The 1000-Page Question[1]

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When teaching at workshops on qualitative research, one may sometimes receive a question like this:

How shall I find a method to analyze the 1000 pages of interview transcripts I have collected?

The following presentation focuses on how to answer this question.

Dismiss or Interpret the 1000-Page Question?

A first impulsive answer to the 1000-page question is to dismiss it—*Never pose that question!* When an interview project has been conducted in such a way that the 1000- page question is asked, the question can no longer be answered. A more adequate reply would then be: *Never conduct interview research in such a way that you arrive at a situation where you ask such a question.*

The present approach goes further than merely dismissing the question. By taking a closer look at the wording of the 1000-page question, the implied conception of the qualitative research may be spelled out. The question is not only posed too late, it is also leading. All questions are leading; they may be opening or closing, productive or counterproductive. In interview research, too much emphasis has been given to the influence of leading questions in the interview situation, whereas the leading influence of questions to the interview texts in the analysis has been neglected. The 1000-page question as formulated above leads in a wrong direction; it is closing and unproductive.

A lead for the analysis of the question is taken from Antonioni's movie *The Reporter.* In one scene, an African witch doctor is interviewed by the white reporter. To one of the questions the witch doctor replies something like this: "I will not answer your question. My answer would tell less about me than your question tells about yourself."

What Does the 1000-Page Question Mean?

The Present Approach

The *material* of the present analysis is the 17 words of the 1000-page question as formulated above. The *purpose* of the analysis is to uncover the meaning of the question, making explicit its presuppositions and thereby the implicit conceptions of qualitative research it implies. The general interest is preventive; it is an attempt to outline modes of conducting interview research so that a researcher never gets into a situation where he feels compelled to ask the 1000-page question. The *method* of the analysis is discussed in the concluding section. The general form of the analysis is to select seven key words of the 1000-page question and analyze them separately.

The Seven Key Words

How (3) shall I find a *method* (4) to *analyze* (7) the *1000* (2) pages of interview *transcripts* (5) I *have* (1) *collected* (6)?

1. *Have*—too late!

The answer is simple—the question is posed too late.

Never pose the question of how to analyze transcripts after the interviews have been conducted—it is too late to start thinking when the interviewing is done. The answer here parallels that of a statistician: Consult me about the data analysis before you collect your data.

Think about how the interviews are to be analyzed before the interviews are conducted. The method of analysis decided—or at least considered—will then guide the formulation of the interview guide, the interview process, and the transcription of the interviews. Every phase in an interview project involves decisions which provide constraints in the later phases of the project. Thus transcriptions may be a verbatim recording of everything said in the original vernacular form, or they may be edited into a more readable written style. If the analysis were to focus on the use of linguistic forms, for example, in a stress interview, or on the effects of leading questions, 1000 pages of edited transcripts would be worthless.

The method of analysis should not only be planned in advance of interviewing, but it may also, in varying extents, be built into the interview situation itself. A clarification of the meaning of what is said may here take the simple form of "I understand that the meaning of what you just said is...." Further, the interviewer's hypotheses may be attempted, confirmed, or unconfirmed during the course of the research interview, similar

to a job interview where the interviewer is continually testing the hypothesis about whether the interviewed applicant is qualified for the job. During a clinical interview, more in-depth interpretations of what is said may be conducted in relation to a patient's life history.

In such forms of *on-the-line-interpretation*, considerable parts of the analysis are *pushed forward* into the interview situation itself. The final analysis then becomes not only easier and more amenable, but it will also rest on more secure ground. Put strongly, the ideal interview is already analyzed when the tape recorder is shut off. And in a stronger version, the analysis is validated during the interview itself. Such an *on-the-spot-verification* is discussed below (4). There are social and ethical restraints on how far the analysis of meaning can be undertaken during the interview itself. It may, however, serve as a methodic ideal for interview research.

The alternative reformulation of the 1000-page question involves a change of the temporal form: How shall I conduct my interviews so that their meaning can be analyzed in a coherent and creative way?

2. *1000 pages*—too much!

