Situational Analysis as a Traveling Concept: Mapping, Coding and the Role of Hermeneutics

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Abstract: Situational analysis mapping is widely appreciated as offering systematical empirical approaches to analyzing relationality. However, the role of grounded theory coding as a technique to analyze sequentially remains somewhat unclear in situational analysis method books. In my contribution, I regard situational analysis as a traveling concept rooted in pragmatism and taken up within research landscapes different from its origin. Scrutinizing how situational analysis is practiced in German-speaking social sciences, I find that grounded theory coding is commonly used in addition to mapping. I relate this to existing debates on social scientific hermeneutics. Relations between pragmatism and hermeneutics are clarified and possible implications for data analysis in situational analysis are pointed out.

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1. Introductory Remarks

In German-speaking academia, situational analysis is acknowledged as an important contribution to reconciling two of the most influential paradigms of the social sciences, namely American pragmatism and French structuralism. Adele CLARKE's, Carrie FRIESE's and Rachel WASHBURN's (2018) methodological propositions for bridging structuralism and pragmatism were regarded as most valuable, and the theoretical challenges of aligning discourse theory and interactionism were considered one of the intriguing issues of current theorizing in the social sciences (KELLER, 2013). As both pragmatism and structuralism/poststructuralism focus on process, practices and relations instead of substance and identities, Rainer DIAZ-BONE (2013) found similarities between the pragmatist-based research style of situational analysis, Pierre BOURDIEU's field analysis and Algirdas GREIMAS' structural semantics. In this article, I argue that CLARKE et al. (2018, 2022 [2015]) prominently focused on situational analysis mapping as a result of their attempts to bridge pragmatism and structuralism, and as a method to analyze relationality. Less attention has been

paid to issues of textual analysis and thus, comparisons between pragmatism and hermeneutics as another grand paradigm in the social sciences have not played a prominent role in methodological debates on situational analysis so far. As a consequence for research practice, I claim that the relationship between mapping and coding remains somewhat unclear as coding does not seem to have a systematic place in procedures of situational analysis (Section 2). Investigating how these matters were resolved in practice, I will scrutinize selected studies conducted in German-speaking academia that used situational analysis as a research style (Section 3). I will show that researchers made use of open coding in a hermeneutical manner and found this a self-evident part of conducting situational analysis. I will place these findings in the landscape of German-speaking academia, where hermeneutic foundations of interpretive research play a key role in qualitative data analysis across different research methods and styles (Section 4). Affinities between grounded theory methodology/situational analysis and hermeneutics are then specified (Section 5). To conclude and to clarify relations between mapping and textual analysis, I will suggest that in future debates on situational analysis further attention should be paid to affinities between pragmatism and hermeneutics both on a theoretical and on a practical level. Not only would this align situational analysis with Straussian grounded theory methodology (GTM) and emphasize continuity between both pragmatist research styles, but it would also contribute to further reconciling different paradigms in the social sciences (Section 6). [1]

2. Mapping and Coding in Situational Analysis

Situational analysis is a research style in which visual thinking forms an integral part of scientific work. In all stages of the research process, different mapping strategies are employed to stimulate thinking, generate new questions, support theoretical sampling, discover and work out relationalities, consider otherwise forgotten elements and visualize results for different audiences (CLARKE et al., 2022 [2015]). Situational mapping can be used to explore a field, develop and refine research questions and identify heterogeneous elements prevalent in the research situation, including the element of implicated actors: people or groups of people that are affected by negotiations within a field but are not participating in the negotiations. Relational mapping and memoing help to systematically analyze relations between heterogeneous elements, thus substantially deepening the analytical value of situational maps. Social worlds and arenas maps can be used to explore collective action (within and between social worlds) and (controversial) negotiations in specified arenas of a field. This mapping procedure is tightly connected to the interactionist theory of action developed by Anselm STRAUSS (1978, 1993) and pertains to analyzing meso-level phenomena of larger historical and geographical scope. The fourth kind of mapping, positional mapping, was developed by CLARKE et al. (2018) as a method to support theory-based analysis. With positional mapping, researchers can detect what can be stated in any given situation, and how this is both limited and enabled by particular lines of discourse present in the research field. The heuristics of "implicated actors" and of "positions not taken" (pp.76ff.)—the silent spots resulting from discourse formations—render situational analysis a genuine research style for analyzing

power in action (OFFENBERGER, 2019a). Situational analysis is designed as a critical interactionist method (CLARKE et al., 2022 [2015], p.101) and researchers are encouraged to employ mapping for that purpose. [2]

Cartographic strategies also played a crucial role in the early days of empirical social science. The Chicago school, for example, used mapping techniques to display living conditions of different parts of the population in Chicago and other cities (CLARKE et al., 2018, pp.65ff.). Two studies deserve particular attention for the mapping methods used by their authors, and the way in which those methods were subsequently adapted by Chicago School sociologists: the "Hull-House Maps and Papers" study by the (female) RESIDENTS OF HULL-HOUSE (2007 [1895]) and the study of "The Philadelphia Negro" conducted by (African American) scholar W.E.B. DU BOIS (2007 [1899]). Today, both are considered groundbreaking works (not only) for the visual strategies utilized in the pioneering days of empirical social sciences in the United States (DEEGAN, 1997).[1] [3]

