

Editorial Note: 2 Years *FQS* Review: 18 Publishers, 74 Reviews, 3383 Mails¹

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Abstract: This contribution reports on the last two years of *FQS* Review, a permanent element of *FQS*. The arrangements we have made with various publishers are discussed and the editorial process, from finding reviewers until a review finally is published, is explained. Overall, the story of *FQS* Review seems to be one of success, not only in terms of the number of reviews and review essays published, but also in terms of the reviews being increasingly recognized as valuable contributions of their own, discussing relevant topics from various research fields. Despite these positive effects, our aim to foster greater exchanges between various scientific cultures and/or nationalities has not yet been accomplished. Two observations inform this conclusion: First, the users of *FQS* (readers, authors of the media units, etc.) have not used the *FQS* Discussion Board to make remarks or replies to the reviews nor have they have not presented additional views, comments, etc. Second, the language of the reviews typically reflects the language of the respective media unit and this means that specific discourses seldom cross language boundaries. The opportunity, therefore, to influence similar discussions, taking place in other tongues, seldom occurs.

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1. Introduction

FQS Review was introduced as its own standing feature with the issue *FQS* 1(2) in May 2000—when we published four reviews and two review essays. Although it was our intention at the time, we did not really expect that this feature would grow so quickly or fully between then and now. In the six issues since May 2000, we published 32 reviews and 27 review essays. The same number of reviews/review essays (or more) will be published in the single year 2002; most of them

1 The numbers of e-mails includes all contacts a) with the authors of the published reviews and the reviews in preparation since *FQS* Review started, b) all general requests we received and answered, and c) all contacts with publishing houses, etc. some specific explanations are provided within the text. Our internal contacts during the process (sending files, forwarding of mails, etc.) are not counted here. The status of the counted 3383 mails is to the end of May 2002.

belonging to the [Special Issue FQS Book Reviews II](#) planned for November (see [reviews in preparation](#)). The continuing development of *FQS Review* is also visible in the topics we cover: Besides "Methods and Methodology"—the topic that *FQS Review* started with—there are now two further thematic fields: "Sign–Culture–Identity" and "Online-Research–(New) Media". In addition, other areas ("Theory-Positions", "Studies about Health and Medicine" and "Work–School–Family–Institution-Organization") are being developed step by step to offer the readers of *FQS* even greater thematic variety (see [MRUCK & MEY 2001](#), MEY & MRUCK 2002). [1]

In addition to these quantitative changes, qualitative transformations have also occurred over the past two years. One year after we started *FQS Review*, we published the first [Special Issue: FQS Reviews I](#). The idea behind such special issues is to provide space so that we do not have to limit authors or readers to brief review notes (which are typical for most [Print] Journals). This space allows the publication of extended reviews, fostering the acceptance of book reviews "as scientific contributions" in their own right ([MEY 2000](#)). [2]

Over time, it began to make sense to give reviews the same visual space and status as other contributions to *FQS*. Since *FQS* 2(3) was published in September 2001, all reviews/review essays now provide abstracts and key words (in German, English and Spanish). Additionally since *FQS* 2(2), all reviews are available as PDF-files (and no longer just the review essays, which has been our practice up to that point in time). This decision was made because the difference between review essay and reviews decreased, with the latter becoming more and more elaborate. Nevertheless, we did not give up the classification; the term review essays remains reserved for contributions that not only evaluate the concrete media unit, but also provide some discussion on the media unit's general research field. [3]

The publication of this issue *FQS* 3(2)—and the seventh issue including the rubric *FQS Review*—provides us with an opportunity to report some of the activities that make up *FQS Review* more generally. [4]

2. The Journey from a Media Unit to a Review

2.1 From the publishing house ...

Paralleling the increasing numbers of reviews/review essays published we observed an increase in the number of publishing houses that cooperate with *FQS*. During the first year, we began by working with Sage Publications as well as various German publishers: Beltz, Campus, Juventa, Leske + Budrich, Universitätsverlag Konstanz (UVK), Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, Westdeutscher Verlag and Wiener Universitätsverlag (WUV). From the beginning, we developed unique arrangements that are still valid today. For example, Sage sends us directly—without special ordering—all new books related to qualitative research.

