

## Contextural Analysis—A Proposal for Reconstructive Social Research in Organisational Contexts

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**Abstract:** The metatheory of the documentary method is well suited to fields such as generations and milieus. However, formal organisations are only partly attributable to conjunctive experiential spaces, since explicit bodies of knowledge and practices assume an important role. In this article, we develop a metatheoretical conceptualisation for reconstructive research in organisational settings following Gotthard GÜNTHER. We view social practice as processing between different latent and manifest bodies of knowledge both with each other and against each other. We propose a parsimonious, but simultaneously highly abstract metatheory using the concepts of contexture and the transjunctional operation with which these processes can be analysed. The potentials of this method are presented, taking the family management of an entrepreneurial family as an example.

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## 1. Introduction

Reconstructive procedures frequently develop in close engagement with the research practice in a certain field and also with certain theoretical concepts that fit this field. Thus, for example, the narrative interview developed within life history research, objective hermeneutics in connection with the issue of socialisation in the family and discourse analysis in relation to concepts of discourses that span societies. The documentary method evolved in milieu research and has its theoretical foundation in Karl MANNHEIM's (e.g. 1923) sociology of knowledge. Like other praxeological approaches, it assumes that social practices have their origin in implicit, embodied knowledge structures which are shared by certain groups or individuals in similar life situations. The focus is on interpreting these "conjunctive realms of experience"<sup>1</sup>—be it in the form of generational locations or as class-specific milieus (cf., for example, BOHNSACK, 2013, 2014). [1]

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1 Quotations from German texts are ours.

In this sense the basic conception of the documentary method, as of all other social scientific forms of theory building, has always been empirically laden and closely interwoven with the subject of its investigations (HIRSCHAUER, 2008, S.168ff.). On the one hand this means that there is a close match between the subject of the research and the method employed. On the other hand, however, this very compatibility is a problem when a certain research subject does not quite fit the metatheoretical basis of the chosen methodological approach. [2]

Organisations are particularly likely to present praxeological social research with such a situation, since while milieus and generations can well be understood as cohesive social nexuses that are relatively homogeneous and almost completely determined by implicit knowledge, the fact that explicit knowledge structures such as procedures (LUHMANN, 1969) or the bodies of knowledge of a profession (ABBOTT, 1988) or specific occupational group (e.g. administrative workers with training in business administration), are the stuff of which organisations are made. The expert-specific "operational knowledge" (Ger. "*Betriebswissen*", MEUSER & NAGEL, 2002, p.82) of the latter is structured in a different way from, for example, that of a youth group. Communicative knowledge, common sense constructions and in-order-to motives (SCHÜTZ, 1981) take on a much greater significance and are not merely a kind of step on the way to the actual, conjunctive knowledge (BOHNSACK, 1997, pp.197ff.). Organisations are also oriented towards function and vary in kind. A large number of social spaces and milieus come together in organisations and the resulting social practices are determined more by the processing or arranging of different bodies of knowledge than by reproducing a uniform and more or less homogeneous conjunctive experiential space. [3]

In what follows we propose a way in which the metatheoretical basis of the documentary method can be expanded to better capture organisations as subjects of research, based on the polycontextural logic of Gotthard GÜNTHER (1979a, 1979b). Using GÜNTHER's concept of contexture we present an alternative to the concept of the conjunctive experiential space. A contexture is initially understood merely as a space as defined by formal logic, with no ontological correlate, that exhibits both explicit and implicit structures and thus encompasses different social spaces as knowledge structures that have always been both interpreted and enacted. The possibilities offered by such a metatheory are then demonstrated, taking family management as an example. Social practice is seen as an arranging of multiple incommensurable spaces. We therefore begin (in Section 2) by addressing the significance of implicit and explicit bodies of knowledge in organisations and the implications they have for documentary research on organisations. In contrast to social practices in milieus, for example, organisational practices cannot—we hypothesise—be seen as simply resulting from conjunctive experiential spaces, but must be conceived of as an interplay between widely differing bodies of knowledge. In order to meet this challenge we suggest, that this kind of practice can be captured hermeneutically with the aid of GÜNTHER's theory of polycontexturality (Section 3). The potentials of this metatheory are then demonstrated taking the management of an entrepreneurial family as an example (Section 4). [4]

## 2. A Hermeneutics of Conjunctive Experiential Spaces

The documentary method differentiates between conjunctive and communicative experiential spaces. Communicative experiential spaces are seen as being spaces that are accessible to all members of a given linguistic community. We are talking about a level of meaning at which common sense stereotypes are produced and in-order-to motives (SCHÜTZ, 1981) are developed. However, in the documentary method these experiential spaces are not considered to be involved primarily in the structuring of social practice. On the contrary, social practice is assumed to be fuelled by implicit bodies of knowledge. Basic, incorporated and atheoretical frames of orientation determine how the communicative knowledge is understood and how social practice is structured. It is here that the concept of conjunctive experiential spaces, out of which these frames of orientation evolve, comes into play. Conjunctive experiential spaces are understood as shared bodies of knowledge that individuals acquire in the course of a certain socialisation (see, for example, BOHNSACK, 2014). They can be considered to be embodied bodies of knowledge (BOURDIEU, 1993) which, as "social sense", determine how we are to behave in our activities of daily living and how, for example, rules that have been formulated explicitly are to be applied and/or departed from. Where individuals are concerned, this knowledge can accordingly be conceptualised as a learned habitus. Thus, the documentary method attributes the handling of communicative bodies of knowledge to implicit knowledge structures which it aims to uncover (BOHNSACK, 2003a, pp.59ff, 2013). The metatheoretical basis of the documentary method is thus—like those of all other praxeological sociologies—strongly oriented towards implicit, embodied knowledge structures (BOHNSACK 2013; RECKWITZ, 2002). These structures are seen as being relevant for the *modus operandi* of social practice, whereas explicit structures are considered mainly to result from latent embodied knowledge. [5]