In recent decades, visual methods have gained fresh momentum for internal communication (among scientists) and external science communication (with the public) (SCHNETTLER & BAUERNSCHMIDT, 2018). One of the causes can be showcased through increased demands for research findings to be disseminated and explained by scientists. Images and other forms of visualization are often used corresponding to the omnipresence of images in the global, internet-based circulation of knowledge (ibid.). Researchers in different social-scientific disciplines also theorize about the (scientific) use of images and about visual communication. For example, Jo REICHERTZ (2018) drew on pragmatist epistemology and recalled Charles Sanders PEIRCE's appraisal of visual scientific thinking: In his work on semiotics, PEIRCE (1932) claimed that diagrams (such as drawings, formulas, images and charts) are useful because details are omitted and important aspects of a phenomenon become easier to grasp (BELLUCCI, 2020; REICHERTZ, 2018). PEIRCE (1932) emphasized that diagrams are created intentionally and thus support (scientific) reasoning by the means through which their interpreters start a dialogue with them, asking questions about the nature of the relationships displayed in the diagram. Those displayed relationships can be flipped; diagrams can be changed in a playful and thoughtful manner, thus enabling creativity and imagination. With this method, diagrams support new discoveries in that "they can destroy the conventional (linguistic) order of things and impose a new order on things" (REICHERTZ, 2018, p.273).[2] As such, REICHERTZ in following PEIRCE judged diagrams as most useful tools for scientific work. [4]

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1 The history of the Chicago School has been revisited in recent decades (BURAWOY, 2006), resulting in increased attention to the role of scholars outside the institutional boundaries of the University of Chicago. In particular, the role of Chicago Hull House settlement as one of the leading social science research institutes of its time has been acknowledged (DEEGAN, 1997; see also OFFENBERGER, STANGE, KOHLER & KAMENIK, 2023), as well as the role of W.E.B. DU BOIS as the founder of the Atlanta School of Sociology (MORRIS, 2015; see also NIERMANN, 2020).

2 All translations from non-English texts are mine.

Additionally, CLARKE et al. (2022 [2015], pp.19ff.) suggested visual thinking based on mapping as a way of experimenting with data by flipping it and playing with its relations. Mapping becomes a systematic part of favoring surprises and of supporting abductive reasoning in the research process. They stated that "surprise at grasping some new position or way of seeing indicates openness to unanticipated data, analyses, and differences—and assuredly not stupidity for not having seen it before" (CLARKE et al., 2018, p.104). They also encouraged researchers to be aware of surprises and to write memos about them to clarify the role of surprising insights for the analysis as a whole, for the mapping practice and for existing research (ibid.). At this point it becomes clear that the mode in which the analysis proceeds is a combination of mapping and writing. Memos were recommended all through the research process to specify relations between elements, to sketch out the properties of social worlds and to determine the way in which discourses are woven into the fabric of research fields. In that vein, situational analysis mapping was designed as a technique to consider relationality and to conceptualize meso-level dynamics of research fields. Among other inspirations, CLARKE et al. (2022 [2015], p.103) drew on assemblage theory and the emphasis on fluidity, connectivity and reversibility in rhizomatic thinking. As such, situational analysis mapping procedures are widely appreciated as strategies to render poststructuralist thinking empirical and enable systematic, data-based analyses of social worlds, arenas or similar concepts as field dynamics or assemblages. [5]

While situational analysis has been developed to encompass newer developments in social theory, CLARKE et al. simultaneously emphasized how it is rooted in pragmatist and symbolic interactionist grounded theorizing and its core assumptions on theoretical sampling, memo writing, constant comparison and sensitizing concepts. However, the relationship between situational analysis and GTM remains somewhat unspecified when it comes to the role of coding. Does mapping fully replace coding, should researchers both code and map, and how are mapping and coding related? CLARKE et al. (2018) called situational analysis an "extension of the grounded theory method, with many shared roots and assumptions," but also emphasized that "situational analysis maps are a separate and different form of analysis from grounded theory" (p.108). While GTM is about action and interaction, situational analysis is about relationality, they stated. In an interview with Reiner KELLER, Adele CLARKE explained:

> "one of the major values of doing GTM analysis is that you approach the data systematically. It is a very thorough form of analysis, word by word, line by line, whatever. In GTM you go through the data as you code, which you should also be doing in SA. The goal here is systematic mapping—map until you cannot map anymore and then try and do things with the maps that are interesting" (CLARKE & KELLER, 2014, §116). [6]

While in this quotation, coding seems to be replaced by mapping as a way of systematically going through the data, CLARKE et al. (2018, p.109) stated that it is possible and recommendable to combine GTM and situational analysis in larger projects. Smaller projects could use either, keeping in mind that "these are

two different kinds of analysis pursued separately" (ibid.). With regard to coding, no details are given in the book. In a long footnote, however, references are made to diverse GTM manuals, with a particular focus on Kathy CHARMAZ' constructivist GTM (2014 [2006]) and her recommendation for action-based coding. The only thing CLARKE et al. explicitly recommended was writing memos: "If you are doing GT coding of your data, memoing as you code is also an excellent strategy" (2018, p.107). And indeed, memos are the actual medium of analysis, be it memos on relational and other kinds of mapping or on different forms of coding. The quotation makes clear that there are no clear prescriptions on the role of coding. It is up to researchers to decide on the size and scope of their project, and which mode of data analysis is deemed useful. [7]

