

### A Demonstration of Contextural Analysis, a Methodology for Reconstructing Polycontextural Configurations, Taking Interviews on Boundary Violations in Teacher-Student Relationships in Tibetan Buddhism as an Example

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## **A Demonstration of Contextural Analysis, a Methodology for Reconstructing Polycontextural Configurations, Taking Interviews on Boundary Violations in Teacher-Student Relationships in Tibetan Buddhism as an Example**

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**Key words:**

contextural analysis;  
polycontextuality;  
polyphony;  
reconstructive social research;  
documentary method; systems theory; Tibetan Buddhism;  
teacher-student relationship;  
boundary violations

**Abstract:** In many fields of qualitative research we are faced with the problem of how to deal methodologically with the simultaneous presence of different speaker positions, institutional logics and the fragmented ways of relating to the self and the world that are associated with them. In our initial attempts to address this problem from both the theoretical and methodological standpoints we have found Gotthard GÜNTHER's (1978) theory of polycontextuality to be particularly well suited to this task. In this article we draw on linguistics and the literary sciences, where the concept of polyphony (BAKHTIN 1984 [1929]) has gained a certain prominence over the last decades, to show how a many-valued hermeneutic approach can be used to analyse interview transcripts. We demonstrate our use of this approach in a study on the problem of boundary violations in the relationship between teachers and students in Tibetan Buddhism. In this study we used the interpretation of interviews with students of Sogyal Rinpoche to show how ambivalence regarding the teacher's integrity is processed and how the associated systemic dynamics can be reconstructed. In conclusion we identify links between contextural analysis and the documentary method.

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"Given that we are vulnerable to the address of others in ways that we cannot fully control, no more than we can control the sphere of language, does this mean that we are without agency and without responsibility? For Lévinas, who separates the claim of responsibility from the possibility of agency, responsibility emerges as a consequence of being subject to the unwilling address of the other" (BUTLER, 2005, p.84).

"I am *not* primarily responsible by virtue of my actions, but by virtue of the relation to the Other that is established at the level of my primary and irreversible susceptibility, my passivity prior to any possibility of action or choice. [...] Rather my capacity to be *acted upon* implicates me in a relation of responsibility" (p.88).

"The limits of my language mean the limits of my world. Logic pervades the world: the limits of the world are also its limits. So we cannot say in logic, 'The world has this in it, and this, but not that.' For that would appear to presuppose that we were excluding certain possibilities, and this cannot be the case, since it would require that logic should go beyond the limits of the world; for only in that way could it view those limits from the other side as well. We cannot think what we cannot think; so what we cannot think we cannot say either" (WITTGENSTEIN, 2016 [1921], 5.6-5.61).

## 1. Introduction<sup>1</sup>

We have previously presented contextual analysis as a methodological approach to the reconstruction of complex ways in which we relate to ourselves and the world and the social arrangements associated with these modes of relating (JANSEN, VON SCHLIPPE & VOGD, 2015; VOGD, 2014). Contextual analysis allows us to take reflection seriously as an empirical phenomenon. In this context reflection is understood as the production of selfhood and world-hood. Viewed from the inside, reflection appears existential, that is, as a certain mode of being-in-the-world, while from the outside it appears as the typical systemic mode of the animate world, wherein living creatures are not only *part of* the world, but also *have* a world, produce this world together with other living creatures and have to behave in accordance with what they have produced.<sup>2</sup> [1]

Thus, the ways in which people relate to themselves and the world—and the associated metaphysics and ontologies—appear as constellations of multiple factors that arise out of specific life and organisational processes and can be reconstructed empirically. This follows from the fact that "what is" (classical Greek *ὄν ὄν* = "being") does not result from a logos (*λόγος*) that is external to human practices, but from a logic of practice. [2]

A number of authors, in particular Bruno LATOUR (2007 [2005]), have pointed out that rendering the epistemic status of concepts—including objects and

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1 The text was translated by Deirdre WINTER, B.A. Hons. Interpreting and Translating (French and German). Quotations from non-English texts were translated by her, otherwise the English original or current translations were used.

2 For a view from existential philosophy see HEIDEGGER (2006 [1926]), for whom human beings, as actors, differ from things in that they can produce their own ontology.

subjects—fluid in this way is necessary, precisely for empirical reasons, since in everyday life people change their ontological and epistemic perspectives like models change their clothes. For example, "people adopt different stances, depending on the context: as subjects or objects, autopoietically closed monads or process structures that are open for communication and can be influenced, either as actors or as being subject to the actions of others" (JANSEN & VOGD, 2014, p.455). As far as their theories about themselves are concerned, they orient themselves towards idealist, constructivist or realist ideas, or towards monistic or dualistic, materialist or transcendentalist thought. "According to the *empirical* version of this perspective their practices have therefore always appeared to be pervaded with metaphysics and—insofar as these practices become reflective—with philosophy, ontology and epistemology" (ibid.). From this perspective we may and can no longer conceptualise either human practices or the (empirical) social research that throws light on them without metaphysics and epistemology, since it follows from this systemic approach that, as a way of relating to self and world, no practice (including that of empirical research) is possible without reflection. However—and this is actually the point—it is now no longer possible to assume a position (a God's eye view, so to speak) from which we could claim epistemic and ontological validity. Rather, which epistemic and ontological configurations do justice to the constructive aspects of the circumstances is only *revealed* in each respective situation, in which, depending on the practice, many different forms are possible.<sup>3</sup> [3]

We need to change our thinking about the way we human beings understand how life forms relate to ourselves and the world, and specifically how we conceive of subjects and actions. To do this, we must free ourselves from the assumptions about ontology and causality that we find in anthropology and social theory, but without throwing the baby out with the bathwater, i.e. without giving up the possibilities for reflection offered by metaphysical concepts. We do not want to abandon ontology altogether, but no longer see it as referring to a fixed basis of being or reality, but rather as being constructed by a practice that generates certain reconstructible and designatable forms (as in "doing" ontology). We can best gain access to this practice by studying the use of language, since it is in language that we find the operations we use to construct our modes of relating to ourselves and the world. Moreover, in speech acts it becomes clear how we

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3 For LATOUR it is the inventions of the philosophical texts that provide us with the language we need to understand the complex metaphysical configurations that are to be found in the practices of everyday life (but not the reasons given for these inventions): "How could enquirers listen to a housewife, a clerk, a pilgrim, a criminal, a soprano, and a CEO and still succeed in following what they express if they had no Hegel, no Aristotle, no Nietzsche, no Dewey, no Whitehead to help them? Have those writers not done quite a lot of useful work to open up what an agency could be? It does not mean that philosophers will know better, go deeper, be more profound than social scientists, nor does it mean that they will provide sociology with its 'foundation' or indulge in 'meta-theory'. It means that cutting the social sciences from the reservoirs of philosophical innovations is a recipe to make sure that no one will ever notice the metaphysical innovations proposed by ordinary actors—which often go beyond those of professional philosophers. And the situation will be even worse if social scientists not only abstain from metaphysics, but take as their duty to cling to the most limited list of agencies, ceaselessly translating the indefinite production of actors into their short one. Actors have many philosophies but sociologists think they should stick to only a few. Actors fill the world with agencies while sociologists of the social tell them which building blocks their world is 'really' made of" (2005, pp.51-52).

actualise these processes of relating performatively, i.e. how we elaborate and stabilise them in our social interactions. Thus, if we are sensitive to the polyphonic richness of linguistic utterances as we interpret texts this can help us to reconstruct the complexities of how people relate to themselves and the world as expressed in everyday life. In this way we can bring together the empirical study of complex linguistic practices which at first glance appear confusing and contradictory and the theory of how people relate to themselves and the world in multiple contexts in a way that is productive. [4]

We are now able to employ a "flat ontology"<sup>4</sup>, according to which what appears to be subjective and what appears to be objective, what appears to be fact or what appears to be construction is not predetermined. This opens up a "empty-place grammar" or "empty place structure" (GÜNTHER, 1976a, p.214) which, leaves open the question as to at which locus something is subjective or objective and shows how what happens at a certain position in a social relationship conditions what is constellated at another position, and vice versa. In this way we can usefully combine a linguistic, literary textual analysis which has no means of addressing the complex logical entanglements of social relationships, and social theory, which focuses mainly on the fundamental differences between the I and Thou perspectives and the associated multiple observational relationships and conditions. [5]

We first became aware of the need for a polycontextual methodology in our research on organisations, where there are different positions and reflective perspectives which are as a rule irreconcilable with each other but exist side by side. This fact is so obvious that we could not fail to see it and take it into consideration in the methods we employed in our empirical studies.<sup>5</sup> We initially noticed the problem in our studies on doctors' decision-making processes in hospitals, and later came across it again in some research we did on supervisory boards with worker participation and on management.<sup>6</sup> This led us to develop a further research field to investigate educational processes. Like Winfried MAROTZKI, who has also drawn on GÜNTHER's notion of a polycontextual logic, we see education as a "process of transforming modes of relating to self and the world" (MAROTZKI, 1990, pp.41f.) In this context we demonstrated the usefulness of the polycontextual approach in research on psychiatry and psychotherapy (VOGD, 2014), where the fracturing of modes of relating to self and the world (i.e. impaired autonomy) and the attempt to re-balance them are a central issue.<sup>7</sup> The methodological advantages of the polycontextual perspective have also been evident in our studies on Buddhism in the West. Since the paths

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4 By "flat ontology" we mean, following LATOUR (2005, p.165), an anti-essentialist attitude which distances itself from understanding things or phenomena that are external to the practice that constitutes them as subjects or objects, i.e. from ontologising them in a predefined way (see also JANSEN & VOGD, 2014).

5 Support for the use of such methodological strategies is evident in the success of the Institutional Logics approach even in work by researchers in the English-speaking countries, which tends to be less theory-oriented (FRIEDLAND & ALFORD, 1991; THORNTON, OCASIO & LOUNSBURY, 2012).

6 See, for example, JANSEN (2011, 2013), VOGD (2004, 2007, 2009, 2017a), and VOGD, FEIßT, MOLZBERGER, OSTERMANN and SLOTTA (2017).

of Buddhist training are oriented towards producing a comprehensive change in trainees' views of themselves and the world here—the dynamics described above can be rendered visible and examined "in vivo", as it were (VOGD & HARTH, 2015; VOGD, HARTH & OFNER, 2015). [6]

In our previous papers we focused mainly on the metatheoretical aspects (the introduction of the polycontextual perspective) and the results of analyses of these aspects (to demonstrate the successful application of the polycontextual perspective). The analysis of the contextures and their inter-relationships was carried out after completing the two steps that traditionally constitute the documentary method, i.e. "formulating interpretation" and "reflecting interpretation".<sup>8</sup> However, to date we have only provided condensed overviews of the contextual analysis itself, i.e. the process by which polycontextual formations and "arrangements" can be identified by analysing text material (be it interviews or notes on participant observation).<sup>9</sup> We have explicitly described how we get to the analysis from the interview or observation notes. In the present article we would therefore like to provide a detailed description of the possibilities

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7 As WITTGENSTEIN put it laconically: "The solution of the problem you see in life is a way of living which makes what is problematic disappear. The fact that the problem is problematic mean's that your life does not fit life's shape. So you must change your life, and once it fits the shape, what is problematic will disappear" (1998 [1977], p.31).