The answer to this quantitative part of the question is also simple—1000 pages of transcripts is too much to handle in a meaningful way.

The precise meaning of the question may depend on its formulation. When posed in a despairing voice, it may indicate a situation of being overwhelmed by an enormous amount of qualitative data, of being completely lost in a jungle of transcriptions. The meaning of the question may then be: Rescue me from my 1000 pages; I cannot find my way out of the labyrinth.

The same question may have another meaning when posed in a more assertive voice. A young, diligent scholar has done his empirical duty, documented his scientific attitude by gathering the large amounts of data. He now awaits the expert's praise and advice about how to treat the data. The question may here involve a *reversed positivism*, a quest for scientific respectability by mirroring the positivist emphasis on large quantities of quantitative data with just as large quantities of qualitative data.

Whether posed in a despairing or an assertive voice, the formulation of the question leads in a wrong direction. The emphasis is on the form—pages—and the quantity—1000—of the

transcripts rather than on the content and the qualitative meanings of what is said.

And in a quantitative dimension, 1000 pages of transcripts is generally too much to handle. The material is too large to overview and to work out the depth of the meaning of that which is said. The analysis is too time consuming and is likely to result in a superficial analysis, unfinished due to external time constraints.

Should there be definite reasons for needing such a large amount of interview material—1000 pages correspond to 30 to 40 hours of interviews. The reasons for the large quantity should be explicitly formulated before the interviews are conducted. It may then turn out that fewer interviews are sufficient, or that the purpose of the investigation is better served by questionnaires and survey methods.

A rephrasing of the 1000-page question, involving a change in emphasis from quantity to meaning, could be: How do I go about finding the meaning of the many interesting and complex stories my interviewees told me?

3. *How*—what and why first

Do not pose the question of how to analyze interviews before the answers to the what and the why of an investigation have been given. Content precedes method.

By the analysis of an interview, what is *not* said may be just as important as what *is* said in the interview. In the question analyzed here, the question of *how* is posed without including the *what* and the *why* of the investigation.

The mode of analysis depends on *what* is analyzed, *what* is the subject matter of the interview. Two distinctions are mentioned here—the concept of the interviewer as an informant or representative, and the level of interpretation attempted (Kvale, 1987a). The first distinction concerns whether the subject matter of the investigation is, for example, a social situation where the interviewee is a witness, an *informant*, or whether the interviewee himself is of main interest, in which case the focus is on what his statements about the social situation tell about the interviewee himself as a *representative* of a specific group investigated. The former, that of informant perspective, concerns a veridical reading of what the interviewee's statements say about the world; the latter representative perspective involves a symptomatic reading of what the statements say about the person interviewed.

The second distinction on the *what* of the investigation concerns context or *level of interpretation.* Three relevant levels may be: (a) the interviewee's own understanding of what he is saying, (b) a more general, commonsense conception of the meaning of what he is saying, and (c) a theoretical level of interpretation of what he is saying.

The method of analysis further depends on the *why* of the interview, on the purpose and the research interests guiding the investigation. If a study consists of *testing a hypothesis* about different attitudes, say of men and women toward housework, then the interviews and their analysis should be systematic and conducted in the same way for the two groups in order to test possible differences between them. The analysis, be it categorization or a meaning condensation of the answer given, should then be conducted systematically and be comparable for the two groups. For an *explorative* purpose, however, it will be more relevant for the analysis, as well as for the interviewing itself, to follow up the interesting aspects of what is said in order to more intensively probe the different venues opened by the interview (Tesch, 1988).

The specification of the subject matter and the purpose of an interview study could be continued, specified further, or made in other ways than suggested here. What is important is that the what and the why of the investigation are specified before a method of analysis is chosen.

In current interview research there are some atheoretical trends. It is the exception rather than the rule that a report of an interview study starts with the review of the literature in the area, or that it formulates a theoretical conception of what is investigated. And there may again here be a positivism in reverse, a mere replacement of the so-called hard quantitative methods of the positivist social science with qualitative methods of a humanized positivism. Both emphasize the method at the expense of the subject matter and the research interest.

