like, well, yes, of course, yes err, but there is not really anything for you to do just now, and stuff like that, and then suddenly he gave me a week off, because he needed a week off.*” (p.11)

After many deliberations, Tina decides to quit her period of practical training, and thus she gives up the struggle. It is at that time and in this manner that her desire-orientated interest in photography is divided from her duty-orientated interest in paid work. The result is that the struggle for education and career, i.e. against external institutions is put on “stand by”, and the autobiographical thematisation is taken inside to the private institutions, where the struggle for a fine and stable relationship with her boyfriend takes priority.

Hence, at the time of the interview, Tina is quite uncertain about her immediate future, although she does hope to find a business in which to have her practical training. She prefers this to being at the production school. She is also considering extending her alternative education, so that she can go travelling with her boyfriend. In the narrative, Tina introduces her boyfriend in connection with her plans for the future, and not at the time when she meets him:

Tina: "...but my alternative education stops or is finished this summer, you know. I have also thought about extending it ... because my boyfriend is also about to plan his alternative education, though his is in video and drawing, but I thought about extending it for a year, so that maybe we can both go abroad, if we can find something that ... would suit ... us both, because my appetite has been whetted when I was in Israel, like, so I would like to travel again, but I cannot leave without him, I cannot do that, because we have been going out for two and a half years now, so we are stuck, we live together, we are really stuck with each other now, this is a serious relationship, so I cannot just up and go without him, I cannot do that, no way. (p.13)

The only thing that is certain, in other words, is that she cannot go anywhere without her boyfriend, who is thus an important ingredient in Tina's plans for the future, and she now has to adjust her plans to fit in with his. The dream about going abroad is likewise attached to her relationship – in contrast to the journey to Israel, when she travelled alone (away from her mother and father), and her longing to travel now takes priority over her longing for education and career:

Tina: "Well, anywhere that is useful to both of us, that is really what it is about. Just getting away, just getting away from here that is just about enough. Well, in fact it is ..." (p.14).

Hence, she wants to get away from the struggle over the work as a photographer and the education this entails, which may be interpreted to mean that she gives up the struggle.

The struggle is no longer about getting an education and career, but has been shifted to a struggle to ensure a good and stable relationship, which incorporates a struggle of whether it is going to be about photography or video, and in which Tina gives in without any notable resistance.

The Interviewer asks what Tina and her boyfriend do when they are not at the production school to which Tina replies:

Tina: "Well, we stay at home ... now we've both, well, OK we have this shared interest in video and he is, it does not interest him, the camera and suchlike, but I am also interested in video, you know, so we pursue this interest somehow, by filming all sorts of things. Well, we just got this cat a couple of months back, so right now she is really the focus of our lives, right. You know, wow, see her now sitting up there and stuff like that all the time. Wow, I must take a photograph of that, and if he has then borrowed a camera from the school, then he just has to film her, and so on, and so forth. So right now, she is the main interest in our life, we spend a lot of time with her and play with her and stuff like that, you know." (p.26)

Quite apart from the fact that it is Tina who is adapting her interest to suit his and not the other way round, it appears a little odd that they turn a cat into the highlight of their life, at any rate when they are 19 and 21 years old respectively. The way in which she speaks about the cat is almost identical to the way parents speak about their newborn child except that after all, parents do have a different time perspective in their narrative from "right now". Thus, it could be relevant to wonder whether getting the cat is a compensation for that child Tina does not want until she has completed her education and found work – which is beginning to be quite some way off in the future. Whether her boyfriend promotes or becomes the reason for Tina to an increasing extent pursuing the track termed "I want to photograph" is difficult to determine, yet the relationship supports her family orientation in which they stick to each other and their shared passion for photographing/filming as a hobby.