In an interview between Carrie FRIESE, Tamara SCHWERTEL and Olaf TIETJE (forthcoming), Carrie FRIESE revealed that for her dissertation on cloning wildlife (a foundational study for the methods book on situational analysis), she used both mapping and coding. She found mapping useful for connecting different data types and conceptualizing meso-level dynamics of research fields in order to clarify what the situation was about. Coding was used by FRIESE for interview analysis. Because she had a focus on action, she concluded that mapping and coding were different forms of analysis operating on different levels and serving different purposes. In another interview in the same volume, Rachel WASHBURN explained her hesitations vis-à-vis coding:

> "[...] part of the issue with codes is that first, oftentimes codes are based on—not always, but oftentimes—interview data and that really limits our source of data. [...] For doing Situational Analysis, we emphasize using a broad array of different data sources, not just interviews, but also field observations, texts, images, things that are also really important in the situation of inquiry. If we just start basing things on interview data and the quotes that we have from interview data, we are going to already exclude a bunch of really potentially important elements. The idea, especially with those messy maps, is that if you are putting codes on, you are kind of already in some ways over-determining your analysis from a SA perspective" (WASHBURN, KLAGES & MAZUR, forthcoming, n.p.). [8]

WASHBURN expressed caveats here regarding data source diversity and premature closure. Putting all this together, there seems to be a need for more clarification regarding conditions and ways in which grounded theory coding could possibly play a useful role for situational analysis. [9]

3. Coding and Mapping in Research Practice: Examples from German Speaking Academia

Given the persistent openness on the question of coding in textbooks on situational analysis, my interest focuses on the question of how researchers proceed in their empirical work, how they make sense of the textbook suggestions and how they build on existing experiences and routines of doing empirical research. Additionally, I conceive of situational analysis as a traveling idea (CZARNIAWSKA, 2014 [2008]): it has been developed from debates in the US and translated into differently situated debates such as the ones in German-speaking academia on social science methodology. While traveling to different disciplinary and geographical sites of methodological debates on qualitative inquiry, ideas on situational analysis are disembedded from the sites of their origin in North American debates on second generation grounded theories (MORSE et al., 2009; see also OFFENBERGER, 2019a). Later, they are re-embedded into different sites and the respective discourses, practices and styles of these sites. Therefore, understanding ideas such as the one on situational analysis means to understand where those ideas come from and how they are shaped through differently situated practices. With regard to qualitative research, existing practice-based studies on knowledge construction have pointed to different guiding principles and ideal types of empirical social research practices in North America and Europe. Stephanie BETHMANN and Debora NIERMANN (2015) suggested that different research styles developed through national research conventions, frameworks and epistemologies generate particular forms of proximity and distance vis-a-vis the research objects and subjects, also resulting in different estimations of research and socio-political intervention. These findings can further sensitize how the particular environments in which methodologies of social science are produced and distributed can shape the ways in which those methodologies are conceived. [10]

In the following, I will therefore scrutinize selected studies undertaken from German-speaking academics who used situational analysis. I will highlight the respective authors' methodological reflections and the ways in which mapping and coding have been used. The examples are selective, and this article is not an empirical investigation on situational analysis in practice. The studies serve an illustrative purpose that should make clear how coding continues to play a prominent role for situational analysis in German-speaking academia. However, readers are not provided with detailed information for all studies on how the analysis was conducted. The first example is from an interpretation group that has met online every third week since 2020 to work with participants' projects. One project is treated per session, all projects being PhDs except for one post doc project. In an article on their group work, Renate BAUMGARTNER, Sarah B. EVANS-JORDAN, Matthias LEGER, Tamara SCHWERTEL and Maja URBANCZYK (forthcoming) reflected on their practices and revealed that they employ three different modes in the group: discussing existing maps (e.g., with regard to positions not taken), jointly developing new maps, and open coding according to the suggestions given by CORBIN and STRAUSS (2015 [1990]) or by CHARMAZ (2014 [2006]). Decisions for the respective mode depend on the