In conclusion, the 1000-page question can thus be reformulated: How do I go about finding out what the interview tells about what I want to know?

4. *Methodically* versus true knowledge

The methodological aspect of the 1000-page question cannot be answered in the way it is formulated. There is no standard method of interview analysis. The question for a method may involve an emphasis on techniques and reliability and a deemphasis on knowledge and validity.

There are no textbooks of standard techniques of analysis corresponding to the multitude of textbooks on statistical analysis in the social sciences. This may be due to the relative novelty and the small extent of cross-disciplinary communication about qualitative analysis in the human sciences. The lack of textbooks on qualitative analysis may, however, also be due to the richness and the complexity of the subject matter, for example, the different conceptions of the nature of an interview transcript (5). Method originally means *way to the goal.* Today, qualitative analyses are used for a variety of purposes which are rarely explicitly stated. It is, then, difficult to outline the road when the goal is in the fog.

There do exist some general approaches to the analysis of qualitative material with different technical procedures. Four main approaches are mentioned here: an *impressionistic,* intuitive reading of the transcripts or listening to the tapes; *categorization* and coding of the transcripts; *condensation* of the content and the structure of meanings expressed; and *expansion* involving theoretical interpretation, conceptual analysis, drawing in metaphors, and explicating narrative structures (Mayring, 1983; Miles & Huberman, 1984).

An emphasis on method may strengthen a tendency toward a reification of the transcript (5). The stronger the emphasis on "method," the more likely an analysis reducing the text to a mere collection of single meanings, manifest or latent, or a simple counting of words. The originally lived face-to-face conversations disappear in the endless transcripts. The interview becomes closed; it no longer opens up to a horizon of possible meanings, to be explored, followed up, developed.

Method may also be used in the meaning of obtaining *intersubjectively reliable* results. The question then concerns how different readers can arrive at the same meanings when analyzing an interview. This may reflect a common myth that qualitative research leads to as many interpretations as there are researchers. When using a specific method with a specific purpose—for example, categorization of the statements of different groups of subjects toward an issue—then a high intersubjective reproducibility of the categorization is desirable. The results of the comparison should not be influenced by who categorized the answers of the groups. A strict requirement of intersubjective reliability to all forms of interview analysis may, however, lead to a tyranny of the lowest possible denominator: An interpretation is only reliable when seen by everyone, a criterion which may lead to a trivialization of the interpretations. This may again involve a *consensualist* con-

ception of truth: An observation or an interpretation is only considered valid if it can be repeated by everyone, irrespective of the quality of the observations and the argumentation.

The emphasis on *method*—in the meaning of standardized techniques or of intersubjective reliability—may also involve a disregard of *knowledge and expertise* by the analysis of interviews. Much psychological research has an empiristic emphasis on naive observers and unprejudiced interpreters as a condition for obtaining objective results. In contrast, the present position emphasizes a knowledge of the subject matter, an expertise in the field studied as a presupposition for arriving at valid interpretations. There is no standard method, no *via regia,* to arrive at the essential meaning and the deeper implications of what is said in an interview.

In the phenomenological tradition a *phenomenological reduction,* a bracketing of one's preknowledge, has been advocated for the analysis of interviews. This involves, however, only a temporary bracketing—not an absence of knowledge of the phenomena investigated. The importance of *background knowledge* for observations in the physicist and the psychological laboratory, as well as by field observations, has been argued by Giorgi (1986). This involves an informed-being present, an educated looking: "Thus a sense of knowledge and guidance with respect to a situation or event [is] implied in the very meaning of observation" (p. 24). By an analysis of verbal protocols from children's mathematical problem solving, a knowledge of mathematics is a precondition for seeing the solutions the children did not see (Schonfield, 1985). In the psychoanalytical tradition, there has long been an emphasis on the *competence* of the analyst for making psychoanalytical observations and interpretations (Spence, 1982).

