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EMPIRICAL STUDY/ANALYSIS

“Maybe this is Speculative Now” Negotiating and Valuing Interpretations in Qualitative Research

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Abstract

Interpretation groups, which meet on a regular basis for jointly analysing qualitative data, are well-established in sociology and related disciplines. There are currently at least 71 interpretation groups in German-speaking countries, and there are more if one includes project teams, which meet on a regular basis for data sessions. Yet, there is relatively little knowledge based on empirical research about these groups and their practices. Inspired by studies on social sciences and humanities (SSH), this article examines how “good” interpretations are jointly created in these groups. Prior studies underlined that social scientific methods are productive, i.e., performative. Following this lead, my study turns data analysis in qualitative research into an object of inquiry by investigating how interpretation groups work on textual data. More specifically, this article discusses how these groups negotiate different interpretative options and at the same time evaluate the quality of their results as well as the interpretation process as a whole. In this regard, the approach presented in this article also contributes to the growing literature on valuation and evaluation in science by focusing on communicative devices for valuing and evaluating interpretations.

Keywords Valuation · Qualitative data analysis · Research groups · Qualitative research · Research practice · Science studies

Introduction

Scholars inspired by STS and interested in studying the social sciences and humanities (SSH) typically base their articles on a storyline like this: Once upon a time, the now classic laboratory studies succeeded in establishing scientific knowledge production as a legitimate object of in-depth analysis (e.g., Knorr Cetina 1981;

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Latour and Woolgar 1986; Lynch 1985). This success was accompanied by a clear focus on natural sciences. As a consequence, some disciplines and their specialities (e.g., physics and biology) have repeatedly been the object of detailed investigations, while SSH have been comparatively neglected. As Kuznetsov (2019) recently observed, research on SSH is missing in leading STS journals as well as in the STS handbooks. But of course, this is only half the story: The ethnographic studies on laboratories were informed and preceded by early ethnomethodology, e.g., Harold Garfinkel's analysis of practices of coding (1967) and Aaron Cicourel's study "Method and Measurement in Sociology" (1964). In fact, there are quite a few studies concerned with the knowledge practices of SSH. What makes it hard to identify them is that they are "scattered over a broad variety of publication outlets and disciplines" (Dayé 2014: 879). In recent years, there have been valuable single contributions (e.g., Espeland and Sauder 2016; Fourcade 2009; Gieryn 2006; Hamann 2016, 2019; Plantin 2019) as well as mentionable efforts to envision a field of SSH studies (e.g., Camic et al. 2011; Mair et al. 2013). There is one focus in recent literature on SSH, which is particularly inspired by STS scholarship: Turning social scientific methods into an object of inquiry (e.g., Ayaß 2015; Law 2009; Maynard and Schaeffer 2000; Schindler 2018; Tutt and Hindmarsh 2011). What holds those studies together is that they describe methods not as objective, but as performative ways of producing knowledge (e.g., Mair et al. 2013). In the following I will try to add to this perspective by investigating the practices of interpretation groups in qualitative research.

Interpretation groups have a long tradition in qualitative research. Some scholars trace them back to the "Chicago School of Sociology" (e.g., Riemann 2011). Perhaps more important than this link to one tradition in social research is that interpretation groups are an established working form nowadays. For instance, there are currently at least 71 interpretation groups in German-speaking countries (IQF 2021). The term "interpretation group" refers to a group of researchers who regularly meet for data sessions and consider themselves as qualitative researchers (see Reichertz 2013: 18). Most of these groups are hosted by senior researchers, but there are also less formal groups organized by young researchers. When referring to specific meetings of these groups I use the term data session, which is familiar for researchers in conversation and discourse analysis.[1] Despite their relative prominence in qualitative research, there is relatively little knowledge based on empirical research about these groups and their practices (see Reichertz 2013: 17). Maybe these group arrangements are not worth studying? Of course, they are, and in fact there are already some informative accounts on the practical work of coding (e.g., Olszewski et al. 2006), conversation analysis (e.g., Bushnell 2012) or videography (e.g., Knoblauch and Schnettler 2012; Meier zu Verl

[1] Besides the groups listed by the IQF there are less formal interpretation groups. For instance, there are project teams, which meet more or less regularly for data sessions, and of course there are ad hoc data sessions, which are listed nowhere. Summer schools and workshops on research methods as well as collaborative research (Cornish et al. 2013) are excluded in the following because they lack the regularity of interpretation groups.

and Tuma 2021). Interpretation groups in qualitative research provide a setting in which knowledge-in-the-making can be observed before it is translated into manuscripts, presented at conferences, or published in various forms—usually stripped of the traces of its joint production.

By focusing on "good" interpretations-in-the-making my study not only resonates with current research on SSH but also with the fast-growing sociology of valuation and evaluation (e.g., Cefaï et al. 2015; Lamont 2012). Studies in this field stress that usually there are multiple registers, principles or criteria used for ascribing and assessing value (e.g., Heuts and Mol 2013; Stark 2009). Therefore what counts as good—e.g., good coffee, literature or sociology—is not easily determined. With regard to science this perspective has been productively applied in studies on peer review (e.g., Hirschauer 2010, 2015; Lamont 2009), which deal with questions of assessing the worth of written scientific communication, i.e., manuscripts or research proposals. My case study on interpretation groups is a good addition to this literature for four reasons. Firstly, my account of joint data analysis highlights communicative devices for negotiating and valuing interpretations. In doing so, it focuses on the valuation of oral scientific communication. Secondly, interpretation groups follow a different agenda than editorial or panel meetings in peer review processes. The latter have to assess and rank textual objects (i.e., manuscripts or proposals) in order to prepare a selection of items worth publishing or funding. The core activity of interpretation groups is to work jointly on data. By doing so, interpretation groups and their participants care for and invest time and effort in data analysis. Thirdly, the technical literature on interpretations groups underlines their function as a device for quality management (e.g., Reichertz 2013). Finally, the literature on interpretation groups underlines the value of joint data analysis for training young researchers (e.g., Dausien 2007; Reim and Riemann 1997). As I will argue, there is interplay between producing "good" interpretations and "good" interpreters.

In the following, I will take a closer look at the joint production of "good" readings. Firstly, I will give a short overview of the material and methods used for my study. Secondly, I will present and discuss common methodological justifications for joint data analysis. This overview is based primarily on existing literature on interpretation groups. Against this background, thirdly, I will develop an empirical analysis of the practice of interpretation groups based on observations and transcriptions of data sessions. At first, I will discuss how the participants of data sessions find an entry into and sequence their data. My core interest is on the practical dimension of developing "good" readings or "fitting" codes for textual data. I will argue that members of interpretation groups use different communicative devices for valuing each other's interpretative propositions (i.e., hunches, tentative readings, etc.). One basic device for evaluating and negotiating readings of data is the call to order, which can be used to mobilize different principles and criteria of qualitative research. Data sessions not only offer the possibility to work out the meaning of data but also provide a space for learning techniques of interpretation. More specifically, I will argue that the production of "good" interpretations is linked to the production of "good" interpreters. Finally, I will take a closer look at different ways of closing and wrapping up data sessions.