On the other hand, we search titles from the catalogs of the German publishers², titles that are then sent to us after a reviewer announces his/her interest in writing a review for *FQS*. All titles available for reviews are included in the [List of Available Media Units](#) that is published on our site. [5]

In the second year, other publishing houses joined the various arrangements: Asanger, Edition Diskord, LIT, Pabst, transcript and Waxmann in the German speaking area (though some of them publish English titles, too); AltaMira, Blackwell and Open University Press joined us as the predominantly English language publishing houses. (In the case of AltaMira, we are also automatically sent all titles related to qualitative research; with the other publishing houses, we arrange the "Ordering-Model"). [6]

Besides such continued cooperation, we sporadically also publish reviews of media units provided by other publishing houses with whom we have no fixed arrangement, but whose titles contain works that specifically meet the interests of *FQS* and its readers. Our attention is called to these titles via announcements in diverse mailing lists or the author(s) or editor(s) of the media unit send—without our request—information about the books or a review copy. [7]

2.2 ... to the reviewers ...

We come in contact with our reviewers in different ways. First of all, we actively search within the *FQS* "community": this means the colleagues on the [Editorial Board](#) and the nearly 2,000 subscribers to the [Newsletter](#), which we email once a month to inform about new contributions to *FQS*. Another important way to find reviewers is the invitation via different mailing lists, offering titles from our [List of Available Media Units](#). The mailing lists chosen depend upon the thematic topic and, as some of the list members forward our invitation to other lists (or to other persons), such invitations are widely distributed.³ Some examples of lists we use are:

- German language Media units related to qualitative research are offered in the mailing lists Qualitative Sozialforschung / QSF-L (<http://www.qualitative-forschung.de/qsf-l/qsf-l.htm>), Biographieforschung (<http://www.zbbs.de/mailling.html>) and Gesprächsforschung (<http://www.gespraechsforschung.de/liste.htm>); English language lists are e.g.

2 Only a few publishing houses inform potential readers about new publications on specific topics and research areas via an electronic newsletter. In most cases, only a catalog (published once or twice a year) is produced and it is a difficult task to find new publications of interest to *FQS* amongst the 1000 or so titles.

3 We often request that our invitation is not forwarded to other lists because not all list owners approve of this kind of searching for reviewers. In addition, we get so many requests after a posting, the number of review copies we can offer is not sufficient. For example, after our postings of 50 titles in January 2002, we received more than 100 mails during the first two days (which means to give an answer to these [independent whether they get the review copy or not, because our philosophy is that all mails should get an answer]. Then, there is the mail to order the review copies from the publishing houses; all in all we send out far more than 150 mails). Additionally, about 20 mails follow during the next two weeks after a posting; in most cases, we can only reply that the requested title is no longer available. For remarks regarding the frequencies of e-mail correspondence in the last two years see the text.

QUALRS-L (<http://listserv.uga.edu/archives/qualrs-l.html>) and Action Research-Mailing lists (<http://www.scu.edu.au/schools/gcm/ar/arhome.html>).

- Media units related to the sub rubric "Sign–Culture–Identity" we are announcing in H-Soz-Kult (<http://hsozkult.geschichte.hu-berlin.de/>), Soziologie (SOZIOLOGIE@LISTSERV.GMD.DE; the address is only useable for subscribed members) and Volkskunde (kv@domo.rrz.uni-hamburg.de; see above),
- GIR-L (<http://www.online-forschung.de/index.htm/gir-l/>) especially makes sense for media units related to the thematic field "Online-Research–(New) Media". [8]

Compared with our active search for reviewers via mailing lists, a fewer number of reviewers contact us directly after visiting our [List of Available Media Units](#). The number of such contacts is increasing (also increasing is the number of requests for reviewing titles not included in the List of Available Media Units). Very few reviews are sent in without our commission—but we hope that their numbers will increase in the future, even though this might mean rejecting those that do not fit the profile of *FQS* and *FQS Review*. Finally, I would like to mention that a core of 25 reviewers has been established that continues to write periodic reviews for *FQS*. [9]

2.3 ... to the book review editor(s) (and back to the reviewers) ...