given data material and the question being pursued. No difference is made regarding the size of the project, and coding is introduced here as a standard procedure of conducting situational analysis. To give another example, Angela POHLMANN (2020), describing the analytical procedures in her study on energy community negotiations in Scotland, also mentioned that she combined coding, memoing and mapping (without further details). In a similar instance, Anna C. REINHARDT (2021) reflected on her analytical work on social worlds and arenas of integrating newly immigrated pupils into the German school system. She emphasized that data have to be interpreted with regard to sensible procedures both from field members and from researchers. During those interpretations of open and axial coding, she not only developed analytical abstractions and theoretical concepts, but also gained a deeper understanding of the social worlds and important elements in them. She then also used coding in her maps, which enabled her to integrate concepts and analytical findings on the social worlds into the overall reconstruction of the situation. REINHARDT concluded that open and axial coding were useful for discovering important elements of situations, for specifying their relations and for analyzing negotiations in and between social worlds and arenas. Another example is the work of Eva MARR (2021) who connected biographical research and situational analysis, arguing that situational analysis is a valuable extension to biographical research, for contextualizing narratives and situating them more widely. MARR replaced coding by mapping and analyzed interviews (expert and biographical interviews) sequentially following the rules of objective hermeneutics. Combining (hermeneutical) biographical and situational analysis allowed her to reconstruct how the multiple perspectives by which conceptions of a good life among adolescents in multiple stressful conditions are shaped. In my own work on home heating (OFFENBERGER, 2016), which is not a full-blown situational analysis, I used messy and relational mapping as well as conceptual underpinnings of situational analysis regarding the role of artifacts, discourses and collective actors in the arena of domestic energy consumption. I made situational maps to become aware of relevant elements in the field, to think beyond the dichotomy of structure and agency, and for displaying the larger site in which my results were to be situated. I used an array of data types—participant observation, documents, artifacts and interviews, and I employed open, axial and selective coding for all data types. However, there is a strong focus on interviews in my analysis, which might be the result of coding being the dominant analytical mode. In my study, I used grounded theory methodology, inspired by situational analysis. The main result is that domestic energy consumption from consumers' point of view is a matter of homemaking, of "domesticating" new energy technologies and making them a part of their everyday lives, their doing family, their doing couple, and their doing being responsible consumers. If my study had been a situational analysis, I might have highlighted different social worlds' controversies on domestic energy consumption, an arena in which households are configured as an important sales market for technological innovations in the name of (discourses on) sustainability. I touched upon these dynamics in the study but approached the field from the angle of private consumers as actors who are not as collectively organized as other actors in the field (e.g., companies) and who are often implicated in technology development and its anticipated use. Open coding played a crucial

role for my sense-making procedures: codes such as "renewable energy and the desire of autonomy," "oil and xenophobia," "feeding the oven like a pet" or "solar panels and conspicuous consumption"[3] served as building blocks for the emerging theory (OFFENBERGER, 2016, pp.64ff.). I worked selected cases into "thick descriptions" (GEERTZ, 1973, p.3) that contained both distinctive features of the cases and references to existing research and sensitizing concepts, e.g., on the social shaping of technology such as the (gendered) scripting of artifacts. To conclude, I found open coding particularly useful for shifting from a mode of taken-for-grantedness while going through the material towards an analytical alienation vis-a-vis the data. This created space for reflexively accounting for my own processes of understanding and sense-making as well. Looking back at the project from today's point of view, I would have kept open coding but replaced axial and selective coding by social worlds and arena analysis as well as by positional mapping. This probably would have resulted in a study center staging the domestic energy arena as a site in which collective state, scientific and economic actors powerfully negotiate ideas on sustainability and technological innovation, constructing private households as (mainly) implicated actors and turning ideas on sufficiency and economic degrowth into positions (almost) not taken in the field. [11]

Regardless of the size of the project, in almost all studies reviewed here researchers used grounded theory coding for situational analysis and found it a useful supplement for mapping. In particular, messy, relational and situational mapping were backed up with coding, and researchers reported how they developed reflexivity, analytical abstraction and deeper insights into social worlds and arenas as well as into relations between elements through coding work. In the following, I would like to investigate this role of coding for situational analysis, asking for basic assumptions and methodological commitments of qualitative research in German-speaking academia, and therefore contributing to the call for empirical reflexivity made by Stephanie BETHMANN and Debora NIERMANN (2015). Based on my experiences with GTM and situational analysis as well as the insights into existing studies, I will suggest a more general point in this article regarding the methodology and the practice of situational analysis: I will argue that including open coding as a form of hermeneutics into situational analysis could both strengthen researchers' reflexivity vis-a-vis the data they use for constructing their research sites and contribute to further aligning pragmatism with hermeneutics—a paradigm that is well established in German-speaking academia. [12]

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3 Using a term coined by Thorstein VEBLEN (1997 [1899], Ch.4).

4. Hermeneutics as Obligatory Point of Passage for Qualitative Research in German Speaking Academia

Traveling to German-speaking debates on social science methodology, situational analysis is received in a landscape where ideas, practices and standards of qualitative inquiry are crucially shaped by debates on social scientific hermeneutics. Different qualitative research styles have been gathered under the umbrella terms of "social scientific hermeneutics" or "hermeneutic sociology of knowledge" (HITZLER & HONER, 1997; SCHRÖER, 1994; SOEFFNER, 2004 [1989]). The common ground of the different approaches can be seen in their attempts to comprehend understanding itself, i.e., accounting for the practices, competences and bundles of knowledge that organize social scientific interpretations. As social scientific hermeneutics is a polymorphous assembly rather than one single approach, theories of interpretation can be rooted in different traditions of social science theorizing and can take different forms. However, referring to debates on hermeneutic traditions of interpretation can count as an "obligatory passage point" (CALLON, 1986, p.201) for methodologies of qualitative inquiry in German-speaking circles. [13]