Material and Methods

The following analysis is based on interpretation groups observed and recorded in different contexts—for example, in the context of a funded research project but also in meetings organized by doctoral and postdoctoral students.[2] The groups vary in terms of size and the regularity of their meetings. The participants differ in regard to their experience with the methods of interpretation, their disciplinary background as well as their prior knowledge regarding the discussed projects. All sessions were led by the inviting person, who was not necessarily the same person who provided the data for the session. In terms of methodologies and methods, the groups I visited rely either on Objective Hermeneutics (Wernet 2013), Grounded Theory (Strauss 1987) or Documentary Method (Bohnsack 2013). All three research styles and their methodologies can be regarded as well-established in German-speaking countries and beyond.[3] In all groups there was a method of choice but also a certain degree of flexibility. In the self-organized groups, for instance, the person who provided the data for the session could propose to use a specific method of interpretation.[4] Typically, the group would follow such suggestions. In other contexts, e.g., data sessions in funded research projects, there might be less flexibility due to existing work plans.

The transcriptions of the recorded data sessions were made highly selective for pragmatic reasons. They were preceded by participating in the groups and repeatedly listening to the recordings for identifying relevant sequences. All translations from the material were made by the author. My analytical approach could best be characterized as "microscopic examination" (Strauss 2004), i.e., a minute line-by-line analysis of the observation protocols and transcriptions. In addition, I also looked for and consulted textbooks and scholarly articles, which deal with interpretation

[2] I have to thank all participants of these interpretation groups for their trust.

[3] The landscape of qualitative research in German-speaking countries is diverse and multifaceted. From the end of the 1960s on there was a growing interest in the works of Howard Becker, Harold Garfinkel, Erving Goffman, Anselm Strauss and others among scholars in sociology and related disciplines. This interest was fuelled by different motives. Similar to discussions in the US, there was discontent with grand theory on the one side and social research on the other. A second motive was the growing concern for language, which could also be observed in philosophy and other disciplines at that time. This first phase of the renaissance of qualitative research was led by several local working groups, among them Bielefeld, Frankfurt am Main and Konstanz. In later decades, qualitative research in German-speaking countries became more diverse and one could speak of growing self-esteem and originality. Nowadays, there are several well-established qualitative traditions in sociology and related disciplines. Their good standing is documented by a number of sections in disciplinary societies – the German Education Research Association, the German Sociological Association as well as the Swiss Sociological Association –, which focus exclusively on qualitative methodology. What's more, qualitative journals and textbook editions have been established as well as annual conventions for qualitative research (e.g., Berliner Methodentreffen Qualitative Forschung, founded in 2005).

[4] One interesting aspect concerning data sessions is ownership of data. In the sessions I attended the materials provided and discussed mostly were field notes and interview transcripts and at least one of the participants of the session had been involved in their production. But of course, an interpretation group can work also with data, e.g., videos on Youtube or archived data, which raises different questions of authorship and ownership of data. Besides legal and ethical considerations, the practical consequences of data ownership might be an interesting angle for investigating data sessions.

groups. The following chapter discusses how this technical literature justifies the use and value of interpretation groups for qualitative research.

What do the Textbooks Say? A Look in the Technical Literature on Interpretation Groups

One predominant genre of literature on methods is "legislative" (Mol 2002: 152). Textbooks and articles belonging to this genre tell their readers how they should understand and use certain methods in order to generate "good," i.e., methodological sound results. The sources cited in this section can be described as legislative but also show features of others genres, for instance, historical or autobiographical accounts of qualitative research. In this literature, as well as in oral communication among qualitative researchers, interpretation groups are generally regarded as valuable for various reasons. They are simply "fun," as one group member remarked in a data session. Most researchers who have experienced such sessions will be inclined to agree. However, allusions to the playfulness and fun of joint data analysis are rare in the technical literature. Instead, this literature primarily focuses on the functions of the groups. Firstly, interpretation groups are described as settings which help to unlock the meaning of data (see Reichertz 2013: 13). Accounts of qualitative analysis in general and joint interpretation in particular stress the need to go beyond superficial readings of data by working on the potential meanings of the data at hand. Thus *opening up data* can be regarded as a basic function of interpretation groups. Secondly, these groups are viewed as a means of *quality management* (e.g., Schröer et al. 2012). There is a variety of rationales, which explain how these first two functions are fulfilled. A typical justification is that interpretation groups are helpful for developing comparisons. Working with comparisons is a basic technique, which can be found in many styles of analysis (e.g., Grounded Theory). A second aspect of quality management is that interpretation groups bring together a variety of interpretative perspectives, which can be linked argumentatively to challenge one-sided interpretations (e.g., Phoenix et al. 2016). As Przyborski and Wohlrab-Sahr put it: "It will always be easier for a group to question deadlocked interpretations and to test hypotheses for their 'robustness'" (2014: 206*).[5] The effectiveness of interpretation groups can be attributed, according to Riemann, to their way of working: "(…) one discovers more through jointly—orally—describing texts, the representation becomes more multifaceted and denser; and the dialogical argumentation—asserting, contesting, doubting, justifying, and providing evidence—leads to more differentiated and denser analytical abstractions, contrastive comparisons, and theoretical models" (Riemann 2011: 413*). Other authors explicitly link the work done in interpretation groups with quality criteria discussed in relation to qualitative research. For instance, Ines Steinke argues that "interpretations in groups are a discursive way of producing intersubjectivity and comprehensibility by dealing

[5] Some of the literature I refer to in this section is written in German. Its use reflects the relative lack of textbooks and articles on qualitative interpretation groups and joint data analysis written in English. When quoting my own translations, I place an asterisk after the page number.

explicitly with data and their interpretation" (Steinke 2004: 187). A third function, which is used to characterize interpretation groups, is that they provide a *space for subjectivity and self-reflexivity* in the research process. According to Mruck and Mey, such spaces are necessary in order to deal with the inherently social character of research and the subjectivities involved (1998: 287). Their conception of interpretation groups values reflexivity as a resource for better research, which is easier to achieve in a group context. A fourth, frequently mentioned function of interpretation groups is the *training of young researchers* (e.g., Dausien 2007; Reim and Riemann 1997). Two aspects can be identified here. On the one hand, it could be argued that the primary function of interpretation groups is not socialising its members into a particular research style, but rather the analysis of data (see Riemann 2011: 413f.). But, of course, regular participation in an interpretation group can also be seen as training in a very specific research style. Therefore, there is the possibility that these groups can become an instrument of school building.[6]

Besides these functional justifications, there is also a fifth line of argument: The reference to the *tradition* of interpretation groups as a work arrangement. Riemann, for example, mentions the context of socialization of Chicago sociologists as a historical reference (2011: 409). According to his account, the working arrangement of the "first" Chicago School was characterized by the fact that materials from individual projects and manuscripts were shared and discussed so that common knowledge and common analytical categories could develop (see Riemann 2011: 410). However, the development of interpretation groups, as we know them in the German-speaking countries, is more closely linked to the so-called "second" Chicago School (Fine 1995). In the research colloquia of, for example, Anselm Strauss, German-speaking researchers such as Fritz Schütze and Gerhard Riemann made experiences with this form of joint interpretation and imported this format into German-speaking sociology (Reichertz 2013; Riemann 2011).