Praxeologically oriented social research is consequently interested in reconstructing these implicit and embodied bodies of knowledge. In this respect, the interpretation must go beyond communicative knowledge (BOHNSACK, 2003a, 2003b; PRZYBORSKI & WOHLRAB-SAHR, 2010, p.32ff.). In practice this approach has frequently proved successful (BOHNSACK 1989; BOHNSACK, LOOS, SCHÄFFER & WILD, 1995; NOHL, 2000). However, it is noticeable that the objects of analysis in the studies reported are highly compatible with the metatheoretical basis, being mainly social aggregates with a low degree of formal organisation, or none at all. Thus, for example, groups of youths (BOHNSACK, 1989), hooligans (BOHNSACK et al. 1995) and migrant milieus (NOHL, 2000) have been studied,<sup>2</sup> in other words, social formations with a strong tendency to develop their own habitus and preserve their homogeneity vis à vis other groups. [6]

However, in organisational contexts a metatheoretical approach that attributes communicative knowledge to a conjunctive experiential space begins to come up against its limits. The first striking difference between organisations and

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2 For exceptions see, for example, KUBISCH (2008) and MENSCHING (2008).

structures such as milieus or generations, into which we are socialised and which we only very rarely leave, is the large number of different social spaces that come together in organisations. One example that has now been well researched is hospitals, which bring together different rationalities (GREENWOOD, RAYNARD, KODEIH, MICELOTTA & LOUNSBURY, 2011). Thus even in simple settings such as those of medical treatment we can discern medical, administrative and nursing logics which, while they are represented by certain occupational groups, also have to be reflected upon by the respective other occupational groups (VOGD, 2004a, 2004b). Moreover, the hierarchy appears to be a further social space that needs to be reproduced. Similarly, the perspective of the patients can emerge as a relevant experiential space that constitutes a challenge for the social processes. As a rule an individual (for instance, a doctor) moves frequently between these spheres, i.e., to emphasise their inherent logic, between these "logical spaces" in the hospital. The patient discourse links up with the professional discourse of the medical staff. One minute her superior has to be manipulated in such a way that the desired result is achieved, while the next minute she is attempting to get nurses to take blood samples because she herself does not have the time, as she has to talk to a patient's relatives about his or her precarious condition. [7]

Thus, while in interactions both groups and generations or milieus develop a mainly exclusionary practice which confirms the homogeneity of the group, in organisations the opposite frequently occurs: the modus operandi of the respective social practice appears to originate less in a clearly defined and apparently homogeneous conjunctive experiential space than in the way in which these different spaces are processed with and against each other (JANSEN & VOGD, 2013).<sup>3</sup> [8]

Moreover, in organisations communicative knowledge takes on a life of its own. The different logical spaces that can be observed in organisations therefore represent more an amalgam of communicative and conjunctive knowledge. The in-order-to motives in organisations are not merely manifestations of a certain experiential space, but rather have an inevitability, which cannot simply be reduced to a certain latency. This is the background to the polemics that LATOUR (1999), who spent a lifetime doing research in organisations, quotes as an argument against the orientation towards latencies in sociology. If a doctor says that she is treating patients, as a rule we can assume that she is in fact doing so. While there is a certain socialisation that is behind this treatment which puts a certain interpretation on it and determines the form of its expression, the in-order-to motivation itself is not attributable to this socialisation, but is simply interpreted in a certain way.<sup>4</sup> [9]

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3 Multidimensional typification (BOHNSACK, 2010) and relational typification (NOHL, 2013) do in fact address this in part by discussing the overlapping of different experiential spaces in individuals. Arnd-Michael NOHL (e.g. 2000), in particular, analyses social practice as an arrangement of different experiential spaces that must be brought into relation with each other. However, the ultimate goal of this form of typification is to understand how different social spaces overlap within individuals and not how social practice can be understood as being fuelled by different logics.

This interlinking of conjunctive and communicative knowledge that we find in organisations is mainly attributable to the fact that they are embedded in institutional societal structures. In this sense a doctor is a member of a generation or milieu (and will hence interpret the role of the doctor differently from a doctor of the preceding generation), but also a member of his or her profession. In so doing s/he draws on a large number of explicit bodies of knowledge, including scientific knowledge, guidelines and hierarchical decision-making structures, which must be seen as functional systems and their implementation in the corresponding programmes (LUHMANN 1988, 1990, 2005) or as institution-based rationalities (FRIEDLAND & ALFORD, 1991)—or as formal organisational structures such as hierarchy and the assignment of functions. The difference between the spokespersons in a formal organisation and those of a group in a specific milieu is then similar to that between WEBER's traditional or charismatic type of authority on the one hand, and the rational organisation on the other (1964 [1922]). [10]

Seen from this perspective it would be a step in the wrong direction were we to attempt to ascribe organisational practice to a conjunctive experiential space. Even in organisations in which a dense conjunctive experiential space develops, for instance in a classical industrial workforce (cf., for example, POPITZ, BAHRDT, KESTING & JÜRES 1961), it is the specialised knowledge of the respective disciplines that guides action within the organisation. This does not, however, rule out the possibility that a milieu of the industrial workers who use this knowledge might evolve. But even this milieu formation would be secondary. The milieu rises and falls with the demands of the organisation. We see this in POPITZ et al.'s (1961)<sup>5</sup> classical example of the "rollers" in steel mills, where the work process that is laid down by the organisation and the individual's position in it determine standing—and worldview and create a milieu that rapidly disappears when new production techniques are introduced. Here we could cite LATOUR (2005) again: explicit knowledge structures do not have their origin in the latent orientations of those who employ them. This does not, of course, exclude the possibility that embodied knowledge is required to really implement certain processes, as is shown clearly by the above example of the rollers. It also does not rule out the possibility of investigating these milieus—or others—as milieus, gender-specific groups, etc. However, the focus would not be on the organisation, but on the question as to the "workers' images of society" (POPITZ et al., 1961). [11]

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4 In regard to the priority that it gives to the conjunctive experiential space the documentary method, like BOURDIEU (HIRSCHAUER, 2008, p.170), sees theoretical and practical knowledge as being highly disparate. However, what would, from an empirical standpoint, appear to be convincing in regard to youth milieus cannot simply be applied to organisations, as the way in which members of organisations are socialised in an organisation is not usually comparable and the ends and means can be rapidly altered via the hierarchy.

5 The authors describe a specific milieu that has developed within a highly specialised team of skilled workers. The task of the "rollers" is to spot the red-hot wires in a split second as they shoot out of the roller, to seize them with a pair of tongs and feed them into another, narrower roller without interruption. To do this they require a high level of practical skill and a lot of experience, with the result that the "rollers" develop their own specific professional pride and are accorded a special role on the shop floor. However, the authors also describe how the rollers' task has been eliminated by the introduction of new machinery and the milieu is disintegrating as a result.

