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# Re-use of Life Stories in an Ethnomethodological Research

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**Abstract**: In the Czech Republic and Slovakia, the age of life history archives with a wider access for the social scientists is only coming. However, secondary analysis of qualitative data is not limited to documents that are stored in public archives. It happens quite often that researchers make use of an interview transcript, or a part of it, which has originally been gathered for a different occasion. Thus, they use these data for studying new topics that are sometimes far from the original research questions and objectives.

In this paper we discuss some methodological problems arising from such practice. We show that, on one hand, the ethnomethodological perspective is especially demanding on the quality and the pinpoint accuracy of transcripts and the descriptions of the interviews by which the narratives were elicited (field memos). On the other hand, however, the ethnomethodological perspective orients scholars to formulate their research objectives according to what the data itself offers. The methodological problems related to the re-use of data can hardly be resolved in advance and on a general level.

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## 1. Introduction

Data re-use in life story or life history research has many forms. In no case it is limited to data that have been carefully catalogued and stored in an archive. In fact, it happens quite often that researchers make use of an interview transcript, or a part of it, which has originally been gathered for a different occasion. Though such practice is usually unsystematic and the re-used narratives or interviews do not normally represent majority of our data, we can see it virtually everywhere. The researchers utilise "unoriginal" life history data for teaching purposes, in a research collaboration, or for a comparison. Other times they engage in the re-use simply as a consequence of the fact that the topics of many of their research projects are interrelated and it would simply not be reasonable to confine, by principle, only to the most recent data. [1]

Today, archives of qualitative data are becoming a commonplace. These archives enable us to re-use our data more extensively and systematically. But their role must be understood in a much broader sense. Generally speaking, they help to promote and cultivate a culture of qualitative data management.[1] In the age of computerisation, successfully penetrating even the realm of non-numerical social research, the elements of such culture become crucial parts of research skills and habits. [2]

The designers and administrators of these archives encounter a number of ethical, technical, legal, and organisational problems. In this paper, we would like to discuss some methodological issues that are reflected in our experience from re-using life history data. We hope that such debate might be of use and interest to others who are either involved in similar projects or simply consider some form of unsystematic re-use of qualitative data. [3]

## 2. Background Information

In this section we provide some background information, essential for what we are going to explain further in the text. The information includes a brief characterisation of our collaborative research on the construction of communist power in former Czechoslovakia, and some remarks about an electronic archive of qualitative data, recently established in Prague. [4]

### 2.1 The research

Our collaborative work (KONOPÁSEK & KUSÁ 1999, 2000) was born out of overlapping interests. The interests were both theoretical and methodological. Sharing the concern how reality is constructed and maintained, we decided to study personal narratives on political screenings that took place in Czechoslovakia in 1970 at the advent of so-called normalisation.[2] We wanted to better understand the nature of the communist power. Our ambition above all,

1 We use the term "data management" roughly in the way HUBERMAN and MILES (1994) do: they mean by this concept "the operations needed for a systematic, coherent process of data collection, storage, and retrieval".

was to show the everyday social sources of this power, and its principal similarity to what we know from other places and other times. Simply put, we were interested in how the power of communists originated and obtained its strength from the very usual and ordinary actions we all do every day without ever realising all of their consequences. [5]

There was data re-use involved for both of us. Zuzana KUSÁ provided the "team" with the narratives.[3] However, these narratives were not recorded for the purpose of our joint analytical effort. The data had been gathered for her previous project on life history, a project that was aimed at Slovak intelligentsia families (KUSÁ 1992). Within that project, the nature of communist power was of no special interest to the researcher. The political screenings belonged to occasional topics discussed in the collected life accounts. Thus, from Zuzana's perspective, her data were re-used in 1999 for a new research objective (and even within a shifted methodological framework). In Zdenek KONOPÁSEK's case, it was even a double re-use. Double one, indeed, since he was analysing data he had not obtained in his own fieldwork. For him, the narratives were second-hand data. Moreover, all the data came from Slovakia. This fact had consequences not only for the way we argued about the power of communists (in former Czechoslovakia) but also, more importantly, for Zdenek's analytical competence. While he had almost no difficulties with the respondents' language[4], sometimes he lacked the tiny elements of the local knowledge that the narrators expected the interviewer would have had and that were necessary for understanding the stories (again, we will discuss these problems later). [6]