Toward the end of the interview, education and career have thus become somewhat distant issues for her, whereas her relationship has become rather present, which is a result of Tina's autobiographical development where autobiographical process structures are fighting with and against institutional process structures. In the beginning of the narrative, several narrative lines are introduced: the struggle relating to photography work, the desire to learn new things, the home-out-home impetus, where her longing to travel the world finally takes priority over the struggle for the photography work. Her longing to travel (to get away) is connected with her relationship and photography work is now something she does within the framework of her relationship as a hobby. Thus the narrative structural analysis reveals when and how the determined wish for an education and career that she had to begin with, ends up by being split into a desire-orientated direction (to photograph) and a duty-orientated direction governed: education and paid work. However, the analysis does not reveal anything about the content-related substance in the divide, to which a work and youth theoretical analysis perspective may contribute.

### 3. A socialisation theoretical perspective

Focussing on the life story involves an assumption that learning processes and participation in education are powerfully attached to the individual life story in which social conditions and prerequisites are subjectively integrated. That is, a close link between life story and socialisation, which includes, among other things, a view that cultural and social conditions are not absent in subjective narratives, but are rather present in a specific individual version (Salling Olesen, 2000). Hence, the life story should be viewed as a duality of subjective and objective conditions and it includes an interpretation and acquisition by the subject of the objective conditions.

This view of the life story is based on a life story concept that attempts to integrate the perspectives of autobiography and life story into a critical theoretical context together with the concept of experience (Negt & Kluge, 1974), and a socialisation concept (Lorenzer, 1975) as the basic approach for understanding learning processes and subjectivity development. This means that the life story is perceived as a series of conflicting interactions between an immediate environment, which in turn is also structured by societal contradictions, and a subject that in its own right is a conflicting product of socialisation. The life story is thus perceived as a subject-object dialectic in which the subject is constituted and perceived as a dynamic structure of conflicts leaving ambivalences and conscious breaches in the dynamics of which learning processes are anchored (Salling Olesen, 2000).

The autobiography is the synthesising narrative about the life story, which on the one hand contains harmonisations of conflicts and on the other can convey utopias. In principle then, the autobiography represents “a dynamic lie”, but it is within this dynamics that learning processes take place, and it is through this they attain importance for the individual. Hence, they should also be viewed as subjective expressions (Salling Olesen, 1996).

This entails the development of analytic strategies that may capture the subjective interpretation of the objective conditions and such conflicts, ambivalences and breaches that are expressed through this. The analytic strategy introduced here attempts, as already mentioned, to combine a narrative autobiographical approach and a system of socialisation theories in the attempt to comprehend the connection between the life stories of young people, their measures in which to connect with the world – as subject to object – and their choice of education and career.

A socialisation theoretical perspective on young people and youth means that the starting point will be the young people as a societal group evolving alongside the development of capitalist paid work, and the development of the young people is one phase in the societal individualisation process that separates production and reproduction and childhood/family and work. In other words, the development of work historically generates the group of young people. The starting point is thus, that it is characteristic for modern young people that work is now absent as socialisation and qualification processes to be historically replaced by education. However, this does not alter the fact that such psychological tasks that are involved with being young must be taken care of, but now the backdrop is the educational system and the other interactive contexts of young people. Hence, youth is also viewed as a phase in life where identity processes and the solving of psychological tasks – including development of gender identity – are on the agenda. These processes cannot be understood merely in the terms of psychology development categories, but must also include subconscious processes and dynamics, i.e. psychoanalytical and socialisation theoretical concepts and categories. Finally, it means that youth cultural expressions and contexts are seen as space for relations and interaction, and the sphere where conflicts and ambivalences are processed in a concrete verbal manner and in a symbolic aesthetical manner (Larsen, 2001).

With respect to the analysis of Tina, this means that her autobiographical narrative enables an understanding of how solving the youth-related tasks is part of a complex interaction of her ideas of education and work, and the entire life story as well as her subjective interpretation of this.