8 For an introduction to the documentary method see BOHNSACK (2010a, 2010b). The documentary method does take into account that verbal utterances are polyvalent and classifies them according to a multidimensional typology of intersecting experiential spaces (see e.g. BOHNSACK, 2001). However, since the analysis is focused on a specific experiential space (the conjunctive experience of a collective we), in practical research the focus tends to be placed more on commonalities than on all the divergences that point towards polycontextual, multicentric conditions. The theory of social phenomenology does include the aspects of communication that are covered by a common-sense understanding of language (SCHÜTZ, 1981 [1932]). However, in his endeavour to avoid drawing premature conclusions about the problem of intersubjectivity SCHÜTZ placed too strong an emphasis on the mediating function of language to be able to capture its polyvalent aspects (BERGER & LUCKMANN, 2003 [1966]). It is thus not possible to translate the theoretical understanding of social phenomenology into a systematic hermeneutic practice. In contrast, NASSEHI and SAAKE (2002) were well aware of the polyvalence of semantic relations and have chosen to make it the starting point for their reconstructive social research. They accordingly tried to free themselves from the methodological rigidities of standardised interpretation procedures, preferring instead to be somewhat more broadly interested in how meaning is created in a given situation, i.e. in terms of the social, factual and temporal connotations (SAAKE & NASSEHI, 2007, p.235). There is of course a risk, if we dispense with a metatheoretical and methodological focus, that the process of interpreting social realities will become too arbitrary. This would run counter to a systems theory position, which assumes spheres of meaning that can be clearly distinguished from one another.

9 The goal of contextual analysis is to identify logical places in which people relate to themselves and the world, in particular by bringing into alignment different perspectives that focus on the social dimension of meaning expressed, for example, by means of certain prepositions, bracketing, distancing etc. One issue of interest is how the boundaries between the origins of meanings and contextures are determined. These processes can be observed when, for instance, problems and tensions that arise in a narrative are marked by certain linguistic practices—such as distancing or switching the frame of reference—and indicate a change in the patterns of attribution. It is also important to take a multivalent hermeneutic perspective and look at how "contextures are opened and closed by means of various transjunctional operations" (JANSEN et al., 2015, §30). This should include looking for practices that are used to bring different reflective spaces into a stable relationship with each other, for instance, by means of taboos that mark where the train of thought has been broken off or barriers have been erected against reflection. "Contextual analysis can then be applied in a second step to discern how different reflective perspectives mutually condition each other, i.e. how they stabilise each other in relation to how the individual relates to him- or herself and the world" (§48).

of polycontextual hermeneutics, drawing on resources from linguistics and research on polyphony in literary science.<sup>10</sup> [7]

In Section 2 we first give an introduction to the subjects of polycontextuality and contextual analysis, following which we present the linguistic and semantic approaches to analysing polyphonic text structures (Section 3).<sup>11</sup> In Section 4 we demonstrate contextual analysis, taking some interviews on the relationships between western students and their teacher in a school of Tibetan Buddhism (Rigpa) as an example. Following a brief discussion of the subject of Tibetan Buddhism, in Section 5, in Section 6 we conclude with a discussion of the areas in which contextual analysis can be usefully applied and how it is related to the documentary method. [8]

## 2. Polycontextuality

We would like to start by defining polycontextuality in the following way: there are different logical locations—e.g. speakers and listeners in different positions—, from which the actors perceive and interpret what happens in their relationships independently. However, what is perceived and what is interpreted are not independent of each other, but depend on one another in a non-trivial way. [9]

Polycontextuality is manifested on three different levels.

1. On the level of psychological systems: ambivalences and uncertainties regarding what has been perceived are associated with corresponding thoughts. Conflicting sensations and feelings that may be more or less intense may then occur (for example, a swinging back and forth between trust and mistrust, understanding and confusion).
2. On the level of language: due to polysemic words and the fundamental difficulty of deciphering the nature of the message that is being conveyed, speech acts always appear ambiguous, which can lead to differing interpretations which are, however, coherent in themselves.
3. On the level of communication: as locutionary acts follow locutionary acts, certain systemic patterns can develop which can be started over and over again, i.e. they can become locked into typologies that are familiar in this social system. [10]

What is special about the polycontextual perspective lies not least in the fact that individual people, milieus, groups, relationships and organisations etc. do not have to be at one with themselves, but that inconsistencies, incommensurabilities and logical contradictions between the various different aspects that are simultaneously present at any one time are the rule rather than the exception. [11]

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<sup>10</sup> See also KRZYCHALA (2019) for an example of how BAKHTIN's ideas on polyphony can be utilised in reconstructive social research.

<sup>11</sup> We thank Julia GENZ for her valuable comments on this subject.

Moreover, the polycontextual perspective assumes that the above-mentioned levels are inter-connected. What is meant by interconnection here is that what happens and develops on the level of awareness is linked to communication, and vice-versa, but without its being possible to reduce one to another in a trivial way. The relationship is one of conditioned coproduction<sup>12</sup> (FUCHS, 2015, pp.139ff.), i.e. of development in reciprocal interdependence, not a causally determined link. Communication cannot directly influence the awareness of another person within in interactive system of interaction. However, what happens in it—for instance, an aggressive act that needs to be responded to—does condition subjective experience, just as, conversely, what happens in conscious awareness influences the utterances that enter into the communication. [12]

Thus, subjectivity is not an independent entity, but only develops in response to a certain relational constellation.<sup>13</sup> In BUTLER's (2005, p.86) view, "[p]rior to the ego taking a decision, the outside of being, where the Ego arises or is accused, is necessary," and—echoing LEVINAS—the "I" does not owe its subjectivity to itself, but to the interdependence of polycontextual relationships. Her remark in this context that we are vulnerable to the address of others in ways over which we have no control, just as we are unable to control the sphere of language, (BUTLER, 2005, pp.84f.), nicely captures what co-production is. [13]

The three levels psychological systems, language and communication produce each other reciprocally, but without its being possible to reduce the one to the other. Coming into contact with or speaking to the subjectivity of another subjectivity which is neither accessible nor controllable, induces polycontextuality which then becomes possible to experience, in the form of tension and contradiction, as one's own subjectivity. Subjectivity appears not as the cause, but as the result of a complex nexus of inter-related perceptions and interpretations. The actors who are enacted in this way will now themselves challenge and unsettle other actors with their own actions, since the competent subject with a certain level of experience will know all that one can do with words—not least lie and deceive. In other words, we can perform linguistic actions which exploit the lack of a clear dividing line between providing information and communicating in order to distract the recipient from our own motives, or to conceal them. From this point on communication becomes complicated, itself polyphonic, permeated by many voices and contradictory interpretations.

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12 SPENCER BROWN (1994 [1969], p.VII) also used the term conditioned coproduction in his logical treatises on self-reference, echoing the Buddhist concept of dependent origination.

13 That this fundamental divergence between the level of subjectivity and the level of the context of communication can be exploited for reconstructive social research has already been demonstrated by Ulrich OEVERMANN (1993) with his "objective hermeneutics". Take, for instance, the example of a mother who says to her thirteen-year-old son that he must not eat any of the cake on the table, and when he is unable to resist it nonetheless, remarks indignantly that he knows that he is not allowed to do so. Even if in such a case it is not possible to predict what happens in the boy's consciousness and what it will mean for his future actions, we can still deduce from the structure of the interaction what ambivalences will be associated with this demand and challenge. Confronted with his mother's expressed expectation he can no longer surrender to his desire, but will be split in one way or another, and then only be able to come to his own decision (be it to obey, to assert his autonomy by defying her or some other option). This will then lead to a certain relational pattern between mother and son, which will in turn configure the subjective experience of each of them.



Awareness also becomes polyphonic—at one and the same time we are aware of both trust and mistrust, both believe the words we have heard and doubt them, switch between different perspectives and the associated multitude of dissonant voices, which are, however, not independent of each other, but themselves in some way relate to each other, or elicit each other in the first place. [14]

Thus it is precisely for this reason that the theory of polycontextuality is so interesting from a methodological point of view, since it is only within the logical space<sup>14</sup> of a polycontextual logic that the relationships between different subjective positions and the resultant configurations can be represented in a way that is free of contradictions, i.e. as a polycentric arrangement in which different things can be the case at different locations. The basic idea is to spread logical sub-systems—which GÜNTHER (1978, p.16) called "contextures"—across different logical locations, the laws of classical logic applying within each separate contexture. In other words it is clearly distinguishable within a contexture what is (true) and what is not—whereas from the standpoint of a different logical locus something quite different can become the issue. [15]

Thus empirically, polycontextuality is always already relevant when two persons come together, since then two obviously quite different logical locations come into contact with each other. What one person sees and holds to be true does not have to be the same as what the other perceives and considers to be correct. For GÜNTHER, analytically we must first differentiate between the three positions "I", "it" and "you", from which we can then derive different relationships of reflection. The "I-it" relationship represents the relationship of a subject to an objectifiable object. It is a simple contexture. A state of affairs either exists or does not exist. For example, whether a seminar instructor is overweight can be decided by stating the necessary criteria. If somebody asks us, we may not immediately know the answer, but we can look to find out what is the case. [16]

However, with the "I-You" relationship that problem is different: in a reciprocal social exchange relationship the You appears as another I who is him- or herself constituting a reciprocal subject-object exchange relationship—and thus also another contexture. The You has a world of his or her own which is not accessible to the I. While I may be able to suspect, empathise with and assume what the other person to whom I am relating is experiencing, I can never really know. Even if I ask the other person and they give me an answer, I can never be absolutely certain whether they are telling the truth or whether they are lying—or whether I am understanding what they say in the way they mean it. [17]

When my "I" reflects on the "You", it adds something to the other person that is not covered by my mirroring their being in my subjectivity (I cannot see what is going in their psychological system, so I have to construct it). There in fact no objective criteria that I could use to assess whether the "You" really has

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<sup>14</sup> Here the term "logical space" is used, following WITTGENSTEIN, to mean the entirety of the structure of possible facts and circumstances that can be true or false. "The facts in the logical space are the world (2016 [1921], 1.13). Moreover, "[a] proposition determines a place in logical space" (3.4), and "[t]he truth-conditions of a proposition determine range that it leaves open to the facts" (4.463).