In any case, one thing is probably clear enough: we did not re-use the data in order to increase our database as much as possible. We did not use older and somebody else's data in order to add something more to what we already had, thereby gaining further information. We just wanted to write something together on the above-mentioned topic and did not feel pressure because of this particular collaboration to go out and do more interviews. Finally, our co-authored research papers were (visibly) empirically rooted in but a couple of rather short extracts of two life narratives. [7]

This fact may disclose a bit on our shared methodological liking. We did not intend to provide a rich social or historical description of the phenomena in question, as is usual, for instance, in oral history research, neither did we want to

2 "Normalisation" meant elimination, in every aspect of life, of all traces of the politically more liberal sixties. In other words, it meant a return from "experimental", de-stabilising socialism to a "normal" socialism. The screenings were massively organised check-ups of Party members and certain categories of professionals (regardless of their membership in the Party). There have been several waves of screenings during the decades of the communist period. The screenings we are talking about were organised at the outset of the 70s and had typically (but not exclusively) the form of asking about one's standpoints on the occupation of Czechoslovakia by the Soviet army in 1968.

3 Actually, we both had some narratives suitable for our purpose. But it happened (for several reasons) that at the end we analytically used only Zuzana's data. We will come back to it later.

4 Slovak and Czech languages are very close to each other. Besides, practical knowledge of the other language used to be part of a taken-for-granted cultural background on both sides of the Czech-Slovak border.

gradually saturate, through further empirical cases, some mutually related concepts that would represent noteworthy patterns and regularities, such as in the grounded theory tradition (GLASER & STRAUSS 1967; STRAUSS & CORBIN 1990). Instead, we studied in detail short sequences of narrative performances as well as interactions described in the narratives. We did so in order to *show* how ordered reality is created and re-created by its actors. We were not seeking for (already) ordered patterns and hierarchies; we just followed actors creating those patterns and hierarchies. And we tried to "see order in all points" (SACKS 1992, p.484)—an order, which is not something that underlies our interactions but rather something that is constantly produced and reproduced by these interactions. In other words we were interested in the *work of ordering* (LAW 1994). In how the ordered, the stable, the durable, the irreversible, the unequal, the hierarchical, the different (the list of words can continue even further) is produced and sustained. If one is to think of a widely comprehensible label for such an approach, it could be said that we attempted to grasp the communist power *ethnomethodologically*.[5] [8]

### 2.2 The archive

"Medard" is the ring name of an archive recently established in Prague, the Czech Republic.[6] In full it means something like "The Digital Archive of Soft Data". As suggested by the name, the ambition of the archive is not only to simply store textual, visual and audio data for further use, but also to store them in an electronic, computer-compatible format. There are several reasons for that (see also KLUGE & OPITZ in this issue). First, data in such a format are easier to handle (in terms of storage, safety, copying, distributing, editing etc.). Even more important is, that the data are immediately available for work with specialised software packages for qualitative analysis—such as Atlas.ti (Scientific Software Development, Berlin), probably the most widespread of all the packages in our home countries. [9]

The electronic archive is browsable via World Wide Web. It is not that the documents themselves are accessible directly on the net; rather, the data are stored on CD-ROMs and well-protected hard disks residing in off-line computers. What is publicly available, though, is an annotated database of research projects and archived documents (e.g., particular interviews). The database is searchable

5 The label (ethnomethodology) should be perceived in a relaxed manner here. We use it, perhaps too courageously, for the sake of simplicity. It does not refer, in this context, to a strictly and narrowly defined analytical approach. Rather, we want to make a link to one of the broadly defined and commonly recognised traditions of qualitative research. This tradition is characteristic by an anti-essentialist supposition that order is not something that explains, but something to be explained. The explanation of that order should consist of a detailed study of local practices and interactions, as performed by individual actors. In other words, it should consist of a study of "the natural as a matter *in the making*" (see GUBRIUM & HOLSTEIN 1997, p.38; italics in original) ... What label for our approach would come to mind if we were less afraid of using complicated expressions? Perhaps this one: ethnomethodologically inspired, but otherwise quite an eclectic research style.