Two examples may serve as an illustration. In developing the sociology of knowledge approach to discourse, Reiner KELLER (2015) aimed at reconciling discourse analysis and (anti-Cartesian) hermeneutics. In opposition to Hubert DREYFUS and Paul RABINOW (1982, p.1) who placed FOUCAULT's work "beyond structuralism and hermeneutics," KELLER argued that discourse analyses are necessarily hermeneutic approaches which remain within the paradigm of textual analysis. Even where material practices are analyzed, discourse analyses view the world as "ensemble of relationships provided through texts" (RICOEUR, 1978 [1971], p.90, quoted from KELLER, 2011 [2005], p.268). KELLER argued that both Max WEBER and FOUCAULT aimed at *re*constructing meaning as a sense and meaning always evolves in a specific context. Working with hermeneutic approaches, researchers reflect on the acts of interpretation and the conditions of possibility for analyses, assuming that reality is brought about through acts of consciousness. KELLER is particularly interested in aligning interactionism and discourse theory, which is why he organized the German translation of the first book on situational analysis (CLARKE, 2012 [2005]). Using his sociology of knowledge as an approach to discourse allowed KELLER (2011 [2005]) to reconcile the works of Peter BERGER and Thomas LUCKMANN with the work of Michel FOUCAULT, thereby tackling similar issues as the ones touched upon by Adele CLARKE: How should we conceive of social action, interaction and the definition of the situation if we assume that objects are constituted by discourses (see also CLARKE & KELLER, 2014)? [14]

Another example of a research style methodologically grounded in hermeneutic understandings of interpretation is Franz BREUER's, Petra MUCKEL's, Barbara DIERIS' and Antje ALLMERS' (2019) outline of reflexive GTM (see also OFFENBERGER, 2019b). They related the hermeneutic circular movement to the idea of sensitizing concepts as basic features of GTM. Those sensitizing concepts consist of background knowledge, patterns of perception, expectations

of what will happen in a given situation, understandings of what "normally" would mean and other pre-concepts (BREUER et al., 2019): without them, it would be impossible to recognize anything in the data. Accordingly, reflexivity is required from researchers to become aware of those concepts and other forms of *a priori* knowledge that we carry with us. As no one is a *tabula rasa*, and as our preconceptions form what we are able to see, reflexive grounded theorizing requires an awareness of the very contingencies of what we see in our data, and how we have come to see it. [15]

Both research styles, one firmly based in grounded theorizing (aligning pragmatism with hermeneutics) and the other firmly based in discourse analysis and sociology of knowledge, serve as important frameworks to receive situational analysis in German-speaking academia (OFFENBERGER, 2019b). At the same time, reflexive GTM and the sociology of knowledge approach to discourse are two examples of how ideas on hermeneutics form part of a German-speaking standard repertoire of legitimating qualitative research styles. [16]

The most clear and profound contribution to the founding of social science hermeneutics was made by Hans-Georg SOEFFNER (2004 [1989]). He distinguished between the interpretation of acts and acts of interpretation and argued that ignoring or not accounting for premises and processes of those acts of interpretation means interpreting naïvely: in that case, analyses would build on implicit routines of everyday assumptions (p.62). SOEFFNER highlighted that interpretation is an inevitable feature of both everyday life and scientific analysis, the latter requiring that those acts of interpretation are determined and accounted for in order to count as *scientific* analyses. Therefore, reflecting upon and developing a methodology of interpretation must be required for obtaining scientific objectivity, not just for social science but for all scientific fields. For SOEFFNER, who based his arguments in the sociology of knowledge and in phenomenology, hermeneutics is the opposite term of Cartesian world views as a division of the world into substance and matter (the division between *res cogitans* and *res extensa* in Cartesian terms) is rejected. While hermeneutics has been misinterpreted as an approach in need of a romantic, lonesome and autonomous hero, capable of creative action on his or her own terms, it is in fact assumed that every thought and every action inevitably falls back on socially shaped bundles of knowledge. And yet, human consciousness is given center stage in hermeneutics as constitutive of reality. But consciousness (contrary to DESCARTES' view) is always a consciousness *of something* and directed *at something*. Consciousness results from the practical examination of one's environment. Rather than universal and detached, meaning is always situated in concrete practical efforts and applications. Rejecting a dichotomy of subject and object, according to SOEFFNER, fundamentally flaws any attempt at mathematically modeling and measuring the world in search of objectivity. Rather, analysis, both scientific and mundane, cannot be anything else than interpretation. As a consequence, SOEFFNER did not distinguish between quantitative and qualitative research but between hermeneutic and Cartesian science. [17]

As meaning is understood as situated and procedurally evolving, interpretation of social scientific data such as texts should be understood as reconstructing the meaning of a text "in the line of the happening" (DILTHEY, 1976 [1958], p.214, quoted from SOEFFNER, 2004 [1989], p.82). Texts are defined as "protocols of irreversible sequences of interactions and interpretation" (p.82). It is assumed that those sequences represent "the nexus of action within which the individual statements fundamentally point beyond themselves and always take into account the framework of action as a whole, as a horizon" (ibid.). SOEFFNER concluded from this that interpretation means sequential analysis. And indeed, social scientists working in the tradition of German hermeneutics place great importance on sequential analysis. Researchers working with different methods and methodologies in Germany agree that sequential analysis is one of the most important procedures that have been developed in attempts to account for the practice of understanding itself. Sequential analysis, i.e., reconstructing the latent meaning of a case by thorough and strict analysis word by word and line by line, is considered as one of the basic analytical procedures for analyzing how sense-making is achieved processually in interactions. Although practiced differently in different approaches such as conversation analysis, objective hermeneutics or hermeneutic sociology of knowledge, Kai-Olaf MAIWALD (2005) has identified a working consensus among German researchers that proper analysis means