What then remains as a conjunctive experiential space determining organisational practice is frequently little: one knows how the interaction functions in formal meetings if one has attended them often enough. One knows that everybody has their own role to play and that alliances and speaker positions can change very fast. What is available to all participants as a conjunctive experiential space is frequently only the knowledge of how to handle formal structures and societal rationalities. This is very likely more important at the top of a hierarchy. But even "ordinary" industrial workers know that they must behave in a certain way towards engineers and the management, that while one can bend and avoid keeping to the explicit rules, superficially at least one must follow them. Although works councils and trade unions can introduce institutions that can contradict the explicit directives, this only creates a further layer of explicit structures that introduces a new rationality which appears, for example (as, for instance, in VOIGT 1962), to be a countervailing force. In short, the only remaining possibility is to get round the primacy of the formal by means of implicit practices—whether for good or for bad (LUHMANN, 1964) —, or to introduce a further explicit rationality that competes with the first. However, ultimately all that is achieved is a higher degree of institutional complexity. [12]

As a result of this anchoring in both formal and societal structures the handling of the social spaces in organisations differs in many ways from those found in non-formalised social communities. Whereas, for example, a clique can more or less differentiate its worldview, which gives rise to a certain practice, from those of others, in the organisational setting multiple rationalities are interwoven with each other in a complex structure. Applied to the example of the hospital that would mean that the doctors cannot simply assume an attitude that would exclude the administration or the nursing staff from their reflections, but must take the respective speaker positions into account. For actors to be able to achieve such complex reflections the spaces in organisations must be accessible and addressable to a much higher degree than, for instance, milieus are for milieus or generations for generations. Whereas one either belongs to a milieu and can speak from its position, or is considered a stranger, in organisations being a stranger is the norm. In organisations individuals present themselves explicitly as speakers of a certain social rationality and are accordingly recognisable as such. The possibility that other factors (e.g. age, gender, social background, religious affinity) may also become visible and manifest in interactions is not excluded, but not initially what is actually at issue in the organisation. From the perspective of the organisation the work of interaction is needed in order to counter any tendencies towards conjugation or dissociation since what is of interest is its members' functions, not issues such as gender, educational background or ethnic origin.<sup>6</sup> [13]

Reconstructive social research in organisations therefore needs to expand its theoretical resources, e.g. to adopt a frame analysis approach or LUHMANN's concept of functional systems (cf., for instance, BESIO & PRONZINI 2010;

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6 The rather "thin experiential space" of the organisation must therefore actively be kept stable and sustained. Addressing difference thus becomes an organisational challenge (cf. GOFFMAN, 1986).

KNUDSEN, 2010; PEETZ, LOHR & HILBRICH, 2010, VOGD, 2009a, 2009b, 2011). And last, but not least, the question arises as to whether the different approaches that render the associated issues manageable cannot be integrated in a unified metatheory. In light of the above, such a metatheory would have to fulfil the following requirements. [14]

What is needed is a conceptualisation of social spaces that includes both implicit (frame of orientation) and explicit structures (in-order-to motives, orientation schemas) without locating them ontologically (e.g. as conjunctive experiential spaces or objectively valid norms). Thus social spaces would have to be understood abstractly as sets of patterns and frames of orientation (BOHNSACK, 1998) which would click into place on neither side of the distinction between manifest or latent, dynamically and depending on the current situation. [15]

This concept must focus on the linking of different spaces in social practice from the start (PEETZ et al., 2010). Practice should not be conceived as something that is generated from a single logical space or frame of orientation, but as resulting from the confrontation between and arrangement of different spaces (e.g. a doctor's practice should be seen as resulting from the confrontation between medical professionalism and administrative routines, patients, colleagues and professional nursing services). [16]

These spaces and their inter-relationships must be seen as emerging from the dynamics of processes of arrangement and the associated constitution of further spaces and relationships. Social research that is reconstructive must be able to observe how different social logics relate to each other, provide each other with structural richness and thus simultaneously both structure and reproduce the *modi operandi* in organisations as practice. [17]

It is, of course, important at the same time to retain the basic essential elements of reconstructive social research. Taking explicit structures more seriously does not mean that we are reduced to using only common sense or content analysis as our only method. Rather, we are still conducting second-order observation (BOHNSACK, 2010) which, however, cannot remain within a single logic, that is, infer an implicit structure from a specific explicit structure, but examines how the different logics are related to each other through social practice. Considering this, such an expansion of the documentary method would in a sense be an expansion of a multidimensional typification (BOHNSACK, 2001). However, while the main goal of multidimensional typification is to conduct an analysis of different factors which in multidimensional typologies appear to be inherently separate and are then brought together as experiential spaces that overlap in concrete persons, our proposal takes us on a search for the practice of the interweaving of different spaces that are both implicitly and explicitly structured.<sup>7</sup> [18]

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7 This also provides a theoretical basis for the problems that are currently being debated under the heading of "institutional complexity" in the international discourse of the sociology of organisation (GREENWOOD et al., 2011).

### 3. Contextures

At this point we shall employ Gotthard GÜNTHER's (1979a, 1979b) much valued logic as a starting point for such a metatheory, since this approach provides a sufficiently high degree of abstraction and differentiation for a deontologised concept of social spaces (cf. also JANSEN, 2013, pp.21ff.). GÜNTHER points out that ultimately classical logic can only distinguish between true and false statements, with the consequence that it is not possible to make statements about a world in which different reflective positions are simultaneously involved. Classical logic separates the world into a positive side—what is—and a subjective (or reflective) side in which statements are made as to the extent to which one side corresponds to the other (*adaequatio res et intellectus*).<sup>8</sup> As a result there is only one truth, i.e. a correct relationship between subject and object. From this perspective if something is true, it must be true for all observers. If two people have a different opinion on the same issue, then one must be wrong. Here GÜNTHER uses the example of looking at a rose (1978, pp.131ff.). For instance, the statement that a rose is thorny or is not thorny can be either true or false. If the rose is thorny, the statement that it is not thorny would be false. [19]

However, on closer scrutiny we realise that the negative statement can be understood in different ways. It can either be taken to mean the negation of a category of being (the rose is not thorny) or the negation of the category system (no, the rose is not thorny, it is yellow). In the second case the negation is an accretive operation (GÜNTHER 1979c, p.8). It adds something to the world, i.e. a new logical space. [20]