"subjectivity" or whether I am actually facing a highly developed, structurally determined machine, a being without consciousness—a kind of "zombie". We cannot experience other people's subjectivities or prove their existence objectively, but only ascribe them by reflecting. And yet whatever the result of this reflection, when I engage in it something that is independent, a third thing, enters into the relationship between me and you. [18]

As outlined above, the relationship between "I" and "You" appears as a relationship that takes the form of a complex network which is realised by interpretation and ascription, not by creating an objective representation of an "it" in the "I". This makes it possible to relate to each other in different ways. For example, the "I" can try to imagine the relationship between "You" and "It" (i.e. the perceptions and perspective(s) of another person). [19]

The reflective distance thus produced enables a process to take place that leads us to question and doubt the certainty of our direct perception. The contexture that is developed from the egological perspective of an other self is now rejected, that is, dismissed as wrong, irrelevant or invalid. In its place we become aware of the relationship between perspectives. Thus one could, for example, say "You are mistaken in your perception", or "You are trying to deceive me", or conversely, "If that is how you see and experience it then I must be wrong, because I trust you and your assessment". There could also be doubts about what is the case. You could perhaps say (or think), "I don't know", "Perhaps you are mistaken", "I want to believe you, but I don't quite trust you", or "Perhaps this is about something quite different, perhaps you aren't interested in me or a serious relationship but simply want to exploit me". Thus it is not only the statements themselves, but the space in which these statements make sense or are called into question, rejected or changed. These few examples alone are enough to demonstrate the richness of the epistemic structure which arises even in a simple four-part "I-You" relationship. It becomes clear that the indeterminacies and uncertainties cannot be dissolved by means of logical analysis, but must be taken seriously as inherent constituents of a polycontextual configuration—that is, of a configuration that arises spontaneously as soon as different perspectives come into play.<sup>15</sup> [20]

As we have pointed out above, these processes cannot be described using bivalent logic since this is no longer a situation in which an observer simply perceives and recognises objects that either are or are not. Rather, as ESPOSITO (1993) remarked as well, in an encounter with other observers anything we can negate by means of logical operations is itself constructed. Thus: "The operation of negation presupposes a more fundamental operation, i.e. a caesura, which results in an object being identified as different from something else" (p.105). Accordingly, for GÜNTHER (1976b) negation is the starting point

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15 KAEHR (1993) described the four-part polycontextual arrangement as follows: "What is an operator at one locus is an operand at another locus, and vice versa. The circularity of the self-referentiality of operator and operand is distributed across four loci, in analogy to the figure of the chiasma. The circularity dissolves into a chiasmic mechanism of order and exchange relations in which the two fundamental circularities between the operator a [...] The relations of exchange and order, the hierarchy and heterarchy of the operativity and relationality are based on and condition each other" (pp.171f.).

for developing a polyvalent logic. It thus appears as a transjunctional operation in that on the one hand it constitutes the unity of two values as a contexture ("something is the case" versus "it is not the case") and on the other hand it is possible to relativise or negate the contexture itself (from a different perspective something else is the case). Thus by negating we can develop not only one contexture, but more and more contextures as we add new perspectives. If a person uses a transjunctional operation this indicates that they perceive different contextures, since the negation can refer to a contexture (i.e. to a mode of observing and differentiating) itself. Not only the observed value, but the mode of observation itself can be negated. [21]

Propositions (which distinguish between true and false), perceptions (which differentiate between object and subject), relationships (which can be trusted or mistrusted) and many other things are thus not given *per se*, but in a sense "observed into" the world. Human beings (and other living creatures) are not simply part of the world, but have a world, that is, they construct the differentiations which then constitute their world. In order to avoid risking the misunderstanding to which constructivist solipsism falls prey, we want to stress that the reflective resources that this requires do not lie in the actors themselves, but that an actor needs to have contact with and be addressed by other persons in order to develop these resources. Distinctions such as true and false, subject and object, etc. are not given *per se*, but constructed in the context of the history of a specific relationship. They themselves result from a complex polycontextual arrangement. How we relate to ourselves (i.e. whether we feel at one with ourselves or not) is also dependent on further positions in the adjacent space and how its values are defined (Here space is seen as a logical space, not as a physical space.) [22]

Formally, GÜNTHER (e.g. 1979) described the structure of these configurations as "kenogrammatics" or also "empty-place grammatics", i.e. in terms of "morphograms" or "empty-place configurations". This structure shows the different inter-related positions. The values applied at the different positions are not yet occupied but are nonetheless dependent on each other insofar as what determines the factors pertaining at one locus also conditions the possibilities that may obtain at another locus. Furthermore, what appears as a subject or an object in an interaction in a given situation correspondingly results from the overall arrangement.<sup>16</sup> One of the main advantages of empty-place grammatics is that it depicts a "structural layer" "in which the difference between subjectivity and objectivity first has to be established and cannot therefore yet be presupposed at that place" (1976a, p.216). Or to put it differently, what appears to be subjective or objective is not based on a pre-given ontology according to which there is a

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16 KAEHR and MAHLER (1995) put it this way: polycontextual logic (PCL) "is characterised by the distribution and mediation [i.e. mutual influence and coordination] of different logical contextures; within each individual contexture all the rules of classical propositional logic have full validity. As a result of the mediation the individual contextures are not isolated from each other as in a hierarchy of types, but linked by means of particular inter-contextual transitions. Since it is the case both that the contextures themselves can be described and also that how they are mediated can be depicted without contradiction, circular and self-referential structures can be modelled within the PCL without contradictions" (p.22).

subjective interiority at the one position and the objective facts of an externally given world at the other. Rather, like "true" and "false", "subjective" and "objective" are categories, each of which results from a specific configuration of positions, which then in given situations cause certain things to appear as subjective, objective, true, false or other.<sup>17</sup> [23]

In this way, the theory of polycontextuality initially provides us with an instrument with which we can analyse how people relate to themselves and the world or a group. We can now examine from the standpoint of which contexture or which frame of reference, to use the terminology of BOHNSACK (2017, p.63ff.), experiences are being made and actions carried out. Or, as LATOUR (2013) put it, every contexture corresponds to a "mode of existence" and each mode of existence has its own ontology and metaphysics. A mode of existence is not only part of an overarching network of relationships which it (co-)conditions, but is also located through the experience of having a world as opposed to being part of a world. It is specified in the form of the metaphysical distinctions that each mode of existence makes. A mode of existence is defined by its own "preposition", each of which is associated with its own specific "interpretative key" (p.57) and then correspondingly "speak[s] well about something to someone" (p.144), thus doing justice to the logos of this mode of existence.<sup>18</sup> [24]

It is now also possible to reconstruct how other positions or places (i.e. specific modes of existence, LATOUR, 2013) are related to from this position. We can then examine whether other perspectives are negated, or whether their own intrinsic logic is recognised, but rejected or at least accepted as partly justified and related to our own position. Here polycontextual analysis, with its inclusion of the corresponding transjunctional operations, allows a differentiated examination of the respective relationships (GÜNTHER, 1976b distinguished between partial, completely undifferentiated and completely differentiated rejection, for a description of the methodology see JANSEN et al., 2015). [25]

In sum, to date contextual analysis has proved to be a useful metatheoretical mode of conceptualisation in various fields of research. However, since there is

17 The fact that truths and objective facts do not result from a perception (positivism) or an observation (naive realism), but are produced by an over-arching relational context was recognised by Karl POPPER (1996 [1992]). He therefore also did not see objectivity as something individual that can be assigned to a person, but as the systemic property of an over-arching cultural context. "It is completely erroneous to assume that the objectivity of a science depends upon the objectivity of the scientist. And it is completely erroneous to believe that the attitude of the natural scientist is more objective than that of the social scientist. The natural scientist is just as partisan as anyone else, and unless he belongs to the few who are constantly producing new ideas, he is, unfortunately, often extremely biased, favouring his own ideas in a one-sided and partisan manner. Several of the most outstanding contemporary physicists have even founded schools which set up a powerful resistance to new ideas. [...] What may be described as scientific objectivity is based solely upon that *critical* tradition which, despite all kinds of resistance, so often makes it possible to criticize a dominant dogma. In other words, the objectivity of science is not a matter for the individual scientist but rather the social result of mutual criticism, of the friendly-hostile division of labour among scientists, of their co-operation and also of their competition. For this reason, it depends, in part, upon a whole string of social and political circumstances which make this criticism possible" (p.72).

18 For more on the relationship between LATOUR's actor-network theory and the theory of polycontextuality see JANSEN and VOGD (2014) and for more on the relationship between LATOUR's late work and sociological systems theory see VOGD (2015).

no direct route from a logical analysis of relationships of reflection to the everyday language used by the persons whom we have interviewed, in the past we have not previously presented an explication of the intermediate steps required to get from the text to a polyvalent hermeneutical analysis. We are now able to fill in this gap, using tools taken from a branch of the linguistic sciences that focuses on polyphony and polysemy and has systematically developed a number of resources for this purpose. [26]

### 3. Polyphony in the Linguistic Analysis of Literary Texts

The concept of "polyphony" was first introduced into linguistics by BAKHTIN (1984 [1929]) in his book on DOSTOEVSKY's poetics. He proposed that the composition of DOSTOEVSKY's works is multi-voiced or polyphonic and does not culminate in a harmonious unity. Rather, the voices of the narrator and those of the characters are woven together (for example, a character uses the expressions and ways of speaking of a different person). BAKHTIN believed that in this way Dostoevsky showed that the human individuality of the characters in the story are constantly being shaped and modified by dialogue, and that for this reason the process never comes to an end. [27]

DUCROT (1984) added a further specification by differentiating between voices and standpoints.<sup>19</sup> In this view, the voice refers to speakers, where first the author of a text himself or herself appears, and also to further voices that he or she embeds in the form of indirect and direct speech. Conversely, standpoints—or to use the terminology of logical spaces—places—can be introduced by numerous different methods, including indirect speech, bracketing or simply the use of nouns that indicate a relationship to someone else. Let us take an example from our own empirical data: in his interview with us Mr Martini<sup>20</sup> talked about his teacher Sogyal Rinpoche. "Yes, Sogyal sometimes says 'these are really very, very degenerate times, that somebody like me is a teacher whom you follow'". Here we have first the voice of the speaker and then the voice of the teacher, which is inserted in direct speech. We can also identify three locations: the superordinate location of the speaker ("Yes, Sogyal says ..."), the location of Sogyal ("these are really very, very degenerate times ...") and the location or perspective of the students whose teacher Sogyal is ("whom you follow"). [28]

GÉVAUDAN (2010) has pointed out that the differentiation between voice and location also bears a resemblance to AUSTIN's (1962 [1955]) speech act theory, which distinguishes three levels. The locutionary level is that on which the act of uttering takes place, utterances then appearing in texts as "voices", several of which can be embedded (e.g. in the form of quotes), in addition to those of the author. The propositional level is the content level of speech acts, according to which (as in the above example) different locations can be identified in the semantic analysis. The third level, termed the illocutionary level, indicates that speech acts not only say something, but also do something, in a social sense.