6 BITRICH (2000). One of the authors of this paper has been directly involved in creation of this Czech (and—hopefully—Slovak) archive. The archive (http://medard.institut.cz) is one of the projects of the Virtual Institute (http://virtualni.institut.cz), a non-profit organisation that promotes internet-based technologies in the field of social sciences.

with keywords and several other parameters. The web page of the archive also contains guidelines for potential users and contributors to the archive, information about the legal issues related to the use and re-use of personal data, and some technical and methodological instructions related to the management of qualitative data. [10]

In our final discussion, we will describe how to eventually promote systematic re-use of qualitative data and to avoid abstract speculations with this particular archive in mind. Nonetheless, that does not mean that we will be explaining what to do with the Medard Archive in a close or distant future. A lot of what is going to be discussed has already been somehow, partially at least, embodied in its formal rules and structures (as well as in formal rules and structures of other similar archives in the world, which served us as models). The presented paper can thus be best seen as an attempt to justify and discuss, with the help of analytical examples, some of the features of archives such as Medard. [11]

## 3. Life Stories Re-used in an "Ethnomethodological" Way: An Illustration

In our study, we have chosen the situation of political screenings as an exemplary case for constructivist study of the communist power. At the first glance, the screenings seems to have a clear meaning: those with power are reaffirming their victory, their safely dominant position. The relation between those who organise the screenings and those who are screened looks highly asymmetrical. The members of the screening committees can do almost anything. Above all, they can ask dangerous questions. Their position allows that. It is firm and certain. The summoned people, on the other hand, seem to be powerless. They are challenged in many respects. Their positions and jobs are uncertain. Their identities are in question. Everybody knows the "right" answers, but it is so difficult even to open one's mouth! [12]

We attempted to challenge this conventional picture by considering the screenings as "trials of strength" (LATOUR 1988) of the communist regime within which a number of actors struggled over their own and others' identities, over numerous definitions and self-definitions. Thus, virtually everybody and everything was screened or tested at the occasion of these massive check-ups. In other words, we interpreted the screenings as a situation in which multitude of actors struggled over sustainable existence in a reasonably meaningful world by redefining each other. [13]

We cannot go in detail here, to show the complex situation. We will only briefly discuss a few rather isolated moments of our earlier analysis in order to illustrate some problems related to the specific re-use of qualitative data. [14]

### 3.1 How we selected the data to be analysed

It may look strange at the first glance. We did not want to make a comparison or do a re-analysis. We did not want to check somebody else's conclusions. We did not need as much data as possible and the secondary data we finally chose were our only material. They were not particularly "precious", hardly obtainable data—we could quite easily go out and find few people who would tell us their stories on the topic we were interested in. It would not cost us much. In short, we had no strong or specific reasons for data re-use.[7] So why did we decide to work with data that was not original? How did it come about? [15]

Well, it has been rather a simple and a very ordinary story. In the beginning, we discussed the problem of communist power. Zdenek was, at that time, starting his project directly aimed at this topic and Zuzana had already dealt with this issue—though not explicitly—many times. We settled on a collaboration. While discussing a more particular topic for a joint study, we came to the phenomenon of political screenings: during a dispute, Zuzana made a reference to a "screening story" contained in a life narrative of one of her earlier respondents.[8] This issue appealed to both of us and we decided to pursue it further. We both immediately recalled other screening stories we had encountered in our older data. Later on, an e-mail attachment came from Bratislava to Zdenek's mailbox: two short extracts with few analytical comments. Zdenek also searched, with the help of a computer, his previous data. He sent several other excerpts of screenings to Zuzuana in Bratislava for analysis. After a short debate we agreed, however, to remain with Zuzana's first two stories. For the time being, at least. There appeared several "small" reasons for that decision. We did not want to evoke, by taking some Czech and some Slovak stories, a Czech-Slovak comparison—among others, this would create misleading methodological expectations. Furthermore, these two stories seemed to us most analytically promising. Perhaps because we had begun with them. And the decision probably also reflected the spontaneous division of labour among us in the very first stages of our work (originally, during the initialising debate, Zuzana mobilised one of her two screening stories as an empirical test or counter-argument to Zdenek's

7 Typical motivations for secondary analysis of qualitative data have been briefly summarised by HEATON (1998).

8 The dispute can be roughly described in following manner: Zuzana's research interest had been focused, up to that moment, mainly upon how ordinary people, in their everyday lives, resisted the oppression of the communist regime, the exogenous forces of the world of politics. Not unlike her informants, she had taken the two spheres—the reality of everyday life and the reality of politics—as separate things. Zdenek's theoretical framework, however, was based upon the presumption that we should not take such separation for granted. He claimed that *virtually everybody and everything* could be seen as co-constructing the effect of the communist power. The construction of the separated realms of ordinary life and politics was, according to him, only part of this game. Zuzana countered this view by referring to the situation of screenings. Within this situation, she argued, the two spheres were directly confronted and their different logics exhibited. During the screenings, one could clearly observe the difference between those with power and the powerless. Between those who were active and those who were passive. Between those who dominate and those who, at best, resist (or simply do not care). In short, one sphere related to the other quite asymmetrically, suggested Zuzana. Since Zdenek was not prepared to give up his viewpoint so quickly, we decided to jointly re-examine the exemplary situation ... The result of our subsequent analyses was, to put it very simply, that Zuzana accepted and appreciated Zdenek's perspective. We managed to see and show, with the reference to this particular example what Zdenek had imagined before only in theory.