With this as his starting point, GÜNTHER (1979a, 1979b) introduced the concept of contexture. He conceived of a contexture as being a bivalent logical space-(in regard to the rose, for example, thorniness or the quality of having colour), each of which has a positive and negative value. The positive value represents manifest content, while the negative value represents reflexivity that determines the way in which the positive value is interpreted. The unity of the distinction can only be taken into account from within another contexture. Thus while from within a contexture, a rose (positive value) may appear to be thorny (negative value), from within the next contexture, thorniness can be seen as a certain logical space.<sup>9</sup> [21]

At first glance such abstract considerations from the field of logic do not appear to have much in common with the everyday problems of qualitative research. However, on closer scrutiny some important parallels with the problems described above appear, in two respects:

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8 Here logicians will object that one can, of course, make the statement that different people have different opinions. However, ultimately this statement is only true within a certain logic. The entities about which the statement is being made are only the opinions of the observers, such that a worldview would be seen as a characteristic. An opinion would then be in the same category as the colour green or the quality of being angular.

9 See also KAEHR (1993) and KLAGENFURT (2001) for introductions to GÜNTHER's concept of polycontexturality.

- in the empirically unsatisfactory binary contrast between conjunctive and communicative experiential spaces (in a monovalent logic something cannot be communicative and conjunctive at the same time)<sup>10</sup> and
- in the challenge that in organisations—one could even, citing NASSEHI (2011), say that everywhere in the "society of presents" different logics exist simultaneously (the fact that doctors think in terms of economics and think about legal aspects does not exclude the possibility that they also engage in medical activities. In a monovalent logic the economics and legal aspects would exclude the medical aspects. As a consequence one would complain that medicine is becoming ruled by the dictate of economics, that the autonomy of doctors is threatened by lawyers or, alternatively, that doctors are inefficient or disregard the law). [22]

In contrast, the idea of the copresence of different logical spaces includes the difference between conjunctive and communicative experience and also between different institutional and functional logics, without having to locate them ontologically. In the polycentrally distributed arrangement of a many-valued logic they can be understood as a dynamic interplay between different contextures. [23]

In this way the communicative experiential space with its common sense stereotypes and in-order-to motives can also provide manifest structures, which in GÜNTHER's view can be understood as positive values (what is said and *is* communicated). At the same time the structures created in this manner must be seen in conjunction with a certain mode of reflecting upon them. They should be put into practice in a certain way. How this is done is determined by the conjunctive experiential space. In a sense, the experience that is incorporated can be understood as the reflection on the manifest bodies of meaning accessible to a linguistic community. At the same time, it includes a reference to when a certain logic must be suspended. Thus, for example, a medical director must know when the time is right to use administrative and financial arguments in negotiations with the hospital administration, rather than medical ones. [24]

Likewise, GÜNTHER's theory (1979b) is well able to capture the copresence of different frames of action. The above example of the interactions between doctors and nursing staff, patients, the professional and administrative contextures is an almost classical case: what is said in one context cannot be said in another. What appears to be right in one context, can be wrong in another. Accordingly, an important part of the practice that takes place on the wards consists in aligning different logics with each other. The structure or reflection that conditions this arrangement would then have to be called a mediating contexture (GÜNTHER, 1979a, p.191). Ultimately, the different practices of arranging and aligning produce an aggregate consisting of different logical spaces that inter-relate and use each other to create structure. Thus as a rule social practices in organisations can and may as a rule no longer be

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<sup>10</sup> For a similar contrasting of different poles (community vs. society) and example of how GÜNTHER's polyvalent logic can be drawn on see BÜHL (1969); see also JANSEN (2014).

assigned to a single logic (and much less to a milieu), but would have to be considered to be a compound contexture. To quote BATESON (1979, pp.8) loosely: organisational social practice is the pattern that connects. [25]

GÜNTHER's conceptualisation of polycontextural logic thus fulfils the first two of the above-mentioned requirements for a metatheory of reconstructive social research that aims to explore the kind of complex social and communicative logics that arise in modern organisations. That leaves the third point, i.e. the question as to how the reciprocal accessibilities of those very spaces can be explained without losing their respective identities as autonomous spaces, GÜNTHER (1976) sees this as being solved by transjunctional operations and proposes that it is through these operations that contextures are related to each other. He distinguishes three different operations (see also JANSEN 2013, pp.47ff.). [26]

The simplest form is partial rejection, through which a value is deemed not to belong or to be a property or quality of something foreign. If, for example, the owner of a family business speaks about the subject of shareholder value orientation this may be regarded as violating the preferred values of a sustainable corporate culture. The intrinsic logic of the rejected value can still be perceived as such. This is an operation that can often be observed in the discourse organisation of group discussions (cf. PRZYBORSKI, 2004), for example, every time a certain norm or a certain behaviour is abandoned in favour of another with which the group itself can identify. This form of partial rejection is the simplest form of transjunctional operation since it does not develop a second contexture, but simply serves to secure the boundary of a "we" from within, without reference to a Thou. It thus remains within the current contexture and confirms it. [27]

Total undifferentiated rejection is more complex. Here the space of the Thou, which is initially undefined, is defined, but then completely rejected in the next operation as a logical space that does not belong. This dissociated structure therefore emerges as a separate contexture or reflective position which can then also be used to create structure. The other side, which is referred to, is thus seen as the totally foreign other which logically appears to be inaccessible because it cannot be understood and therefore also not accepted. Total negation thus has a transcontextural function since it regulates the transition from one contexture to another, while partial negation only functions within a contexture (MAROTZKI, 1990, pp.213f.). If, for example, the owner of a family business starts to talk about the banks with which s/he is unsuccessfully trying to negotiate a loan, this can lead to a totally undifferentiated rejection on the part of the business. The bank may appear as an entity whose actions are arbitrary and whose modes of evaluation can be neither understood nor accepted. It will therefore be described for instance as a hotbed of ignorance and stupidity which has failed to grasp the firm's business model and uses ineffective procedures. Epithets such as "stupid", "sick" and "mean" are common patterns of judgement in this operation. [28]