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<sup>19</sup> We would like to thank Julia GENZ for her valuable comments on this subject.

<sup>20</sup> Names have been changed to ensure anonymity.

They can report or claim (representatives), order, give advice or request (directives), express a commitment to a future action (commissives), express inner and emotional states (expressives) or urge or encourage others (appeal function). There are also what are termed performative speech acts which do what they say as they are being said. In the performative execution of a speech act somebody is placed in a position through the mere action of speaking—as, for example, at christenings, in blessings or appointments. [29]

GÉVAUDAN (2010) made two further differentiations in regard to voices, one in relation to the question as to for which propositions (and to what extent) a speaker (voice) or an embedded speaker (location) assumes responsibility for a statement (proposition). And secondly we can also differentiate between whether they do this in an "objective" or a "subjective" modality. Here is another example that is relevant to the subject matter that we will later be using to demonstrate contextual analysis. Take the following sentences about the holiness of a spiritual teacher.

1. He has reached the state of liberation from greed and aversion.
2. He appears to have reached the state of liberation from greed, aversion and ignorance.
3. I know that he has reached the state of liberation from greed, aversion and ignorance
4. I think that he has reached the state of liberation from greed, aversion and ignorance.
5. I doubt that he has reached the state of liberation from greed, aversion and ignorance.
6. I assure you that he has reached the state of liberation from greed, aversion and ignorance. [30]

In the first of the above sentences, the speaker claims from an objective perspective that the teacher has achieved the above-mentioned spiritual goal, which in Buddhist circles is generally termed "total enlightenment". Sentence 2 retains the objective perspective, however, the speaker does not assume any responsibility for the veracity of the statement since the verb "appears to" is used to indicate that the difference between appearance and reality is indissoluble. In Sentence 3, reference is made to the location of a subjective perspective ("I"), the speaker's own position being presented as certain ("I know"). In Sentence 4 the speaker's own position is expressed as being uncertain. The speaker says that s/he "thinks" that it is true that this state has been achieved. In Sentence 5, the speaker expresses doubt about the assertion made in the subjective position in Sentence 1. Sentence 6 is particularly interesting because it is a performative speech act insofar as starts by establishing a subjective location, but the speaker then turns back on him-/herself reflexively and avers a fact that goes beyond his or her own position. The subjective position is in a sense duplicated (since the word "assure" refers to the speech act itself, and the voice and the location are spread over two positions). [31]

Readers who are well-versed in the thought of WITTGENSTEIN and in particular his logical-philosophical investigations in the "Tractatus" (2016 [1921]) will initially see that such a sentence seems nonsensical since the affirmation is a tautology and cannot therefore add anything to the truth value of the claim made in the sentence. However, if we take into account WITTGENSTEIN's late work (1963 [1953]) we can see that this is a special kind of language game. When we use concepts such as certainty, doubt and belief a series of family resemblances must appear, the most important of which is that they must appear nonsensical if we see them as internal states, whether from the position of the I or from the position of the You. (They do not do at all what they purport to do, i.e. distinguish between certainty and uncertainty or even affirm the objective status of what is asserted). The subjective sensations and perceptions of the Thou position are simply not accessible to anyone (and this also applies, of course, to the claims about enlightenment or liberation of a spiritual teacher, as in our example). In contrast, from the subjectivity of the position of the I, attitudes such as certainty or doubt are simply what they are—mental attitudes that exist in the here and now, no more and no less. [32]

However, this does not mean that a claim such as that expressed in Sentence 6 is meaningless, but its meaning cannot be deduced from its content as a proposition, but from the special relationship that becomes evident on the illocutional level: in the social nexus of a community of individuals who want to believe in liberation the performative act of assuring someone actually makes them liberated. However, the exact sociodynamics can only be revealed by a contextural analysis that takes into account the configurations that make these acts possible and stabilise how the persons involved relate to themselves and the world. Thus, in this context in particular it must be pointed out that what appears to be subjective or objective cannot be deduced on the basis of a pre-given ontology, but on that of the relationships between the positionings within the complex possibilities afforded by the grammar of our language. [33]

As NØLKE (2006) has demonstrated, when we look at polyphony from the perspective of linguistics we find a further linguistic indication of the division into two voices, i.e. the use of a negation particle. In order for us to be able to negate something it must have been asserted beforehand, which inevitably points to two standpoints that appear simultaneously (e.g. if we tell someone not to think of a blue elephant they will not be able to avoid imagining a blue elephant, i.e. what was negated). Now let us look at the following two sentences.

7. The master does not live in abstinence or celibacy.
8. The master is not enlightened. [34]

In Proposition 7 a behaviour is postulated that it is possible to verify, and in Sentence 8 one that is not possible to verify<sup>21</sup>, i.e. the behaviour is first posited as

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21 What is most important for this differentiation is the reference to the fact that it is in principle possible. While the Thou-perspective draws on a knowledge that is *per se* inaccessible and thus never verifiable, the other meanings are at least *in principle*—if not perhaps in actual fact conclusively—verifiable.

being within the logical space of possible facts, and then this is immediately reversed. Thus the two postulates are juxtapositioned in space. Even if the negation makes the contradiction of the statement the most likely option, the other side is invoked as a conceivable and tenable position, in order, either indirectly or directly, to draw attention to the positions of the speakers who have not decided to refute the claim, but to affirm it. (Which is the case can only be decided hermeneutically, by considering the context in which the sentence is uttered.) However, with the exception of ORT (2007), the procedures used for text analysis in literary science have not to date included the transjunctural operations of negation that refer to the positive (and the negated) postulates themselves. If we look again at the examples we can say, for instance:

9. It is not important whether the Master lives in celibacy, but that he has never-ending compassion with all sentient beings. [35]

In regard to Sentence 8 it is also possible to reject the meaning of an internal state, for instance, if we then claim that:

10. What is important is not whether the master is really enlightened, but my relationship to him. [36]

If we now consider the polyphony that is expressed in these sentences we see that the number of voices has at least doubled, since the content of the original proposition is still included, despite the negation. The resulting polyphony can, in turn, be multiplied by referring to further positions that are embedded or come to light as voices of the authors. The sentences that are constructed in this way can then refer to other sentences to create configurations or "arrangements", to stick to the musical metaphors that can have any degree of complexity. [37]

Let us now leave the literary sciences, where we (theoretically, at least) find poetic texts with contents that can be constructed with an almost infinite number of degrees of freedom, and turn to issues of the social sciences. The narratives that we find here (be it in interviews or observation transcripts) necessarily have limited degrees of freedom (not everything that is conceivable in fantasy is feasible). This results from the fact that the individual positions that arise in social arrangements are not independent of each other, but are reciprocally condition each other. However, this need does not prevent us from using the tools of linguistic analysis that we have just presented. [38]

However, in this context it should be pointed out that it is not possible to discern the polyphonic or polycontextual structures of texts by means of lexical analysis alone. It is not enough simply to analyse linguistic modes (such as the subjunctive and the indicative), the ordering of parts of sentences, the use of conjunctions and punctuation etc. in order to reconstruct the intertwined webs of voices and locations. This is evident from the simple fact that in analyses we are often less concerned with the level of content (the propositions) than with the performative (illocutionary) level, since, as GÉVAUDAN (2010, pp.44ff.) has shown for various European languages, the expressive, appellative and



representational (conative) functions (commissives) and the obligations of speakers and listeners cannot be clearly distinguished in terms of their illocutionary meanings. We therefore need a hermeneutics that is founded on a theory of logical spaces which needs to have been developed deductively.<sup>22</sup> For the purposes of the task in hand this means that we expect to find actors who have long since been socialised into polycontextual conditions, that is, who not only know about other perspectives, but have also learned on a performative level to deal with fuzziness and indeterminacy. [39]

In the context that concerns us here, rather than being a problem, the fact that forms of linguistic expression are polyvalent would seem to be simply another argument for a polycontextual perspective which assumes that the empty places associated with these uncertainties must be filled in an in a way that is conditioned and not arbitrary. They do not follow identifiable patterns, each expressing a certain systemic configuration according to which how one empty place at one position is filled restricts what is possible at another position. These overarching patterns—BATESON (1979, p.8) spoke of the "pattern[s] that connect[s]"—can be reconstructed in comparative sequential and case analyses. We now shift our attention from the linguistic disciplines that address polyphony and present an example of contextual analysis in which the above-mentioned resources are employed and explain their use. [40]

#### **4. An Example of the Conduct of Contextual Analysis Demonstrated in an Interview About a Problematic Teacher-Student Relationship**

The following analyses are based on interviews carried out in a project entitled "Buddhism in the West" that was funded by the German Research Foundation. As this article is focused mainly on methodological issues and not on issues of religion for reasons of space in what follows we shall limit ourselves to those context details that are necessary to understand what we are discussing here. We have also already published some detailed reports on our studies (HARTH, 2020; VOGD, 2017b; VOGD & HARTH, 2015; VOGD et al. 2015). [41]

We present excerpts from three interviews with students of Sogyal Rinpoche, who founded an international network of centres and groups known by the name of Rigpa in 1975.<sup>23</sup> Rigpa is one of the most successful groups of Tibetan Buddhism in the West. However, since 1995 there have repeatedly been allegations that Sogyal behaves and leads his life in a way that is inappropriate for a Buddhist teacher. Sogyal Rinpoche himself considers himself to belong to Nyingmapa, a school of Tibetan Buddhism whose teachers (the great majority of

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22 In an article written in 2010, GÉVAUDAN presented a similar recapitulation of research on polyphonic linguistics: "it is not possible to arrive at a concept of modality that is coherent and provides a satisfactory explanation using semasiological methods. This is so not only because they are based on an inventory of forms of expression that have been arbitrarily compiled, but also and especially because they attempt to derive a semantic category from morphological criteria. In contrast, it is evident even from this small example, that typological studies on modality are most usefully conducted using an onomasiological approach, i.e. starting from a theory of modality that has been constructed deductively, as proposed here" (p.63).