theoretical considerations—you see? Zuzana was a data-giver from the very beginning). In any case, it did not come to our mind to get a new collection of interviews. It was just not on the table. We did not see the re-use of Zuzana's older data as a principal problem. [16]

Why is all of this worth recounting? Because in our view, a large portion of qualitative data re-use is born similarly unplanned, ad-hoc, and non-programmatically. No special motivations, no well-prepared steps. Moreover, the re-use often follows (within a single piece of research) multiple logics that are not always consistent. To what extent are researchers as well as archives open for such trajectories (i.e. ways of data usage)? To what extent are they prepared for them? This is not, we believe, so much the question of open minds and good wills. It is much more a matter of well-stored audiotapes, well-organised file systems, and carefully written annotations. [17]

### 3.2 Ethnomethodology and data re-use

The ideas of qualitative data archives or secondary analysis in qualitative research are usually associated with the researcher's need of many interviews, narratives, and records. They are connected with *accumulation of information*. People thus view either systematic or non-systematic forms of qualitative data re-use as something that belongs to ethnographical rich descriptions, oral history, comparative research or grounded theory. Our approach, which we call "ethno-methodological" (but which could bear some other labels as well), went against this logic. It went against accumulation of information. Because we did not hope for something like that at all. On the contrary, we resorted to secondary analysis of data only to work with a couple of lines of transcripts. For what reason? Because showing *how* was more important for us than learning *what* and *why*. That is also why a few illustrative examples or cases were perfectly enough. [18]

As you probably guess, within such a research logic, one need not worry too much about the sample and its representativity. The selection of a relevant case or cases is not a really big problem here. More for this research framework than any other, it is just a problem of *economy of argumentation*. Here the data are not a kind of window into reality, they are reality itself. It is not, of course, the only reality that exists, but simply a reality that is worth studying. That is why GUBRIUM and HOLSTEIN (1997, p.52; italics is ours) can write that ethnomethodology "does not require 'getting inside' social worlds in order to describe them. Instead, the field can be found *wherever reality-constituting interaction takes place*". [19]

In this sense, re-using qualitative data for "ethnomethodological" purposes not only makes sense, but it is even very well possible. It usually does not represent a serious problem to select the few cases to be analysed. In principle, all possible cases are relevant—the field is everywhere. It is much more difficult, however, to choose some really *illustrative* cases. How does one secure this? Such question will take us back, paradoxically, to the beginning of this section. It is taking us back to the presumption that the value of qualitative data archives consists in

gathering many documents, many cases together. But this time, the benefit does not come from having more data to be analysed, but rather from having a broader basis of selection. In order to choose the few "good examples", we *have to have many examples at hand*. [20]

### 3.3 "S. from P. who founded the State ..." and other mysteries of second-hand data

Let us now finally look at a couple of analytical troubles we had while re-using data collected for other purposes. [21]

A part of our argument had to do with multiple or "contradictory" identities. One of the accounts we analysed, the one provided by a non-member of the Party, was remarkable by complex membership categorisations associated with the character of a communist, the screener and boss. The logic of the entire story[9] required that this communist was not simply "communist", but *also* somebody with a first name and a family name, somebody coming from a particular region, and belonging to a certain church. It had to be somebody with special motives for joining the Party, and even a good friend to the narrator. In his words, the boss was "not a convinced communist". It was crucial, for the story to be understandable and accountable, that the boss be only partially associated with the supposed centre of the communist power. That he was defined by a mixed membership; by simultaneous memberships in competing but also collaborating social worlds. Later on, after having discussed some other identity switches or divisions we had identified in our examples, we concluded that multiple memberships, in their complexity and mutual overlapping, created space for manoeuvring, and thus for making contracts between the world of power and the world of ordinary people. By virtue of that the reality of screenings became negotiable, shapeable and consequently, somehow acceptable. [22]

Let's look at one of the key passages:

