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# Wittgensteinian Ethnomethodology (1): Gurwitsch, Garfinkel, and Wittgenstein and the Meaning of Praxeological Gestalts

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**Résumé :** L'ethnométhodologie (EM) de Garfinkel implique essentiellement une respécification praxéologique, ou interactionnelle, des phénomènes de la Gestalt. Au début de l'EM, cela se fait en développant une catégorie de Gestalten praxéologiques, où les faits sociaux (ou les unités sociales) sont respécifiés comme des phénomènes de Gestalt, dont les membres sont les constituants et dont l'unité sociale est un tout ou une Gestalt. Le tout en question est de son côté produit praxéologiquement par le travail méthodique de ses membres. Dans des travaux ultérieurs, Garfinkel préconisera la reconfiguration praxéologique des phénomènes perceptifs traditionnels de la Gestalt, notamment de la musique. En développant l'EM par la reconfiguration praxéologique du gestaltisme, Garfinkel a puisé dans la phénoménologie constitutive d'Aron Gurwitsch, notamment là où ce dernier a tenté une fusion entre la psychologie de la Gestalt et la phénoménologie. Ainsi inspirée par Gurwitsch, tout en étant également nourrie par les travaux de Schütz, et, plus tard, de Merleau-Ponty, l'EM est souvent présentée soit comme largement endettée à l'égard de la phénoménologie, soit comme une façon distincte de pratiquer cette dernière : que l'on pourrait appeler une phénoménologie praxéologique, peut-être. Par ailleurs, des parallèles entre les travaux ultérieurs de Ludwig Wittgenstein et l'EM ont été établis depuis la publication des Recherches en ethnométhodologie de Garfinkel en 1967. On a souvent insisté alors sur l'analyse des règles et du respect des règles, ainsi que sur des positions similaires face à la notion de signification dans l'EM et dans les travaux du second Wittgenstein. Toutefois, étant donnée la centralité de la psychologie de la Gestalt dans le développement de l'EM, il est intéressant de noter que dans ses derniers manuscrits, Wittgenstein a largement discuté des phénomènes de la Gestalt et de la psychologie de la Gestalt, d'une manière qui anticipe souvent

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ce que Garfinkel fera des idées gestaltistes. Les similitudes et les différences entre l'engagement de Wittgenstein, de Gurwitsch et de Garfinkel à l'égard du gestaltisme méritent donc une exploration plus poussée, et c'est ce que je cherche à faire dans cet article. En conclusion, je propose que l'EM soit considérée, tout comme Wittgenstein, comme étant post-phénoménologique.

**Abstract:** Garfinkel's Ethnomethodology (EM) at its core involves a praxeological, or interactional, respecification of Gestalt phenomena. In early EM, this is pursued through the development of a category of praxeological Gestalten in which social facts (or social units) are respecified as Gestalt phenomena, where members are the constituents and the social unit is the whole or Gestalt, produced praxeologically by the methodic work of its members. In later work, Garfinkel would praxeologically transpose traditional perceptual Gestalt phenomena, such as music, to explore the interactional work done in the production and perception of those phenomena. In developing EM by praxeologically reconfiguring Gestaltism, Garfinkel drew on the constitutive phenomenology of Aron Gurwitsch, wherein Gurwitsch sought to integrate Gestalt Psychology and phenomenology. In drawing on Gurwitsch, while also being informed by the work of Schütz and, later, Merleau-Ponty, EM is often depicted as either heavily indebted to phenomenology or as a distinct type of phenomenology: praxeological phenomenology, perhaps. At the same time, parallels have been drawn between Ludwig Wittgenstein's later work and EM, since Garfinkel's *Studies in Ethnomethodology* was published in 1967. The parallels drawn have often centred on the treatment of rules and rule-following and on the similarities in the treatment of meaning in EM and in Wittgenstein's later work. However, given the centrality of Gestalt psychology to the development of EM, it is worth noting that in his later manuscripts Wittgenstein discussed Gestalt phenomena and Gestalt Psychology extensively and in ways that often anticipate what Garfinkel would do with Gestaltist ideas. It is, therefore, worth exploring the similarities and differences between Wittgenstein's, Gurwitsch's and Garfinkel's engagement with Gestaltism. This is what I seek to do in this article. In conclusion, I propose that EM should be seen, like Wittgenstein, as post-phenomenological.

It is interesting to note that, as Schütz has pointed out with reference to Husserl, the social world presents an organization which is similar from the formal point of view to that of the perceptual world, which we have been discussing. As Schütz suggests, Köhler's location of the Ego may also be stated, *mutatus mutandis*, in social terms. The center of reference in this case is the social Ego, i.e., the Ego as a member of the social world, engaged in social situations. [Gurwitsch 2010*b*, 517]

[...] Gurwitsch's argument on the functional significations and their coherence of figural contexture in its empirical perceptual

details [...] has been a foundational point of departure in all my teaching. It has lasted a long time. It has also been missed as Ethnomethodology's key resource in identifying Ethnomethodology's concerns to specify "the problem of meaning" [...]. [Garfinkel 2002, 84]

It is—contrary to Köhler—precisely a *meaning* that I see. [Wittgenstein 1983, sec. 869]

## 1 Introduction

Early 20th century Gestalt psychology, particularly of the Berlin School, had a huge impact on the intellectual landscape of 20th century Europe and USA. Many of the arguments of the Gestalt psychologists would play important roles in intellectual developments in psychology, philosophy and research methods across many disciplines, including Ethnomethodology (EM), as discussed recently by Clemens Eisenmann & Mike Lynch [2021] and outlined some time ago by Doug Maynard [1996], and ecological psychology, enactivism and e-cognition, [see, e.g., Kiverstein, van Dijk, & Rietveld 2019], whether directly or via Gurwitsch and Merleau-Ponty. Moreover, Gestalt psychology inspired a method of Psychotherapy: Gestalt Therapy [Wheeler & Axelsson 2015]; serves as a key to the development of qualitative research methods in psychology and beyond; and has influenced approaches to philosophy and philosophical analysis, exercising influence on phenomenology, in the work of Gurwitsch [2010*b*] and Merleau-Ponty [2012], and on Wittgenstein's later philosophy [1983]. While the main figures of the Gestalt movement did not quite achieve long-term discipline-transcending status, in the manner, perhaps, of some of those who inherited and implemented their ideas, their *ideas* have had significant impact.

As a phenomenologically-inflected approach to psychology,<sup>1</sup> Gestalt psychology's impact was rooted in its critique of elementalism, the challenge that rejection posed to analytic reductionism, and, in addition, the rejection of the constancy hypothesis. The first of these, the rejection of elementalism, and the insistence on the irreducibility of the relationship of wholes to elements, served as a decisive step towards the dissolution of the dualisms that persist across a range of disciplines,<sup>2</sup> by opening up a space in which we

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1. This doesn't mean Gestalt psychology drew upon phenomenology understood as a school of philosophy, it is rather to observe that the movement emerges in a place and time when phenomenological ways of thinking were exercising influence not only in and via the emerging philosophical school, instigated by Husserl, but among physicists, mathematicians and psychologists. Wolfgang Köhler would address this relationship directly in his *The Place of Value in a World of Facts* [Köhler 1976].