Total differentiated rejection is the most complex transjunctional operation. Here, as with total undifferentiated rejection, a new contexture develops as an

independent reflexive entity. In contrast to the situation with total undifferentiated rejection, here the inherent logic of the rejected contexture is understood, i.e. the self-referentiality of the other contexture is taken into account. If, for instance, the owner of a family business considers the question of who should take over from him/her, s/he can do so by means of a total differentiated rejection. For example, if s/he perceives his/her son or daughter as someone whose own preferences and interests must be taken into consideration and who cannot be forced to enter into the business, but who needs to be motivated, s/he is including the self-reference of the respective Thou-position in his/her reflection. A bank can also be viewed in this way. If the businessman does not reject and condemn the bank's loan-granting procedures but tries to understand and benefit from its specific rationality in order to adjust his/her own rhetoric to that of the other party, the total undifferentiated rejection is transformed into a total differentiated rejection. The entrepreneur does not share the self-referential position of the other party but addresses it in order to find his or her own way of dealing with it. Another example can be found in situations of increased economic pressure where doctors may try to obtain the maximum possible profit in some cases in order to create more latitude for medical intervention in others. Thus the respective other logic is subverted by addressing and understanding it and using it to further one's own self-referentiality. [29]

Polyvalent hermeneutics based on Gotthard GÜNTHER's logic thus focuses mainly on how contextures are opened and closed with the aid of different transjunctional operations. This approach attempts to establish how different reflection spaces are brought into a stable alignment by such operations as they are carried out in the practices of organisations, how their boundaries are defined in the process, how problems and tensions develop and dissolve in such a practice and how the arrangements that emerge condition themselves. Social research that is thus informed results in the reconstruction of a workable compound contexture, i.e. in an understanding of why certain solutions will or will not work (and then in a second step what that means and how it is to be assessed). [30]

#### **4. Family Dynasties: The Reconstruction of the Unity of Family and Business in Family Businesses in Critical Circumstances**

Up to now we have focused mainly on medical examples since at the present state of the art hospitals are seen as being typical, if not ideal-typical as regards the co-existence of different rationalities in organisations. However, in what follows we would like, to take the case of an entrepreneurial family business as an example, to contrast the specifics of the metatheory we are proposing with those of the metatheoretical basis of the documentary method. Entrepreneurial family businesses provide a particularly good example of how conjunctive experiential spaces can dissolve and thus demonstrate the limitations of the concept. The case in question is that of an entrepreneurial family that now has over 300 members and attributes its establishment to the founder of the business (the firm was founded over 150 years ago). Membership of the family is defined

by descent from the founder and by ownership of shares, the former being a precondition for the latter. [31]

The conjunctive unity of the family is accordingly at risk since under these conditions the generations to come are no longer socialised together. The term used to describe such families in the literature is "family dynasties" (e.g. JAFFE & LANE, 2004). In these cases neither the family nor the business can function as a conjunctive experiential space. Mere "ownership" creates community, which makes the family association through the business appear to be a unity. But ownership also remains in a sense abstract since the proximity to the business was lost generations ago. As a reaction to this rather weak bond many of these "extended families" develop specific governance structures with the intention of re-creating something like an entrepreneurial family (CARLOCK & WARD, 2010; MARTIN, 2001; WIECHERS, 2006). [32]

However, these governance structures are themselves problematic since they represent an attempt to transform the family into a formal organisation while at the same time demanding that they remain a family, i.e. a non-formal grouping. On the one hand we have the business with its own competition, training and profit requirements, and on the other the family with its orientation towards family loyalty and attachment, and as a third element the specific logic of ownership (SIMON, 1999; TAGIURI & DAVIS, 1996; VON SCHLIPPE & FRANK, 2013). While in smaller entrepreneurial families or in small circles in large entrepreneurial families this configuration can still have a specific conjunctive experiential space as a correlate that leads to a certain entrepreneurial practice results (BOHNSACK & PRZYBORSKI, 2012), large entrepreneurial families and family dynasties are confronted with more challenges. [33]

The practice of this family management provides a very good illustration of the metatheoretical problems described above since—as will become clear in a concrete example below—the family management must be seen as an attempt to generate a conjunctive experiential space on the basis of differing abstract logical spaces. Different contexts (ownership, business, family) which have retained only a communicative content, particularly in large enterprises with widely ramified branches of the family, are expected to relate to each other in a way that is conducive to the revival of something like a conjunctive experiential space of the entrepreneurial family. [34]

The database for the example presented here is an interview with a "family manager", i.e. a person who is responsible for family governance. It is taken from a larger study with a total of nine entrepreneurial families in which group discussions and interviews were carried out with the persons responsible for the subjects of family governance and "family strategy". The interviews were conducted as expert interviews with a guideline, with two interviewers for each case (JANSEN & VON SCHLIPPE, 2014). Judged on the basis of this broader database the interview presented here provides a typical example of the problem situations and action practices in entrepreneurial families of a comparable size. [35]

#### 4.1 The starting point: The disintegration of the family

Asked about the importance of family management, the family manager of an eighth-generation entrepreneurial family, which now has several hundred shareholders, answered:

"Well, ultimately the family management has doubtlessly always been important, but (.) it was less formally structured (..) Perhaps that wasn't so necessary, since in the times when, for example, the entire management consisted exclusively of members of the family, the family was of course extremely closely involved in the business anyway, because if you wanted to know something you simply called your uncle, brother, father, grandpa, or whoever, or your cousin."<sup>11</sup> [36]

In this passage today is compared with yesterday. Yesterday is described as a time when the family and the business formed an organic unit and when the contacts that one had within the family were at the same time the contacts [one had] within the business. Here both contextures, the family and the business, seem to be identical with the one conjunctive experiential space of the entrepreneurial family. Even if it is not possible to determine whether this was in fact true in the past, it becomes clear what the problem is for the family business today: the family and the business are two different spaces, each of which has its own rules. This is elaborated in the next passage.

"And this decision at the time, to bring members into the management who weren't part of the family, was not undisputed, (.) since it made it clear (..) that one was sending a clear signal to certain (...), then, I think, exclusively male descendants, 'We don't believe that you have what it takes'. Hopes were dashed. Uhm, my father was very keen to push this step through." [37]

The family and the business drifted apart and seemed to be two different, but linked contextures that the interview participant separated by means of a total differentiated rejection. Both contextures have their own inherent laws—managerial skills on the side of the business and family loyalty on the side of the family—, which enter into competition with each other. The acceptance of the fact that the contexture "business" has its own inherent laws that may even be in opposition to those of the family would appear to have created a caesura which resulted in the estrangement. [38]

This problem also cannot be solved by means of governance procedures. Transparency and information apparently only make everything worse.