> 9. Otherwise, he was Jano S. from P.,
> 10. Lutheran,
> 11. good acquaintance to us,
> 12. who became Party member for nothing but
> 13. having chance to become deputy-director for economy in the company and then on the headquarters
> 14. Otherwise he was not a convinced communist,
> 15. we called each other first name,
> 16. and we spoke totally differently in private than
> 17. he used to speak when he was holding a speech and on Party political training meetings. [23]

9 Both analysed passages are in full available in the Appendix.

The family origin of the boss can be taken as a proof, one of many, that he simply cannot be reduced to a "communist". By introducing *his name and place of birth* (line 9) Milos, the narrator, informs about the boss's family relation to one of the "founding fathers" of Czechoslovak state (in 1918) who is generally considered as the paragon of selflessness and dedication to high moral principles. Such information can be understood—due to common assumption that personal qualities are cultivated and transmitted within one's family—as a hint at "true" moral qualities of the boss. Further, the sequence 10 mentions his belonging to the Lutheran church, in Slovakia minor. It is the narrator's church as well: Milos is a son and grandson of Lutheran pastors. Usually, an affiliation to a minor community is associated with the commitment of solidarity between members. And it is possible to expect that in this case, such commitment will be as strong as the commitment issuing from the boss's Communist Party membership, or even stronger ... This is roughly what we have written on this particular passage (especially the first two or three lines) in our study. [24]

But, is all of this really in the text? Well, it is there ... *with a little help*. The initial "S" may indicate a family relation to the founder of Czechoslovak State, but, indeed, only for somebody who knows the whole name (who is not exclusively dependent upon the anonymised transcript), and who is perhaps more familiar with the names and people in question. For instance, even if Zdenek, one of the analysts, knew the full name of the boss (which is identical to the well-known name of the Slovak co-founder of former Czechoslovakia), he may not "automatically" identify the connection. And he actually did not, until Zuzana (slightly shocked at the fact that Zdenek had no idea that the famous S. had been born at P.), told him. For her it was clear. [25]

Why the narrator himself, in his account, had not explained the consequence more clearly so that everybody could understand the hint? The reason being, he was behaving normally. He was not telling the story to anybody. He was telling it to Zuzana, the interviewer, who knew. Who understood. Why should he fool her and waste time with the obvious things?[10] [26]

Indeed, any life history narrative, even if it is relatively uninterrupted by the interviewer, must be seen as an interactive achievement (see ATKINSON 1998; KVALE 1996 and many, many others). That is why even absolutely silent and invisible audiences considerably shape what is being told. And that is also why the users of second-hand data get often in trouble. The meaning of many details is encoded and enciphered by the subtleties and complexities of the relationship that existed between the interviewer and the narrator, between a *competent* interviewer (in the eyes of the narrator) and a *competent* narrator (in the eyes of the interviewer). Although careful reading of the whole interview—and not only of the short extract—might provide the re-user such as Zdenek with some additional clues for a better understanding[11], however, the role of someone who was there

10 Similar point could be made regarding the narrator's reference to the Lutheran church. Or, regarding the strong meaning that is in Slovakia still widely ascribed to the information on where one comes from, what is one's place of birth.

when the narrative was being born and who knows the context and the background, remains crucial.[12] [27]

### 3.4 How "Pali" changes the whole scene: the problem of transcript's punctuality I.

At another occasion, we dealt with plasticity/rigidity of space and reversibility/irreversibility of time. In other words, we studied how actors use space and time as their interactive resources. [28]

Take the problem of distinguishing between private and public places. Its relevance for the study of the ambivalent power relations under communism is crucial. After all, we have seen it in the previously quoted Milos's narrative (lines 16 and 17). Public and private settings implied completely different way of speaking. The boss spoke as a proper communist only at precisely defined places, for instance, on Party political training sessions. When he was with Milos in a "private" place, though, he behaved "totally differently". The simplest way to deal with this behaviour would be to say: under communism, people carefully distinguished between public and private places, which represented two clearly separated realms or GOFFMAN's (1959) stages, and they chose to perform their selves accordingly. However, we tried to offer still another view. It is not only the character of the place that determines the way we speak. The way we speak (the way we call each other, the tone of our voice, the question of whether we speak quietly or loudly) may equally well determine the character of the place. Precisely this can be observed in the following passage coming from the second interview we used (Pavol's story):

4. The commission
5. that was doing the check-up in my case
6. consisted of three members,
7. two of them were my good mates.
8. One was from the faculty of medicine and the other one from the faculty of law.
9. And they asked me
10. how I see the entry of the (Warsaw pact) military troops, whether it was necessary or not.
11. I said
12. definitely—from their perspective, of course ...
13. but I am not quite sure about it, I continued, from our perspective.
14. They said: Pali, go out to the lobby and have a five minute walk,

11 If, for instance, Zdenek the analyst read the whole interview, he himself could learn that the family tradition of the narrator (if nothing else) links him to the Lutheran church. Fortunately, Zdenek did not have to. He was told about this fact by Zuzana. He got lucky, again.