> "to spend a considerable amount of time and energy analysing rather short parts of texts, following the sequentiality of the social practice displayed in them. And judging from practical experience, e.g., in research groups, conferences and workshops, there is a high degree of agreement on how to interpret the data and to develop or criticise hypotheses on the basis of this interpretation. This working consensus cuts across the various methodologies adhered to by the participants" (§1). [18]

In that vein, sequential analysis is a technique to alienate researchers from taken-for-granted assumptions on data, and to deconstruct their surface in order to arrive at latent meaning or at interpretations that are relatively freed from researchers' prejudices, opinions and everyday knowledge-based perspectives. Sequential analysis therefore is considered a technique suited to discipline researchers to systematically question their own preconceptions and routine understandings of a topic. Jo REICHERTZ (2016, pp.259ff.) called it a process of systematic and intensified sense-making in which all taken-for-grantedness of one's own perspective and language are destroyed. Sequential analysis, rather than creating familiarity and intimacy with the data, alienates data from their researchers, confronting them with their own prejudices. This allows for a reflexive take on data analysis in which data are regarded as co-constructions and results of interactive dynamics. Data from interviews for example can be reconstructed with regard to the sequential processing and ordering of sense-making during the course of an interview. Even if the understandings of what a sequence is may vary, and even if there are differing degrees of how strict sequential analysis should be pursued, it is widely considered as a suitable method to account for the interactive and communicative construction of reality which (not only) takes place when conducting interviews. However, authors such as REICHERTZ (pp.153f.) also acknowledged that the fully reflexive potential of

sequential analysis depends on ideal circumstances and that a total alienation from researchers' prior assumptions does not always succeed. I would emphasize this even more strongly and argue that such a full alienation is a myth and that such a *tabula rasa* assumption is epistemologically impossible. [19]

5. Grounded Theory Methodology, Situational Analysis and Hermeneutics

GTM has not been included in the attempts to canonize hermeneutic social sciences despite theoretically common grounds and historically close relations between pragmatism and hermeneutics. Social scientific hermeneutics are prominently rooted in the work of philosopher Wilhelm DILTHEY (1992 [1910]) who set out to determine grounds of scientific interpretation and analysis. Sequential ordering is considered the founding principle for nexuses of action which form the grid, framework or horizon for individual statements. The idea that action is always part of a broader nexus, and the way in which action relates to that nexus, are similar to the idea of the unity of the act, which is a basic tenet of American pragmatism (see e.g., DEWEY, 1896 where the co-constitution of subject and object is nicely explained). Like the philosophy of DILTHEY (1992 [1910]), action and experience take center stage in American pragmatism, a similarity which becomes apparent when comparing DILTHEY to MEAD (1934). Matthias JUNG pointed out the striking parallels between both philosophical conceptions, partly explaining them "through direct influence, partly through the similarity of the questions both tried to answer" (1995, p.661). Having studied at the Humboldt University of Berlin between the spring of 1889 and the fall of 1891, and having heard several lectures given by DILTHEY, MEAD was accepted by DILTHEY as a doctoral candidate in 1891, planning to write a thesis on the concept of space from an empiricist perspective. The PhD remained unfinished as MEAD took on an academic teaching position in the winter term of 1891 at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor (JOAS, 2000 [1989], p.45 and 213; JUNG, 1995, p.662f.). When MEAD later developed his theory of action, the similarity to DILTHEY became obvious as both determined meaning as the result of social processes, "rooting meaning in the way we act in the world and interact with each other" (JUNG, 1995, p.664). Although MEAD did not explicitly mention DILTHEY in his writings, several authors have demonstrated parallels between MEAD's and DILTHEY's conceptions of experience, mind and the role of interpretation (CÔTÉ, 2021; JOAS, 2000 [1989]; JUNG, 1995). DILTHEY's notion of being-in-the-world and the primacy of experience can count as "steps towards a pragmatic foundation of the human science" (JUNG 1995, p.674). Hence, both in pragmatist and hermeneutical theories of action, acts of interpretation are seen as fundamental, both approaches are built on a common epistemology.[4] [20]

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4 These first hints at the *Wahlverwandtschaft* [elective affinity] between pragmatism and hermeneutics should serve as inspiration for future deliberations on theory-methods packages. For those reflections, it might be noteworthy that in current debates on the philosophy of social sciences, the relationship between neo-pragmatism and hermeneutics form part of the discussion, drawing on the work of Richard RORTY. But RORTY, in contrast to SOEFFNER, did not treat hermeneutics prominently with regard to theories of interpretation but rather with regard to epistemology (BARRY, 2017; RORTY, 1980). Furthermore, there was a vivid debate between proponents of hermeneutics and of poststructuralism, which most prominently played out between Jacques DERRIDA and Hans-Georg GADAMER (2004). The controversy was