23 See <https://www.rigpa.org> [accessed on January 21, 2019].

whom are men) do not observe/feel committed to celibacy, unlike, for example, those of Gelugpa (one of the four schools of Tibetan Buddhism), to which the Dalai Lama belongs. At public events Sogyal Rinpoche also insists that he is a representative of what is known as *crazy wisdom*. He claims that this permits him to perform unusual and transgressive acts if these promote the development of his students (LARSSONS, 2012). In July 2017 eight students from the inner circle of Rigpa wrote a twelve-page open letter to Sogyal LAKAR, in which they made accusations of serious abuse (they used the teacher's family name LAKAR and not the honorary title of "Rinpoche", as otherwise customary).<sup>24</sup> [42]

On August 1, 2017 the Dalai Lama mentioned during a public lecture in the district of Ladakh in northern India that his friend Sogyal Rinpoche had fallen from grace and that his own students had therefore publicised their criticisms, as he had already recommended some years previously.<sup>25</sup> In an open letter dated August 11, 2017 Sogyal LAKAR publicly announced his resignation as a spiritual teacher from all organisations bearing the name Rigpa. [43]

Our interviewees were a novice who was reflecting on her first encounter with Sogyal Rinpoche, a member of the staff of a local Rigpa centre and a man who had completed a three-year retreat<sup>26</sup> at the headquarters of the European Rigpa centre in France. We have selected those sections of the interviews which address the teacher-student relationship. In particular we have carried out comparative interpretations of sections of the interviews in which the interviewees spoke of problematic behaviour of their main teacher. Although we re-interviewed a number of respondents in the longitudinal study we carried out in 2017 and 2018, here we are discussing only those interviews that we conducted before the scandal was made public, i.e. in 2013 and 2014. From a methodological point of view the polyphonic and polysemous narrative structures are more interesting than the students' later, more unequivocal reports. These interviews and those we conducted with students who had dropped out and had already left Rigpa at an earlier point have also been included in a monograph in which one author has addressed the subject in more detail on the basis of this material (VOGD, 2019). The longitudinal design allowed us to draw conclusions as to the way in which positions and arrangements were interwoven with each other by comparing different positions (in this case those of novices, advanced students and students who had dropped out) at different points in time (before and after the public announcement of the scandal). In this way we were also able to throw some light on overarching structural dynamics of the community and the Rigpa organisation. In contrast, in the context of the present article our main objective is to present the methodology of contextual analysis in more detail as we applied it to some interview material that is sufficiently complex and polyphonic. [44]

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24 See <https://buddhismus-aktuell.de/diskussionen/debatte-um-sogyal-rinpoche/dokument-2-brief-von-sogyal-rinpoche-an-seine-sangha-juli-2017.html> [accessed on March 23, 2018].

25 See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0wP4rsM7AZQ> [accessed on March 22, 2018].

26 Traditionally in Tibet lamas would withdraw from all worldly commitments during their training and completed a three-year phase of intensive study and meditation. Sogyal Rinpoche led a retreat for western students at his centre in France from 1992-1995.

#### 4.1 Ms Klinge, the novice

As they begin to engage with Tibetan Buddhism, students, and western students, in particular, initially experience the prominent role of the teacher as a considerable imposition, which is, however, balanced by the hope that they will be able to profit from the teacher's power and holiness. Whatever the case may be, to start with, especially, this results in a highly ambivalent relationship. As an example of the reflections and expectations that students may have about their "crazy" teacher when they start their practice, we present an interview with a Rigpa novice, Ursula Klinge, in which she describes how she thinks about what the *crazy wisdom* could be about. At the time of the interview, Ms Klinge was 43 years of age. [45]

The passage we present is about the question of whether Ms Klinge has already recognised Sogyal Rinpoche as her teacher or master. She responded by talking about what happened at a retreat where she and her husband met Sogyal Rinpoche for the first time.

Interviewer: "[So your husband] didn't have anything to do with it, to begin with? Or was he perhaps a bit interested? [...]"

Ms Klinge: "Exactly, and I, exactly, I did manage to persuade him to go with me to the Winter Retreat, to Sogyal Rinpoche and it was an enormous event with 500 participants. And my husband is an introverted person. I'm not super extroverted, but I do seem to be more so than he is. And he was simply overwhelmed by the number of people. It was too much for him. He said, "It's too much for me". And then he said, 'Well, he's putting on an act here' and I found that difficult when my husband said that because, for me it isn't an act. And still, I did find some things difficult to understand, when Sogyal Rinpoche was sitting on the stage phoning his mother in Tibet. Well, I don't know (laughs)."

Interviewer: "What was that?"

Ms Klinge: "He called his mother and all he said was, 'Ama, ama' and then he talked in Tibetan and I kept thinking, 'Why's he doing that now?' I didn't understand. And then, yes, I don't know, whether he was sometimes also teaching something, that is, o.k., that that was important for his mother, she was supposed to listen, too. But somehow [it] was. I must say, I found that disconcerting. I was disconcerted and Stefan [the director of her local centre] is something like my teacher here, you could say, and he said he was the one who who was running the course and he said, 'If you follow Sogyal Rinpoche you must be clear that he is also a dynamic teacher'. He's said to have kicked a table off the stage in Berlin and apparently he did it three times before the audience started to catch it. (Laughs) That's just to give you an example."

Interviewer: "Yes"

Ms Klinge: "I haven't seen him do anything like that, but I would perhaps find that disconcerting, too. Well, but o.k., I have read that some masters throw stones at their students until they faint, somehow, but then they've reached a higher level because the master has hit energy centres with the stones. Yes, but I mean, for me with my western mind some things are difficult to understand, know what I mean? I'd think

that's abuse, like, somebody should report him. (Laughs) I don't know. How much is he my master? I'm afraid of being disrespectful if I say he's not my master or something like that. And it's not true, either. But I'm also afraid to say he's my master and to come out with that." [46]

We can pause here for a brief analysis and start by looking at the voices and positions that emerge in the narrative. Ostensibly, what we have here is direct speech spoken by the interviewer and by Ms Klinge. We also have another four voices embedded in Ms Klinge's narrative: what her husband said, ("It's too much for me"; "He's putting on an act here"); Sogyal's phone call ("Ama, ama") and what Stefan, her teacher from her local Rigpa centre, said ("If you follow Sogyal Rinpoche ..."). At various points Ms Klinge also quotes herself word for word and in an embedded form (e.g. "I kept thinking, 'Why's he doing that now?"; "I must say I found that disconcerting"). The text is already complex enough due to the distribution of the voices, but becomes more complicated when we also bring the embedded positions into the picture. Here the following actors appear (each voice also appears as a position): the 500 participants of the retreat; Sogyal's mother, Sogyal and his students at a retreat in Berlin; the master Ms Klinge had heard about and the students at whom he threw stones. In addition, Ms Klinge's I-position is duplicated because she appears as both subject and the object of a situation that she is describing, and at different times. Moreover, by integrating systems theory into our contextual analysis we can identify three further generalised societal positions: that of the law ("that's abuse, that should be reported") and something that one can perhaps call an academic stance which does not believe in subtle energy centres ("with my western mind"). The third position may not initially be directly evident to the reader, but can be inferred from the overall context of the text, namely the transcendence that a student is presumed to be able to achieve because of the teacher's transgressive behaviour and boundary violations ("then they reached a higher level"). This is a reference to the spiritual goal that motivates people to engage in such a path. [47]

In the next step of the analysis, we can look at how the interviewees described their attitudes, i.e. what appeared objective or subjective to them, what epistemic status they assigned to the individual speech acts and, in turn, what was their appraisal of it, if they had one. Sogyal's strange behaviour during the retreats was seen as an objective fact, the epistemic status in regard to the event in Berlin being limited somewhat by the words "is said to have", but without going as far as to doubt the statement. Likewise Ms Klinge's husband's statement, which she reports in direct speech as an objective fact ("Well, he's putting on an act here"). Interestingly, from her own subjective perspective she adds "for me it isn't an act". Even though she offers a divergence between two perspectives—in other words, two different voices are presented the same time, she decides on certainty, on what she determines "is" (certainty, not doubt). She goes on to evaluate on the one hand the divergence ("I found that difficult"), and on the other when we analyse the polyphonic structure we find that despite having committed herself to her subjective view that Sogyal's behaviour was not putting on an act, she is not clear about what it in fact was. She assesses the epistemic status quite unequivocally as unclear ("Well, I don't know"). However, for her this not-knowing

is apparently not unproblematic, but disconcerting, inappropriate. Her use of the reflexive pronoun in German ("*mich befremdet*"—Eng. "I found that disconcerting") indicates that she is not managing to reconcile how she is relating to the world (to Sogyal's behaviour) in this situation with how she is relating to herself (feeling disconcerted). [48]

In her narrative, we then find a reference to an attempt by a third person, Stefan, who is also a representative of her local Rigpa centre, to mediate. Interestingly, at this point she also makes a statement that reveals her attitude to Stefan: she explains that she sees Stefan as her teacher (she has been attending a meditation course led by him for some time, from which, as she mentions elsewhere in her interview, she has greatly profited). [49]

As she continues, she weaves her teacher's interpretation that Sogyal's behaviour is intended as a lesson ("he's [...] a dynamic teacher") into the narrative as an additional voice, but this fails to reassure her: on the contrary, it bothers her more. Rather, remembering what she has read about dramatic teaching methods in the literature leads her to take the position of an enlightened democratic society that doubts esoteric explanations and sees physical attacks as punishable acts. And yet the narrative does not end in the certainty of an assessment of what the case is, but in a renewed expression of the status of her own subjective position. Not knowing, again, results not in a harmonious form, but in confused ambivalence. When she tries to arrive at a final evaluation of the question of whether she sees Sogyal as her master she becomes embroiled in a polyphonic mesh which contains four positions. From the standpoint of one of these positions she answers the question in the affirmative, from that of another in the negative, from a third she considers that a negative assessment would be "disrespectful" and from a fourth—that of the generalised third of society ("to *come out* with that") it seems problematic to answer it in the affirmative. [50]

We can also enrich the interpretation with a separate and more exact analysis of the illocutionary level, for instance by looking at the commitments that Ms Klinge makes (the commissives) or at how she verbalises inner states (the expressives). In the context we are considering the following passages are of interest in regard to this aspect. [51]

The statement "Stefan [...] is something like my teacher here, I'd say" finishes with a performative speech act that emphasises what she is saying (she is already speaking) once more as something that has been said. In a sense here she is in a sense establishing the definition of a relationship in a special way. Or, to compare it with her relationship to Sogyal, while she cannot see Sogyal unequivocally as her master, it is not only possible, but necessary for her to see Stefan as her teacher, in light of the history of their interactions. Whatever that may mean (e.g. how wise, experienced or knowledgeable she considers him to be), the nature of the relationship between them does not seem in question for her. [52]

In contrast, the statement "I must say, I found that disconcerting", expresses that she experienced the relationship as problematic. Here again, she stresses what she has just said once again by means of a performative speech act. The word "must" could be understood both as a commitment (as in, "I owe it to myself to say so") and as an appeal (e.g. in order to alert the listener to the fact that something is not o.k.). We do not have to commit ourselves to a conclusive interpretation here, but can rather appreciate the polyvalency that was already expressed in the ambivalence which we found above. At all events, closer analysis of the illocutionary level reveals further clues which can be used to identify the configurations that emerge as in a polycontextual hermeneutic approach.<sup>27</sup> With this we can conclude our analysis of the polyphonic aspects of the text. [53]

However, the instruments of literary analysis do not suffice to gain an understanding of the overall structure. To do this we need to find an approach that gives us a overarching view. This is only possible with contextual analysis, which gives us an account of the configuration of the empty places as in "morphogramatics" and demonstrates how the values in the places are mutually conditioned. The voices and positions are now systematically related to each other. To repeat, a place stands for a contexture, each of which represents a logical position at which a proposition is two-valued (something is or is not) and in which the principle of *tertium non datur* (no third [possibility]) is given) obtains. Correspondingly, when we bring together the text passages we have just reconstructed we can establish four propositions and their negations.