The process of writing and publishing reviews involves a more-or-less-standard procedure. After a request to review arrives, an e-mail is sent to confirm the request and to indicate whether the respective media unit is in fact available. If it is available, we then inform the reviewer that the review copy either will be ordered from the publishing house or sent out by the Book Review Editor. Additionally, we ask the reviewer to inform us when he or she actually receives the review copy. This step is necessary because sometimes a book gets lost in the post or a publishing house forgets to send out the review copy. With the receipt of the review copy, a six month-deadline starts; it is within this timeframe that we expect our reviewers to send in their first draft. One month before the due date, a "reminder" is sent asking for the status of the review/review essay. Depending upon the reviewer's schedule and the status of the review, we may, at this point, arrange a new deadline. Obviously, this offer often is appreciated! The percentage of reviewers who need more time than the suggested six months is substantial; nevertheless, many reviewers do send in their reviews on time! [10]

After receiving the review/review essay, it is evaluated vis-à-vis content (especially consistency, comprehension of argumentation, etc.) and *FQS* [guidelines for manuscripts](#). In particular, one of the guidelines of *FQS* that we foster—in addition to all others—is to structure the review/review essay by using subheadings. The use of subheadings makes it easier to read a text on the screen without printing it out; in addition, such "formalization" helps to establish a clear structure and a specific profile for *FQS Review*, making it easily recognized. The "peer review" of reviews/review essays is similar to the peer review provided

for other contributions published in *FQS* (see [PENICHE & BERGOLD 2000](#); in general, MRUCK & MEY 2002/in press). [11]

The process of peer review takes place within three days after the first draft is received. Comments and suggestions are directly noted within the text. The commented version is sent back to the reviewer with the request to revise the draft within ten days. (In some cases several revision cycles are necessary until a review meets the expectations of the editors.) After the revision phase (which also includes a final copy editing of the manuscript by a native speaker) is completed, the corresponding HTML-file is prepared and the reviewer is again contacted for a "final check" (a procedure analogous to the reading of a "print proof"). During this stage, the author has the opportunity to make last corrections. Upon receipt of the "Imprimatur," a PDF-file is created. Additionally, the abstracts (for English contributions) are translated into German and Spanish. [12]

From the start of this step by step procedure (sending the copy of the media unit to the reviewer) until the publication of the review/review essay, we interact a lot with the authors: more than 800 e-mails have been sent to reviewers for the 74 reviews published to date. Reviewers have sent more or less the same numbers of e-mails back to us. This mail correspondence means an average contact frequency of about 20 mails per contribution. So far, about 400 e-mails had been sent to publishing houses, most of them to order review copies or to inform them that a review had been published. Two hundred messages have been sent to reviewers who requested a review copy to inform them the requested review copy was no longer available. Although the number of mail contacts may seem to be rather high and work intensive, this procedure makes sense and is necessary. First, it allows us to explain the overall process and the specific structure of *FQS* Review (in most cases the reviewers appreciate this effort, see the [Appendix](#)). Secondly, by taking the reviewer at the hand, we make sure that the reviews are actually completed and published (of great importance to the publishing houses with whom we cooperate). In *FQS*, the relation of uncompleted reviews to posted media units is about 1:10, an extraordinary high percentage, in both our opinion and that of the publishing houses, according to their feedback. Finally, this procedure helps to fulfill our aim to publish reviews shortly after the media units themselves are published. This is a relevant function that obviously is better realized within *FQS* Review as an online journal than could be accomplished in traditional print journals, due to their time and place constraints (see [MEY 2000](#)). [13]

2.4 ... to the readers

Reviews/review essays are published immediately after the revisions are done and the final HTML- and PDF-files have been created. Once a month, we inform our readership of new reviews (as well as other new contributions to *FQS*) via our [Newsletter](#). In addition, we inform potential readers about the publication of reviews through diverse international mailing lists, again, after the respective issue is published. [14]

FQS Reviews/review essays are more frequently read now than they were in the early days. In the beginning we counted only a few requests and downloads compared to other FQS contributions. But, as the numbers of [accesses to FQS sites](#) increased, so too did the hits for reviews. Besides such "quantitative" criteria, we do not have further systematic evaluation tools (e.g. the possibility to respond directly via our [discussion board](#), which is still used infrequently). We do not know whether or what number of readers do/do not appreciate the reviews and we do not know whether they—after reading such a review—decide to read (and/or buy) the reviewed media unit or not. Nonetheless, some unsystematic anecdotal information becomes available sporadically; some reviewers forward private e-mails that they have received from readers. In other cases, the author(s) or editor(s) of a reviewed book have contacted us and commented on the reviews. Responses from publishing houses are infrequent too; nonetheless, more and more publishers are citing passages taken from the reviews or link directly to the published reviews from their own sites. Naturally, this happens often only when the media unit has been positively reviewed! [15]