Regarding the inclusion of pragmatism into the canon of social scientific hermeneutics, the controversy has not been settled, however. Some authors (including BREUER et al., 2019) regarded hermeneutic foundations of GTM as self-evident, while others displayed it as the *other* of hermeneutic approaches. For example, Jo REICHERTZ and Sylvia WILZ argued that although grounded theory coding requires "a basic form of hermeneutic" (2016, p.62), it is fundamentally different from strictly sequential hermeneutic approaches to data analysis. But at the same time, they stated that STRAUSS did interpret hermeneutically, even if he was a pragmatist. Similar to REICHERTZ and WILZ, Ronald HITZLER (2016) differentiated between coding and interpretation and ascribed coding a logic of subsuming and deducing from *a priori* theoretical concepts. For HITZLER, coding and working with existing lists of categories are identical procedures. Several authors have opposed this position (MEY, 2016; STRÜBING, 2017). Uwe FLICK (2016) also argued that grounded theory coding was introduced by GLASER and STRAUSS and developed by CHARMAZ in exact opposition to this logic of theory-testing. Rather, grounded theory coding (if practiced in combination with theoretical sampling and the constant comparative method) can be considered a core procedure of a kind of inquiry through which inductive-deductive-abductive loops can be enabled. Coding in this case means attaching conceptual phrases or notions and reformulating instances in the data from an analytical perspective. Researchers do draw from *a priori* knowledge here as well, but the attitude differs from the hypothetico-deductive model in that existing knowledge is treated as sensitizing concepts, enabling researchers to see their data in a particular light. Coming back to HITZLER's confusion of coding, I suggest using the term "tagging" for working with pre-existing lists of categories (which seems useful for identifying instances in large amounts of data that are worth closer examination), and stick to the term "coding" where data segments are closely examined in an attempt to understand their particularities and concrete situatedness. [21]

Open coding serves this purpose particularly well. It has been called "analysis through microscopic examination" by STRAUSS (2004, p.169) in a text that he had prepared in 1995 and planned to insert into a GTM book edited together with Juliet CORBIN. However, that text never appeared in a book on GTM but only in 2004 in a volume of the German journal *sozialer sinn*, a core publication organ for hermeneutic social science. STRAUSS (2004, p.176) wrote on microscopic analysis that it

> "introduces you to the style of thinking that's intrinsic to grounded theory methodology. It also helps in initial steps of discovering the categories and their properties/dimensions that are vital to open coding. [...] Invariably, this close examination of data is likely to be of help to the researcher, no matter how experienced and skilled. In fact, strictly speaking, without this microscopic analysis it

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about the possibility of interpretation and the polysemy of signs, through which, according to DERRIDA, interpretation is made impossible. However, if we assume that interpretation is a basic feature of human being-in-the-world, both in science and in everyday life, and that no interpretation is universal or timeless, hermeneutic social science is an attempt at making scientific acts of interpretation accountable. I subscribe to this view of hermeneutics and therefore emphasize the conditions of interpreting rather than its general impossibility.

> would be extremely difficult to systematically discover relevant dimensions, relate categories and subcategories, and to track down the more subtle aspects of causality." [22]

STRAUSS suggested an approach to data analysis that pays close attention to single segments of data to reconstruct properties of situations and accounts (note that there is no limitation to action). It does an invaluable job in alienating data, getting beyond at least some of our taken-for-granted assumptions and thereby accounting for researchers' processes of understanding and sense-making. It is for this reason that STRAUSS' writings on microscopic analysis have received attention in German debates on hermeneutic social sciences.[5] Now STRAUSS' microscopic analysis is not as strict as sequential analysis when it comes to staying to the chronological order of the text documents. Using microscopic analysis, different segments of documents can be chosen regardless of the order of their appearance. Within one segment, however, analysis is done sequentially. Given that for GTM, different kinds of data such as field notes, documents and interviews make up for the data corpus, this seems a useful approach. But the way in which single segments are scrutinized and deconstructed through microscopic analysis corresponds to the working consensus on sequential analysis as described above. In reflexive GTM, it is also suggested that significant importance be placed on fine-grained and meticulous analyses of small segments of data. BREUER et al. (2019) argued that a very small section of data can contain the nutshell of a whole (hypothetical) theoretical structure—as the result of intensive coding work. Understood in that way, open coding is not limited to action; it can be applied to different data types; further analysis can be prompted; analytical abstraction is supported; and open coding is a methodological tool which can be used to align GTM with social scientific hermeneutics. [23]

If open coding is to be considered one form of sequential analysis, then situational analysis mapping and grounded theory coding are different forms of analysis: the core analytical procedure in mapping is identifying relationalities rather than sequentiality. So can there be a systematic place for open coding in situational analysis? While this question has not yet been sufficiently answered by existing textbooks on situational analysis, researchers have found it valuable in several respects. Acknowledging the importance that Anselm STRAUSS and others placed on microscopic analysis and given its affinity for different forms of sequential analysis in the tradition of hermeneutics, I argue for the value of open coding for situational analysis as well. It serves as boundary work to align situational analysis with hermeneutic social sciences. Also, through open coding the attitude of reflexive distancing is supported as data are not accepted at face

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5   There are well-established bridges between North American and German scholars of qualitative research, GTM, interactionism and pragmatism: in the 1970s, the 'working group of Bielefeld sociologists' reconciled American interactionism with German sociology, and close contacts have been established between Anselm STRAUSS and German researchers such as Fritz SCHÜTZE, Hans-Georg SOEFFNER, Gerhard RIEMANN, Heiner LEGEWIE and others. Ever since, GTM and pragmatist interactionist concepts developed in research groups around STRAUSS have been adopted in German-speaking debates on sociological theory and qualitative methods. However, the German translation of the first book on situational analysis (CLARKE, 2012 [2005]) was not enabled by one of these scholars, but by Reiner KELLER.