1. He's (not) putting on an act.
2. Sogyal teaches (doesn't teach).
3. It is (not) abuse or (not) deception.
4. He is (not) my master.
5. It is subjective, not objective (and *vice versa*). [54]

Since according to the morphogramatics of a polycontextual configuration the propositions occupy different logical positions, formally any combination of these positions initially appears conceivable, e.g. "Sogyal objectively abuses his students, he is nonetheless a master and from my subjective perspective his performances are not putting on an act, but teaching." Or: "For me he is not a master and thus he doesn't teach me anything, but from an objective perspective he is a teacher of Tibetan Buddhism." [55]

Empirically, however, here we can see how the overarching social configuration is conditioned, which brings Ms Klinge to oscillate between two variations which are mutually exclusive. "Sogyal puts on an act and deceives and abuses his students" versus "Sogyal is an out-of-the-ordinary teacher who can lead his students—including me—to transcend their egos by unusual means." Following

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<sup>27</sup> It will not be necessary to conduct such a detailed analysis in all cases. However, here we want to show what hermeneutic tools can be used to gather information on how contextures are structured.

LATOUR (2013) we could also say that Ms Klinge vacillates between different modes of existence in each of which something different holds true.<sup>28</sup> [56]

Ms Klinge continues to shuttle between these two alternatives—the fear of manipulation and the hope that transcendence could result from the teacher's clever intervention—in the following excerpt from the interview.

"Perhaps that's just our western mind, because we haven't yet grasped, they say he works with our ego, except that in order to do this, like to tickle our egos or that we look at our issues a bit. But of course then I'm also afraid of being manipulated, like, yes, if I were now to stop completely and run after him blindly. On the other hand Sogyal Rinpoche says, 'Work with your doubts too, or look at your doubts. We are in the West here', he says, 'Masters of doubting and we doubt so much that we can never even perceive the true path, because all we do is question, brood and doubt', to put it in my own words." [57]

The question as to why Ms Klinge considers only these two alternatives is easy to answer from the interview. Her options are restricted by the fact that on the one hand significant others from the Rigpa community to whom she has already developed a relationship testify to Sogyal Rinpoche's merits. This is only possible through a performative speech act (e.g. "I testify to the fact that Sogyal Rinpoche is an enlightened, unconventional master") since the you-perspective is inaccessible to Ms Klinge from the contexture of her own subjectivity, i.e. if she is to believe something it can only be shown as in a performative act. Even if Stefan, Ms Klinge's teacher, can only claim (not prove) that Sogyal is a real master, this assumption nevertheless becomes important and instructive in the social arrangement. For her to reject Stefan's performative speech act would simultaneously mean calling her relationship to him (and thus also her relationships with her community of practitioners) into question. Accordingly, if she wants to fit in with the social dynamic she has to believe what the speech act conveys, even if she cannot really believe it. On the other hand because its structure is polycontextual, modern society has built up positions of reflexivity from which statements with a claim to absoluteness—which can only be believed—must, quite rightly, be doubted (e.g. law, science, democracy). Authorities are no longer believed merely because other authorities confirm them. The fact that these two variants are so stable in Ms Klinge's mind is therefore due on the one hand to the social dynamic of the local Rigpa association, where it is especially the middle level teachers (known as "instructors" in Rigpa) who play an important role, since with their performative speech acts they decide what is (in WITTGENSTEIN's terminology) "the case" (2016 [1921], 1). And on the other hand it stems from the forms of reflection of modern society. [58]

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28 The question as to what is the case is, as we have also shown with reference to the polyphonic view, not directly dependent on the question as to whether what happened was ascribed objective or subjective status. Thus, for example, something (such as "drama", "a lesson" or anything else (e.g. "he kicked the table off the stage")) can appear to be objective fact, but this is independent of the ontological decision as to what is "the case", just as it is independent of what subjective epistemic status is assigned, such as if one says, "I or you only dreamed that or mistakenly thought it was so."

Since for Ms Klinge both the experience of community and participation in society are paramount, at this point in time the dilemma seems to her to be insoluble. She needs more stabilising factors to influence the co-production of this dilemma and allow her to arrive at a stance that is unequivocal. Her current doubts cannot therefore simply be transformed into trust or certainty. However, whether such a shift is possible when students have got to know Sogyal Rinpoche over a period of many years is a different question. [59]

#### **4.2 Thrusting doubt aside—Mr Martini, a course instructor at the local Rigpa centre**

We therefore now take a look at the narrative of an interviewee who got to know Sogyal personally in various different contexts during his work for the Rigpa association and himself leads meditation courses at a west German Rigpa centre. For reasons of space we cannot explicate all the steps of the text analysis and therefore present only the results of the contextual analysis in detail. [60]

At the time of the interview Peter Martini was 48 years old and had been active in the Rigpa association for over ten years. The interview took place in 2016, that is, before the scandal was made public. Mr Martini nonetheless spontaneously addressed the criticism of Sogyal Rinpoche that was already occasionally leaking out, without being asked.

“Well, if you see it like that or more or less there are a lot of er things where they say, 'Yes pfhh pfhhh, he he does his his thing or does his own thing or mmh lives in luxury or somehow has affairs with women or things like that.' But I don't want to check up on things like that [...] of course pfhh/ I try/ we talk about it or so, when things like that happen. Then it gets talked about, then it gets talked about, what do you think about it, what happened, what newspaper article is that, did you see that or something like that.' But then I try not to look at those things because/ I don't want to have such doubts. And [...] if there are somehow injustices or inconsistencies that other people see or experience then I have to say, ok, that's your thing. Of course it's difficult because you'll/ because you can't get rid of this objective element." [61]

A detailed analysis of the interpretation reveals that Mr Martini was drawing attention to the fact that there were reports of facts regarding Sogyal's behaviour that could actually be checked and were therefore objective and were also seen critically by other people. He continues that it reports have been noted in the Rigpa community and that have people compared them to their own perspectives ("what do you think about it") but Mr Martini—and this is a constitutive element of his associated ways of relating to himself and the world—actively tries not to look at the details of the allegations ("I try not to look at those things") in order to avoid the potential conflict shaping his relationship to his teacher (don't want to have such doubts"). At the same time here we see a second form of negation, i.e. he rejects the subjective speaker position of all the "you" perspectives that have problems with Sogyal's behaviour ("that's... your thing"). But Mr Martini's active negation of doubt and the divergent you-positions does not eliminate the problem that he has negated ("Of course it's difficult ... because you can't get rid of this



objective element." A shred of doubt remains. Rejecting the truth claims (are the allegations true?) and refusing to assess them (is it right what Sogyal is doing?) nonetheless enables Mr Martini to take a different perspective which foregrounds the specific nature of his relationship to Sogyal, as revealed by the following interview excerpt.

"For me, Sogyal Rinpoche is actually almost beyond the judgements because it's so/ it's (sighs) yes for me it's beyond my comprehension and I know, too, that I do really think some things, like how how can / how why and that's not my style, it, er er with any other person I'd say, pfhh that's unacceptable or something like that, but I, for me that's also a sort of test, like, if you, like a partner you allow to get away with things that you wouldn't let other people get away with because you know that it's a process one goes through." [62]

He brings in partner relationships, as we know them from love relationships, as an analogy that appears to determine his relationship to Sogyal. One would still stand by a lover if they were doing something bad, in the same way that one might forgive the idiosyncrasies and weaknesses of another person one loves and even forgive them when they are aggressive towards oneself,—because it's about the higher value of remaining true to one's love. His relationship to his teacher appears as a process that is beyond conventional judgements. It's not a matter of truth or morals, but, as in love, about the contexture of something that is bigger that transcends the here-and-now phenomena. The metaphor of the "test", in particular, points towards a broader context, of which his relationship to Sogyal can be seen as a here-and-now symbol. However, this way of framing also does not appear a hundred per cent stable across the course of the narrative, as evidenced by the words "actually almost", which have a limiting effect. [63]

That Mr Martini does not feel that the analogy describes his relationship to Sogyal completely accurately also becomes clear in the following sequence.

Mr Martini: "I really don't know how, how to describe it. I sometimes find it really difficult to get to the heart of it and somehow almost to accept those things, but I still sort of trust in this [relationship] and because he also stresses again and again, er and says, It's not me that's important. but the dharma<sup>29</sup> and what, what it conveys and you are the ones who will pass it on/ who will keep it going. And this receiving in order to pass it on is a selfless way. And that is of course also very, that is it takes this a little, takes this this er self-centred completely (short laugh), yes."

Interviewer: "One's own self-centredness or his?"

Mr Martini: "His and one's own // o.k. // because / because it can easily / there's also a lot of criticism of him." [64]

Let us assign these remarks to the appropriate logical positions of the contextual analysis. As systems theorist Peter FUCHS (2015) has shown, love should by *definition* have included the whole person, which in this case would have meant being able to accept Sogyal unconditionally as an eccentric Tibetan whose

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29 The dharma refers to the Buddhist teachings.

behaviour is indeed questionable. However, this does not appear unproblematic in Mr Martini's narrative. Otherwise, it would be possible for students to say that they love the Lama even if others see him as hedonistic, addicted to sex or in some other way deserving of criticism. [65]

However, Mr Martini manages to keep Sogyal in the position of an authentic master in a different way, i.e. by splitting him into Sogyal as a person and Sogyal as a teacher. In this way what is taught is placed outside of the alterity or subjectivity of the teacher, which one must love. Even if it is not possible to gain any certainty on the issue of whether Sogyal's behaviour is holy or appropriate for a wise Tibetan Lama, it is still a fact that Sogyal teaches the Dharma and that the students pass these teachings on. Accordingly, Mr Martini's trust in this relationship is grounded less in the quality of the relationship itself—here his doubts persist -, than it is in the task of propagating the Buddhist teachings. [66]

The teachings then appear on the one hand as objectifiable texts (it can be established that Sogyal refers to traditional, canonical sources) which can then be understood to—this the implicit message—proclaim a transcendent truth, and on the other hand as the interpersonal experience, that can be shared intersubjectively, that the teachings can be both received and passed on to others. However, the teacher's selflessness is thus reduced to his participation in the propagation of religious teachings. As, for example, we can say about a winner of the Nobel prize for physics that it he has won because of what he has said about and achieved in physics and his winning has nothing to do with how he behaves towards his wife or his students, in this case, too, how the spiritual master relates to himself and the world is blotted out in order to protect him from criticism. Accordingly, in this configuration, to refrain from being self-centred means to play a role and behave as if different ways of perceiving things or different points of view (the disconcerting and disturbing you-perspectives) do not exist. [67]