It can be assumed that each interpretation group has its own "educational history" (see Reichertz 2013: 23–26*). This general idea also applies to the groups I visited, which means on the one hand that each long-standing group has a unique perspective, its own ways of doing things, past methodological debates to which they sometimes allude, and a special repertoire of jokes. The educational history develops over time and indicates familiarity and shared understanding among the members. Which is why, in the context of interpretation groups a different tone is adapted in comparison to discussions with a wider and more anonymous audience. Thus, jokes, judgments and informal statements are possible within this protected space, which are not equally likely in other professional contexts, such as talks at academic conferences (e.g., Hoffmann and Pokladek 2010: 208). On the other hand, jointly working

[6] With regard to school-building, Reichertz describes interpretation groups as a place where tests of worth occur, which may, for instance, result in new work contracts (2013: 68). At first sight, it is plausible to understand certain situations as tests, which document differences in experience and competences among the members of interpretation groups, but this perspective is flawed by methodological and conceptual problems. For instance, it is nearly impossible to empirically link the renewal of an employment contract with "good" performance in a series of data sessions, which is why the following analysis abstains from concepts such as power or hierarchy.

on the meaning of data also brings about typical problems and tasks, which open up the space for comparisons between interpretation groups and their practices. Interpretation groups have in common that data analysis—regardless of whether it is verbal or visual data—takes place under the conditions of a specific form of an *internal public*. Within interpretation groups, a communicative process unfolds during the data sessions in which hunches, ideas and arguments are exchanged and various dimensions of quality are negotiated. At this abstract level, these group sessions are comparable to editorial or panel meetings during the peer review process (e.g., Hirschauer 2015; Lamont 2009). The participants of data sessions comment upon each other's ideas, they formulate questions regarding methodology and present alternative readings in a more or less immediate and informal style. The feedback and evaluation of statements is more direct than in other contexts of scholarly communication. A number of aspects may affect the participants and their style of contributing. Among them are familiarity with the other members, time invested for preparation, personal interest in the method and data in question. What's more, in interpretation groups there may be more or less clear dependencies between the actors involved, which also can affect their style of contributing.[7]

"We can also Start Somewhere Else": Finding an Entry into the Data

After initial greetings data sessions usually start with an introduction to today's research project or data. The topics of this phase can be quite diverse. For instance, it can entail information on the research question, current problems of the presented project, method of choice or very personal topics among other things. In short, the participants jointly define why they are meeting today, what they want to work on, how they go about the data at hand, and what they expect in the next hours. This introductory phase is as important as later phases of the data session and participants may return to its elements, e.g., the research question, at any point in time. The length of this introductory phase depends on various aspects. For instance, interpretation groups in on going research projects need less time to establish a common frame of reference and thematic focus because they have done so on prior occasions. Interpretation groups, which at every meeting discuss new material and projects contributed by their different members, are different in this regard. Their participants have to invest more work into the introductory phase. For instance, the participants in a self-organized group I visited work with different methods on different types of data. In order to align the diverse perspectives, there are communications in advance (via mail) as well as an exchange on methods at the beginning of each session.

The following example is taken from a data session of an interpretation group, which meets regularly in the context of a funded research project. The session quoted involved the primary investigator, a young researcher, two research assistants

[7] For instance, such dependencies make unequal distribution of speaking time more likely. This may be the case if the leader of the interpretation group also supervises the research presented and discussed. However, unequal distribution of speaking time can also occur in the context of self-organized groups of doctoral and postdoctoral researchers.

and me. As I arrive, all members of the group are already assembled at a round table. Everyone has got two printouts, which are the material for today's session. More specifically, we will work on an opening sequence of an interview, which was conducted for the research project as well as a full-written interpretation, several pages long, of this very passage. In the beginning, the project leader P3 explains the task for today.

Interpretation group M

> P3: Right. So that er (.) what we are looking at today (.) is now the (.) an excerpt from the opening sequence of the interview with [name] (.) who is co-director (.) of the [organization 1].
> P5: [Organization 2].
> P3: [Organization 2]?
> P2 and P5 unisono: [Organization 2].
> P3: I see. Yes right [organization 2] oh god. (..) Ok (..) and the interpretation (..) was prepared by you, right Maria?
> P5: Uhu.
> P3: Now we go into the reflecting […].

At first, the project leader P3 announces what we are about to look at in today's session. She provides the real name of the interviewee, her position and also the name of the organization she works for. All three pieces of information taken together make the person easily identifiable among the other interviewees in the sample of the research project. However, she misplaces the interviewee and is corrected immediately by her research assistant P5. After a short correctional exchange, the project leader checks the authorship of the written interpretation and states that we will now follow the procedures of the Documentary Method. More precisely, she hints at the precise mode of interpretation ("now we go into the reflecting") we should apply in the next hours. Without knowledge of the technical literature her reference to the Documentary Method is nearly impossible to understand. Scholars following this style of research distinguish between two modes of interpretation: formulating and reflecting interpretation (Bohnsack 2013: 225). The first mode of interpretation aims at reconstructing the topical structure of a given document (e.g., a group discussion). It results in a sequential overview of topics and their hierarchy (e.g., Bohnsack 2013: 227). The second mode of interpretation focuses on how things are said in order to reconstruct latent orientations or habitus structures (e.g., Bohnsack 2013: 228). More specifically, while enacting reflecting interpretation researchers try to work out the "organization of discourse" in the material under scrutiny (Bohnsack 2013: 225), which entails working with a specific technical vocabulary (e.g., "proposition" for the introduction of an orientation). After the preliminary remarks of the project leader we start digging into the material and the written interpretation provided and prepared by the research assistant P5.