3. Concluding Remarks

In summary, FQS Review has made great leaps in accentuating (and realizing) reviews as journal contributions in their own right. Our small success demonstrates that the act of reviewing can be an important part of scientific activities—supporting scientific exchange. This seems to be a growing trend and develops beyond just our own concerns; for example, since the end of 2001, a new review bulletin for psychology and the social sciences, "Psychologische Revue," specializes by publishing only reviews. Like FQS, this journal attempts to foster a lively discussion and exchange. In addition to reviews, it publishes "Double Reviews" to show different views on the same media unit or it invites reviews of "Classics" to bring in fresh views on "old" books. [16]

Such "Multiple Reviews" (two, three, or more) are also published in FQS, but—as mentioned above—our effort to foster a lively exchange has not yet been as successful as we had hoped it to be when we started FQS and FQS Review. Perhaps scientific exchange cannot be guaranteed and/or compelled, especially if this exchange/dialog is exposed to the public (and not occurring between two people in "private e-mails"). Nonetheless, we continue our efforts and we now know (more than at the beginning) that we need time to initiate such dialogues, dealing as we do with long-term socialization processes inside scientific communities with all kinds of developmental resistance (in regards to boundaries in online-publishing; see MRUCK & MEY 2001/in press). As a consequence, it may be that reviews lose their "flavor" of just being "complimentary reviews"—to use the potential of reviews means to start discussions beyond the (anticipated) sensitivities.⁴ [17]

4 Attention to the kinds of (anticipated) sensitivities we some times get from reviewers during the publishing process: e.g. in some cases we asked to be provided with explications or more precise description of some ideas in the book. We often get the feedback that the reviewer was not at all satisfied with some chapters and so s/he preferred not to mention these chapters. This is a "reservation" we do (and can) not accept because in this way reviews do not fulfill their function to inform and to give orientation to the readers (as well as give away the possible

Another aim of *FQS* (and *FQS Review*) is to foster exchange and discussion through crossing language barriers and to bring national studies/research activities to a broader audience, independent of the original language of the researcher. Typically in *FQS Review*, the language of the media unit author and the language of the reviewer is the same. In the case of the 57 German and 27 English reviews/review essays already published, it is lamentable that English written media units are hardly ever reviewed in German. It is difficult to find German reviewers who are interested in reviewing English language books; only five times has an English language written media unit has been reviewed in German. This means that English titles (respectively specific discourses, which are different from the German ones) do not get sufficient attention. The same disproportion holds sway in regard to media units written in German. English reviews of German titles are rare: only three English reviews of German media units (and one in French resp. Spanish) exist up to now. In all cases, these are translations of a German review/review essay. In the past, we tried to balance the disproportion with the publication of abstracts in Spanish, German and English. In the future our efforts will continue to foster more frequent transnational exchange. I take pleasure, therefore, in welcoming [Kip JONES](#) to *FQS* who, since February 2002, is the Associate Book Review Editor of *FQS*. Together we will edit the planned [Special Issue: FQS Book Review II](#), and he specifically will support us in developing the transnational perspective of *FQS Review*. [18]

Others interested in *FQS* are invited to support us too: perhaps the newly published reviews will encourage you to participate actively in *FQS Review*. I hope that all of the reviews in this issue attract your interest and I wish you fruitful reading. If you have "discovered" *FQS* for the first time, I hope that you will discover here and in the previous issues some interesting contributions to the rubric *FQS Review*—and to *FQS* in general. [19]

Appendix: Selected Feedback During the Last Two Years

- I've finished the review and included all your helpful suggestions ... (15. February 2002)
- Thanks! Good suggestions – see enclosed modified ms. (10. February 2002)
- Wow. I really should have caught so many of those editorial problems! You are very good at this. I really appreciate your good eye and will work on this and get it to you by the middle of next week. (7. December 2001)
- Thanks for the email, the gracious comments, and the invitation. (17. October 2001)

potential of discursive argumentation). More drastically, some reviewers ask us to read/revise the review in a way so that the author(s) / editor(s) of the media would not feel too strongly criticized. In such cases we remind our reviewers of the guidelines that Contemporary Psychology' editors give to their reviewers: "Criticize the text, the ideas, the logic, the accuracy, not the author." We know that the separation between the author and the author's book is often difficult and, in addition, we know that the idea of constructions and "pertinent" criticism is spoken often only in general by scientists, stopping at the point where it might invite criticism of their own work. Our efforts are to make clear that the aim is to evaluate the media unit compared with the self formulated intention of the author(s)/editor(s)—this means the target is not the author(s) as (an) individual(s) or his/her/their whole work at all.