2. A few examples: philosophy of mind: mind-body, thought-behaviour, inner-outer. Epistemology: mind-world, appearance-reality. Social philosophy/social science: action-social fact, and agency-social structure.

might see those dualisms as artefacts generated by non-obligatory elementalist approaches. The Gestalt psychologists rejected elementalism and affirmed phenomenal unity, where we now understand parts of phenomena not as discrete elements which form composite phenomena but as constituents or regions of phenomena which have unity. However, while the arguments against elementalism were decisive, the accompanying argument for phenomenal unity is not provided in “off-the-peg” Gestalt psychology, for the major Gestalt psychologists of the Berlin School—Max Wertheimer, Kurt Koffka and Wolfgang Köhler—had, arguably, failed to successfully complete their project. The revolution in thought that Wertheimer, Koffka and Köhler initiated succeeded in reconfiguring our way of viewing problems by inviting us to consider the possibility of an internal, synergistic, relationship between part and whole *relata* but hadn’t quite, in their own work, cashed-out that possibility. While in the presentation of examples and in the arguments for the irreducibility of wholes to elements Gestalt psychology made a profound contribution, the supporting arguments for phenomenal unity were much less convincing and satisfactory.

In responding to the challenge posed by Gestalten and making a case for phenomenal unity, there were, arguably, two paths taken: 1. intrinsic/immanent and 2. extrinsic/transcendent. Intrinsic solutions see phenomenal unity as endogenously achieved, so to speak; they do not invoke external matrices to confer unity. In contrast, an extrinsic solution sees unity as conferred exogenously, where external matrices are theoretically invoked to confer unity. In what follows, I will be interested in the immanent responses to challenges posed by Gestalten and for accounting for phenomenal unity. We’ll focus on the immanent arguments for phenomenal unity found in the work of Aron Gurwitsch, Ludwig Wittgenstein and Harold Garfinkel.<sup>3</sup>

So, what were the Gestalten and what challenge did they pose? Gestalt pictures, patterns or structures are those in which the qualities or meaning of the whole cannot be described as the sum of its parts taken as discrete elements or atoms. Much of the focus of the Gestalt Psychologists themselves and those who would enter into dialogue with their work would be on the classic examples of Gestalten. There are many Gestalten but for our purposes we can provide an illustrative sample, divided into four categories.

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3. Extrinsic responses were more prominent within the discipline of psychology, including with Köhler’s own proposed solution and the programme of Kurt Lewin. A contemporary example of an extrinsic “solution” can be found in Wanja Wiese’s [2018] recent book.

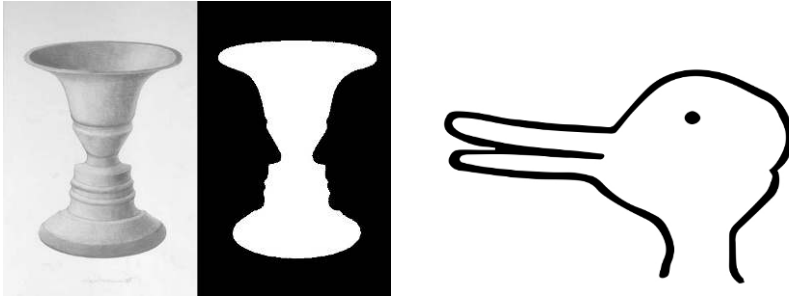


Figure 1: Rubin's vase/face figure by John Smithson 2007 at English Wikipedia CCBY-NC-ND 2.0. <https://www.illusionsindex.org/i/rubin-s-vase> and Jastrow's Duck-Rabbit.

1. Pictorial Gestalten – Aspect diagrams and pictures (e.g., Jastrow's Duck-Rabbit & Rubin's Faces-Vase (Figure 1)) in which you can see the same diagrams as different objects by seeing the constituent features under different aspects. So, for example, when you look at the Jastrow duck-rabbit and see the protrusion as long ears, you see the picture as a rabbit. If you see the same protrusion as a bill, you see the whole picture as a duck.

If you look at the Rubin faces-vase and see the small symmetrical  $< >$  lines about one third of the way up the diagram as decorative stem detailing, then you do so by seeing it as a vase. If you see the same contours as outlines of lips, where the top lip meets the bottom lip, then you do so as you see the diagram as two faces. What I see the whole as, under what aspect, serves to change the sense, the identity, of the elements within the whole.

Therefore, the elements alone cannot account, in sum total, for what we see. The identity of the elements is intrinsically related to the identity of the whole, and *vice versa*. The key point to the examples, the challenge they pose to elementalism, is that you cannot arrive at the description of the whole based purely on the analysis of the elements, taken as lines on the page. In order to be constituents of the whole, the lines on the page must be *seen as* a duck bill, rabbit ears, lips or decorative stem detailing. What enables such '*seeing as*' is the relationship of the identity of the constituents to the identity of the whole. The relationship is synergistic.

2. Three Dimensional Object Gestalten – Profiles and three-dimensional objects (e.g., viewing a house from the front) in which one sees profiles of objects as constituents of the three dimensional object, which is not concurrently viewable from every available profile. An example of this might be viewing the front elevation of a house *as* the front of the house. In viewing the front elevation of the house, I do not see it as a discrete wall with 6 rectangular windows and a door at the bottom, no more

than I see it as an orderly collection of bricks, glass and uPVC. *I see the front of the house.*

3. Melodic Gestalten – Tones, rhythm and melody. For example, when sounds are organised according to rhythmic time sequences and tonal patterns and heard not as sounds or noise but as constitutive parts of a melody. For example, when I hear the tape loops of sped-up and slowed down traffic noise samples as rhythmic beats and tones in an electronica dance track, in contrast to hearing the sound of the traffic through my open window as I try to concentrate. Or, perhaps, hearing the feedback generated by a guitar being lent against an amp as the opening bar of a familiar song, such that hearing it you hear it as the opening bar of the song (e.g., the opening bar of the Beatles' *I Feel Fine*).
4. Praxeological Gestalten – Actions-Social Fact. For example individuals queuing and the queue. Here members and their actions are seen as part of sequences that constitute a social fact (social unit). For example, I walk to the end of the queue and stand. As the person in front of me moves forward, I do so too and maintain roughly similar distance through each queue move. I might acknowledge those who join the queue behind me to let them know I am part of the queue: I might do this verbally and explicitly in response to a question ("is this the end of the queue?") or voluntarily in anticipation of someone failing to see me as part of the queue ("I'm in the queue" or "the end of the queue is there" or "excuse me. I'm in front of you").

Where 1. contains perhaps the most familiar examples of Gestalten, which over one hundred years after their introduction still circulate beyond academic discussion as puzzles and "brain teasers", 1–3 received extensive discussion in the literature of Gestalt psychology and phenomenology. The 4th category of Gestalten was introduced by Harold Garfinkel through his Ethnomethodological "misreading" and respecification of Aron Gurwitsch's work. For the three writers on Gestalten who are the focus in this paper—Gurwitsch, Wittgenstein, & Garfinkel<sup>4</sup>—the challenge they took up was that of establishing the nature of the *internal* relationship between particulars and the whole. To do this in a way that builds on the insights of the Gestalt psychologists and retains the internalist, or immanent, constraint, one needs to provide an account which establishes an immanent, internal, or endogenous relation between the particulars and the whole of the Gestalten.

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4. Jean-Paul Sartre and Maurice Merleau-Ponty could also be added to this list. As I've suggested, others would seek to explain away Gestalt phenomena by domesticating them to their existing theoretical frameworks and arguing for transcendental, external, or exogenous relationships. Examples of this externalist "solution" to the challenge posed by Gestalt phenomena, one finds in (representational) cognitive neuroscience or in the transcendental arguments of some philosophers and social theorists.