After the introductory phase a communicative process unfolds over a period of several hours, in which the group members participate in variable degrees of intensity.[8] The different *degrees of participation* are not necessarily linked to specific individuals, but may vary from case to case, from session to session.[9] A major condition for lively discussions is that participants share knowledge usable for interpretation—e.g., a common disciplinary background or experience with data analysis. In contrast to the idea that heterogeneous groups produce dynamic sequences of interpretations (e.g., Schütze 2005), I argue that moderate homogeneous groups are more dynamic in exchanging, negotiating and valuing readings (Hoffmann and Pokladek 2010: 214; see also Knoblauch and Schnettler 2012: 349f.). Similar to participants in group discussions participants in data sessions seem to be more active if they can relate to one another on the ground of experiences or knowledge, which they have in common. Of course, this does not necessarily mean that they must have jointly gained this knowledge. As Britt Hoffmann and Gerlinde Pokladek point out, homogeneity does have many dimensions: The similarities between participants' research themes (e.g., closely related research questions), the data formats used (e.g., documents), the method of analysis (e.g., sequential analysis in the style of Documentary Method), the progress of the respective research projects (e.g., initial data collection), participants research competences (e.g., mixed levels of experience), disciplinary background (e.g., different disciplines), theoretical knowledge as well as cultural heterogeneity (see Hoffmann and Pokladek 2010: 204). Some of these dimensions are subject to change over time. For instance, familiarity with the practical aspects of interpreting data may be a prerequisite for joint interpretation or at least lively discussions, but since most interpretation groups bring together experienced and less experienced members, this and related aspects can be cultivated over time.

The first notorious problem of joint data analysis is where to begin interpreting the provided materials (e.g., transcripts, observational protocols or pictures). *Finding an "appropriate" entry* is an important subject of negotiations, which can proceed quite different: While some groups open the interpretation with "Let's just start in the first sequence" others discuss the topic for several minutes. What is considered as appropriate depends on a number of questions, such as: What data format (biographical interview, picture, etc.) is to be interpreted? What analytical approach are we following? What relevance has the material in the discussed research project (e.g., first interview of a new project or negative case for refining project results)? What is the overall goal of the joint data session (e.g., reviewing the interview technique)? Some of these questions can be settled by referring to conventions of qualitative methods (e.g., sequential analysis) in general or a specific approach to

[8] There is a considerable variation in the field regarding the actual length of data sessions. In my own experience, how long a data session takes depends on a number of questions. For instance, are the data sessions part of an event (e.g., an internal workshop for a research project)? How often and regularly does the group meet? Do people from different research projects participate in the group? Is the group meeting face-to-face or online? What type of data (e.g., video) is the object of analysis?

[9] Of course, there are participants who are more visible and active than others in almost every session. But even those are at times silent, for various reasons. Also, a single individual cannot force the group into a dynamic exchange of interpretations. The other participants must play along and join the communicative negotiation of readings.

analysis (e.g., Objective Hermeneutics), others may afford longer discussions. In the first example quoted above, the interpretation group has already established a way of working with their interviews. As a consequence, they do not discuss where to start. Instead they routinely include the initial question of the interviewer in their interpretations of the opening sequences.

Once the entry into the data has been successfully agreed upon, the joint interpretation develops over time. In addition to the identification of an "appropriate" starting point, the *size of each unit of analysis* (e.g., a word, part of a sentence, line, paragraph etc.) is also a recurrent object of negotiations. In the case of methodological approaches such as Objective Hermeneutics, the size and boundaries of the (next) sequence are negotiated time and again in the course of the interpretation. Such negotiations also occur in interpretative groups, which are based on Grounded Theory—even if the coding procedures of Grounded Theory are not sequence-oriented in a strict sense. Focussing on these data segments, the participants jointly explore different interpretative options. By doing so, they work out and enact conventions of qualitative research (e.g., rules of transcription, coding procedures, etc.). These conventions have become standardized to a certain degree in recent decades. The growing technical literature on qualitative analysis is a strong indicator for this development. This literature embodies a set of conventions to which participants in interpretation groups can refer to. At the same time, the praxis of interpretation groups cannot be reduced to these written-down procedures, because it depends on experiences and skills, which are not standardized.

"I have an Addition": Negotiating and Valuing Interpretations

First tentative interpretations are formulated. An initially low frequency of hunches, ideas and questions is at times contrasted by particularly dense phases if the process of joint interpretation develops a corresponding communicative dynamic. An exasperated look at the "data," reinforced by raised eyebrows, a chin scratch while listening, and other gestures are the silent and yet telling companions of joint analysis. Riemann describes the communicative exchange of interpretative propositions in group sessions as "dialogical argumentation," the components of which are activities like to claim, to document or to contest (2011: 413). In order to better understand these various activities, I would like to suggest that jointly working out the meaning of data has a triadic structure. Let's imagine a data session. At first someone gives a short introduction to the research question, the context of the interview and the method of choice. As a next step, we agree to start from the top and identify the first sequence which is part of the initial episode in a biographical interview. The interviewee is a young researcher and speaks right in the beginning about her decision to study computer science. Right away, she introduces her first computer into the narrative. The participants of the data session wonder why someone starts a career narrative with a reference to childhood. Maybe this is a clue in a story of biographical continuity. From a more abstract perspective, the interview sequence in question can be understood as a sign in a *semiotic triad* (Tavory and Timmermans

2014: 22–30).[10] The other two basic elements are the object which the sign signifies as well as the interpretant which can be understood as the effect of the sign-object relation. In the context of our data session, such an effect could be a question for further investigation: What is the relevance of artefacts such as computers in narratives of educational decision-making? Perhaps there are other instances from prior data sessions, which can serve as sources of inspiration for comparative analysis. Another idea might be that the interviewee is starting a story, which connects her current position and education with events from her childhood. As the process of interpretation proceeds the current interpretant can become the sign in the next step of meaning-making (see Tavory and Timmermans 2014: 24). Interpretative activities—such as repeating one's own and other's interpretations as well as reformulating and extending them—connect and transform these semiotic triads. Consequently, the communicative exchange of interpretative propositions in data sessions can be understood as the build-up of *semiotic chains*, consisting of semiotic triads.

The following example is taken from the same data session of interpretation group M. As already stated, we work on an opening sequence of an interview, which was conducted for the research project as well as a full-written interpretation of this passage, which is oriented toward the working steps of the Documentary Method. The written interpretation entails two things: First a proposal for sequencing the opening passage of the interview transcript, and second interpretations for each sequence. For most of the time, we first read the sequence in question and then evaluate if its boundaries are well-chosen. As a next step we read the interpretation of the sequence, discuss its plausibility and develop our own ideas. On my right-hand side sits P5 who wrote the interpretation. She will heavily annotate her printout in the following two hours and is responsible for the revision of the written interpretation. During the data session this document is several times a starting point for discussing various sequences from the interview transcript as well as questions concerning methodology and research techniques. In the following sequence, the project leader P3 notices that the written interpretation of the interview is missing something:

Interpretation Group M

P3: I have an addition right at the beginning.
P5: Yes.
P3: Namely I would go into this relatively long time period of three seconds which she needs to answer.
P5: Ah, yes, I've totally ignored it.