12 As reported by CORTI, FOSTER & THOMPSON (1995), some researchers, when asked about their attitudes toward archives for qualitative data, touched precisely on this point. They expressed doubts about the usefulness of second-hand data for researchers without an appropriate background knowledge from the field.

15. think it over
16. if it was necessary also from our perspective. [29]

Thanks to these several lines, we are witnessing a critical situation, no doubt. Pavol did not get through with the answer that allowed him to keep his dignity, his face. But he did get a second chance. He was sent out to the lobby (to a "backstage") to "think the issue over" once again. As a bonus, he was given a special key to open the door for those successfully screened and finally pass through: at the moment when it turned out that Pavol's evasive and non-committal answer disqualified his belonging to the category of reliable Party members (unlike Milos, Pavol was member of the Communist Party), the formal space of the screenings was radically redefined, right on the spot. Suddenly, the members of the commission addressed Pavol not in the way that was typical and appropriate for the setting ("camarade", "sudruh") but by the diminutive of his first name. They called him Pali (line 14). This familiar address re-defines not only the space (from the public stage to a private scene), but also—situationally—the identity of all the participants in the interview. The commission members reveal to Pavol that they are for the present moment, his "good mates", who give him friendly advises or even "play into his hands". [30]

The switch from a public to a private place, however, is a chance given not only to Pavol. It is an important opportunity for the commission as well. The switch allows its members to mobilise such exceptional means like sending Pavol behind the door for a five-minute walk to "re-think" his answer. Also, it allows them to signal to Pavol: don't take the situation too seriously, too dramatically! Nothing has really changed much, we are still friends. We are still able to *create a private space together*. No clear-cut polarisation is occurring, nothing has been lost, don't worry. Last but not least, the commission members, by switching to a private space, suspend the political meaning or seriousness of Pavol's answers. They de-politicise what they want him to say, making it thus less real and binding. [31]

Let us notice something at this point: this interesting moment of Pavol's story depends almost entirely upon one peculiar detail—the familiar way of calling Pavol by the committee members. Without having this detail preserved in the transcript, the analyst would have much less to say. [32]

But wait a minute, we should not be too hasty with the conclusion as details do not always help. Sometimes they complicate the situation and create a confusion for us. Let us just imagine a situation; a researcher is reading the above quoted passage of Pavol's narrative (as second-hand data). If he or she is, at this very moment, only slightly tired, she could easily become a little confused: "What? Pali? Who the hell is Pali? I thought I was reading about a guy called Pavol!" ... We hope it is clear what we are explaining here. It is difficult, before one becomes familiar with the story, to identify its characters by their names. Especially if it is a piece of second-hand data and if there exist a lot of different characters in it (not mentioning the situation when the language of the original narrative is other than your own). In this respect, it is much easier and smoother

to read a narrative where Pavol is always Pavol, and not also Pali, Pávlik, Palo, depending on the interactional context. That is why many would argue for dropping the above-discussed detail out. Especially, if it was a transcript offered for re-use to a broader public. After all, dropping such detail out does not seem to cause a real damage. While taking care of anonymisation of transcripts we do such things almost unnoticed, routinely. [33]

### 3.5 How one laughter can help another laughter: the problem of transcript's punctuality II.

Transcripts do not consist only of what has been said. They often contain what has not been said and *what could not be verbally expressed*: gestures, scenic notes, and other characterisations. In research such as ours, these comments and notes can be very important. [34]

Here is the continuation of the previously quoted passage of the Pavol's narrative:

17. So I went out and told myself that
18. if I tell that it [the arrival of the "allied" forces] was not necessary
19. then they would expel me from the Party and
20. (I would lose) everything I had been building throughout my life,
21. my position at the Faculty
22. and in the Party organisation
23. where I had represented the wing of progress,
24. because there were rather progressive elements as well as elements of retardation in the Party, as elsewhere.
25. So I went back and said (laughter)
26. okay, I have thought it over,
27. it was necessary
28. even from our perspective.
29. They started to guffaw, to laugh,
30. then we hand-shook and that was the end of the story. [35]