As one of those approaches that inherited Gestalt psychology and sought to work out the internal relations, Ethnomethodology emerged in the 1960s, establishing itself as a distinctive approach to social psychology<sup>5</sup> and sociology, while having impact beyond with the development of discursive psychology, and in major contributions (sometimes via conversation analysis) to human-computer interaction, linguistics, and (critical) cognitive science. At the core of Ethnomethodology is the reconfiguration of Gestalt phenomena which both respects the internalist constraint while developing an original account of the relationship, via a praxeological respecification. Garfinkel would later remark that this respecification was based on an Ethnomethodological misreading [Garfinkel 2002, 177], [Garfinkel 2021] of Aron Gurwitsch's constitutive phenomenological work on Gestalt psychology. Later in life, Garfinkel would also emphasise his debt to Maurice Merleau-Ponty's existential phenomenology. Garfinkel's written statements regarding his debt to Gurwitsch, Merleau-Ponty and Schütz, the philosophical resources he recommended to his students, and the philosophical content of his courses and reading lists at UCLA, all *suggest* that Ethnomethodology might be seen as a distinctive development within the phenomenological tradition. If Gurwitsch's contribution is correctly depicted as *constitutive phenomenology*, Schütz's as *social phenomenology*, and Merleau-Ponty's as *existential phenomenology*, then Ethnomethodology might be depicted as *praxeological phenomenology*.

There is a certain neatness to this depiction of EM as praxeological phenomenology, but I want to argue that it might also be misleading. Ethnomethodology is, in significant respects, *post-phenomenological*,<sup>6</sup> and in this regard similar to the later philosophy of Ludwig Wittgenstein. If I am right, then Ethnomethodology as a living intellectual tradition and as a set of policies for social inquiry, would be best served by deeper dialogue with the Wittgensteinian tradition and by drawing on Wittgensteinian policies, rather than, as, for example, Bob Anderson & Wes Sharrock [2018] recently

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5. Ethnomethodology is not generally seen as social psychology now, following the decline in *sociological* social psychology as an approach to social psychology within the discipline of psychology. Garfinkel and Ethnomethodology are more obviously associated with sociology than social psychology, in the contemporary disciplinary landscape. At the time *Studies in Ethnomethodology* [Garfinkel 1967] was published, figures such as Garfinkel, Goffman, Sacks, and others, worked without those disciplinary boundaries. As late as 1995, Garfinkel's work was recognised with the Cooley-Mead Award for lifetime contributions to the intellectual and scientific advancement of sociological social psychology [Maynard 1996]. Conversation analysis, as a development of Ethnomethodology, has found a home in linguistics and psychology departments, in the latter case as a core tool of discursive psychology.

6. In employing the term "post-phenomenology" I do not invoke Don Ihde's very particular usage as a kind of brand name for his own philosophy, but use it in the sense akin to the widespread use of "post-Kantian", "post-Freudian" or even "post-structuralism".

proposed, drawing further on phenomenology and depicting it as third-person phenomenology.<sup>7</sup>

I begin with a brief overview of the relationship between Ethnomethodology and Wittgensteinian philosophy, as that has been presented since the publication of Garfinkel's *Studies in Ethnomethodology* [Garfinkel 1967, hereafter *Studies*]. Hitherto, this relationship has been primarily based on the shared interest in and similarity in treatment of rules and rule-following, in addition to overlaps in the way both Ethnomethodologists and Wittgenstein approach questions of meaning. This will lead into a discussion of Garfinkel's "misreading" [Garfinkel 2021] of Aron Gurwitsch on Gestalt phenomena, Garfinkel's development of the category of praxeological Gestalten in the social production of social facts (social units) and the respecification, or as Lynch and Eisenmann put it, "transposing" of the other categories of Gestalten *praxeologically*, rather than as passive, perceptual phenomena. In section 4, "Wittgenstein's praxeogrammatical reading of Wolfgang Köhler on Gestalt phenomena", I will give an overview of Wittgenstein's brief flirtation with and subsequent rejection of phenomenology, before progressing to discuss his "praxeogrammatical" analysis of Gestalt phenomena. In the final sections, I conclude by arguing that Ethnomethodology and Wittgenstein's later philosophy share significant points of overlap which should inform future developments.

## 2 Proto-Wittgensteinian ethnomethodology—rules as accounts and indexicality

The idea of a Wittgensteinian Ethnomethodology has been present from the moment *Studies* first appeared, and was perhaps seeded before, with the publication of Garfinkel's proto-Ethnomethodological "Trust" paper [Garfinkel

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7. Anderson & Sharrock argue for what they call "third person phenomenology" in their [2018] book and in their follow-up methodological works [Anderson & Sharrock 2019b,a] on the same topic; in doing so, they invoke Hubert Dreyfus [2002] and Samuel Todes [2001] as their phenomenological resource and inspiration. I confess to finding this a puzzling move, particularly for two authors who throughout their careers have been at the vanguard of Wittgensteinian approaches to social research and Ethnomethodology. A challenge to this move, beyond what I write below, can be found in the debate between Dreyfus and John McDowell [Scheer 2013], in which I believe Dreyfus errs quite fundamentally in collapsing together the conceptual and the propositional, as he marshals his argument against what he mistakenly believes to be McDowell's position. In short, Dreyfus assumes that if one invokes concepts then one must be invoking propositions-as-cognitive-representations. This is incorrect. See also Hutchinson "Hidden Summits: Brute affect, phenomenal affect, and members' accounts of emotional phenomena" [2019].

1963], and the central position accorded to the discussion of rules and games therein. Despite the occasional, though prominent, dissenting voice [e.g., Rawls 2002, 2] arguing against the idea that Garfinkel's thought was *influenced* by Wittgenstein, prominent, secondary and introductory texts which fed into the reception of *Studies* in the decades that followed its publication, such as those by John Heritage [1984, chap. 5] and Wes Sharrock & Bob Anderson [1986, 11–12], accorded prominent place to outlining Ethnomethodology's overlap with Wittgensteinian thought. The connection would be further established by the body of work produced by an influential group of Ethnomethodologists, based in Manchester, UK,<sup>8</sup> who would become particularly associated with reading Ethnomethodology alongside, through and in light of Wittgenstein [e.g., Button 1991]. A few decades later, the Loughborough school of EMCA-discursive psychology would also cite Wittgenstein, alongside Garfinkel & Sacks, as a key intellectual influence, as outlined by Jonathan Potter [2001] and Jonathan Potter & Derek Edwards [2013].

The arguments for the Wittgensteinian heritage of Ethnomethodology primarily focused-in on the way in which Wittgenstein, and Wittgensteinians who engaged with arguments in the social sciences, such as Peter Winch [1990, 1997, 1964], reflected on rules and rule-following and how Ethnomethodology, beginning with the "Trust" paper [Garfinkel 1963], also dealt with rules and rule-following. In both Wittgenstein and Garfinkel, the idea of rules as akin to tracks laid down in advance of practice and which people must follow so that their actions and practices are meaningful would be challenged and the polarity of analysis reversed. The result would be the focus on rules as the embedded accounting practices of members, produced for practical purposes.<sup>9</sup> Such purposes might be the issuing of orders, giving instructions, justifying one's actions, and, in bureaucratic and institutionalised accounts, codified or tabulated in the service of such things as establishing commensurability and accountability, and so on. Wittgenstein would explore the sceptical challenge to rule-following accounts and the problem of rule-finitism by dissolving those challenges through drawing our attention away from a picture of rules as kinds of logical "tracks", on which our thoughts run, to the place different types of rules, used for different practical purposes, have in our practices, within our form of life [e.g., Wittgenstein 2009, secs. 200, 241]. In their treatment of rules, Ethnomethodologists would pay particular attention to what Garfinkel [1967, 21–22] called "ad hoc-ing" practices, memorably writing that if one thought such practices a "nuisance" and desired their removal to better see

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8. Among the first generation, emerging in the late 1960s and early 1970s: John Lee, Wes Sharrock, and, arriving in '72, Rod Watson. Their influence would spread further through the work of prominent students, coming to the fore in the late '70s and '80s: among them Bob Anderson, Graham Button, Jeff Coulter, and David Francis. Both Garfinkel and Sacks visited Manchester in the 1960s.