[10] The idea to use Charles S. Peirce's semiotics for better understanding meaning-making in qualitative research can be found in "Abductive Analysis" (Tavory and Timmermans 2014). There are other conceptual sources of inspiration, but the general idea of semiotic triads and chains nicely fits to the process of (textual) interpretation. Of the three concepts sign, object and interpretant, the last is not easy to grasp. Basically, it can be any effect of a meaning-making process. For instance, if you read a caricature in a paper the interpretant could be a grin, the urge to show it to someone else or a written interpretation of the picture.

P3: So that's quite long, right, "have experienced" one (.) two (.) three (.) so she doesn't answer quick as a shot but takes herself the time (…) and then she performs a kind of a (..) search movement. (…) Good.

Early in the session, P3 who is in charge of both the research project and the current session, raises her hand and states that she wants to add something. In the short communicative exchange quoted above she proposes an alteration of the written interpretation, without generally questioning it. Rather, she refines the written interpretation by hinting at the relevance of a pause in the transcript, which she interprets as relatively long. P5 concedes that she has ignored the pause and the intervention is confirmed, whereupon P3 further develops her idea. She quotes from the sequence in question and counts out loud the seconds of the pause. The effect of this verbalisation is that both the pause and its duration are stressed. How P3 formulates her own version of the sequence combines a kind of simple verbal re-enactment with an altered reading as she states that the interviewee verbally performs some kind of search movement. The expansion of the interpretation is done quickly and easily at this point. In this process P5's initial reading—her interpretant of the interview sequence we all refer to—becomes the sign in the next semiotic triad. By highlighting the pause in the interview sequence, P3 relates to this sign and adds a new link to the semiotic chain. At this point, there are no further additions and objections by the other participants and P3 closes this episode with a final "good".

Negotiating readings, building up semiotic chains, and working on their quality can take much more time as in the simple example above. In fact, in the same session there are extended discussions on the meaning of various sequences and their elements. Of course, discussions can lead to dead ends in semiotic chains, which can be solved by returning to prior readings (i.e., semiotic triads) or exploring new ones. In the following extract we are starting to explore the initial answer and its possible meanings. The interviewee begins her answer with "I have" then interrupts herself and continues with "I am now".

Interpretation Group M

P1: Yes so here (.) I would yet erm take a closer look at the verbs, because erm "I have" and "I am"-
P4: Uhu.
P5: Uhu.
P1: Erm makes quite a (..) erm difference because erm "have" yes I would erm (.) connect with possession (.) respectively also with something passive and "I am" (..) now I would connect with a position which she has set for herself like with something active.
P4: If I say that "I have experience" is that more active or passive than "I am" in a [type of organisation] for 20 years?
P1: Erm I would say more passive because "I have experience" (.) does not necessarily mean I've done actively something about it.
P4: And "I am experienced"? Have I done actively something about it?

P1: Erm (.) yes I would really say so. Because with "am" you express your own being with "have" you don't. (…) I cannot grasp it entirely accurate.
P3: (…) Erm. One could also interpret here that "I am" is less a subject category like an account of what (..) where I place myself in the world but an account of a location like here.
P5: Uhu.
P4: Uhu.
P1: Yes.

In the excerpt quoted above, P1 proposes to explore the implicit meaning of the two verbs used by the interviewee more thoroughly. Two other participants, P4 and P5, signal approval ("uhu") and P1 goes on by suggesting that "to have" and "to be" signify different modes of relating to the world. More specifically, in her perspective both verbs imply different degrees of active involvement and agency. Since researchers using the Documentary Method typically investigate implicit frames of orientation this analytical move by P1 should be of interest to the other participants. After this initial statement, P4 presents two formulations—which are relatively close to the formulations used by the interviewee—and asks which one is more active. By doing so, he opens up the possibility to explore further the dimension of activity. What's more, in using exemplary formulations close to the original sequence, P4 ties the discussion more closely to the transcript. In her direct response to P4's question, P1 picks one of the formulations and links it to a higher level of activity. Immediately P4 poses another question, which varies the expression "I have experience". Without overtly criticising the answer of P1 the new question by P4 increases the pressure on her suggestion. P1 tries to further elaborate her idea but finally concedes that she has trouble pinpointing the differences between the formulations. At this point the exchange of arguments and ideas comes to a halt. The idea of differentiating between active and passive modes of being in the world is not taken up by any participant. After a longer pause P3 proposes an alternative and a way out of the current dead end. In her account, the sequence in question might relate to a social position rather than to a mode of being. Her alternative reading opens up a new side-track for discussing the sequence in question. The other participants signal interest, but shortly after we will return to the differences between to have and to be.

On the one side, interpretation groups are an arrangement that is centred on slowing down and hindering our everyday habits of sense-making. On the other side, there is a shared expectation among members of these groups that their efforts bring about results. Thus, it is both a central challenge and task for these groups to agree upon the meaning of data. The examples above make clear that joint interpretation involves going back and forth between chunks of data, the things they possibly signify and our understandings of them. In the process of discussing different readings a wide repertoire of dialogical activities is used. In connecting to previous formulated interpretations group members work on—implicitly or explicitly—their value. Negotiating and valuing readings comprises not only the assessment of their interpretative appropriateness. It also contributes to their improvement.

"That's a no-go": The Call to Order

The evaluation or reformulation of an interpretation can also be accompanied by references to methodology and techniques of analysis. If such references are woven into the formulation of alternative or extended interpretations, they can be made highly relevant for the legitimation of "good" readings. Of course, the quality of interpretations can also be questioned by referring to methodological standards. "Good" readings or interpretations are those, which survive the confrontation with criteria and working principles of qualitative research in general or a specific research methodology in particular. Criteria, as well as methodological principles, can be understood as rhetorical resources used during negotiating interpretations. In the same way as in negotiations on the acceptance of manuscripts for publication those criteria are strategically applied (see Hirschauer 2010: 76). This, however, does not contradict the assumption that quality is established during group interpretations. Indeed, mobilizing criteria and methodological principles for evaluating interpretative propositions is an important part of improving interpretations. There are different ways of mobilizing criteria in the practice of interpretation groups, one of those is the *call to order.*[11] A call to order is observable if one member of the interpretation group addresses another or several members, questioning not primarily the meaning of an interpretative proposition, but its *Gestalt* or the process of its formulation. These interventions more or less explicitly enact the criteria and principles of qualitative research in general or a specific methodology in particular in the interpretation process. There are two basic variants: First, the call to order does not introduce a competing interpretation. Second, the call to order is directly followed by an alternative reading of the sequence in question. What is more, calls to order can be formulated in the light of a specific method. They can, for instance, demand that the group has to (1) follow the sequence or (2) ignore contextual knowledge. Calls to order across various methods can, for instance, insist that (3) interpretations are not to be accepted quickly or that (4) the group should return to the material.