Perceiving work as a basic socialisation and qualification process entails a socialisation theoretical work concept in which work is seen as a basic constitutional relationship between subject and object, i.e. interaction with both internal and external nature. Such an understanding is based on the work concept of Oskar Negt, where the concept of living work denotes work in the comprehensive implication of being a fundamentally sensuous, object-related metabolism between people and nature, where one may not exist without the other. This fundamental exchange between subject and object is thus the basic means for the making of a human being. The exchange, however, is not just an individual process; it is also a collective process through which we enter relationships with other people, and it is through this we connect to society. In short, work represents both subject and society. The concept of societal work goes beyond the framework of paid work and denotes that work which



is necessary in order for society to be successful, and the work force can reproduce itself, i.e. it contains both production and reproduction processes (Negt, 1985). Since work is not only the processing of external nature but also a means of controlling and changing psychological structures, this is because the processing of human nature in the primary socialisation process precedes the ability of human beings to process the external nature. That is, one has to be able to control the powers of one's own nature, which is done through instinct sublimation and the formation of the super-ego. What characterises work as a specific psychodynamic process, is the exact mix existing between the various impulses that may be fulfilled through the work. In other words, work situations entered into as a juvenile and adult reactivates and resuscitates under certain conflict-related preconditions the socialised forms of interaction of early childhood (Leithäuser & Volmerg, 1994).

The work's historical and cultural restructuring into paid work as a dominating societal institution means that activity in the labour market is now considered the most important means of acquiring social acknowledgement and of developing one's individual identity (Negt, 1985). The dual character of paid work indicates that there are two elements that are fundamental for the worker as seen against his/her own work activities: the work force as a means to the valorisation of capital and the subject as carrier of concrete work processes, where even monotonous piece-work contains opportunities for identification – not in the form of quality in the work, but rather as the worker's subjective flair for enriching certain work activities with subjectivity (Morgenroth, 1994). The capitalist value production and the work force's production of life are thus not merely two parallel processes; they intertwine, which points to a perception of work subjectivity as an identity process, in which the individual person's particular interpretation of the world will change, and be changed by, the work process (Salling Olesen, 1997).

Hence, work is not only a vital condition; it is also an opportunity for self-expression with the possibility for linking oneself as subject to object. As shown by the second and next part of the analysis, subjective meaning and subjective self-expression must be attached to work in order for it to be maintained within the horizon of capitalist paid work. Just like the worker has to be able to accept such elements of exchange and estrangement that are the preconditions for paid work.

In other terms, this may be denoted as creating harmony between internal and external realities, and as solving that subject-object conflict in which many young people find themselves. The cultural release results in an expansion of one's expectations and dreams even though the objective opportunities may not have changed accordingly (Ziehe, 1983). Tina is a good example of this.

### 3.a. Education is not work

Although the first part of the analysis shows that Tina narrates about her school years as being relatively unproblematic, education as such provokes ambivalent feelings in her, and from the very beginning she has indeed opted out of the more academic juvenile educations:

*Tina: "I have never been one for, well, I want to go to upper secondary school or I want to go to the commercial college, and that was how it was for the other pupils in my class, they were all going to either upper secondary school or commercial college, and then there were a few who studied for their higher preparatory examination. But it was, in fact there were only really those three options, and I felt I was different for choosing the technical college, and then, in fact, I found it pretty annoying that I was not accepted, but then I decided to take the higher preparatory examination, well, take some single subjects for the higher preparatory examination."*

Tina mirrors the general educational distribution and orientation primarily toward the academic educations and the correspondingly smaller interest for labour market educations. The selective function at school is seen by Tina as a result of her own choices in that she "chooses" a labour market education. She has thus also chosen work rather than education, and since she is very certain about her choice of education and career, she sees no reason to postpone her choice by going to upper secondary school or by staying on in the educational system for any longer than she absolutely has to. To Tina, education is not an aim in itself, but is a means to get to the point, in this case photography work. Having decided to be different, it was annoying that she was not accepted, and she has to begin taking the higher preparatory examination, which she does not really want to since she wants an apprenticeship as a photographer, which is a choice based on her desires and needs.