Mr Martini is able to immunise himself against criticism by dismissing the self in such a way that it has no effect on the configuration. He dismisses both his own "self-centredness" and that of the master ("his"). Anyone who propagates the teachings acts selflessly *by definition*, and his/her actions are therefore holy. Here we have a two-valued religious contexture which is determined by the polar opposites transcendent and immanent. Since here we are concerned with the transcendence that is a central element of the teachings of Tibetan Buddhism (but which is outside of the I-perspective and cannot therefore be evaluated from that position), what is understood as being immanent—thus as part of the perceptible everyday world—(e.g. strange behaviour on the part of the master or one's own doubts) is unimportant and is accordingly to be rejected or transposed. All that is left is the abstract form of the religion, the reference to transcendence. Once this abstract form of religion (reduced to transcendence and neglecting immanence) has become established, while it is possible that those in Mr Martini's own circles will talk about the criticism that is being voiced by various groups, he will point out that a spiritual master of this tradition (most of whom are male) cannot respond to accusations, since to do so would be to become

implicated in worldly disputes and thus subvert his status as *bodhisattva* (a person whose actions are informed not by selfishness, but solely by compassion for other beings). However, Mr Martini, too, is left with a fractured relationship to his master; he can only manage "somehow almost to accept those things". This is because he is confusing the relationship to the master that he sees as analogous to a love relationship with the religious system that the master embodies. If it were just a matter of the former he could easily say (like a wife to her husband), "He is someone who makes mistakes and has hurt many people, but I love him and will stand by him, whatever he has done". However, this is not possible within the framework of the religion of Tibetan Buddhism, which conditions all other positions in the configuration. That the system of reincarnate tulkus<sup>30</sup> can produce people who are fallible, not holy (and who possibly even succumb to lust and other addictions) cannot be verbalised (at least, not in reference to one's own school). [68]

In sum, the configuration expressed in Mr Martini's position can be expressed as follows: the more doubts in the infallibility of his teacher arise, the more they have to be actively pushed aside, since to perceive serious transgressions would call into question the holiness of the position of the teacher in whom he wishes to believe and whose blessings he wants to receive. The more it appears to become evident that the Lama is a person with manifest weaknesses, the more a student must work on him- or herself to prevent the doubts from gaining the upper hand. [69]

#### 4.3 Mr Schneider: Differentiating between person and role

The above two cases lead us to ask the following question: could the empty places that condition the arrangement of the teacher/student relationship, also be occupied by different values? Is it possible to retain an unbroken relationship to the teacher without closing one's eyes to his problematic behaviour? Let us see how this Mr Schneider deals with this in his narrative. Mr Schneider had been a member of the Rigpa organisation for over 20 years and had completed a three-year retreat at Lerab Ling, Rigpa's main centre in France. In a conversation that we had with Mr Schneider in 2013 we asked him whether the level of spiritual development of his teacher was important for him.

Interviewer: "But theoretically a Lama doesn't have to be enlightened, now, I mean, that isn't the issue or [whether he is in fact] on that level or he's? [...]"

Mr Schneider: "I'd put it the other way round. Whether the Lama is enlightened or not is immaterial. Completely (unclear). Whether I can see the buddha qualities in a teacher and as a result bring my own buddha qualities to light. That's what's decisive. In other words, there's a Lama who says theoretically we could also profit from a butcher. I mean (a bell rings) a butcher as somebody who is actually accumulating bad karma, etc. Or who kills animals or (unclear). What's decisive is not what's going on with the Lama, but in my view what's decisive is always how I see it. Buddhism

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30 Tulkus are considered to be spiritual teachers (in the Tibetan tradition this applies almost exclusively to men) who can determine the form in which they are reincarnated themselves.

assumes a radical... I'm just going to open the door. Buddhism makes the radical assumption that, that, that you can't say anything about how the outside world exists. (The bell rings again.) You can only [do that] through your own perception and how you look at the world. And there's like this thesis that if my perception is pure, the world will act towards me purely. And that's what I work on. So for me, I want my master to be a field that I can use to practise on and then he is enlightened so-to-speak. And that's what I practise on."

Interviewer: "That is what's fascinating. That is in fact the point."

Mr Schneider: "And then the question is not, 'Is he enlightened?', but 'Am I seeing him?' And then I see at how many (laughing) points I keep bringing out my critical, evaluating, judgemental mind, again and again. And then, I don't know, if you look at Sogyal Rinpoche and think, 'Why is he so fat? Can he really be enlightened?' Then I think, aha, I've got a certain concept that a fat person can't be enlightened. Well, then I probably won't get there myself (laughs)."

Interviewer: "Yes, yes."

Mr Schneider: "And that if I/ If I free my concept, so-to-speak, then a fat, or thin, or tall, or small person can be enlightened." [70]

Mr Schneider's answer is remarkable in a number of different ways. To start with, he rejects the question as to whether the Lama is enlightened or not ("Whether the Lama is enlightened or not is immaterial"). From that perspective the associated thoughts and doubts would also make no sense. For Mr Schneider what is decisive is rather the perspective itself, from which one reflects. If the Lama is considered enlightened, the observer develops a view in which their relationship to the Lama appears pure and perfect. Thus the Lama functions primarily as an opportunity to practise, to cultivate a view of the world that is not shaped by value judgements. Mr Schneider draws a comparison with a "butcher" (literally "meat seller") whom one could theoretically also choose as Lama and practice object. [71]

Thus, what is decisive here is not whether the teacher really has the abilities and virtues that are ascribed to him, but one's own reflections, that is, what the I attributes to the You. In this context the Lama is both an opportunity to practice seeing and perceiving without discriminating and without judging, which permits the practitioner, after a time, to see him- or herself mimetically reflected as pure and immaculate. If the flaws of the role model are no longer seen as problematic, one can also accept one's own flaws and comes to a view in which the world—and above all the way oneself is in relation to the world—appears whole and natural. Insofar as one is able to adopt this way of relating to oneself and the world it goes without saying that the Lama's faults can be seen as what they are, weaknesses that people can simply have. Accordingly, there is no need to see the Lama as a superhuman being and his actions do not need to carry an aura of infallibility. [72]

Thus in the case of Mr Schneider we find someone who has a sophisticated perspective and is aware of its artificial nature, but sustains this perspective precisely because it is the only way to permit the associated way of seeing things

to be "real". Mr Schneider's reference to Sogyal Rinpoche's corpulence ("why is he so fat? Can he really be enlightened?") is interesting in this context. At first glance the implication is that the Lama is not able to keep his sensual desires under control and that he cannot therefore be considered holy. However, as he continues to reflect Mr Schneider then realises that the actual problem is that of remaining fixated on a specific concept of holiness, since this would prevent the practitioner from becoming enlightened him-/herself ("Then I think, aha, I've got a certain concept that a fat person can't be enlightened. Well, then I probably won't get there myself"). The sophisticatedness of this perspective lies in the fact that it includes the possibility that the Lama, too, can behave in violation of the ethical standards of the Buddhist teachings or act out of ignorance because he is not, in fact, enlightened. At the same time Mr Schneider brackets the associated implications for practice as of no importance because the issue is not what is the case, but one's own epistemic attitude (how I see other people and the world). [73]

Structurally Mr Schneider is no longer describing enlightenment or the enlightened master as something that is the case, but as a perspective from which one can reflect, which is borrowed from the sphere of what is not the case and can still, as the imaginary, have an epistemic effect in the here-and-now of daily living. Thus he is negating a way of seeing things or but he is not negating a specific set of facts (and he does not therefore need to deny the accusations of abuse nor push aside doubts associated with the evaluation of the facts). From such a perspective it is all the same (and thus also of no import) whether the Lama is holy, enlightened and perfect or whether he is not enlightened and is driven by his physical needs. This altered perspective opens up degrees of freedom for a person's own actions, because it is then possible to maintain one's relationship to the Lama even if one disapproves of his behaviour, and one can decide not to follow some of his instructions and may even consider some of the consequences of his behaviour to be disastrous. Unlike Mr Martini, Mr Schneider does not reduce the function of the Lama to a formal role, but rather sees his relationship to him as central. [74]

Thus if we now look once more at the contextual analysis we have four positions in the centre of the morphogram—the subjective poles of I and You and the objective poles of the observable behaviour of two bodies. When we analyse the configuration that Mr Schneider describes we see that the cut now lies exactly between the side that philosophy describes as factual in contrast to the transcendental sphere (the perceivable sphere of everyday life and the inaccessible spheres of the subjectivities of other sentient beings). This leads to a constellation where Mr Schneider has to experience the encounter with the You as a blessing, and consequently to experience his own extraordinarily intensely. This relationship constellation is not unknown in western thought, we need only think of the romantic era—the keyword here, for which there is no trivial definition, is "love". [75]

Accordingly, in an interview that was conducted after the content of the open letter had been made public, Mr Schneider described that he actually still wanted to love Sogyal—or to have loved him. However, the real tragedy with which he

now had to deal was the fact that he was infinitely grateful to or loved somebody who had evidently severely disappointed the expectations of his students. [76]

It is important to understand and to stress once again that neither does this configuration make it necessary for Mr Schneider to negate or blank out facts related to Sogyal's misconduct, nor does it put the Lama on a pedestal and see him as an almighty and infallible being. Thus this configuration is not grounded in religious concepts that require faith or superstition. Rather, we land in a spirituality that is rooted in the uncertainty of the Thou-perspective and the associated impermanence and unpredictability, in the sense that love can be tragic. [77]

## 5. Self-Immunising Configurations—a Brief Discussion

A comparison of the above three interviews reveals that it is not possible to consider interpretations of a spiritual teacher's troubling behaviour in isolation from the context of other positions on which these interpretations depend. Each of our interviewees refer to different "configurations", all of which sustained the ambivalence that arose in connection with the teacher's problematic behaviour. [78]

Ms Klinge, a novice, is still undecided and vacillating between doubt and the hope that she will be able to believe in the teacher's power and integrity. This mode of relating is conditioned by her community of practitioners, which affirms the teacher's role. Most of the advanced students have already settled for a response that consists in actively pushing their doubts aside, even if this does not help them to calm their turbulent inner and outer relationships to the teacher. For them it their spiritual practice and their participation in and support of the religious institutions that make that practice possible seem more important than their personal doubts, and this justifies their not looking more closely at it. In turn, within the community of practitioners this reinforces the attitude that critical questions are to be seen as the personal and subjective problems of the critics. [79]