The first mentioned call to order reminds the participants to (1) *follow the sequence*. It is primarily employed in groups, which follow methods such as Objective Hermeneutics or Documentary Method. Both methods are characterised by their emphasis on sequentiality as a methodological assumption, which finds its way into the practice of interpretation (e.g., Maiwald 2005). References to this principle are ubiquitous in the relevant literature (e.g., Nohl 2010; Wernet 2013). Any hint of leaving the sequence can be used for a call to order. "Leaving the sequence" is negatively sanctioned by a communicative intervention, which may use different expressions (e.g., "we are still not there").

Closely related to "follow the sequence" is (2) *ignore contextual knowledge*: The interpretation groups I examined differ in the ways in which they dealt with

[11] Group members may also intervene in order to address other things. For instance, they can remind the other participants that there is only limited time left, which is why one should return to the research question. Such communication during data sessions could be also understood as calls to order referring to conventions of coordinating joint activities.

contextual knowledge, i.e., supplementary knowledge about the cases. For example, one of the key principles of interpretation in Objective Hermeneutics is to temporarily exclude contextual knowledge in order to explore thoroughly the different meanings of the data at hand (Wernet 2013: 239). This methodological principle can be used for interventions. However, it does not generally forbid the use of contextual knowledge but rather limits the ways of using such knowledge. Besides these two exemplary calls to order there are other possible interventions, which are recognized across various interpretative approaches. One can think, for instance, of an intervention against a (3) *rash closure of interpretation*. This call to order can be described as follows: A member of the interpretation group addresses another or several members of the group with the comment that the interpretation has been accepted too hastily. This call can take on different forms, for example, a mere assertion that things are going too fast, or a question as to whether the group could have overlooked something. Finally, call to orders can also be linked to an alternative reading as in the following example.

The interpretation group T is organized by a doctoral researcher who wants to finish his empirical study in the near future. In terms of methodology, he is inspired by Grounded Theory and Documentary Method. The data session, which we will now visit, was about four hours long and its purpose was to discuss a theoretical model grounded in and developed from group discussions with young adults. The participants of the data session are four doctoral researchers and one postdoc, all working at the same university. We meet at the office of the inviting doctoral researcher and sit down at a table with food and beverages. Everyone is provided with copies of transcribed sequences from various group discussions. On one desk, a monitor is showing a visualization of a theoretical model. At the beginning P1, who invited us, introduces us to his doctoral research. We discuss his model and research question for about one hour before we dive into the material. The next hours we go back and forth between an intensive discussion of sequences from his group discussions and his theoretical model.

Interpretation Group T

> P4: That is too fast for me. Erm because (.) if it is always the same M1 as in that case then he is simply introducing changing horizons of reference one of which is so to speak erm parental the parental context and the expectations the other one is so to speak erm the peers (.) and right and -
> P2: These are perhaps the spaces of recognition which you have.
> P4: Exactly.
> P1: Yes.
> P4: When it comes down to it they are social relations.
> P4 intervenes in stating that the interpretation is too "fast".

By doing so, he might criticize the current interpretation both in regard to its content as well as its terms of formulation. After his unambiguous "That is too fast for me," he suggests an alternative reading. First, he refers to a previous statement made by a teenager called M1 in one of the transcripts, which was discussed earlier, and then he starts formulating a reading of this sequence by introducing two contexts M1 might refer to in his statements. Immediately, P2 addresses the young researcher P1 who is hosting the interpretation group. She translates the interpretative proposition of P4 into a language compatible with the research interest of P1 ("These are perhaps the spaces of recognition which you have."). In doing so, she uses her knowledge from our initial discussion of P1's study and research question. The formulation of P2 gives the alternative reading of P4 extra weight because it opens up possible connections to the research interest of P1 as well as the literature on recognition. P4 confirms the suggestion of P2 whereupon P1 agrees and P4 concludes that what they are actually talking about are different social relations.

Time and again members of interpretation groups suggest that the group should return to the material or data. Requesting to go (4) *"back to the material"* has a different character than the preceding interventions. With statements like "can we simply stick to the material" or "I don't read it there" participants can refer to the material, which should be the basis for analysis. If prompted, on going thought experiments and discussions are most likely interrupted. Those group members, who are confronted with this intervention—and with them their interpretations—,are under pressure to legitimize their readings. Therefore, this type of intervention can be understood as a *plausibility test*.[12] The intervention "back to the material" calls to attention that interpretations, which are jointly formulated and revised, have a common reference object—hidden in plain sight due to its visibility: The interview transcript, observational note, image or video transcript—in short, the material which is to be interpreted. The quite common reference to the material reveals the triadic relationship of interpretative propositions. Each new formulated proposition is connected to former propositions as well as to the material in question. In this perspective, transcriptions are not only the empirical basis for interpretation. Also, they can be understood as instruments of controlling the process of interpretation and keeping the participants on track. So, referring back to the "data" is both. On the one hand, it potentially acts as a strong test for interpretations and their approval. On the other hand, calls for going back to the data help to establish start as well as end points in the process of negotiating and valuing interpretations.

To sum up, calls to order contribute to the quality of interpretations in various ways. First of all, they help to stay within the boundaries of the conventions of the respective method of analysis. In addition, group members can use calls to order for sharpening each other's arguments. Finally, they also immunize readings and interpretations against possible critiques. Interpretations, which survive the challenges mobilised in joint interpretations, may have better chances outside the context of the interpretation group. They can gain additional weight by adding results from past data sessions or already published findings. As in the case of scientific publications

[12] The plausibility test, as I understand it here, shares aspects of Boltanski's and Thévenot's notion of tests (see 2006). One important common trait is that tests are used to bring a disagreement to a close. In the case of interpretation groups a review of fit normally only affects specific interpretative propositions but does not undermine the underlying method of interpretation.

(e.g., Latour 1987), references to existing literature, theories or philosophers as well as past interpretations potentially make it harder to criticise the freshly developed readings.

"Every Word can Become Meaningful": Learning to Evaluate Interpretative Propositions

One could say that the production of "good" interpretations goes hand in hand with the production of "good" interpreters. Several aspects of the interpretation process are relevant in this regard. Theories of interpretation and their vocabulary are necessary for valuing and evaluating interpretative propositions in the context of data sessions, but also beyond them. Besides calls to order and other communicative devices for valuing readings there are other elements integral to the interpretation process, which contribute to learning the art of interpretation in a group. One typical form of working on the right perspective and vocabulary is *methodological instruction.* It can be used as an introduction of an alternative interpretative proposition or be demanded for by participants. In the following two excerpts, we return to one of the sessions, we already visited earlier. It is a session by the interpretation group M, which uses the Documentary Method. As mentioned earlier, one of the student research assistants (P5) has prepared a written interpretation, whereas the other research assistant (P2) participating is less experienced with the Documentary Method. During the session, the project leader P3 and other participants insert several brief technical explanations. In the following example, P1 and P3 describe their general analytical approach to the less experienced student research assistant P2. The underlying questions of this episode are why one should interpret data in sequences and what to look for in analysing them:

Interpretation Group M

P1: So we look at each individual sequence but not at each word.
P2: Then specifically at adjectives, right?
P1: It doesn't matter.
P3: Erm everything.
P4: Everything.
P2: You're kind of looking for meaningful (.) words?
P3: Erm no so there are- we look at two levels, so first what is said (.) and then how it is said.
P2: Ok, yes.
P3: Therefore theoretically every word can become /meaningful.
P2: /relevant.
P3: So it is not our, our relevance which we define. It is not that what we believe to be significant but what- what is meaningful for the interviewees.
P2: Ah ok. And therefore this preparatory step (.) first?
P3: Uhu.
P2: For identifying (.) that narrowing it down. Ok.