value. Rather, data such as interviews appear as co-constructions which evolved from interactive situations in which participants position each other. Analyzing interviews while bearing this in mind trains researchers' reflexivity on the interactive and communicative nature of data construction. Equally, open coding of artifacts or visual material can reveal implicit assumptions inscribed into objects and images. [24]

Working in research teams or alone, initial data analysis can start with open coding sessions of selected pieces of data. This may serve as a preparation or a parallel exercise to messy mapping, as open coding can render situational maps more elaborated and less based on different forms of brainstorming based on everyday knowledge on a given subject. Open coding of selected segments of different kinds of data, i.e., close reading of those selected segments word for word and line by line, is an excellent strategy for supplementing messy maps. Those maps serve the purpose of collecting heterogeneous elements that are perceived as parts of situations. They are not meant to be collections of code. Given the potential of open coding or close-reading of small segments of data for troubling researchers' taken-for-granted assumptions about a topic and enhancing reflexivity, however, open coding can aid the generation of analytical questions, the organization of theoretical sampling and the development of first hypotheses on a topic, thereby grounding and fine-graining the evolving analysis. The same holds true for social worlds and arenas mapping: open coding of selected data pieces, combined with mapping, can clarify interactions between social worlds and controversial issues negotiated in arenas. [25]

How about axial and selective coding? Axial coding in GTM as laid out by CORBIN and STRAUSS (2015 [1990]) is tightly connected to the coding paradigm. The aim is to analyze causes, conditions, interactions and consequences of particular processes. The coding paradigm is related to the conditional matrix, and both are developed from interactionist theories of action. CLARKE et al. (2018) clarified that there is no such thing as "context" inviting researchers to think more flexibly and fluidly and conceive of situations and their analysis in terms of interchangeable figure and ground relations which can undergo gestalt switches.[6] In situational analysis, STRAUSS' and CORBIN's conditional matrix was replaced by the situational matrix, leading to a more empirically grounded description and analysis of how structural elements form an integral part of situations. Relational mapping and memoing play a crucial part at this stage: "The main work they do is to provide what Park (1952) called 'the big picture' or 'the big news' about the situation under study" (CLARKE et al., 2018, p.104). At the same time, they facilitate analytical thinking about a topic and asking generative questions. Relational mapping is therefore a good substitute for axial coding. As the situational matrix is smoother than the conditional matrix, relational mapping in my experience also allows for more elasticity of data analysis (OFFENBERGER, 2016). Also, mapping of social worlds and arenas is

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6   This also renders situational analysis genuinely critical, as CLARKE (2019, p.201) argued: "The core critical interactionist methodological strategy of situational analysis (SA) is making the situation the unit of analysis. Its import cannot be overstated. *Analysing the situation is the critical interactionist heart of the SA method*—through its insistence that there is no such thing as context […]. The situation is the conceptual portal to *empirical* criticality."

helpful for researchers in conceptualizing the research field as a site of interaction between different collective actors and the way in which sites of negotiation and contestation are shaped by discourses. As to selective coding, it is important to see that situational analysis does not aim at reconstructing any "basic social process" (CLARKE et al., 2022, p.62) but rather aims at reconstructing relationality and the role of discourse. Carefully choosing and focusing on different positional maps can replace former methods of selective coding, thus analyzing what can and cannot be said or done in a given situation, and how some positions are rendered possible and others impossible through discourses. [26]

6. Conclusion: Pragmatism and Hermeneutics—a Plea for Further Rapprochement

While particular attention in situational analysis as a theory-methods package is paid to analyzing relationality and aligning pragmatism and poststructuralism, the role of coding has been treated less systematically so far. Mapping and coding can count as two different analytical modes, one aiming at relationality, the other at sequentiality. As different approaches to sequential analysis form a common ground for hermeneutical social sciences in German-speaking academia, I was not surprised to find that coding continues to play a role in situational analytic studies from German-speaking academia. If hermeneutics count as an obligatory point of passage in German social sciences, open coding as a form of sequential or microscopic analysis would be particularly suited to anchor situational analysis in a research landscape different from where it originated. Suited not only for texts, but also well established as a tool to consider processual and situated accumulations of sensemaking, integrating open coding could provide situational analysis with methodological legitimacy as an approach in which both sequentiality and relationality are considered. Both in reflexive grounded theorizing and in the sociology of knowledge approach to discourse, two approaches that form important lenses through which situational analysis is received in German-speaking academia, open coding is suggested as a way to conduct reflexive analysis. Used for situational analyses, researchers have found open coding useful for recognizing important elements for situational and relational mapping and for better understanding the social worlds and arenas in their research fields. [27]

The reflections in this article are rooted in observations of how situational analysis is used in German-speaking academia and in my personal approach to situational analysis, at which I arrived via GTM. This might explain why I find coding invaluable and why I drew on the role of hermeneutics to find a suitable explanation for the value of (open) coding. Within other approaches to situational analysis, more informed by poststructuralist work, other useful analytical strategies to supplement the mapping work may be developed. The intention was to reflect on the grounds on which situational analysis is received in German speaking academia, revealing practical conduct of analysis and to suggest fruitful nodes. As hermeneutic approaches to data analysis form a powerful tradition in the social sciences, my emphasis on the common grounds between pragmatism

and hermeneutics historically, theoretically, and methodologically, should contribute to anchoring situational analysis even more broadly in a circle of well-established and well-received styles of doing qualitative research. [28]

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