Laughing and hand shaking mentioned in the last two lines (29-30), in the context of the entire story attracted a lot of our analytical attention. It does not make sense to repeat the whole argument here; in short, we saw it as means of solving a moral dilemma. As observed by Harvey SACKS (in SILVERMAN 1998), laughter can be seen as something that turns a potentially challenging behaviour (such as suicide threats) into a ceremonial form, into a joke, that is a routine part of the everyday world we inhabit. Similarly, the purpose of the laughter of the commission members was to make the situation and its moral consequences less real. It constituted theatrical nature of that situation: it was all just for the audience, not really. Thus, nobody needed to feel guilty. Neither Pavol for the denial of his own opinion, nor the commission for forcing him to do it. [36]

But all of that is not our main point here in this debate. What interests us now is not the laughter of the members of the commission, but the *laughter of Pavol, as noted in the "scenic note"* in the line 25.[13] We read Pavol's laughter as an echo, or perhaps as a foretoken of the laughter that came out during the screening interview, and thus as an affirmation of it. One could say that Pavol's laughter extends the reality of the other laughter, the laughter of the commission members, from the past into the presence. Indeed, we read this detail as an indication that the thirty years old laughter of the commission members, as we have roughly and incompletely interpreted above, was still making sense at the time of the interview, sometimes in the beginning of the 90s. And, in fact, the narrator helped, by that very narrative laughing, the "real" laughter doing its work: to make the situation more acceptable *for all the participants*. Can there ever be a better proof of the high moral charge of the studied event than the laughter that is so big, so loaded with what needs to become less fatal and serious, that it spreads over several decades? [37]

Thus the tiny scenic comment in the transcript enabled us, as well as our readers, to see Pavol and the members of the commission laughing *together and pretty long*. Is this not a fascinating and an important observation? The value of this observation makes us conclude that taking care of details is good for our work. But it need not be equally good for someone working in a different type of project, studying different things. In other words, we acknowledge that there are approaches and projects in which taking care of such details would only make researchers uselessly busy. [38]

## 4. Conclusion

In this paper we certainly did not come up with some new methodological problems related to secondary analysis of qualitative data. As one can see from the literature (see HEATON 1998 and the resources she quotes), these problems are rather well known. Instead, we tried to document and exemplify some of the difficulties, using our experience from a particular study, in order to make the debate on the topic more differentiated and grounded. [39]

Yet, a few "weak" conclusions can be made at this point. One rather general conclusion might be that the re-use of qualitative data is not necessarily limited to approaches and research questions that imply accumulation of information. An analysis of second-hand data makes sense in various methodological frameworks. This is why we can never tell in advance and once for all how the re-

13 Do you object that this laughter does not belong to the studied situation of screenings but only to the narrative itself and that the two spheres should not be mixed? We cannot accept such an objection. It would destroy one of the main principles of our approach: not to make principal distinctions between the life and the narrative, between (true) reality and (mere) texts. In our view the Pavol's laughter does belong to the situation of the screenings. It belongs to it precisely *because* it belongs to the narrative (and not despite that). The reality in question and the narration itself simply belong to each other and should be studied together. Precisely such an approach can perhaps be legitimately labelled as "ethnomethodological". As WATSON (1997, p.94) described it in references to ethnomethodology (SACKS & GARFINKEL): "descriptions or definitions are constituent features of the circumstances they describe. Descriptions or definitions ... are integral to, and non-extractable from, those circumstances."

use should exactly be carried out. The material, technical and organisational conditions for it must be as flexible and open as our thinking and methodological doctrines. This means, among other things that archives should look for not only large data sets but also for very small collections and even for single interviews or records. [40]

Furthermore, it seems important to us that the qualitative data archives have a layered structure: they should store and offer data ("cases") in as many forms as possible; as original recordings, as more or less detailed transcripts and annotations of these recordings. A relative imperfection of one layer (e.g. insufficiently detailed transcription—from the perspective of an ethnomethodologist or conversation analyst) may then be overcome or compensated by another layer (e.g. by going back to the original audio recording). Perhaps the most important "layer" of such an archive, however, should be participation of researchers themselves. We are definitely not the only ones who would stress the usefulness of collaboration of "secondary researchers" with the person(s) that participated in the collection of the material. This is, in the field of secondary analysis of qualitative data, a widely accepted recommendation. We only demonstrated and reviewed the practical logic of this recommendation. The archives should therefore encourage, as much as possible, collaboration between data providers and data re-users. Our own experience shows that the data-providers need not be just "helpers", willing to selflessly orient the re-users in the forest of adopted data. Both sides may and should benefit from the collaboration. [41]