P3: Uhu. This is meant to discipline us (..) using the Documentary Method […].

In this episode, P1 tries to explain to P2 what to look for methodically in the subsequent interpretation. She stresses the importance of focusing not on single words but on whole sequences. Then P2 asks if specific categories of words are more relevant than others, which is rejected by the other group members. They state in unison that everything is equally important. In doing so, they are in line with the conventions of their method of choice—the Documentary Method (Bohnsack 2013). As a response, P2 asks another question, which still focusses on the meaning of words. P3 reacts to his question by taking a step back and extending the previous explanations. First, she introduces a basic analytical distinction between two levels of meaning—content and form. Her explanation implicitly refers to two working steps in the Documentary Method: the formulating and reflecting interpretation (Bohnsack 2013: 225). P2 signals that he understands her differentiation. Following this, the group leader P3 states that any words can be of importance for the interpretation, at least in theory. Once again P2 tries to contribute to the methodological discussion by suggesting a word ("relevant"). P3 borrows his choice of words and refines this contribution with a reference to a basic principle of interpretative social research: the necessity of following the relevancies of the actors and not that of the researchers. P2 poses another two questions, in which he probes his understanding of the basic idea. P3 closes this episode with a remark which connects the techniques of a certain approach—Documentary Method—to discipline. In the very same session, the project leader P3 not only explains the general perspective but also technical terms.

Interpretation group M

P3: Now we can first discuss if it is a follow-up proposition.
P2: Erm.
P3: So follow-up proposition means that now a new statement comes so a new unit of meaning which is (.) connected to the previous one, but does not clarify the previously mentioned one no (.) example of the previously mentioned one no explanation of the previously mentioned one but it is (..) a new unit.
P2: Yeah I would agree with that, I think. Because it is linked to the (.) expertise which she has (.) but focusses on another line of action.

P3 opens this episode by defining the next task for the participants. We are to discuss whether there is a "follow-up proposition" in the interpreted sequence or not. In other words, P3 draws out attention to the question "how" the interviewee articulates herself and not "what" she possibly means. In doing so, P3 uses a basic technical term in the Documentary Method ("follow-up proposition"), which characterizes how the interviewee relates to what she has said before. P2 signals his attention, while the other three group members initially remain silent. Without much waiting, P3 explains the meaning of the technical term in her own words. After her explanation P2 responds to the initial question of P3 and describes why the sequence in question qualifies in his perspective as a follow-up proposition. Both episodes presented here are embedded in the analytical work. There are no long methodological discussions here or references to technical literature. Instead, the analytical perspective and key terms are explained while jointly working out the meaning of the transcripts.

Participants of interpretation groups develop and enact a shared style of working with data that requires legitimisation especially when questioned by new members. In the course of explicating and legitimating methodological principles and procedures, a specific vocabulary is used, which may vary profoundly depending on the style of research. Learning a fitting vocabulary goes hand in hand with practicing habits of analytical distinction and interpretation. In addition, group members learn which methodological decisions are permissible and which are not. As a consequence, the members of interpretation groups learn to evaluate interpretations regarding their plausibility and their methodological quality. The knowledge acquired shapes their evaluation of other researchers' interpretative practices, and this very knowledge can be used to defend knowledge claims against critique in other situations (such as talks).

Time to Wrap Things up: Closing Data Sessions

Closing data sessions might seem of little importance regarding the production of good results. However, closings and their elements—especially the timing and the techniques of wrapping up—are crucial for participants' evaluations of the sessions as a whole. How data sessions are finished is familiar to anyone regularly attending meetings in work contexts. First, at some point someone remarks that it is about time to come to an end. Maybe a participant mentions that he has to leave in about 30 min because it is his turn to pick up the child from the kindergarten, or the project leader reminds everyone that the department meeting is starting soon. One way or the other, the participants jointly open up the closing of the data session. They stop to discuss interpretative options, alternative readings, or methodological strategies. Instead they turn to other things. In the following excerpt, we revisit interpretation group T. After nearly three hours of joint data analysis P1 asks if we agree to close the session.

Interpretation Group T

P1: Should we now (.) make a cut?
P5: Yes.
P4: Ok.
P1: I have somehow the feeling (.) so to say (.) that I now already have quite a lot to do (laughs).
(Others join in laughing).
P5: Get rid of some hours of overtime.
(everyone laughs).

> P1: Erm (..) well (.) well we didn't go through everything (.) erm honestly I didn't expect us to (.) erm but some fundamental things have become clear […].

In this short excerpt, P1, who invited us to discuss his material and conceptual ideas with him, opens up the possibility to stop our discussion. He does that by formulating a simple question, which is answered positively by two other participants. His impression, that he now has a lot to do, implies that our session was productive. Productivity is ambivalent because it means in this context that P1 now has new ideas to digest and tasks to perform. In other words, our session produced a plethora of new work for him. The humorous interjection by P5 ("get rid of some hours of overtime") has the serious background that the tasks generated by our joint work have to be performed by P1 more or less on his own. Whether the duration of the session was agreed upon in advance or not, the timing of closing a session is more than a technical question. In the light of the whole research process it is a strategic question. For instance, the current stage of the discussed research project affects the "right" timing. At an early stage in the research process the analysis of interview data opens up the opportunity to explore different research ideas in data sessions. Such extensive search movements are valuable, but also challenging for the researcher providing the data. This is partly because the next steps after the data session might become unclear. Therefore, good timing might make the difference between inspiring input and confusing information overload. Later stages of projects have their own challenges. The session of interpretation group T cited earlier, started with a visualization of a theoretical model. In the course of the session, we went back and forth between the data and this model. As a result of this open-end session, the theoretical model and its visualization had to be rebuilt from scratch. Fortunately, the session continued until there were constructive suggestions on the table.