9. I will discuss Wittgenstein and Ethnomethodology on rules, rule-following and accounting practices in a forthcoming sister paper to this one.

the rules then one was doing something akin to asking for the removal of the walls of the house to get a better view of what was holding up the roof. In short, the ad hoc qualificatory work done with rules by members exhibits the place rules have in, and the relationship they have to, our wider social practices and social world.

This shared interest in and approach to rules and rule-following in the work of Wittgenstein, Wittgensteinians and Ethnomethodologists segues into the related overlap one might observe in their respective treatments of meaning. The Ethnomethodological development of the notion of indexicality [Garfinkel & Sacks 1970], which Garfinkel inherits from linguistics and the philosophy of language [i.e., Bar-Hillel 1954] and generalises beyond indexical terms to all meaningful signs (including meaningful actions), has been seen as very similar to Wittgenstein's proposal that we treat requests for meaning as requests for descriptions of use [e.g., Wittgenstein 2009, sec. 42], [Wittgenstein reported in Rhees 1984, 115].

This latter point of convergence provides for us a way into deeper discussions regarding the potential affinity between Garfinkel and Wittgenstein, because in unpacking both the Ethnomethodological account of indexicality and Wittgenstein's respecification of questions of meaning as requests for descriptions of use, we find them united in seeing meaning or sense (of words, actions or phenomena) as being intelligible and accountable as parts of a *contexture*. As noted above, Garfinkel *generalises* the notion of indexicality. As a concept of Ethnomethodology, "indexicality" is generalised beyond the claim that it is a property of a certain class of linguistic terms, to apply to phenomena more generally. Like Wittgenstein, Ethnomethodological interest is not in linguistics or language, narrowly and formally construed, but in meaning and sense (whether of linguistic expression, actions or phenomena).

There is a further way in which the Ethnomethodological treatment of indexical phenomena and Wittgensteinian proposals about describing meaning by describing use differ from more mainstream contextualist or pragmatist accounts and this is found in the way both conceive the contribution that *context* or the *occasion* makes to meaning or sense. For Garfinkel (and Sacks) and for Wittgenstein, context is not passive, whether understood as the contribution made by local conditions or by the invariant structure of consciousness. Ethnomethodology and Wittgenstein stand at odds with both analytic contextualism and the phenomenological contextualism of Gurwitsch (and Husserl). Ethnomethodology and Wittgenstein go beyond conventional contextualism in linguistics or philosophy of language, because they do not ask us to merely see meaning or sense as context-dependent—as in being framed by the materiality of local circumstance—but rather it is being argued that meaning, or sense, is *contexture*-dependent, where "contexture" is understood as something that is actively produced or "woven" by the participants to the setting.

In Garfinkel & Sacks' statement paper on indexical phenomena, "On Formal Structures of Practical Actions" [1970],<sup>10</sup> they employ Gurwitschean terminology, taken primarily from Gurwitsch's paper "Essentially Occasional Expressions" [Gurwitsch 2010a] and in doing so, I suggest, title their own paper ironically. What we find Garfinkel & Sacks arguing is that the "Formal Structures" of their title, i.e., the "formal structures" that confer sense on the occasional, or indexical, phenomena, are not, on their account, formal or structural in the usual sense and nor in the sense that Gurwitsch had argued, in his "Occasional Expressions" paper [Garfinkel & Sacks 1970]. For, Gurwitsch had argued that the phenomenon of context is not dependent on actual contexts but is rather imposed by "the invariant structure of consciousness". Here's Gurwitsch:

The formal structure of the phenomenon of context does not depend upon the specific nature of any particular context but is an invariant of consciousness. This structure consists in the way a thematic field is organized with respect to a center which stands in relations of greater or lesser immediacy to the items of the field. [Gurwitsch 2010a, 536]

Garfinkel & Sacks do not follow Gurwitsch here; instead, their respecified "formal\* structures", dispense with the "invariant structure of consciousness" and replace it with the endogenously-produced local praxeological contextures. This marks a radical shift from Gurwitsch's argument; a shift from the "context" imposed by the "invariant structure of consciousness" to the contexture endogenously enacted by members co- and inter- acting, and which is made available to us through their accounting practices (often having the form of rules).

While Garfinkel & Sacks switch-out the Gurwitschean transcendental architecture of the "invariant structure of consciousness" they retain the debt to Gestalt psychology. The language of Gestalt psychology, in the terminology of theme and thematic field as a version of the figure and ground relation is retained, only now it is no longer presented as requiring transcendental, or even theoretical, treatment as it does in Gurwitsch. We shall come back to this in more detail below. Suffice to say now that what we see if we place Garfinkel & Sacks and then Wittgenstein alongside Gurwitsch is something similar. We see that where for Gurwitsch "occasional expressions" were to be given meaning by the invariant structure of consciousness providing a Gestalt contexture, for Garfinkel & Sacks and for Wittgenstein the contexture is produced in social practice, in interaction.

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10. The "Formal Structures" paper is one of the few places where Wittgenstein is explicitly cited by Garfinkel (and Sacks).

### 3 Garfinkel's praxeological critical reading of Aron Gurwitsch

My purpose, by deliberately misreading Gurwitsch and Merleau-Ponty, is to appropriate to the interests of EM investigations and its policies and methods, the topics and themes of Gestalt phenomena that Gurwitsch and Merleau-Ponty describe as the achievements of their investigations. I give them the EM name: "a figuration of details". [Garfinkel 2002, 177]

Garfinkel's "misreading" [Lynch 2009, 107], [Eisenmann & Lynch 2021], [Garfinkel 2021, 2002] of Aron Gurwitsch's phenomenological work on Gestalten speaks directly to his concerns with the relationship between the perennial dualisms that persist in social psychology and sociology; these are the dualisms of action-social fact, and agency-structure, which are in turn tokens of a more general type of dualism of particular and whole.<sup>11</sup> The question is, if we establish as our fundamental principle the objective reality of the whole (social facts, structure) as Durkheim demanded [2013, 15] and Garfinkel endorsed [Garfinkel 2002, 1996] how are we to study this? Durkheim had advocated special empirical methods, others who followed would propose theoretical and methodological lenses that would putatively grant access to the social units.<sup>12</sup> Garfinkel argued, inspired by Gurwitsch's distinctive reading of Gestalt psychology, that we do not need such methods because social facts, as social psychologists and sociologists seek to study them, are first and foremost phenomena of the social world; in being so, their

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11. Gurwitsch's philosophy is centrally built upon a reworking of Husserlian phenomenology via an extended dialogue with Gestalt psychology. In the history of phenomenology, Gurwitsch's constitutive phenomenology was largely usurped by Heidegger's and Merleau-Ponty's respective versions of existential phenomenology, perhaps in part because Gurwitsch never fully overcame the requirement for the transcendental argument, in the form of his version of Husserl's transcendental ego [see Dreyfus 2014]. In particular, and influenced by attending Gurwitsch's lectures in Paris, Merleau-Ponty's own engagements with Gestalt psychology in his *Phenomenology of Perception* [Merleau-Ponty 2012] came to largely overshadow Gurwitsch's. Gurwitsch's dialogues with Gestalt psychology are to be found in his *Field of Consciousness*, [Gurwitsch 2010b, particularly Part 2, chap. 1], in addition to Essay V "The Phenomenology of Perception: Perceptual Implications" in vol. I of his *Collected Works* [Gurwitsch 2009b], and chapters I "Some Aspects & Developments of Gestalt psychology" and X "Phenomenology of Thematics and of the Pure Ego: Studies of the Relation between Gestalt Theory and Phenomenology" in vol. II of his *Collected Works* [Gurwitsch 2009a].

