

## NOTES ON CONTEXTUALISM

The simplest formal statement of the contextualist position as follows from the formulation of the open system.

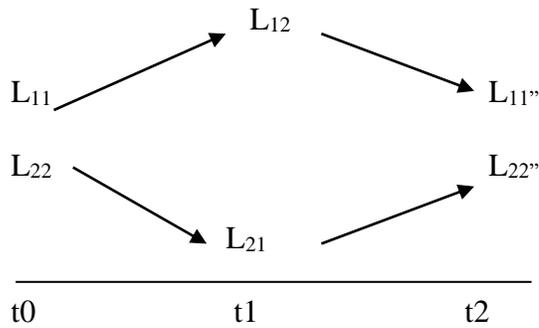
*Note from ME. This was typed from very rough notes. I do not have an original here so have done minimal editing to provide a coherent statement.*

This position (of Contextualism) differs from the three historically earlier world hypothesis in that it allows that the sufficient condition might be found in the system or the environment. The earlier hypotheses maintained that the sufficient condition were to be found within the system. For sociology and anthropology the society or the culture was taken to be the system and the constituent human beings regarded as part of the biological environment upon whom the society or culture set its mark by socializing them.

This contextualist position also differs from the mechanist and organist world hypotheses in that it starts from the epistemological assumption of realism i.e. that the environment is knowable to living systems. The second proposition distinguishes habitat from the physical environment (E) for more than 100 years experimental studies of perception seem to have been devoted to defending the mechanist and organist assumption that we had evolved with deficient perceptual systems. It also follows that part of the environment which is composed of living system can also know the individual system. The symbiotic relations build up between plants and plants and sharing the same habitat reminds us that knowledge is not just in books. These implications lead to two propositions:

- a. one cannot characterize a system without characterizing the environment it is in
- b. one cannot characterize an environment without characterizing the systems within it

As a second step it is necessary to represent the fact that time, change and novelty are basic categories of contextualism.  $L_{12}$  and  $L_{21}$  are processes that take place over time, they must take place contemporaneously and they define a nested series of presents that exists from the original conditions to the future. The formulation follows that first presented by Sommerhoff (1950, 1969).

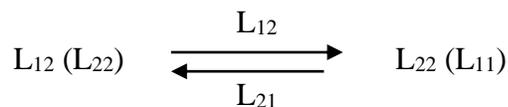


In discussions of biological adaptation it is usual to implicitly assume the  $L_{22}$  is unchanging from  $t_0$  to  $t_2$ . Sommerhoff introduced the broader concept of *directive correlation* which allows that either or both  $L_{11}$  and  $L_{22}$  might change between  $t_0$  and  $t_2$ . This also recognizes the fact that at  $t_1$   $L_{11}'$  is interacting with  $L_{22}'$  (not  $L_{22}$ ) to co-produce the end result at  $t_2$ . This representation includes the fact that sometimes  $L_{11}$  is engaged in a series of activities e.g. nest or hive building of which the changes from  $L_{22}$  to  $L_{22}''$  is but one step in a chain that leads to a significant change of state for  $L_{11}$ . It could also include the population changes in a predator part of the environment which leads to a collapse in population before the prey is driven to extermination.

Between  $t_0$  and  $t_1$  we have the period of mutual perception and choice ("the decision cycle) and between  $t_1$  and  $t_2$  the action cycle. In the interaction at  $t_1$  is to be found the set of 'focal conditions' that lead to  $(L_{11}' L_{22}')$  at  $t_2$ .

A third step is necessary. The formal statement at step one serves to mark off contextualism from formism, mechanism and organicism. As we have already noted it needs to be expanded as we have already noted it needs to be expanded to represent the unique features of contextualism. As it stands it represents a theoretical limit. It represents a situation where  $L_{11}$  and  $L_{22}$  confront each other as totally distinct and foreign entities. As such  $(L_{12}$  and  $L_{21})$  could represent only interaction. In proposing above that neither can be characterized without characterizing the other we implicitly dropped the assumption of foreigners. We assumed that we were talking about living systems in their habitats and about habitats, not environment as it would be described by the physical sciences.

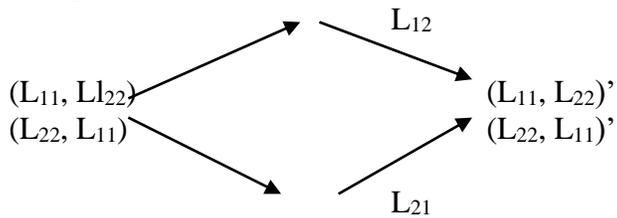
As a first approximation this could be represented as follows:



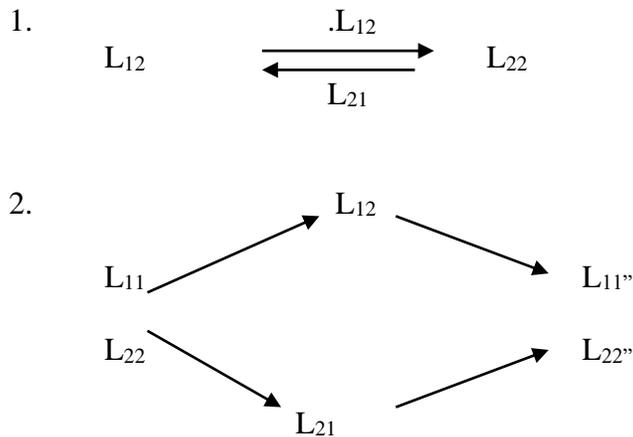
This at least reflects internalization by the system of some aspects of its environment and the modification of the environment that has resulted from the presence of the system.

At this level ( $L_{12}$  and  $L_{21}$ ) represents transactional relations not just inter-actional relations.  $L_{12}$  or  $L_{21}$  may still be blind actions or reactions but they might be transactional: the  $L_{12}$  may be directed at changing the  $L_{11}$  in  $(L_{22}, L_{11})$  hence changing the relation and hence subsequent  $L_{21}$ 's and even the  $L_{22}$  in  $(L_{11}$  and  $L_{22})$ . Similarly with  $L_{21}$ . It will be noted that this opens the way for *behaviour* to emerge; necessarily goal seeking and potentially purposeful and even ideal seeking.

The second approximation incorporates the point that has been made about time and change

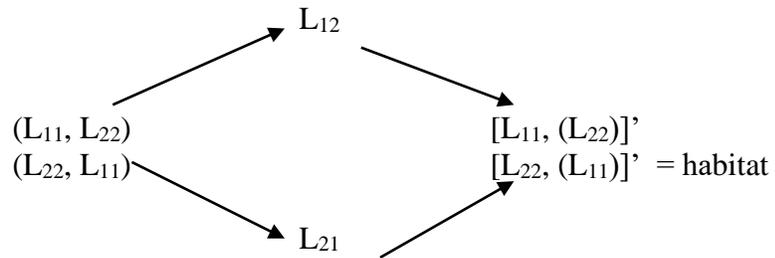


Throughout this expression we have dealt only with the two levels of systems and their environments. All experiment phenomena emerge in a nested services of events and are nests to other levels of events (nesting does not constitute a hierarchy). The same logic applies to mesa levels e.g. individual – social group – society. What does this mean for genetics here?



How do  $L_{11}'$  and  $L_{22}'$  differ from  $L_{11}$  and  $L_{22}$ ?

3.



Most of our questions about contextualism start from (3) not (1) . that is from the transaction of (3) not the *interaction* of (1). No historical question exists within the formulation of (1).