The emphasis on *method* as involving standard methods and intersubjective reliability may detract from the question of the truth value of the results. This question involves the issue of what *validity* means in qualitative research (Kvale, 1987b). Again the specific forms of validation depend on the why and the what of an investigation, as, for example, on what level the interpretations are aimed (3). If the subject's self-understanding is the topic of investigation, then his *yes* or *no* to an interpretation is the validation criterion. If a critical commonsense understanding is the criterion, then an interviewee's conspicuously many *no's* may in some cases come to mean the opposite—a *yes.* And if the focus is on the psychoanalytic concept of resistance, neither the patient's *yes* or *no* may be taken at face value; both may be expressions of the patient's inner

resistance toward learning the truth about himself or herself. The forms of validating an interpretation thus depend on the questions asked to the *text.*

In a discussion of validity in human science research, Salner (1986) maintains that *the role of the researcher* has itself taken a methodological dimension. Among the requirements for the researcher are an acquaintance with philosophical analysis, an understanding of the development of rational thought in Western culture, a critical perspective on society, training in formal analysis of everyday language, expertise in a variety of research methods, an awareness of the ethical dimension of human science, and an aesthetic sensibility.

The alternative to the methodical emphasis of the 1000-page question is: How can the interviews assist me in obtaining a true knowledge of the phenomena I am investigating?

5. *Transcripts*—beware!

Do not conceive of the interviews as transcripts; the interviews are living conversations. Beware of transcripts.

The transcript is a transgression, a transformation of one narrative mode—oral discourse—to another narrative mode—written discourse. The interview is an evolving conversation between two people. The transcription is frozen in time, abstracted from the ongoing action and decontextualized from the social interaction. The face-to-face conversation becomes technified into transcripts. The abstracting and fragmenting of the originally lived interviews is further increased by the common form of reporting interview studies as an endless number of quotations taken out of the interview context.

The problems of an interview project appear in full with the transcripts (Kvale, 1987a). The transcripts constitute the bottleneck of the interview research. Whereas the original interview situations are often remembered as a positive experience, the analysis of the transcripts is more often remembered with despair. Reminiscences conjure up fantasies of being lost in the bureaucratic tangle of typed pages.

One reason for the problems encountered with the transcriptions may be the sheer quantity of pages (2). A further reason may be the quality of the interviews themselves; the interviewer may not have clarified sufficiently throughout the interview the meaning of what was said (1), which may again be related to a lack of clarification of the nature of the subject matter and of the purpose of an investigation (3). There is no reason why the interview researcher should only start to think

systematically when the transcripts have arrived; that is too late. Two further reasons for the struggle with the interview transcripts are suggested here: the difference in modality between the oral and the written discourse, and the issue of what is the nature of a transcript.

The oral and the written discourse. Trans-scribe means to trans-form, to change, from one mode to another. All transcripts contain an element of interpretation. The emphasis on exact verbatim transcripts versus edited and more readable transcripts depends on the nature of the material and the purpose of the investigation. Whatever decisions are made here, the procedures of transcription should be made explicit to the reader.

Interview transcriptions are often boring to read; ennui ensues in face of all the repetitions, the incomplete sentences, the many digressions, and so on. Compared with the interview situation, there is a definite loss of vividness; the intonation of the voice and the bodily expressions accompanying what is said are lacking. The voice may be retained on the tape, the facial expressions on videotape. Neither, however, captures the living persons of the interview situation. Some of the complexity and richness of the interview situation can be indicated in the transcription by stating, for example, tone of the voice, pauses, or hesitation. The issue of interviewer reliability, and of coder reliability, has been frequently discussed in interview research. A *transcriber reliability* has received less attention. It is a fairly simple experiment to let two persons transcribe the same taped interview, and then compare the often frequent differences between the two transcriptions. Even with detailed typing instructions, it may be difficult to reach a full agreement on what was said, what is the beginning and the end of a sentence, and what is a pause.

The rather interpretative basis of the transcripts is often forgotten by the analysis, where the transcripts tend to become a rock-bottom basis for the ensuing interpretations.