A few individual highly experienced students arrive at a configuration that permits them to perceive the weaknesses of the Rigpa teachers (most of whom are men), but without denying the importance of the relationship. However, since this configuration is also a highly subjective view of the problem, it fails to change the fundamental configuration of the "empty place grammar" within the Rigpa community, in other words the students' views of the problem seem to be *purely* subjective. Even if there are a few individuals who take a more differentiated view, this does not alter how others involved reconcile their values at other positions. This can only occur if a group of people go public—as happened in this case—when some students from the inner group published an open letter in order to produce new, meaningful speaker positions. Only such a collective performative action can bring about a fundamental shift in the social constellation. From that point on doubts about the Lama's problematic behaviour can no longer be regarded as a subjective problem that individuals need to deal with in private, but is an intersubjectively corroborated fact. To use the linguistic analytic tools

presented by GÉVAUDAN (2010), we see that significant others assume the responsibility to testify to something, in an "objective modality". [80]

However, from the perspective of the "empty-place grammar" of contextual analysis it is not sufficient for individual actors to perform this illocutionary speech act if they do not occupy a position that gives them a high level of authority (e.g. in the sphere of Tibetan Buddhism the Dalai Lama). As our analysis of the teacher-student relationship described by the novice Ms Klinge shows, even the opinion offered by her husband in an objectifying mode was not enough, as the students who want to believe in their teacher may continue to place their hopes on the promise that the Lama will give them spiritual guidance. Consequently, they view such a critical statement as merely the personal, subjective position of an individual which they do not share. The same mechanism is evident in interviews we have conducted with students who have dropped out, whose decision to leave is still seen at most as a (more or less regrettable) individual act which does not affect how each deals with the problem themselves—and this despite the fact that those who left the community had been active members of it for decades. How can the insight that something is going really wrong be stabilised in such a system? In order to change the way the empty places mutually condition each other, interventions are needed that develop a social scenario that constellates the relationships between the group, its members and the teacher irreversibly, i.e. stabilises the realisation that something is wrong, so that it cannot be mitigated by shifting the attention to the subjective positions of individual persons who have complained. [81]

However, at the same time this shows that the problem of Rigpa and Tibetan Buddhism is more far-reaching than most of those involved presumably want to acknowledge. Due to the systemic relationships described above it will hardly be sufficient simply to replace the main teacher, since virtually all the people in important positions in the Rigpa community (and in particular the long-standing students and those who lead meditation groups) have been trained to push aside critical perceptions and to deal with them as a problem arising from their own attitude. This is also promoted by the teachings of Tibetan Buddhism. The associated tendency to idealise the teacher, which teachers can perceive as an invitation to abuse the power that has been vested in them, must be considered to be an inherent characteristic of the system of this spiritual community. To what extent the institutions of Tibetan Buddhism can find a way to counterbalance this which would correct the relationship between use and abuse is an issue that we cannot address here (for more on this subject see VOGD, 2019). [82]

## 6. Fields of Application of Contextural Analysis and its Relationship to the Documentary Method

The methodological approach we have presented above has many potential fields of application. It is suitable in all cases where the subject matter can be expected to involve the simultaneous presence of different logics of action and canons of values. Its usefulness for exploring organisational logics and values is obvious. It also seems to be equally fruitful in research in psychiatry and on psychotherapy, since in these fields diverging standpoints are to be expected and thus attributions of what appears to be subjective or objective can be analysed without preconceptions and depending on the concrete specifics of the attributions made in interactions. It can also be employed to investigate issues in the educational sciences. Following GÜNTHER (1976a, 1976b), MAROTZKI (1990) had conceived of learning as a transformation of self and world relations, but was not yet able to present the theoretical considerations in the sense of an empirically useful methodology. Contextural analysis can, of course, equally well be employed in the analysis of the multiple ways in which subjectivity is produced in the modern world, since in this case it postulates modes of relating to the self that are theoretically complex and alienated. [83]

Using this methodology it is also possible to switch systematically between a local perspective (the "configuration" of specific actors) and the morpho- or empty-place grammar of overarching configurations. This reveals the systemic interdependencies without reducing the local and global levels of analysis in a way that leads to causal and deterministic conclusions, e.g. making a direct link between the levels of psychological systems, social systems and communication. [84]

A further advantage is that this approach offers points of conjunction with a phenomenology that is oriented towards embodiment, as developed by Maurice MERLEAU-PONTY (1968 [1964]), in particular. One of MERLEAU-PONTY's most important achievements was to shift KANT's "transcendental" subjectivity (1998 [1781], pp.91ff.), that is, an abstract construct defining an I that is posited to be a *priori*, back into the level of being, into the concrete practice of embodied interactions. However, this means that we can also no longer draw on a conception of language or rules that is founded on transcendental logic when we are discussing the problem of intersubjectivity. The only empirical reference point is the way in which the links between reciprocal embodied practices are linked to each other over time. We can then look at the links between these embodied practices, which arise in interdependent origination,—or at how they are configured.<sup>31</sup> [85]

The practitioners' own experiences and those of others are brought together in a back-and-forth of reflections. Each of these reflections creates a concrete

31 As MERLEAU-PONTY phrased it: "The phenomenological world is not pure being, but the sense which is revealed where the paths of my various experiences intersect, and also where my own and other people's intersect and engage each other like gears. It is thus inseparable from subjectivity and intersubjectivity, which find their unity when I either take up my past experiences in those of the present, or other people's in my own" (2005 [1962], p.xviii).



configuration in which unity and difference, subject and object, we and the others, concrete and abstract entities can emerge, depending on the respective situation—i.e. in a concrete practice context. As in the theory of polycontextuality, in MERLEAU-PONTY (1968 [1964]) it is also not possible to capture this differentiation from the perspective of a hierarchy of grounds and justifications (since "transcendental" subjectivity and intersubjectivity can likewise no longer be seen as the primary foundation). There is no longer any foundation, but only a complex hierarchy of multiple practices that support each other reciprocally. Similarly, reflection and rationality can no longer be situated outside of these practices. To quote MERLEAU-PONTY: "Rationality is precisely proportioned to the experiences in which it is disclosed. To say that there exists rationality is to say that perspectives blend, perceptions confirm each other, a meaning emerges" (2005 [1962], p.xviii). Whether we will or no, here we find a mode of constituting practices in which meaning, rationality and, of course, also the other phenomena that must be seen as emerging ways of relating to ourselves and the world, must be considered to be by-products of interdependent origination. The links between the phenomenological perspective and a polycontextual perspective, including the location of speech in the lived body, are explored in detail in VOGD (2018). The present article closes a further gap in the methodological explication—the connection with the linguistic interpretation of polyphonic speech acts. [86]

The main basis for the development of contextual analysis was the documentary method (BOHNSACK, 2014). As mentioned in the introduction, above, the starting point for this methodological expansion was the fact that in the results we obtained in our research on organisations we discerned multiple frames that we could no longer leave unaddressed in the data analysis.<sup>32</sup> We therefore looked to systems theory to find ways of expanding our methods that were suitable for describing and reconstructing these configurations and relationships. As is well-known, the documentary method includes stages of analysis which are referred to as "formulating" and "reflecting interpretation", the latter being augmented and further developed by conducting systematic comparative analyses. Contextual analysis begins with a special form of reflecting interpretation which is used to reconstruct modes of relating to the self and others. At the same time the method also follows the central metatheoretical assumption of the documentary method according to which the ontological and epistemic positionings and orientations in any practice arise from a "transpersonal" configuration. They are conditioned by an overarching network of relationships. We can thus state, in line with the excerpt from BUTLER (2005) cited at the beginning of this article, that even what appears to be our innermost subjectivity results from relational dynamics. This is also consistent with the praxeological principles developed by BOHNSACK (2014) and BOURDIEU (1990 [1980]), according to which persons do not consciously select an ontology or an epistemology which allows them to relate to the world (and themselves), but are connected together in networks of practices

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<sup>32</sup> See by way of comparison the development of the institutional logics approach (THORNTON et al., 2012), which is similar. However in this approach, the question as to how different logics can be related to one another, in particular has received little attention, since it has remained too narrowly focused on the perspective of the actors.

that strongly influence how they experience and act, which in turn determines their practices. [87]

However, one difference between the polyphony of contextual analysis and the concept of the habitus or the frame of orientation, as BOHNSACK conceptualised it in the strict sense in his early work (e.g. 1998), consists in the fact that the latter were understood primarily as resulting from homogeneous orientations that evolved in a more or less uniform social field where the modes of existence (LATOUR, 2013) were similar. Discussions in groups whose members have similar orientations in regard to the aspect under examination are the methodological royal road to collecting data on and reconstructing such configurations (BOHNSACK, 2010a; BOHNSACK, PRZYBORSKI & SCHÄFFER, 2005). The data analysis is conducted on passages with a high intensity of interaction and in which there is a high level of consensus or, where there are divergences, which show a conflict between two competing orientations.<sup>33</sup> In contrast, contextual analysis throws light on practices that are used to structure differing perspectives into a configuration. It thus broadens the view to include polyphony from the start, but without excluding the possibility that certain voices may sound together in a single homogeneous symphony. With contextual analysis it is therefore possible to conduct a systematic analysis of relationships and configurations where there is systemic tension and which are distributed across different positions and value orientations. [88]

However, even in more recent developments of the documentary method we find approaches that attempt to capture people's ways of relating to themselves and the world and their associated frames of orientation in more complex ways (see KRZYCHALA, 2019 for another attempt to make use of BAKHTIN's categories in the documentary method). For instance, BOHNSACK (2016) spoke of the "double multidimensionality of the experiential spaces in organisations" (p.248). What he means is that on the one hand members of organisations have to handle how they are forced to frame them others that go against their original action orientations, while on the other hand there has always been a certain tension between their habitual orientations and the normative identity concepts of societal common sense (for a more detailed explanation see BOHNSACK, 2017). From a praxeological perspective we then need to see how actors relate these differing perspectives to each other in everyday practices. The perspectivisations that prove successful in everyday practice themselves follow a logic of practice and can also be seen as an expression of the "document sense" which is one of the pillars of the documentary method (e.g. BOHNSACK, 2010a, p.313, following MANNHEIM, 1964). The document sense is supra-individual per se, since it is not dependent on the intentional actions of individual actors, but results from the history of the conflicts between complex social (and socio-technical) networks. The complexity of these perspectivisations is evident in the transcripts of qualitative interviews (be it narrative interviews, group discussions or expert interviews), which can be analysed using contextual analysis as described in this article, in a way that stays close to the text. Likewise, the practical sense

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<sup>33</sup> For a discussion of the organisation of discourse in the coherent and divergent modes see PRZYBORSKI (2004).

(understood as in BOURDIEU's concept of habitus) always emerges as the product of how the perspectivisations develop over time, as expressed in the sequentiality of texts and the refined embedding of different speaker positions with differing ontological and epistemic statuses. [89]

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