Saying this, however, one should go even further. We believe that, consequently, archives' main mission consists in promoting mutual contacts and support among researchers on even more general level. What do we mean by this? The archives for qualitative data are sometimes viewed as institutions that draw various things together such as tapes and papers. But, this is not enough. These institutions have to be carefully designed so as to draw researchers together. We thus imagine them functioning not like mechanisms, but like communities and cultures. [42]

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## Appendix: The Screening Narratives

Here is a sequenced transcription of the extracts from the two life-history interviews used in our paper. Both narratives have been recorded within the

research project "20th Century in the Slovak Intelligentsia Families" carried out by Zuzana KUSÁ in 1991-1994. Names of the narrators have been changed.

The first extract is from the life-history narrative of Milos A., lawyer, non-party man, born in 1921.

Milos's story:

1. Then the year of 1968 came
2. and as a consequence of the fact that our Party secretary had kept
3. all the petitions written after the occupation in his drawer,
4. the screenings in our company were basically mild.
5. the Central Committee did not send anybody to us.
6. We were...
7. we were told in advance by our economic director
8. how the screenings would proceed.
9. Otherwise, he was Jano S. from P.,
10. Lutheran,
11. good acquaintance to us,
12. who became Party member for nothing but
13. having chance to become deputy-director for economy in the company and then on the headquarters
14. Otherwise he was not a convinced communist,
15. we called each other first name,
16. and we spoke totally differently in private than
17. he used to speak when he was holding a speech and on Party political training meetings.
18. Anyway, it became commonplace to see such hypocrisy during these long years.
19. So when we learned what sorts of questions are usually posed during the screenings
20. we asked him urgently not to ask us whether
21. we agree with the entry of the troops.
22. "Because if you ask this question
23. it may happen that
24. somebody of us will say no
25. and then you would get into troubles
26. even bigger than we would."
27. And so we made agreement before the screenings started
28. what questions from the field of economics would be posed.
29. And then they actually were posed,
30. we recited our negative opinions about the theories of Sik and similar (reformers)

31. and without making too big fools of us
32. we stuck up for us and our bosses-communists.
33. Actually, all this was a public secret
34. and people had already used to speak differently on public and put different faces on
35. at occasions such as political training and manifestation
36. than when they spoke to each other face-to-face.

The author of the second extract and its main character is Pavol B. Unlike Milos A. he was a Party man. He was member of the Communist Party continuously from 1947 to 1991. He was university teacher.

Pavol's story:

1. During the party screenings in 1970,
2. everyone was interviewed
3. (later on, I myself did such interviews [as member of commission] at the Faculty of economics).
4. The commission
5. that was doing the check-up in my case
6. consisted of three members,
7. two of them were my good mates.
8. One was from the faculty of medicine and the other one from the faculty of law.
9. And they asked me
10. how I see the entry of the (Warsaw pact) military troops, whether it was necessary or not.
11. I said
12. definitely—from their perspective, of course,
13. but I am not quite sure about it, I continued, from our perspective.
14. They said: Pali, go out to the lobby and have a five minute walk,
15. think it over
16. if it was necessary also from our perspective.
17. Indeed, they could not play into my hands better.
18. So I went out and told myself that
19. if I tell that it [the arrival of the "allied" forces] was not necessary
20. then they would expel me from the Party and
21. (I would lose) everything I had been building throughout my life,
22. my position at the Faculty
23. and in the Party organization
24. where I had represented the wing of progress,

25. because there were rather progressive elements as well as elements of retardation in the Party, as elsewhere.
26. So I went back and said (laughter)
27. okay, I have thought it over,
28. it was necessary
29. even from our perspective.
30. They started to guffaw, to laugh,
31. then we hand-shook and that was the end of the story.
32. Well, and later on they asked Duro S.
33. who were the representatives of the right-wing opportunism at the Faculty
34. they asked him to name.
35. And Duro refused to name.
36. If they had given me such question
37. I hope I would also have refused to name.
38. Because it was one's character what was at stake here,
39. to harm somebody else,
40. but in my case, it was just about
41. fouling or not fouling my own head a bit.

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