The problems with the transcripts of interview research are, however, due less to the technicalities of transcription than to inherent *differences of an oral and a written mode of discourse.* The interview takes place in a context of which the spatial, temporal, and social dimensions are immediately given to the participants of the face-to-face conversation but not to the reader of the transcript. In contrast to the taped interview, a novel will report the immediate context of a conversation to the extent the author finds it relevant for the story he wants to

tell. The transcripts are *decontextualized* conversations. Accepting as a main premise of interpretation that meaning depends on context, the transcripts make for an impoverished basis for interpretation.

Further, the often *incoherent form* of the language of the interview transcripts, which do not live up to the requirements of a written discourse, may be perfectly appropriate for communication in the interview situation. Here the immediate context is given, the words followed up and accompanied by facial expressions and bodily gestures. The verbatim transcribed oral language may, however, appear as incoherent and confused speech, thus implying a lower level of intellectual functioning. An interviewee reading verbatim transcripts of what he or she has said may become offended and refuse any further cooperation and use of what he or she has said. And the publication of verbatim interview transcriptions may, besides their often being difficult and boring to read, also involve an unethical stigmatization of specific persons or groups of people.

The transcriptions are *de-temporalized*; a living, ongoing conversation is frozen into a written text. The words of the conversation, as fleeting as the steps of an improvised dance, are fixated into static written words, and open for repeated public inspections. The words of the transcripts obtain a solidity which was not intended in the immediate conversational context. The flow of conversation with its open horizon of possible directions and meanings to be followed up is replaced by the fixated, stable written words. The "textification" of the interview conversations leads to an objectivation of the subjective, to an "experiential bureaucracy."

In a conversation, we normally have an immediate emphatic access to the meaning of what the other says. The tape-recorded words and the ensuing transcript of an interview tend to become an opaque screen between the researcher and the original situation. Attention is drawn toward the formal language recorded, and the emphatically experienced lived meanings of the original conversation fade away. The transcripts tend to become some rock-bottom verbal data of interview research rather than means to evoke and revive the original interview situation. In this respect it should not be overlooked that the development of psychoanalytic theory on the basis of therapeutic interviews was accomplished without tape-recorders and transcripts.

The transcripts should not be the subject matter of an interview study, as implied by the 1000-page question, but rather the means or tools for the interpretation of what was said in the interview. The current development of *computer-based analysis* of qualitative material is ambiguous in this respect. The use of computers in qualitative analysis may reinforce the existing trend toward reifying the transcripts, dismissing their basis in a lived social situation. The computer programs for interview texts may, however, as argued by Tesch (1987), save the qualitative researcher the many mechanical tasks of analysis. The computer analysis may, by its diversity and flexibility, then open the way for meaningful and creative approaches in the interpretation of interviews.

What is a transcript? Having pointed to the basis of an interview transcript in an oral mode of discourse, the next issue concerns how to conceive of the resulting transcript.

A transcript may be regarded as merely a *recorded conversation*. The task of understanding the written conversation may then follow the mode of understanding meaning of ordinary conversations. Another conception of the transcript may be to see the questions and answers as a series of *stimulus-response* chains to be analyzed quantitatively as verbal behavior (Mishler, 1986).

In a phenomenological approach, the transcripts may be regarded as an expression of how a *subject experiences* his world, and the interview analysis becomes a condensation and analysis of the meaning and the structure of the experience (Giorgi, 1975).

The transcripts may further be conceived as texts to be interpreted in accordance with the *hermeneutic interpretation of literary texts* (Kvale, 1983). While the tradition of the hermeneutic interpretation may lend itself to the subtleties and issues of the understanding of meaning, the differences between interview transcripts and literary texts should not be overlooked. The distinction between the oral and the written mode has been mentioned. Hereto comes the eminent character of literary texts, which have been written with the aim of public communication, as compared with the often trivial character of the transcripts from an interview as a spontaneous private conversation.

The transcripts may also be regarded as *linguistic data* constituted in a communicative situation. The transcripts may be analyzed by the tools of linguistic analysis, focusing on gram-

matical forms, style of language, and so on (Polkinghorne, 1983).

The transcripts may be considered as recordings of *dialogues* in a philosophical sense. The transcripts are then to be analyzed as rational discourse, as a Socratic search for truth, involving a logical analysis of the validity of the arguments.