- Appreciate your comments and I agree. (19. September 2001)
- I thought all your suggestions well taken and appreciate receiving them. Hope this will work now. If not, get back to me. (18. September 2001)
- I have taken into account your useful comments and tried to do most of what you recommended. However, I after thinking hard, I felt that I would rather not provide a longer introduction than the one I wrote as a first paragraph. The reason ... (22. November 2000)
- Thank you for your comments, they were very useful and I think they have helped to improve my book review immensely. (15. November 2000)
- ... sind Sie eigentlich gelegentlich für Ihre Arbeit gelobt worden (oder passiert das ständig)? Wenn nicht möchte ich das nachholen: für die inhaltliche Arbeit, die Betreuung und die Geduld! (16. May 2002)
- Ihre konstruktiven Verbesserungsvorschläge meine Rezension betreffend bin ich Ihnen dankbar. (29. April 2002)
- Es ist mir immer ein Vergnügen, mit Ihnen zusammenzuarbeiten und ich bewundere die Sorgfalt, mit der Sie Ihrer Aufgabe nachgehen. Weiterhin viel Erfolg! (20. April 2002)
- Manches an den bibliographischen Angaben scheint mir überdeterminiert, da man das über die online-Buchhändler problemlos ja mitkriegt ... Andererseits verstehe ich die Intention, komplette Angaben zu liefern ... (22. March 2002)
- Danke für die schnelle und gründliche Bearbeitung. Habe alles korrigiert. (4. March 2002)
- Die Idee, den Text auch denjenigen zugänglich zu machen, die das Deutsche nicht beherrschen, ist ausgezeichnet. In der Tat ist das ja auch der unbestreitbare Vorteil der Internet-Publikation und ihre Verdienste in dieser Hinsicht sind nur zu begrüßen. (25. February 2002)
- ich bin erfreut, wie gründlich Sie meinen Beitrag gelesen haben und danke für die hilfreichen Kommentierungen und Verbesserungsvorschläge. (21. February 2002)
- anbei die überarbeitete Fassung des Reviews. Ich hoffe, Ihre Vorschläge zu Ihrer Zufriedenheit eingearbeitet zu haben; ihre Anmerkungen waren doch sehr hilfreich und willkommen. (20. August 2001)
- [Die] schnelle und äußerst konstruktive Rückmeldung hat mich sehr gefreut. Herzlichen Dank dafür! (18. July 2001)
- vielen Dank für Ihre ausführliche Rückmeldung zu der Rezension. Ich kann den meisten ihrer Kommentare nur zustimmen und werde sie am Wochenende einarbeiten. (21. June 2001)
- Es war wieder einmal sehr schön was für FQS zu schreiben und mit Euch zusammenzuarbeiten! (10. June 2001)
- haben Sie vielen Dank für die prompte und ausführliche Reaktion. (18. May 2001)
- Das ist ja eine Menge Arbeit, die Sie sich da gemacht haben. Vielen Dank. (11. May 2001)

- vielen Dank für Ihre Rückmeldung zu der Rezension. Ich habe mich gleich noch einmal dran gesetzt und maile Ihnen die überarbeitete Fassung zurück. ... Ihr Eindruck, dass es sich um eine Textsammlung zu interessanten Themen handelt, trügt nicht so ganz, ich habe diese Anregung im Resümee noch einmal aufgegriffen. (5. May 2001)
- vielen Dank für ihre Anregungen und Korrekturen. Tut mir leid, dass es an meiner Rezension noch so viel zu ändern gibt. Ich werde mich umgehend dransetzen. (25. April 2001)
- Ich hoffe, der Text ist nun in Ihrem Sinne "optimiert". Ich bedanke mich für Ihre konstruktiven Hinweise (10. April 2001)
- Das war ja eine prompte Antwort von Ihnen. ... Ich werde ihre Vorschläge und Anregungen am Sonntag einbauen und Ihnen dann die Datei zurückschicken. (20. September 2000)

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