12. Some examples: Marxian historical-materialist methods, sometimes given a transcendental, or Critical Realist twist, Elias's Figurational methods, and Foucauldian power analysis. Each of these provides a method or family of methods which are designed to disclose the distinctively social. See Scambler [2020] for a recent argument in support of taking a transcendental and extrinsic approach.

identity, their meaning, for formal analysis, is always derived from and even parasitic on the identity of those phenomena as phenomena of the everyday social world. Again, there is here a core overlap between phenomenology, Ethnomethodology and Wittgenstein: all three are interested in the extent to which phenomena or grammar are implicated (while often denied) in formal, empirical and theoretical analyses. For the life-world or the grammar of our language are presupposed by and frame empirical investigations, theoretical and transcendental approaches.

What Garfinkel calls his “misreading” actually transpires to be, when studied closely, a critical or inventive *reading* of Gurwitsch (and, later, Merleau-Ponty) read through a co-actional, praxeological lens, which is in-part, perhaps, indebted to the Polish philosopher of (co-)action, Tadeusz Kotarbiński,<sup>13</sup> see [Zielinska 2018], [Garfinkel 2022, 176–177]. Read this way, Gestalt-contextures require no exogenous figurations, whether imposed by invariant consciousness, formal social theory or special methodologies, because those figurations are endogenously *accomplished* through co- and inter-action by members. When Garfinkel & Sacks remark that “[t]he notion of ‘member’ is the heart of the matter. We do not use the term ‘member’ to refer to a person. It refers instead to mastery of natural language, which we understand in the following way” [1970, 342], they are making the point that they are interested in persons so much, and only so much, as they are masters of natural language, and (what they don’t say) this qualifies them as members (constituents, profiles) of a Gestalt. “Member”, in this latter usage, is straight out of Gurwitsch and is the term he uses to refer to constituents of Gestalt contextures [Gurwitsch 2010*b*, Part 2, chap. 1], such as the dots that are constituents of a shape, the visible profiles that are constituents of a three dimensional object or the sounds that are constituents of a melody. These constituents are members, in Gurwitsch’s terms; they are members of their Gestalt contextures. In Garfinkel’s hands, members are people in so much as they are masters of the natural language, which means they interact with other members in the constitution of social facts, understood as Gestalts. A person’s humanity or personhood isn’t dependent on their constitutive role in the Gestalt/social fact, but their status as member of the social order is. This is why the (Gurwitschean) “notion of member is the heart of the matter”.

To sum up, Garfinkel finds a way of completing Gurwitsch’s project by switching out the “*invariant structure of consciousness*” for *members’ accomplishment of social facts (fait accompli) in interaction*. The identity—sense—of social facts (their meaning) is accomplished in and through the co- and inter-action of members. This is why social facts have phenomenal unity—they are social units.

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13. Garfinkel cites Kotarbiński presumably to acknowledge the key move he makes from action to co-action. Garfinkel does, however, note in a seminar that Kotarbiński’s praxeology is a “failed normative program”. Garfinkel argues that the failure is owed to the normative or legislative objectives of the program [Garfinkel 2022, 176–177].

Garfinkel's solution has a genuine elegance to it. It is not a theory or a methodological lens, it is merely something we observe in our studies of what people do, considered as members. We observe members co- and inter-acting and ongoingly accomplishing sense and therefore social facts. We observe them queueing, for example.

Garfinkel improves upon Gurwitsch. If Gurwitsch took the ingredients of Gestalt psychology provided to him by Wertheimer, Köhler, and Koffka and, inspired by James and Husserl, produced something new and improved, then Garfinkel took what Gurwitsch had provided and, inspired by Parsons and Schütz, and perhaps even Kotarbiński's praxeology, produced something new and improved. Late in life, Garfinkel would increasingly cite Merleau-Ponty, presumably because Merleau-Ponty himself had improved upon Gurwitsch by moving beyond the invocation of the "invariant structure of consciousness" to the more existential "structure" provided by bodily comportment. However, it's my view that Garfinkel had himself moved beyond both Gurwitsch and Merleau-Ponty, and arguably beyond phenomenology. In his later writings [Garfinkel 2002], [Garfinkel 2022], Garfinkel moves beyond the concern to explicate the category of praxeological Gestalten that he had introduced and, as Lynch & Eisenmann argue [2022, this issue], turns attention to praxeologically respecifying the other Gestalt phenomena such that we no longer think of, for example, the animal in the foliage, as purely a question about perception or seeing, but about what is done, praxeologically, to find the animal in the foliage or to bring into view the phenomenon out of the background noise. Garfinkel's own praxeological reworking of Gestalt phenomena situates him as one of the two great Post-phenomenological philosophers of the 20th century.

## 4 Wittgenstein's praxeo-grammatical reading of Wolfgang Köhler on Gestalt phenomena

One part of Gurwitsch's treatment of Gestalt phenomena which remains ambiguous in Garfinkel's praxeological development is the question of the precise way in which we are to characterise the relationship between constituent/theme/member on the one hand and on the other hand whole/thematic field/Gestalt contexture. Gurwitsch argued that the relationship was one of *functional significance*—i.e., what function the constituent(s) played in the whole. This, therefore, was the basis for ascribing the particular meaning to both constituent and whole. In this regard Gurwitsch remained close to Köhler. Garfinkel remarks that this aspect of Gurwitsch's analysis is foundational for Ethnomethodology:



Gurwitsch's argument on the functional significations and their coherence of figural contexture in its empirical perceptual details [...] has been a foundational point of departure in all my teaching. It has lasted a long time. It has also been missed as Ethnomethodology's key resource in identifying Ethnomethodology's concerns to specify "the problem of meaning" [...]. [Garfinkel 2002, 84]

My own reasons for arguing that there is ambiguity here is based on my reading, summarised in the previous section, of the "Formal Structures" paper. In that paper, and in many of the studies produced in Garfinkel's oeuvre, Gurwitschean functional significations are replaced by members' accounting practices. While one might be tempted to respond to such a remark by saying that members' accounts for Ethnomethodologists just *are* the functional significations, I would retort that there is an important distinction to be drawn based on the term "functional signification" being a philosophers' category term or glossing device that needs "unpackaging" in interaction [cf., for example, Jefferson 1985]. In Garfinkel's own terms we might write Gurwitsch's term as "functional significations\*", with the asterisk there to mark that it is basically a formal analytic place holder or gloss employed in lieu of studies which will provide us with the relevant situated members' accounts. It is the members' accounts that give us the relationship between constituent/theme/member on the one hand and on the other hand whole/thematic field/Gestalt contexture. This, I suggest, provides the ground for coming to see the similarity to Wittgenstein.

In summary, there are two reasons for exploring the Wittgenstein-Garfinkel nexus on Gestalten.

- (i) Wittgenstein, like Garfinkel (and Merleau-Ponty), rejects cognitivist and transcendental solutions. This family of "solutions" we might group together and call the *exogenous matrix* solutions, since these putative solutions employ external theoretical or methodological frames or matrices to resolve the problems presented by Gestalten and to account for phenomenal unity. Like Garfinkel, Wittgenstein seeks to find a solution which resists the temptation to appeal to theoretically postulated domains to explain how figure and ground, theme and thematic field are related.
- (ii) Further, Wittgenstein (anticipating Garfinkel to an extent) embeds his discussion of Gestalten in our wider practices and appeals to the way we ordinarily talk about Gestalt phenomena. This has clear overlap with Garfinkel's accordance of a central role to members' situated accounts and is what distinguishes Garfinkel and Wittgenstein from the phenomenological treatments one finds in Gurwitsch and Merleau-Ponty. Where Gurwitsch and Merleau-Ponty provide analysts' accounts of Gestalt phenomena, Wittgenstein and Garfinkel return us to the way

in which grammar and our day-to-day practices furnish us with accounts of those phenomena.