And the transcripts may be considered as *narratives*, as the telling of a story to be analyzed by the principles derived from analyzing folk tales and other narrative forms. Mishler (1986) has argued in favor of the narrative nature of the research interview and has shown how the narrative analyses developed in the humanities can be applied to research interviews in the human sciences.

The different conceptions of what an interview transcript is also involves different conceptions of who the interviewee is: a conversation partner, a respondent, an experiencing subject, an author, a common language user, a philosophical opponent, or a storyteller. The different conceptions of the interview and of the interviewee lead to different methods for analyzing the transcripts.

The different conceptions or metaphors for the interview transcripts may enrich and broaden the analysis of the meaning of the interviews, particularly by drawing on the long tradition of the study of written texts in the humanities. The literary metaphors may, however, also lead away from developing the specific values of the qualitative research interview—a living conversation with an active and directing listener, with the possibilities of on-the-line interpretation and on-the-spot verification of the meaning of what the interviewee says within its natural context.

In conclusion, the alternatives to the transcription-emphasis of the 1000-page question is: How do I analyze what my interviewees told me in order to enrich and deepen the meaning of what they said?

6. *Collected* versus coauthored

The interviewee's statements are not collected—they are coauthored by the interviewer.

The inter-view is an inter-subjective enterprise of two persons talking about common themes of interest. The interviewer does not merely collect statements like gathering small stones on a beach. The questions of the interviewer lead up to the dimensions of a theme the interviewee will address, and the

interviewer's active listening and his following up of the answers codetermine the course of conversation.

There exists a general tendency to take the result of a social interaction, when first arrived at, as given, thereby forgetting the original discourse and the social coconstitution of the final result. This *reification* may be strengthened by the transcripts of the interviews; the sheer quantity and fixated written form take over, and the original face-to-face interaction of the interview situation fades away.

A reification of the jointly produced interview into a trancription of collected statements has consequences in a social and a temporal dimension. First, the forgetting of the joint social creation of the interview statements and the neglect of the interviewer's constructive contributions to the answers produced may lead to a biased view of the interview as merely reflecting the interviewee, with the possible exception of the influence of directly leading questions. The alternative approach of deliberately using the role of the interviewer as a coproducer and a coauthor of the interview, and of reflecting on the social constitution of the interview, is then overlooked.

Second, the focus on the transcripts as a collection of statements may freeze the interview into finished entities rather than into stepping stones toward a continuous unfolding of the meaning of what was said. In the latter case, the analysis of the transcribed interviews is a continuation of the conversation which started in the interview situation. The interviewee's answers open up a horizon of possible meanings to be pursued during the later conversational analysis with the interview text. The focus of the analysis slips from what has already been said, going beyond the immediately given to what could have been said.

The continued dialogue with the text may lead to a renewed conversation with the interviewee, sharing and developing the zone of possible meanings of the original interview. More often, the analysis will be in the form of an imagined dialogue with the text, unfolding its horizon of possible meanings.

The alternative to the "stamp collecting" version of the 1000-page question is: How do I carry on the dialogue with the text which I have coauthored with the interviewee?

7. *Analyze* versus narrate

Do not let the analysis balloon, inflate, so that it covers the major time of an interview project.

The analysis of the interview takes place between the initial story told by the interviewee to the researcher and the final story told by the researcher to his audience. *Analysis* means to separate something into parts or elements. The transcription of the interview (5) and the conception of the interview as a collection of statements (6) may promote a fragmentation of the story told by the interviewee into separate parts, be it single paragraphs, sentences, or words. It is then easily forgotten that in open, nondirective interviews, the interviewee tells a story or several stories to the researcher and that the transcript itself may then approximate the form of a narrative text.

The narrative aspects of the interview have been rather neglected. Mishler (1986) has pointed to the many interpretative possibilities of regarding interviews as narratives, emphasizing the temporal, the social, and the meaning structure of narratives. He also suggests that the earlier dominating conception of interviews as responses emitted to stimuli may, already in the interview situation, have suppressed the spontaneous tendencies of people to tell stories.