"That was still patriarchy [name], he and our speaker, the managing director [name], I think the most important decisions were made then, between the two of them and, I mean, it would be a bit negative [to say so], but we were in fact rather more like a

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11 The interviews were transcribed word for word. Pauses are denoted by brackets, dots inside the brackets representing the duration of the pause, e.g. a pause of two seconds is shown as "(..)". The interviews were conducted in German. The translation was done by a professional translator.

rubber stamp committee. That is, the decisions had already reached a very advanced stage before we heard about them. That has changed enormously. We are [now] informed about a lot of things at a really early stage, much earlier than the contract requires. We get much more information, I think if you weighed it symbolically in kilos of paper (sighs) I think it's a really steep curve and so today it would be best not to print it out any more but (laughs) simply to store it electronically because otherwise at some point the cellar would get too small. (.) So time, increasing massively. It's not always the same. There are phases when there's an enormous amount, let's take something like a strategy process, that happens every few years, and then you get a real present under the Christmas tree. Thank God that's always in January, you really get it before the Christmas holidays and that really is a lot of material [...]" [39]

Here the idealised past is also the time of the patriarch who made all the decisions. Back then the members of the shareholders' committee knew virtually nothing at all, nor did they have any influence. At the time of the interview this situation is reported to have changed enormously. However, interestingly the new structure is failing to solve the problem, but simply displaces it, since there is still a gap between the family and the business, which becomes evident in the metaphor of the "[present] under the Christmas tree". Where in the past the business was closely interwoven with the family, it now appears as a kind of bothersome foreign body that invades the idyll of the Christmas holidays, which should in fact be protected. Whereas in the past no distinction was made and life in the family was synonymous with life in the business, now the business intrudes upon the private life of the nuclear family in the form of endless columns of figures. [40]

At the same time there is something positive about the new developments. The current practice of providing information "early" that is to replace the old lack of transparency with transparency and control is positively compared to the "rubber stamp body" of the times when the current head of the family and the management ruled. Whereas in the past the advisory board had to rely on the decision of the head of the family, now it can make its own judgement. Thus, while in the interviewee's description in the past the business and the family were felt to be a single unity, this unity is now becoming an abstraction. [41]

However, this very transparency of the business has the paradoxical consequence that the felt unity is being lost. It is becoming clear that there is no longer an embodied correlate, no entrepreneurial intuition that welds the family and the business together. The business appears to be nothing more than a more or less abstract numbers game, a reflexive entity with its own rules which are now themselves intruding upon family life in a theoretical and abstract form. It is a technoid foreign body which is very practical, but which in the closed circuit of the family remains foreign due precisely to this highly developed technical quality. This is what is meant by the metaphor of the pile of paper under the Christmas tree. Nonetheless: a return to the old days is neither possible (nor desired?) and the family is thus faced with a situation in which family and business are no longer a lived unit. [42]

However, the entrepreneurial family no longer constitutes a conjunctive experiential space.

Interviewer: "What, er, aspects, what factors, what (.) elements would you say are central forgers of identity for the family as an extended family?"

Interviewee: "(..) The great need to keep the business going, (..) on the one hand out of pride in the fact that we do possess something special (..) and also out of a feeling, I believe, of social responsibility, that one repeatedly imagines that one has—that one is particularly good at managing a business, also in terms of social responsibility. Perhaps one must put that idea out of one's head sometimes. Uuh, because the family is only a family because of it [of the business], that we wouldn't know them at all otherwise, otherwise I wouldn't ever somehow know a seventh cousin. I wouldn't even know that he existed. Also, I think, that there are many shareholders who feel that they gain something from it (..), that through it they can have a share in a real economic factor. We have many people who do something completely different in their own careers, who are goldsmiths, musicians, you name it (.) and who through this participation suddenly have impressions of a world that would otherwise be totally foreign to them. They don't read the business section of the *Frankfurter Allgemeine* newspaper, or the financial market, they're not really interested in all that." [43]

Here the family itself seems to be in a precarious situation. Not only are the business and the family drifting apart, but the family itself is also. It is now so large that one may possibly only get to know someone else because the shareholders' meeting provides an opportunity to come together ("otherwise I wouldn't ever somehow get to know a seventh cousin"). The organic connection with the business, indeed, the very bases for this connection are missing ("the business section [...], or the financial market, they're not really interested in all that). The contexture of the "entrepreneurial family" as a conjunctive experiential space of those who read the business section every morning as a matter of course has disintegrated into a plurality of different experiential spaces. The only bright spot here is the hope that this very lack of familiarity makes one curious, but this ultimately remains only small consolation since natural familiarity is being replaced by a well-meaning interest in people one does not know. [44]

In addition, it is clear to the interviewee that initially the special social responsibility that is seen as embodying the special identity of the entrepreneurial family is, in fact, no more than an illusion. What remains is the empty formula of the business itself, with which one no longer has any relationship—apart from through the name and formal membership—, and which thus only exists as property, without any felt personal bond. The entrepreneurial family may continue to exist as a contexture, a meaningful social space, but no longer—or only in a rudimentary form—as a conjunctive experiential space. [45]

## 4.2 Managing the split between family and business

In response to this situation the interviewee has developed a specific practice of family management.

Interviewer: "Can you say something about how you manage (.) the family? Who manages the family and how is the family managed by the family management? What is it, how does it work?"

Interviewee: "(...) To start with through trust (..) I think you can't really instrumentalise that. It only works if you first keep giving the family the feeling, 'It's a good thing that we exist as a big family' and the members of the family keep reminding themselves that 'We only exist as a big family because of the business' and then through something like interpersonal contacts, that is, knowing each other, lowering the barriers, that if you don't like something, you reach for the phone and know someone you can call." [46]

The direct conjunctive experiential space of family communality has been lost. Now there are multifarious new reflection groups. These are recognised in an abstract way and addressed (goldsmiths vs. readers of the business section, the patriarch vs. the supervising committee of shareholders). They are thus theoretically accessible as contextures, but only partially accessible as conjunctive experiential spaces. The goldsmith also remains foreign, as does the business, although in a different way. Both are understood, but no longer felt. [47]

At the same time it is quite clear to the interviewee that integration can only be achieved by constructing a conjunctive experiential space. The empty fiction of the business must be filled with a corresponding, felt experience. A situation must be achieved in which one "you know someone". This very generic and unspecific statement ("you", "someone", "to someone") shows how unattainable this natural unity appears to be. [48]

This impression is further reinforced by the paradoxical initial passage in which the interviewee uses the term "instrumentalise". Management is clearly an instrumental activity. However, this is exactly what *cannot* achieve what needs to be achieved here. [49]

Accordingly, new constructions must be found with which the family management quasi subverts itself as management. That becomes clear in the following interview excerpt.