One way of striking this contrast between Garfinkel and Wittgenstein's post-phenomenological praxeological treatment on the one hand, and previous treatments of Gestalt phenomena on the other, is as a replaying of a debate which was internal to Gestalt psychology in its infancy. The question has always been one of how we make sense of the relation of the constituents to the whole. Crudely put there are three possible approaches to answering this question:

(i) External or transcendental matrix.

Through postulation of a theory we overlay a matrix through which we interpret or "read" phenomena as parts of *theoretically postulated* wholes. The relation between particular and whole are specified by the theory. Here such theoretical artefacts as cognitive architecture, evolutionary theory, underlying generative mechanisms, structures of power, and so on serve to group together elements as constituents of a whole: e.g., a smile is explained with reference to the evolutionary logic of courtship rituals. The idea in the background is that without these overlaid theoretical artefacts we do not see the "elements" in their constitutive reality (and their unity) but merely see their apparent and contingent identity.

(ii) Constitutive function.

Here the particulars are argued to be correctly perceived—via employment of the phenomenological reduction—as *constituents* of the whole. What makes us tend to see elements (and feel the need for a theory) when, phenomenologically, they are constituents of Gestalten, is the distorting influence of wider assumptions about the world, perhaps owing to the predictive success and dominance of the natural sciences leading to a kind of epistemological and cultural hegemony; this leads us to mistakenly take up this form of analysis in all domains of inquiry and overlook the phenomenological bases. The idea is that a phenomenological analysis will afford us a view of the constituents free of the distorting influence which renders them as discrete elements. A smile is, when seen free of scientific prejudice (i.e., following phenomenological reduction) seen as a constituent of a face of a happy person.

(iii) Meaning.

On this view the relationship is grammatical, between the meaning of the constituents and the meaning of the whole. The meaning of a smile is internally (grammatically) related to the meaning of a face and of a happy person, for example. Put another way, knowing how to use the word smile is to know how to use the word happiness and other related words. Because happiness is internal to the grammar of to smile.

Our third entry in this list should not be confused with the “meaning theory” proposed by some within the Gestalt movement [see Heidbreder 1933], and rejected by Köhler and Koffka. That theory conceived of meaning as interpretation, as a kind of interpretive overlay produced by stimulus-response conditioned associations. Indeed, Kurt Koffka [1935, 86] would for this reason refer to it not as the “meaning theory” but as “interpretation theory”. For Köhler and Koffka, there are two reasons to resist this account: the first reason is that the experiential demand simply cannot be met, in many cases; and second, the account involves, as Köhler [1947, 277–278] points out, a circular argument, whereby organisational features are taken, through repeated stimulus effects, to create organisational associations which are then said to be overlayed on the objects of perception through acts of interpretation.

For our purposes, it is enough to note that this is, of course, an account of meaning that Wittgenstein would have no truck with, and, therefore, Köhler’s rejection of the “meaning theory” does not have consequences for Wittgenstein’s own appeal to meaning in the practice-embedded grammatical approach he employs.<sup>14</sup> This is why when Wittgenstein writes “It is—contrary to Köhler—precisely a *meaning* that I see” [1983, sec. 869], he is not thereby defending the “meaning theory” advanced by some of the early Gestalt psychologists and rejected by Köhler and Koffka, but rather demonstrating that it is Köhler’s own assumptions about what is involved in saying that the relationship between particular and whole is a meaning relation (sometimes referred to as an *internal* or *grammatical* relation) that lead him to reject meaning as a viable candidate.

## 4.1 From phenomenology to phenomenology-as-grammar to praxeological grammar

In Wittgenstein’s case, his engagement with and relationship to phenomenology is complex. It is widely reported that Wittgenstein set out to develop a phenomenological language for a brief period in 1929, as a way of providing a solution to the colour exclusion problem, which Frank Ramsey had persuaded him caused serious and ultimately fatal problems for the system of the *Tractatus*.<sup>15</sup> This period, in 1929–1930, immediately precedes Wittgenstein

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14. In short, this allows us to dispense with Gurwitsch’s qualified invoking of the Husserlian transcendental ego, and the phenomenological architecture of Theme, Thematic Field and Margin(-al consciousness) as the invariant formal structure of consciousness in which phenomena are experienced. Instead, we explore Gestalt phenomena through the grammar of those phenomena, which emerges from our everyday talk of Gestalt features treated as meaningful phenomena, i.e., part of our grammar.

15. The colour exclusion problem (CEP) clearly played a significant role in Wittgenstein’s ultimate abandonment of the *Tractatus* [Wittgenstein 1922] in 1929. The further question is whether it does so as a substantive, discrete problem in need of a solution that wasn’t available within the system of *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*

beginning to develop what is now seen as his later philosophy. One of Wittgenstein's students in the 1930s, who would later become one of his close friends and literary executors, the philosopher Rush Rhees, has written [1963, 213] that the plan for developing a phenomenological language lasted no more than a few months, before being rejected. In the subsequent couple of years, 1930-1931, Wittgenstein would refer to his philosophy as a *kind* of phenomenology (around the time he was drafting the manuscript that would be posthumously published as *Philosophical Remarks* [Wittgenstein 1978]). What seems clear is that what Wittgenstein means by referring to his approach at this time as a “kind of phenomenology” has little to do with Husserl's project of developing a phenomenological language or a science of phenomena. As Wittgenstein progresses in the early stages of the development of what we now see as his mature philosophical views, he develops his account of grammar and grammatical investigation and we find in the manuscript published as *The Big Typescript* [Wittgenstein 2005], drafted in 1933, the slogan “Phenomenology is grammar” employed as a section heading. The significance of this is that it does not amount to an endorsement of phenomenology as a school of philosophy, much less to that school's aims and methods, but rather respecifies the problems of phenomenology as problems of grammar. As Wittgenstein writes:

The investigation of the rules of the use of our language, the recognition of these rules, and their clearly surveyable representation amounts to, i.e., accomplishes the same thing as, what one often wants to accomplish in constructing a phenomenological language. [...] Each time we recognize that such and such a mode of representation can be replaced by another one, we take a step toward that goal. [Wittgenstein 2005, sec. 94]

The slogan, “Phenomenology is grammar” would later find expression in the more mature manuscripts published as *Philosophical Investigations* [Wittgenstein 2009]—the closest we have to a finished book, which represents Wittgenstein's mature philosophical thought—as “*Essence* is expressed by grammar” [2009, sec. 371] and “Grammar tells us what kind of object anything is” [2009, sec. 373], where grammar is not “read-off” a stock of use and the rules

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(TLP) or whether it served in some other way to draw into question the approach of TLP and Frege and Russell. In this way the CEP serves as the tip of an iceberg, in the sense that when you see the CEP it might seem manageable at first but one soon finds that it isn't really the CEP that is the source of the problem, rather the CEP is a token of a deeper and wider issue which is the way this form of analysis must depict the world as dimensionless and available for analysis from a perspective-free point. At the very least, I think Wittgenstein rejects this analytic viewpoint, and radically so, in around 1929-1930. The analytic viewpoint is an objective viewpoint, which doesn't account for dimensionally-specified space and points of view but rather implies a dimensionless world depicted from a perspective-free point. On this reading it is this dimensionless space and objective “I” (or eye) or viewpoint of the analytic approach that Wittgenstein rejects in 1929.

established by the stock of uses, but is, rather, discerned through observation of people's sense-making practices. I shall come back to the notion of grammar Wittgenstein is working with here, below. For now, I will just say a little more about why the term phenomenology largely drops out of the picture in Wittgenstein's work as we progress through and beyond the 1930s.