The structures and functions of the narratives of folktales and literature worked out in the humanities may be used to reflect and analyze the narrative's structure employed by the interviewee. The interview analysis may be treated as a form of narrative, as a continuation of the story told by the interviewee. The analysis of what was said leads to a new story to be told, a story developing the themes of the original narrative. The analysis may also be a condensation or reconstruction of the many stories told by the different people into a richer, more condensed, and coherent story than the many scattered stories of the different interviewees.

A good storyteller has in mind a main point and an intended end of the story that he wants to get through to his listeners. Also, the interview analyst may keep his goal and audience in mind when conducting the analysis, working toward a good and convincing story. Keeping the end result in mind during the analysis, the form of the final report may be envisaged as a coherent story involving metaphors, possibly including visual presentations of the conceptual structures to be arrived at, and thus enriching and broadening the understanding.

A narrative approach to the interview analysis, going back to the original story and anticipating the final story to be told, may counter getting lost in the jungle of transcripts. A focus on the interview as a narrative may even make the transcripts

better reading, in that the original interview is deliberately created in a more narrative form. Learning from radio interviewers, the research interviewer may, for example, start by describing the immediate context of the conversation, inviting the reader into the living room of the interviewee, as well as giving the interviewee an occasion to comment on his description of that common situation. And the interview may be conducted with respect to creating a good story, clarifying and making the main points clear during the interview.

In conclusion, interview research considered as a narrative supports a unity of form between the original interview situation, the analysis, and the final report.

The alternative question to the *analysis* version of the 1000-page question then becomes: How can I reconstruct the original story told to me by the interviewee to a story I want to tell my audience?

Concluding Comment on Method of Analysis

A question about interview research was posed in the introduction: How shall I find a method to analyze the 1000 pages of interview transcripts I have collected? The answer given was that the question was posed too late to give a satisfactory answer and that the formulation of the question made it difficult to answer. The wording of the question was then analyzed in detail with the purpose of bringing its implicit presuppositions of interview research into the open and in the general interest of making the question superfluous.

No standardized method of analysis was applied to the question; rather, a variety of approaches was tried in order to bring out the meaning of the question. The general structure of the analysis consisted of selecting seven key words from the 17-word sentence and analyzing them separately. The analysis was, however, not decontextualized; by the analysis of the separate words it was attempted to bring in the context of the question. And there were continuous overlappings between the meanings developed from the seven words, thus pointing to common threads of underlying meanings of the question.

Guesses were made as to the intonation of the voice in order to find the implied meanings, as to whether the emphasis on the *1000 pages* was in a despairing or an assertive voice. Some brief attempts at an etymological analysis were made concerning terms such as *method, transcribe,* and *analyze.* Some metaphors were suggested, although not fully developed, for example, the transcripts as "bureaucratized experiences."

The original sentence was rephrased in different forms leading to different directions of meanings. The rephrasing of the original 1000-page question showed some of the possibilities of meanings that the original formulation of the question closed off. This presupposes a certain background knowledge of the area of interview research in order to see some of the possibilities the question closes off. The analysis took the form of the imagined dialogue, an attempt to answer the original 1000-page question by questioning its possible meanings. The analysis approached in part a question-answer sequence of an imagined conversation resulting in a coauthored text, a story told about the interview research, approaching a narrative, imagined and told. The main point of the analysis was that different questions to the transcripts lead to different types of answers, and more specifically, that the original wording of the 1000-page question leads in wrong directions. The rephrasing of the original question attempted to lead in directions more constructive for the current development of qualitative research.

It may be objected that the analysis of the 1000-page question has been too brief and superficial, that it has not been comprehensive enough to really develop and go into the complex meanings of the original question. The present analysis of the 17-word question has required many pages and almost an hour to present. The topic of the original question concerned 1000 pages of interview transcripts of questions and answers. With approximately 200 words per page, you are welcome to compute the pages and time required for a corresponding analysis and presentation of the meaning of the 200,000 words.

Note

1. Paper presented at the Sixth Human Science Research Conference, Ottawa, May 26-30, 1987.

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