Tina mirrors the structural dual position in which young women find themselves (Drotner, 1993). Through education, she wants to and has to develop the individuality and independence required in order to take care of

herself and maybe take care of others whilst she must also develop closeness and care, which she has already done. For instance, without hesitating she and her boyfriend look after his younger brothers aged two, three and five for weekends every so often in order to relieve their mother. Hence, in many different ways and for many different reasons, education becomes important to Tina. Education is the means to working as a photographer, which is what she wants and dreams about. Education is the shortcut to becoming an adult paid worker and to having children. However, Tina's problem is that she expects her education to be like and afford her the same satisfaction as working (as a photographer), i.e. she has to be able to relate to the contents of the work and to attach subjective meaning to it.

The period of practical training with the advertising photographer makes it clear to Tina that education is not the same as work, and so she experiences difficulties with completing her education:

Tina: *"I just think he had a problem giving me things to do and ... I tried, I think, to take an initiative and say, don't you have something I can, that you can get me to do for you, and stuff like that. Well, no, he didn't really, and that ... I think it, I became more and more annoyed with having to be there, because I didn't think I was doing anything, I thought it was a waste of time ... and I ... began skiving some days, you know, because I would wake up in the morning and think 'o no, I can't be bothered going out there and then just hang around waiting for the time to go home, so I can do things at home'."* (p. 11)

To Tina the photography work is not merely paid work or an education, it is also very much her hobby, and so if she has not achieved anything during the day, she has to do so after work. Tina's great expectations and joy of having to learn by doing and through (almost) real work (the period of practical training) is not fulfilled. Her needs for engagement and involvement are not met, and she does not get to use herself and her energy. Thus, Tina's committed desire to learn is struggling in this kind of paid work, where the exchange is not about doing as much as possible but about putting up with being kept out of harm's way and the lack of interest. Work does thus not achieve subjective meaning for her (she does not link as subject to object), and at this stage in Tina's life and of the narrative, her educational orientation is severed from her work orientation and turned into a desire-orientated direction – I want to photograph – and a duty-orientated direction that education and work is necessary.

### 3.b. Work and passion

As mentioned, from the very beginning of the narrative, Tina thematises, the duality of wanting very much to become a photographer and the fact that this is very difficult owing to a lack of educational and practical training opportunities. However, she begins at the technical college, which she is obviously happy about, but when she cannot find a business for her period of practical training, she decides instead to join the kibbutz in Israel. Over and above earning some money, Tina uses the time to reflect on herself and her future. She begins to consider a career in the health and social sector. She believes this is because as a child she went with her mother, who is a social pedagogue, to work and found this to *"be great fun"*. She does not think so any longer. Work has to *"entice"* Tina. Photography enticed Tina, whereas the health and social sector was not enticing. In other words, work must be tempting almost to the point of being seductive in the same manner as photography has been, in order that she may devote herself passionately and entirely to it. She uses the same kind of terminology later on in the interview, when the interviewer tries to get her to elaborate on her interest in photography work.

I: *"Would you tell me a bit more about the time when you took photography in eighth grade, what happened?"*

Tina: *"Well ... actually it was our Danish teacher and grade teacher who ran the photography class, and he introduced the course in such a manner that I was hooked from the very beginning. I can't really explain what it was that he did, he just did something which, well this, this is something I am going to stick with...."* (p.14)

Here she explains about the attraction of photography, although she is unable to pinpoint what it is. Like falling in love though, it appears like a flash out of nowhere, and in her narrative she links it with the significance of the teacher and his share in the fact that it was photography and not something else she was attracted to. To begin with they were only allowed to photograph still lives in the youth club, which Tina found boring since they had come in order to photograph each other. Tina soon has enough of this and she continues her narrative:

Tina: *"I then developed a growing interest in the light in the photographs ... and in the motive itself, it was, the others continued more with doing crazy things, if you can call it that, you know taking pictures of each other sticking our tongues out and stuff like that, right. Whereas I really got hooked on trying to compose some beautiful pictures."* (p.15)

It is not a game to Tina any more, it is serious business, and she begins to be interested in the motive as such along with its aesthetic value. She manages to make some things that she finds genuinely beautiful, which only motivates her even more. Tina continues:

Tina: *"This went on, and in fact he taught me everything he could teach me and then ... then I was stuck, really ... but even so, I actually continued going to the classes in the youth club, in tenth grade also even though I no longer went to that school, but I continued because I wanted more, more, more."* (p.15)

Thus, Tina continues taking the classes even though she cannot learn much more, and instead she begins teaching the new pupils, which she is *"fairly happy with"*. After all, the best part of it is being behind the camera oneself. She is now stuck in more than one sense of the word. Her teacher is unable to teach her any more, so she feels she is stuck in her learning and development processes, whilst at this stage she has devoted herself to photography to the extent that she is stuck – and at the same time she wants *"more, more, more"*.