The reason for dropping the term phenomenology is, I think, clear; it is because "phenomenology" can too-easily reify a discrete realm of phenomena and Wittgenstein wants to resist positing a spectral world of phenomena to which it might be tempting to assume our grammar must correspond and our propositions must represent. Indeed, to do so would be to reproduce one of the doctrines of the *Tractatus* and therefore the very problems which had led him to develop his later approach in the first place.

So, what we see in Wittgenstein is a progression from very briefly seeking to develop a phenomenological language in 1929, to talking of his philosophy in the first few years of the 1930s *as* phenomenology, to a respecification of phenomenology *as* grammar, while remaining interested in many of the same questions that the phenomenologists would be interested in: i.e., what makes scientific enquiry possible? What is assumed by experimental practice? Or, as Wittgenstein would put it, "One might [...] give the name 'philosophy' to what is possible *before* all new discoveries and inventions?" [Wittgenstein 2009, sec. 126]. Where phenomenologists would answer these questions with the "logic of phenomena", Wittgenstein would answer the question by pointing to our grammar,<sup>16</sup> our practices and our form of life. For Wittgenstein, we are not engaged in a proto-scientific endeavour to understand and represent the logic of the lifeworld—the world of experience—but rather we are concerned to remove confusion by providing grammatical reminders of the sense our (life)world has for us.

## 4.2 Grammar, grammatical investigation and practice

Giving grounds, however, justifying the evidence, comes to an end;—but the end is not certain propositions' striking us immediately as true, i.e., it is not a kind of *seeing* on our part; it is our *acting*, which lies at the bottom of the language-game. [Wittgenstein 1975]

Wittgenstein's use of the term "grammar" was, initially at least, somewhat idiosyncratic, in being synonymous with "meaning" and "use" [Wittgenstein 2009, sec. 90]; it is closer to, though not the same as, the term "philosophical grammar" which one finds Bertrand Russell coining in 1903 in his *Principles*

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16. For exegetical work on "grammar" and "grammatical investigation" in Wittgenstein's work, see Baker [2004, chaps. 2–3], McGinn [2011], Hutchinson & Read [2017], and Tamara Dobler's excellent Ph.D. thesis on the topic [2011].

of *Mathematics* [Russell 2009, sec. 46] than it is to “grammar” understood as morpho-syntax. Indeed, the strongest parallels are possibly with the use of the term in Fritz Mauthner’s work [see Weiler 1958]. For Wittgenstein, “grammar” is about the workings of language as an embedded, embodied practice within a form of life; it is about how language is used, embedded in social practices, about the “moves” we make with certain words, phrases and gestures and how those “moves” have sense in particular circumstances and on particular occasions. Wittgenstein coins the term language-game as a way of capturing the local contexture *as* occasioned, circumstantial use—an activity—embedded in a wider form of life; writing “[t]he word ‘language-game’ is used here to emphasize the fact that the speaking of language is part of an activity, or of a form of life”. When Wittgenstein first introduces this conception of grammar in the 1930s it has a more formal quality, which is closer to—though still not the same as—the notion of “philosophical grammar”, than it would come to have in the later manuscripts from the mid-1940s, where the emphasis is laid more on the practice of language in *language-games*.

A “grammatical investigation” is undertaken because our grammar tracks and elucidates the “possibilities of phenomena”. We remind “ourselves of the kind of statement we make about phenomena” to both shed light and clear-up misunderstandings, which might emerge from misleading analogies [Wittgenstein 2009, sec. 90]. For example, we can say both “I have a pin” and “I have a pain”, and this might lead us to think that “pins” and “pains” are similar kinds of phenomenon, based on their syntactical status as substantives/nouns. However, following through on the comparative use, we can note the difference in the grammar of “pins” and “pains”, in the different moves available to us with each. For example, while talk of “picking up the pins” is something readily imaginable, talk of “picking up the pains” would require a quite specialised set of circumstances if we are to find sense in such talk at all. Moreover, even then, should we find a set of circumstances in which such a phrase had sense, it might do so only figuratively. Put another way, “pick up the pins and throw them in the trashcan” has an obvious sense, in that we can readily imagine many circumstances of use in which it would make perfect sense to us as a request or instruction that we can make or give, carry-out or refuse. On the other hand, “pick up the pains and throw them in the trashcan” doesn’t; we’d simply not know what to do with such a phrase. In the second case, we would, at the least, have to do a lot of quite specialised contextualising work to persuade someone that such an utterance had sense; work which would likely also serve to shift the sense of the word “pain” to something discontinuous with its more familiar sense; e.g., “this old laptop is a damned pain. Any more of this and you can come pick up the pain and throw it in the trashcan”. This tells us something about the differences between the phenomena of “pins” and “pains” as they feature in our lives; it is a step in the direction of our seeing that the phenomenon of pain is not to be confused with a tangible object or item; whatever “pain” being a noun, and predicating of pain that it is something we can possess, might initially

suggest, we now see that that was just the *surface* grammar and that if pains were objects, like pins are, it would make sense to talk of picking them up, moving them and placing them in receptacles. What is clear, is that grammar isn't a matter of identifying pre-existing grammatical rules, but of observing what must be in place *praxeologically*, in the situation, and on the occasion, for seeing the sense in a phrase, action or sequence of actions. Stating the rules they were acting in accordance with, will be one way in which a participant might help us see that sense: "I was cursing the laptop, which has been a damned pain for weeks now." The "cursing" here is the account and specifies the rules in place that give sense to the phrase "pick up the pain and throw it in the trashcan"; put in Wittgenstein's terminology, the "language-game" was that of "cursing" or "venting anger" [Wittgenstein 1993, 137]. We see that "pain" is used here, in the language-game of "venting anger" not to pick out the phenomenon of "pain", but as a pejorative metaphor for the laptop which has triggered our anger.

It is in light of this brief precis that we are now in a place to grasp more clearly how Wittgenstein's treatment of Gestalt phenomena differs from both Köhler's and the phenomenological treatments. As we saw, the phenomenological treatment in Gurwitsch sees the relationship between part and whole as one of *functional significance*, which is pre-conceptual and generative of meaning, rather than seeing it as grammatical or as an instance of a meaning relation, in Wittgenstein's sense.

### 4.3 Praxeologically and grammatically respecifying Gurwitsch on Gestalten

To illustrate the difference between the constitutive function and meaning relation accounts of Gestalten I will work through a number of respecifications of a passage from Gurwitsch. So, we shall begin with Gurwitsch, in paragraph a., followed by my praxeological respecification, in paragraph b. So, here is a quote from Gurwitsch:

a. The functional significance of each constituent derives from the total structure of the Gestalt, and by virtue of its functional significance, each constituent contributes towards this total structure and organization. Both formulations are but two expressions of the same state of phenomenal affairs. [...] The functional significance of a constituent of a Gestalt is a genuine phenomenal character and must not be mistaken as secondary or supervenient. [Gurwitsch 2010*b*, 112–113]

Here is the Gurwitsch passage re-written to accommodate Garfinkel's introduction of social facts as types of Gestalten, but done so while remaining largely Gurwitschian in presentation.

b. The functional significance of the actions of each member derives from the total structure of the social fact/Gestalt, and by virtue of its functional significance, each constituent member contributes towards this total structure and organization. Both formulations are but two expressions of the same state of phenomenal affairs. [...] The functional significance of a member's actions as a constituent of a social fact is a genuine phenomenal character and must not be mistaken as secondary or supervenient. [Phil Hutchinson (PH) after Garfinkel after Gurwitsch]