Interviewee: "And that is, I think, in fact very important, that we keep having new events and keep motivating the shareholders to get involved in the business, making them curious and allowing them to participate. We didn't use to do that as much in the past as we do today."

Interviewer 2: "And what, what was the point where this was seen and it was seen that, 'We want to make more of an effort?' Can you imagine how, how it happened, this change?"

Interviewee: "It didn't happen all at once. It happened bit by bit. As I said, the information group was [created] mainly for the very young shareholders because we had realised that there were more and more shareholders who have no parents, or no older brother or no uncle who could say, 'Come on, now you're eighteen, let's sit down together and I'll tell you what [name of the business] is'. So there's the [name of certain products and production departments] division and this and that and this is how the business works, that's what's in our articles of association and you have these accounts and you must do this and that and you may not do that'. There are fewer and fewer of them (.) and thus it simply became clear that the young shareholders had to be somehow introduced, because there were in fact shareholders who suddenly arrived here at the age of eighteen and a) didn't know anybody except their own closest family and who thus of course felt completely uncomfortable, a host of people, everybody's looking at me, 'Who are you?'. [50]

Here the interviewee briefly describes one of his family management strategies. He has founded an information group for the young shareholders with a view to getting them interested in the business ("somehow introduced"). The interesting thing about this technique is that it is both instrumental and non-instrumental. It is bivalent, since it addresses the contexture of the business on the level of communicative knowledge. It is a matter of conveying objective skills that a shareholder needs. Here the world of the strategy report under the Christmas tree and that of the academics who are not part of the family are being addressed. However, the goal is not simply to provide the shareholder with formal training, but rather to use the logical space of shareholder training to open up a conjunctive experiential space. The intention is to create interest and identification by talking about the material and thus, as it were, to kill two birds with one stone. Family management is thus instrumentalist, but not within the contexture of the family. It is so-to-speak tunnelled through the contexture of the business and addressed in a mediated way. The official goal within the contexture of the business, training, remains secondary so long as care is taken to develop a conjunctive space within which no-one experiences people as strangers who should be family for him. [51]

Methodologically here it becomes clear how communicative knowledge structures develop their own rationality. Both the shareholder and the interviewee are of the opinion that shareholder skills are important. They need to be imparted so that a shareholder can fulfil his functions. This is an action-guiding pattern which functions as an explicit structure (but not an implicit one) and can thus be addressed as such. Being a shareholder is thus a social space for itself which, however, should not be seen as a conjunctive experiential space, but is defined by formal role requirements. [52]

Another way to get the family to identify with the business is to work with substitutes.

Interviewer 2: "Do you think that is an identity anchor? What other points might perhaps be important, if any?"

Interviewee: "Well in my opinion one of the most central points is certainly our principles. They are enormously important for the shareholders, the management principles, the principles of our business. If they were to be revised and certain passages were deleted without our having communicated about it very carefully beforehand and really tried to establish whether there was a majority in favour, in my view that would be a stress test that we might not pass." [53]

It is no longer possible for the family to run the business directly and the skills needed to exert a direct influence on the management are limited to communicative knowledge. Here this problem is addressed by formulating value codes. Where a business is foreign and remote it is possible to formulate values that render a felt identification possible and which are assumed to be those that guide the business's actions (cf. GRODDECK, 2010). [54]

Admittedly the idea that these value codes guide the management's actions remains a figment of the imagination.

"Well of course this, this fairness in human resources management isn't measurable. One must be careful there. But if that was really/if that reached levels where one would really have to say those are really tough managers, they don't give a damn, they push their staff and pressurize and mob them at every conceivable opportunity, and that's a law, but that is also part of our management principles." [55]

Here the "measurability" of the values emerges as extremely precarious, discussed as exemplified in human resources management. Normality appears to have become to a great extent detached from the respective standards set by the family and the extreme cases where the interviewee believes intervention would be needed are, he says, backtracking, excluded by the management principles. Thus even in these cases the assumption would seem to be that what must not be cannot be. [56]

The wisdom of the family management therefore lies in maintaining the fiction of a family identity and producing a limited conjunctive experiencing space which does not, however, re-establish the unity of business and family, but sustains the separation. It is clear that it would be difficult to re-establish an intermeshing of the two, on the contrary, it would also result in problems that neither the business nor the family wants. Thus as regards family members working in the business the interviewee says:

"We have there a rather, a bit of a soft way that permits everything and there are in fact guidelines for it. They are also sensible, as sensible as one can make them, I think, but ultimately the question is, does equal treatment [of employees who are shareholders and those who are not] in fact work? Can it in fact work? And what price

am I willing to pay for it? And there we must unfortunately also keep the, uhh, the predecessors in mind, where it sometimes simply did not work, and think about what is happening on the good side of the balance and what is happening on the bad side? And every case that goes badly leaves scars in its wake, not only in the person who was really affected, but very often to a much greater extent in the parents, who are deeply hurt because they (.) no doubt believe that their child has not been treated fairly. The child himself may go in a completely different direction and may even be happier afterwards than he was before, but I think the wound of, 'My child has been treated badly because' is worse, 'my cousin didn't do enough for him', is a very big burden. And there it's rather a question of the philosophy." [57]

As a general rule the employment of family members in the business cannot be completely excluded, on the one hand because this furthers the shareholders' identification with the business, and on the other hand because the fiction of the family business needs to be maintained. However, the interviewee believes that the problems that arise outweigh [the advantages] because the wishes and needs of the respective nuclear families in the entrepreneurial family and the family member who joins the business clash with business's rules. If the business does not adhere to the rules of family loyalty ("my cousin didn't do enough for him"), this leads to conflicts in a family whose unity is already precarious anyway ("fifth cousin"). [58]