To Tina films and pictures are not merely technique, expression and communication, they are also art, aesthetics and self-reflection. She gives this as the reason for her next series of video and picture shoots being self-portraits:

Tina: *"And I became very enthusiastic about it, because I thought it was fun to try and suss out myself in front of the camera, and it is weird also, because I hate being in front of the camera, be it a video camera or a normal camera"*. (p.29)

In other words, she wants to find out more about herself and how she looks in front of the camera, and her need for this is so big that she overcomes her normally great dislike for being photographed:

Tina: *"I hate it, but when I, when it is me who is in charge of it somehow, then it is quite good fun all the same. Though I don't know exactly why, why that should be, it would probably be something to do with describing me as a person, how I am, what I do every day, and what I like to do, right, I can't, I don't know, just something saying something about me."* (p.29)

Thus, Tina is not only linguistically and verbally reflective, she also likes to try to express herself in other ways. She is able to "portray" herself both in her autobiographical narrative and probably also in photographs, and in a manner of speaking, she is trying to turn the work into a portrait of herself: hard working, being present, and showing the world and herself through pictures (Larsen & Larsen, 1997).

Hence, the various content-related aspects of photography work means something different at different times in Tina's life and consequently in her narrative, and photography work for her becomes a tool for gaining a relationship with reality. However, the artistic and aesthetic aspects are fairly common and constant. With respect to the information video on the rare disease, it takes on an extroverted power in that it is directly useful to others, and through it, she thus connects to society. The photograph also has an introverted power in that it becomes her tool for reflection – which is not an attempt to connect to society through her work – but to connect to herself.

Her wish for the self-portrait is thus ambivalent; on the one hand, she wants to show the world and herself who she is, and on the other hand, it expresses her wish to find out who she is, and is thus a manifestation of her insecurity. Thus, she attempts to thematise her own emotions and to discuss the meaning of life with herself (Ziehe, 1998). In the same manner that she is caught up in the conflict between desire and duty with respect to education and paid work, she is caught up in the conflict between devotion and control. She wants to make her own decisions and choices whilst she has also put herself in a situation where she has no influence. She wants to devote herself to the camera and the portrait, whilst at the same time she does not want to give up control, and hence it is different for her when she is in charge. In continuation of the requirements and opportunities of modern society, she tries to create herself and her own identity and individuality. Nevertheless, this becomes increasingly difficult for her, since through the self-portrait, she closes in more and more on herself and increasingly she only wants to do her own thing. Photography work has now become completely detached from society and paid work, unless the self-portrait in fact enlightens her about herself to the extent that she will again be able to connect to society including education and work. Tina's interest in working aesthetically with

photography and express herself through this, may be interpreted as a need for working with things in a symbolic manner, and thus to establish connections with the collective system of meaning and to communicate between subconscious meaning and symbolic forms of expression and between graphic body elements and the linguistic system of meaning (Olsen & K ppe, 1995). However, this will require a very good tutor/teacher, and this may be the alternative education's drawback, since it is anything but certain that at this stage the best thing for Tina is to do what she wants to do. Alternatively: instead of being an alternative route to the labour market, the alternative education could pull in the opposite direction for Tina.