In most cases, interpretation groups have solutions for wrapping up and documenting their work results. Maybe the group leader tries to summarize the most important results and problems, which came up in the session. Such summaries can come in many forms. Some interpretation groups rely on visualisations for wrapping up their data sessions, for instance, by drawing a conceptual map or a table on a whiteboard, which depicts key results and open questions. Another solution are recordings of whole sessions as well as annotated documents and transcripts. They provide rich raw material for written protocols or interpretations. The episodes from interpretation group M discussed earlier resulted in a revised version of the written interpretation. The complex series of semiotic triads was translated into something, which can later be used by the group to produce manuscripts and talks. Whatever the solutions might be an interpretation group comes up with, it is plausible to assume that they affect both the productivity of the work arrangement as well as the post hoc evaluation of individual data sessions. Finally, the person who presented her work and provided the data thanks everyone for their constructive ideas, and the participants might discuss when they meet the next time and what material they will work on.

Conclusion: Negotiating and valuing interpretations in qualitative research

Interpretation groups are well established within qualitative research. They are considered as important means of quality management as well as devices for training young researchers. In some cases qualitative researchers report that they turned their own interpretative practice into an object of analysis (e.g., Allert et al. 2014: 302; Knoblauch and Schnettler 2012; Olszewski et al. 2006). However, many of these "sociological self-experiments" are not published and thus not available to others. For this article I took part in qualitative data sessions of interpretation groups in order to learn more about their practices of joint interpretation. More specifically, I was interested in the production of "good" interpretations. This specific interest was fuelled by the growing literature on SSH and their practices of knowing (e.g., Ayaß 2015; Camic et al. 2011; Law 2009; Maynard and Schaeffer 2000; Meier zu Verl and Tuma 2021; Schindler 2018; Tutt and Hindmarsh 2011) as well as the emerging sociology of valuation and evaluation, which has investigated scientific (e)valuation in different contexts (e.g., Hirschauer 2010, 2015; Lamont 2009; Rushforth et al. 2019).

Interpretation groups and their data sessions provide an appropriate site for investigating a form of the social scientific "microprocessing of facts" (see Latour and Woolgar 1986: 151–183). The production of readings in interpretation groups can be understood as a communicative process under the conditions of an internal public. In this regard data sessions resemble editorial meetings (Hirschauer 2010, 2015) or fellowship competitions (Lamont 2009). In contrast to these settings the participants in data sessions do not primarily classify and assess what is good and what is bad. Rather they jointly develop and improve interpretations and ideas regarding their data. Parts of what they do can be understood as care (see Heuts and Mol 2013: 130), i.e., they care for and about the quality of each sessions' results. In doing so, they work on and improve the quality of hunches, ideas and interpretations. After agreeing on an acceptable entry point into the data, the process of negotiating, valuing and valorising interpretative propositions develops over time. The participants of data sessions exchange ideas, comment on each other, build up chains of concepts or readings, and at times evaluate in situ what they are doing. They formulate readings, compare them and play with the meaning of data by constructing *semiotic triads and chains* (see Tavory and Timmermans 2014: 22–30). In this process, the participants not only exchange and replace readings, but also challenge them by the rhetorical use of criteria and principles. These criteria and principles can refer to qualitative research in general as well as specific methods and methodologies in particular. Their rhetorical use takes the form of various *calls to order*. These communicative devices, which can be formulated by any group member, are used for valuing interpretative propositions. Again valuing does not primarily mean that participants discern good and bad ideas and readings. Rather calls to order help to improve the overall quality of interpretations. What's more, they also contribute to the immunization of results, which are better equipped for criticism in other contexts. Among the various calls to order, the call for a comparison of an interpretative proposition or reading with data segments has special relevance and can be understood as a *plausibility test*. Performing this kind of test does not imply that there is a pre-existing fit between the current proposition or reading and the data. Indeed semiotic chains can lead participants of data sessions anywhere. Thus plausibility tests can be understood as a device for establishing a link between interpretative ideas and data segments. In case of non-fit only the tested reading is modified or discarded, not the whole interpretation process. In sum, this form of testing has three effects: keeping the participants on track, stabilising the method and contributing to the quality of interpretations.

At first sight, this description might sound negative and competitive; however, negotiating and valuing interpretative propositions is very productive. Interpretation groups are arrangements, which help to produce "good" interpretations. What's more, interpretation groups not only produce "good" interpretations but also "good" interpreters. Negotiating and valuing interpretative propositions allows for learning the conventions of qualitative analysis, which contributes to a shared methodological knowledge among group members. It is this very knowledge, which is crucial for formulating and understanding calls to order. Practising the art of interpretation is associated with learning to use specific sets of vocabulary. These sets indicate to the group members present which method is currently being used (e.g., Grounded Theory), and also allow for complex strategies of legitimation. Methodological instructions explain methodical procedures as well as elaborate their methodological meaning. These instructions may have different starting points, however, they all contribute to the legitimation of specific interpretations and the methods used. These legitimations, in a transformed form, can be found later in the methods sections of research papers and monographs without being clearly visible to outsiders. Thus, investigating joint data sessions is one way of making this work and the enactment of research conventions visible.

In my perspective there are several options for using the analysis presented here as a starting point for further research. A first option would be to investigate how membership in interpretation groups affects the development of "individual research programmes" (Laudel and Bielecki 2018) as well as strategies of "portfolio management" (Rushforth et al. 2019) in SSH. As I argued above, members of interpretation groups learn specific vocabularies and theories, which they can use for assessing other's people research. The question is if they also develop intellectual independence and strategies for investing time and other resources in promising lines of research. Second, comparative research on national traditions of qualitative methods stresses the emphasis on "observing" social reality by carefully reconstructing data (Bethmann and Niermann 2015) and procedural legitimacy (Keller and Poferl 2016) in Germany. In the light of this research, it would be interesting to further investigate national as well as local conventions of qualitative research and how they are enacted in data sessions and other work arrangements. Third, borrowing an idea from Howard Becker (2006: 23) one could investigate the *fundamental indeterminacy of interpretations* and the solutions of qualitative researchers for this problem. The basic idea is that there is no interpretation in the singular, since interpretations exist in various versions. Initial impressions are written down in the interviewer's notes directly after an interview, her interpretation group produces and rejects more readings in several data sessions, and in the "lonesome" interpretation mode at the desk, written versions of these results are produced and redefined. The publication process brings about further versions, also because some reviewer always points out that quotes may be interpreted differently—at least that is what I tend to do. In short, interpretations are never finished, but sociologists and other researchers employ specific conventions to coordinate and wrap up "definite" versions. Investigating the solutions to the fundamental indeterminacy of interpretations might help to work out common aspects of different methodologies. Fourth, a last issue is connected to questions of authorship (e.g., Pontille 2003). The joint efforts of interpretation groups result in what the participants and others can perceive as interpretation results. The interesting thing here is that all members carry out an activity that can be regarded as a core activity of research. Does that automatically mean that all group members can claim authorship? Obviously not, in the transition from oral interpretation to written manuscripts, there is a transformation of authorship. The conventions of this transformation have yet to be explored in SSH.

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Textbooks and methods literature on joint data analysis

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