Moreover, there can no longer be any question of giving more weight to the logic of the business, which gave rise to the separation in the first place, than to the family. Relieving the entrepreneurial family from the obligation to act on business issues is thus evidently a central factor in maintaining the stability of the entrepreneurial family's identity. [59]

In sum, we can say that in this configuration the entrepreneurial family is primarily a logical address, a contexture which can no longer be considered a conjunctive experiential space. The entrepreneurial family is no longer in contact with the business and outside of it also has no conjunctive experiential space as an entrepreneurial family per se. On the one hand the business is being reduced to being a pure non-family abstraction (the pile of paper under the Christmas tree), while on the other the family is being reduced to a group of shareholders who don't know each other and don't share the same lifeworld (the "goldsmith" as the ideal type who does not read the financial section of the newspaper and who is asked by the "mob" of others who he is). The contexture of the entrepreneurial family nonetheless offers certain resources that can be mobilised. However, these are explicit bodies of knowledge which are borrowed from the world of the business and which are also accessible to the "goldsmiths". Thus, for example, interest in the business generated by founding "information groups" can be used to produce a conjunctive experiential space between the members of these "information groups". A conjunctive experiential space is developing quasi as a side product of the "shareholder training". [60]

The family management resorts to these communicative bodies from the "business" contexture in order to fill the empty contexture of the entrepreneurial

family by inviting the shareholders to engage in a shared practice, for instance through training programmes and establishing management guidelines, which produces an ex post conjunctive experiential space. One could say that fictitious business activities are created without undergoing the risks that would result from actual business activities. [61]

The work of the family manager cannot thus be ascribed to any clear conjunctive experiential space or to practice in separate conjunctive experiential spaces (NOHL, 2000). His practice consists rather in switching back and forth between the different worlds (the figures under the Christmas tree, the feeling of being a family, the shareholder training events, the goldsmiths and the financial section readers) and in interlinking the respective contextures in such a way that that artificial conjunctive experiential space develops in which the false appearance of a unity of business and family and the family itself exist. The social practice of family management thus arises from an intermediate space in which both communicative and conjunctive knowledge guide action and in which the fictitious nature of the activities is known. In this sense it is a social practice which is itself multidimensional and plays artfully with conjunctive and communicative knowledge that instrumentalises the one for the other and brings together the different contextures, only to keep them apart after all. [62]

## 5. Conclusion

The example of family management shows how social spaces develop their own activity beyond the concept of conjunctive experiential spaces. What was once the entrepreneurial family as a conjunctive experiential space has dissolved and now consists merely as a fictitious functional sphere stretching between the contextures of the business and the various nuclear families. Social practice develops as an arrangement in this field of tension and links different contextures together in a new compound contexture. [63]

Thus on the metatheoretical level the example shows how there are limits to the scope of the concept of conjunctive experiential spaces. At the same time it illustrates how the concept of contexture can come into its own as a metatheory for reconstructive research in such a context. Even if certain meaningful spaces such as the business or the entrepreneurial family no longer have a conjunctive correlate they still have their own realities as norm and value systems which have certain characteristic knowledge structures. The concept of the contexture is thus on a higher level of abstraction since it can identify both conjunctive experiential spaces and spaces that can no longer be called conjunctive experiential spaces. It makes it possible to reconstruct how these spaces guide actions and to understand social practice on the basis of the field of tension between them. It thus offers potential for reconstructive social research that is less ontologised. [64]

The analytical gaze thus shifts to opening and closing movements of different contextures, that is, to transjunctive operations that are reconstructed and finally condensed in an overall picture which is the result end of the research. Ideally this shows a compound contexture, i.e. a practice of interweaving different

spaces that is fuelled by the field of tension of between them, while at the same time reproducing the differences. [65]

The theoretical means required for this analysis remain maximally deontologised and thus undetermined in regard to its subject. They are restricted to the concept of the contexture, defined as a logical space with a negative or positive structure, the idea that these spaces inter-relate, and the concept of transjunctional operations which process the relationships between them. A contexture can be almost anything: a person, an organisation or a reflexive entity.<sup>12</sup> What functions as such is thus deduced from the empirical data. The same applies to the analysis of transjunctional operations that result from the reconstructions themselves. [66]

This proposal is thus not concerned with a theoretical analysis in terms of a "post-qualitative theorism" (KELLER, 2014, §29), but is rather intended to offer, in an attempt to do justice to the complex internal relationships of the subject-matter under investigation, a way of "navigating" between the Charybdis of simply "illustrating theory" (op. cit.) and the Scylla of failing to be aware of one's implicit theoretical assumptions. Consequently the aim of this article is to establish a heuristic that avoids both sliding back into simply demonstrating a case empirically, on the one hand, and methodologically and theoretically uncontrolled interpretations on the other (op. cit.). [67]

Rather, our objective is to follow HIRSCHAUER's (2008, p.165) call for a "disinhibition' of the relationships between theory building and qualitative research" and to foster a productive relationship between the two. What is at issue is thus precisely the productive interplay between data and theory-building that has been subjected to metatheoretical reflection and monitored while at the same time remaining open as regards the subject of investigation. [68]

Here we have developed the idea of a polycontextural hermeneutics explicitly for organisations and successfully applied it in the same context (cf., for example, JANSEN, 2013; VOGD, 2013, 2014). However, the method can also have much broader applications if we take GÜNTHER's (1979b) diagnosis seriously and view life in contemporary society as being polycontextural. Thus MARTOZKI (1990), for example, following GÜNTHER, understands life history constructions as polycontextural processes. Likewise, one can also usefully see psychiatric patients' complex ways of dealing with their illness as such a process (VOGD 2014) or, like ORT (2007), usefully employ GÜNTHER's ideas in literary studies. Here the advantage of the idea of polycontexturality is that due to its degree of abstraction it can substitute contents almost ad infinitum and is not bound to a certain subject matter—from a metatheoretical perspective whether a contexture is a body, an institution, a milieu or a self remains irrelevant. [69]

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12 Here we see the parallels with, but also the differences from the actor network theory (ANT), since although the idea of the actant in ANT is a similarly abstract concept, the ANT has no means of analysing latent knowledge structures and meaning-creating processes (FARÍAS, 2013). It therefore remains on a purely descriptive level (HOLZINGER, 2013).

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