### 3.c. Work consists of many things

The analysis makes it clear that on the one hand, work has to trap and entice her, and on the other hand she wants it to be the result of her own carefully considered decisions. Thus to Tina, work is very present both in a concrete emotive way and as a horizon for her life. She has a good insight into the work of both her mother and father, and her parents' experiences influence her own choices:

*Tina: "When I became older and began considering that path, I didn't really think it was very alluring, like ... I didn't want a job where I might risk having to work on Christmas Eve and New Years Eve and suchlike, and this is probably to do with my mother working every fourth Christmas Eve or so, then she was at work, and that, it has made an impression on me so that I definitely wouldn't do it, right, because I missed her then. So I gave up that idea, and I, I never really stopped to consider that there might be jobs in the health and social sector where you do not have to work at Christmas, New Year and other holidays. But I just called it off, anyway ..."* (p.3)

Her mother's absence every fourth Christmas Eve has evidently made a lasting impression on Tina. So much so, that she will not even consider opportunities within the sector although they do not involve evening shifts. Tina thus refers to the past in her narrative in connection with her choice of education and career, but she does so in a negative sense and gathers arguments against a certain field of work. Nonetheless, she does not argue against the nature and the contents of the work as such, but against the working hours. According to the German researcher in socialisation, Walter Heinz the socio-biography is materialised at the transition between school and career, and during this process reflections on the past is made, where decisions are turned into experience with a biographical cause (Heinz, 1982).

Tina also looks back on her father's work in a paving company, work that she has also taken part in with great joy and enthusiasm as a child, but since her father now has a bad back, this has also put Tina off:

*Tina: "... and then I could come along and carry rocks and things like that, which I thought was great, you know, at weekends to get out and carry a lot of rocks, and work hard and earn a lot of money... But I never really thought that doing physical labour was something I wanted either, because it ruins your back and stuff, I have, my father is now suffering from arthritis of the spine, and so this is why I think like I do, right."* (p.4)

As was the case with her mother's work, it is not the nature of the work she argues against, but in this case the injuries one may get – Tina states this as being conscious considerations and reflections, and so she is able to express them. As with her mother's work, she "forgets" that physical labour comes in many shapes and sizes, and that working conditions are continuously improved.

Work is thus absent as basic qualification and socialisation processes and so it is an abstract, though it is present and concrete in the orientation of the young. This entails that when the young people have to make a choice about education and career, they have to *imagine* their future work. An imaginative task with links to the past and so to their life story. Hence, an autobiographical approach to youth and the concept of youth helps to visualise this imaginative task as well as providing an insight into the subjective interpretations of the life lived.

As mentioned, Tina moves to the capital city after returning from the kibbutz, and since she does start the course for her higher preparatory examination, she is actually unemployed and stays at home until one of her neighbours in the youth accommodation suggests that she enrolls at the production school. Unemployment and idleness is not Tina's cup of tea, and she becomes keen on the video workshop of the production school. After one year at the production school, Tina is fed up with not having much money, and she would like to save up a little for when she begins the actual photographer's education, but the work in the factory is definitely not her cup of tea, and she accounts in detail about how, after a few months, she becomes unstable:

Tina: *"sitting in one place and ... and doing the same work day in and day out, OK, it wasn't exactly like that, because we rotated and did various things ... different things in the course of the day, but ... this wasn't me at all; I couldn't really put up with it, so I ended up simply staying away"*

Eventually she asks to be paid off and she is unemployed once again. After one week at home, Tina has had enough of it, and she returns to the production school, where she begins planning her alternative education. Again, she turns the required action into a decision made by her:

Tina: *"I then began planning it and finding out what I wanted it to contain, because I had decided to take this education, right, because this was a brilliant opportunity to build up a lot of photo-related experience ... and being able to document it."* (p.9)

Tina makes this choice one that "reasonably secured her identity", partly through her professional interest, she has made her own decision, and – sensibly – she will have documentation for her qualifications. According to Heinz, the quest for a profession is a critical phase, in which the young people need to place their life story in a position that reasonably secures their identity in relation to the demands of the labour market. For instance, they have to reach a decision in which there are indications that their professional abilities will match their skills and interests (Heinz, 1982).

During this period in her life, Tina has experience of different types of work. She very much likes the work in the newsagent's store since she meets many people, and she becomes very close to her maternal grandparents who live nearby. The work in the kibbutz is paid work in the extreme sense (long working hours and poor wages) as well as being societal work in that there are purposes reaching far beyond the interests of paid work, and the work is collectively organised (Negt, 1985). Here the companionship, the juvenile lifestyle and the many new adventures and experiences overshadows and dominates the experience of paid work. Unemployment – and idleness, come to that – is definitely not Tina's cup of tea. She fills out the unemployment with the chores of a housewife, but she is soon fed up with this. To begin with, she does not see the production school as being anything to do with education, but rather a place where she is able to combine her work with her interests. The pay – i.e. the student allowance – does not correspond to the work actually carried out by the students (compared with normal paid work), and she does not relate to it as being work. In the video workshop (at that time), she exclusively focuses on the professional aspect and its relevance to her subjective needs and interests. At one point, she decides to take on an ordinary paid job with the sole purpose of earning some money. A purpose that is not enough to keep Tina for very long in the labour market as an unskilled worker, not even though she wants to save up for taking the education to become a photographer. Pleasant colleagues and the measures of the factory to make the assembly work less monotonous does nothing to change the fact that she *"could not stand it any longer"*, and she becomes unemployed again. Her subsequent stay at the production school is part of her alternative education. Even though she is now in an educational context, she connects to the societal work with respect to the information video and photo series, both with regard to the production and the societal purpose and contents of the assignment, and she talks at great length and in a very committed manner about the actual subject and not (for once) about the professional photographic relevance.

To Tina, work is closely connected with the act of photography and the processing of the material and nature of the work process, and likewise, she is very involved with the aesthetical and sensuous opportunities for self-expression entailed in the work. Only to a lesser degree is she able to connect to society including paid work. With the exception of the work in the kibbutz, work to her is not about interaction and relationships, since she prefers to work alone, and the emotional contents is to be found in her engagement and in the learning. Her work subjectivity is closely tied up with hard work and getting tired, as she has sometimes been when working with photography, as she was in the kibbutz and when she worked with her father gathering rocks. When the photography work does not involve hard work, learning and tiredness it is less interesting to her, and she has difficulties sticking with it. The combination that she is obsessed with and has occupied photography work to such an extent that she is unable to give it up and the objectively limited opportunities, thus become decisive factors in Tina's future.

Toward the end of the interview, the interviewer asks, how Tina imagines her working life will be in a few years time, which results in Tina lighting a cigarette (her first and only) whilst saying:

Tina: *"Actually, I believe I will be self-employed one way or another. I'm not saying that I will be having a career as an independent photographer for instance in advertising photography, and that I will be having my own studio, and that I'll be running everything on my own, but just something where it is up to me, what I want to do in any given day. Where I don't depend on someone to come and tell*

*me that today I have to do this and that, and that and this, and have a schedule drawn up for me, which I shall then just follow right down to the smallest detail. I prefer it, when I can like decide that well, today I'll have to leave a little early because I need to this, that or the other, and so I'll leave early and maybe return later on and do something or other. That is how I see it, you know ... that I have something, where I can also make some of the decisions, right. I don't really have anything, I don't know for sure ..."* (p.28)

Deep down Tina's dream is to become an independent advertising photographer (to have an education so that she can photograph and have children). However, her desire to photograph has been detached from education and paid work, and so she produces a compromise when she imagines the future: just something where she can organise her own working hours (to fit in with a family life).

Tina has liberated herself from the relationships of her childhood and has now established an adult and independent relationship with a man, which is one of the psychological tasks that go with being young (Nielsen and Rudberg, 1994). To Tina, however, this entails a new kind of dependency, where she "is stuck", and her education is mixed up with her family life, which contributes to making the future uncertain. Her very determined plan to become a photographer has been replaced by much open-mindedness and insecurity, and she very much finds herself in that waiting position outside production and the labour market that is typical of young people, long after she has psychologically become an independent adult – the increased discrepancy between psycho-social personality development and achievement of socio-economic independence (Alheit, 1994).

This also mirrors the simple fact that, in many ways, Tina has become adult and independent and "only" now needs an education and an adult paid job. She has yet to solve the psychological project that is also part of youth, i.e. to create balance between internal and external reality (Nielsen & Rudberg, 1993), of which the alternative education may be seen as a, by now failed, attempt. The question is whether indeed the production school can provide Tina with the adult and professional challenge that she needs. Since Tina has the same demands to an education as she does to a job, and she attends the education as she would a job, that education must contain processes and produce needs and experience that match those of a job. And can it do that? Much would indicate that it cannot!

#### 4. Conclusion

Conclusively, the analysis of Tina shows that what in the beginning appeared to be the problem, the shortage of educational facilities ends up as very complex set of problems about Tina's insecurity about her future. Tina is grown-up and independent, but her needs for an emotional occupation of her work cuts her off from employing and displaying her extroverted force in her work, and as time – and the narrative – goes by, she becomes more and more introverted. Thus, Tina experiences difficulties with turning her work subjectivity into a paid worker identity, whilst she also displays a basic desire to work hard and to connect with the world, and in this manner, she also raises the critical question of the organisation of work as paid work.

Tina's life is following two tracks that for a long time run along parallel courses, and at one point in her life, they are indeed identical. One track pursues education and paid work with a view to having children also. The other track pursues her passionate interest in photography work. The tracks intertwine beautifully when she is working on the information material on the rare disease. At the production school, she learns a lot, and she feels her photographic skills are improving all the time. For Tina there is also a qualification aspect to the course at the school in that it leads up to the period of practical training with the advertising photographer. This is where the tracks divide. She is not allowed to photograph and in doing so to emotionally occupy her work to the extent required in order for her to gain satisfaction. Add to that, that she is not included in the working relationship of her co-workers and she is not paid, so she cannot even view it as a (boring) paid job. Her interaction with the environment is stripped for emotions, and so it is severed into a desire-orientated direction (to photograph) and a duty-orientated direction (education and work). From this time onwards, the tracks run increasingly further apart, she becomes more and more unsure of herself, and eventually she shuts herself off in her work on the self-portrait and her personal relationship.

The way in which she psychologically handles this situation is by diminishing her expectations to and making comprises concerning the future in an attempt to make the two tracks meet.

Where some young people are having difficulties growing up and becoming independent as a prerequisite for even getting close to work, Tina is so grown-up and independent that it ends up becoming a problem for her. She is ready for having a family; she "only" lacks education and work.

Based on Tina's autobiographical narrative, the analysis attempts to provide a real life understanding of how Tina perceives her education, work and relationship, and how choices, necessities and opportunities appear from the subjective universe and play a part in the identity process. The life story as a framework for understanding opens up for resources and potential in the participants in the educational system, and also makes access possible to those conditions and structures that may appear to impose limits. Based on Schütze's ideas on process structures and the inherent analysis strategy, the first part of the analysis consisted of identifying the cohesive construction of the life story. Using a struggle metaphor, Tina renders how the struggle for educational facilities appears from an individual perspective and what the consequences of a shortage of education facilities may be. Likewise, the origin of her wishes to become a photographer has been made clear, and how such wishes are tied to the life story.

Tina is an example of the large group of young people who want to work in a creative and aesthetic profession, but who for one reason or another do not fit into the ordinary education system. Either because there is a shortage of education facilities or because the traditional education cultures do not live up to the wishes and needs for challenges of the young people. On the other hand, as shown by the second part of the analysis, they, like Tina, find it difficult to combine their passionate interest in a given work area with an identity as a paid worker. This leaves the question why so many out of one generation of young people want to work in creative professions, and why they find it so difficult either to combine their commitment with an identity as a paid worker – or to make the necessary severance?

The use of an analysis strategy that combines a narrative structural analysis and a youth theoretical and work theoretical system of concepts thus provides an opportunity for uncovering the process resulting in so many young people being without an education. Moreover, it helps to define what the role is of the content-related substance in relation to the young people, education and identity processes – in the journey from childhood to adulthood and working life of the young people.

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