Here is the same Gurwitsch passage paraphrased to give it a Wittgensteinian inflection:

c. The sense of each of the actions of each member derives from the meaning relation with the sense of the social fact/Gestalt, and by virtue of the grammatical relation between the sense of each action and the sense of the social Fact (Gestalt), the sense of the constituent member is part of the sense of the whole. Both formulations are but two expressions in the same language game. [...] The sense of a member's actions as part of the sense of a social fact is what it is meaningfully identified as and must not be mistaken as secondary (projected) or supervenient (a matter of interpretation). [PH after Wittgenstein after Gurwitsch]

For Garfinkel and Wittgenstein there is a crucial further move to be made, and that is the move to simply showing the relations in the ways of acting and talking, as part of ongoing practices that are their home. So Garfinkel undertakes and recommends studies and Wittgenstein warns against philosophical theorising and implores us: “don't think, but look!” [Wittgenstein 2009, sec. 66]. To illustrate the move to EM studies and Wittgensteinian “looking and seeing” we might again revise the already praxeologically-respecified passage from Gurwitsch.

d. The action's sense derives from the internal relation between the action<sup>gloss</sup> as meaningful item on this occasion and the social fact<sup>gloss</sup> as a meaningful item on this occasion. This is really just a way of glossing the following: “Yes, I'm waiting in line<sup>specific</sup>”, and “queueing<sup>specific</sup>”, are grammatically related, such that “waiting in line” is something one does in a “queue”. Each meaningful action gains its identity, is what it is seen as, through its relation to the identity of the social fact. [...] The sense a member's action has in its relation to the social fact is its identity—what it is—and must not be mistaken as secondary or supervenient. In other words, seeing someone “waiting in line” is not secondary or supervenient on something more basic, that is what it is.<sup>17</sup> [PH]

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17. I here use the superscript<sup>gloss</sup> & <sup>specific</sup> as devices to highlight when we are using glossing terms for the purposes of our discussion, i.e., for the purposes of this text,



What I am proposing is that considering social facts as types of Gestalt, serves as a perspicuous way of respecifying those social facts in such a way as to help us see how the Gestalt contexture is produced through our co- and inter-actions as members of the contexture. All this really serves to do is highlight the grammatical relations there in our language: such that, for example, queues involve queueing or waiting in-line. This is why, “people stand in line in queues” is a grammatical remark in Wittgensteinian parlance.

## 5 Praxeological Gestalts as perspicuous settings and presentations

Gestalt phenomena offer a perspicuous setting in which the relationship between the actions of individuals, considered as members of the community of natural language users, and social facts, considered as phenomena of the life-world and the contextures that confer sense on the actions productive of those social facts, might come into view. Respecified in Wittgenstein’s terms: such an approach might serve as a surveyable or perspicuous presentation of our grammar [Wittgenstein 2009, sec. 122].

The history of philosophical psychology, social psychology and sociology is peppered with those who have argued that such study requires special theoretical or methodological tools to access reality, examples of which are legion: the rebranded transcendental arguments of critical realism, as recently found in the work of Pilgrim [2019], and Scambler [2020]; the meso-sociological theoretical frameworks of interpretation of Figurational sociology, proposed by Elias [2000, 1984], and recently advocated for by Scambler [2020]; the Foucauldian theory of power as proposed by Paul Hanna [2013], Parker & Aggleton [2003] and Hannem [2012]; Marxian theoretical frames, such as proposed by McDonald, Gough *et al.* [2017] and Tyler & Slater [2018]; and cognitive (representational) theoretical figurations as proposed by cognitivist philosophers of psychology such as Wanja Wiese [2018]. Put another way, what we observe in representational cognitivism (e.g., cognitive neuroscience), social psychology and sociology is an assumption along the following lines: if our topic is that which is distinctively social, then that topic requires special methods or theories which give analysts access *to* the distinctively social, otherwise we merely reiterate the particular by collapsing the social into the actions of individuals. What we find is authors introducing theoretical artefacts in an attempt to bridge the gap between the particular and the whole.

As we move toward conclusion, we shall first rehearse the classic examples, discussed by the Gestalt psychologists, and picked up by Gurwitsch. Most

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and to indicate specific terms which indicate the internal, or grammatical, relation we’re talking about. Crucially, the relations hold between the specific terms, not the glossing devices.

of the literature on Gestalt phenomena take visual or audible phenomena as examples, and Gurwitsch was no different. As I've argued, one of Garfinkel's original contributions to the literature is, I would suggest, the introduction of a new, praxeological category of Gestalt phenomena and then, later, his praxeological respecifying and transposing of the traditionally perceptual Gestalten. This has parallels with Wittgenstein's grammatical respecification of these phenomena. I'll here briefly reintroduce the three types of Gestalt phenomena (1–3) before introducing praxeological Gestalts (4). In discussing all four I will do so employing Wittgenstein's take on these phenomena as grammatical.

1. Aspect diagrams and pictures (e.g., Jastrow's Duck-Rabbit & Rubin's Faces-Vase, cf. Figure 1, p. 65) in which you can see the same diagrams as different objects by seeing the details of their features as internally related to the concept of the whole. So, when you look at the duck-rabbit and see the protrusion as long ears, you see the picture as a rabbit; you are seeing the internal (meaning) relation between the concept of a rabbit and that of long-eared. If you see the same protrusion as a bill, you see the whole picture as a duck; part of what it is to grasp the concept "duck" is to also know that ducks have bills. The child that continually identified animals without bills—dogs swimming in the lake at the local park, for example—as ducks would not be said to have grasped the concept "duck". If you do not know what a duck is, you won't see a duck bill, indeed you won't see a non-rabbit aspect at all. You couldn't say "I see a rabbit, but I also see the picture as another animal that I do not know"<sup>18</sup> [Wittgenstein 1983, sec. 70]. What is happening when seeing the picture as a duck is the privileging of the internal relation between the concept of "duck bill" and that of a "duck". If you look at the faces-vase and see the small symmetrical < > lines about one third of the way up the diagram as decorative stem detailing, then you do so by seeing it as a vase and knowing the grammatical relation between decorative detailing and decorative artefacts, such as vases; if you see the same contours as outlines of lips, where the top lip meets the bottom lip, then you do so as you see the diagram as two faces, acknowledging the internal relationship between the concepts of lips, mouth and face. What I see the whole as, under what aspect, serves to change the sense, the identity, of the elements within the whole.
2. Profiles and three-dimensional objects (e.g., viewing a house from the front) in which one sees profiles of objects as constituents of the object, which is not concurrently see-able from every available profile. An example of this might be viewing the front elevation of a house *as* the front of a house; its identity as the front of a house (as a profile of a house) is internally related to the concept of a house as a whole and my seeing it *as* such is *just to see the front of the house*. I do not see it as a

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18. Unless you really did know but had just forgotten the name for the moment.

discrete wall with 6 rectangular windows and a door at the bottom, no more than I see it as a collection of bricks, glass and uPVC. *I see the front of the house*. It's identity, in seeing it, what I see it as, is the front of the house, as opposed to a discrete item which also happens to be the front elevation of a house (of course, in certain contexts we would just say that "I see the house"; this would be an acceptable gloss when which profile I am looking at is irrelevant to the purpose of my utterance). The internal relation is in place because of the grammar of "house", that is to say, the moves we can make in language with the term "house": we *live in houses*, we *build houses*, I enter my house and leave my house. I can tell you where my house is. None of these things I can say about my house would make sense if houses were not also things that it also made sense to say have a front and back.

3. Melodic – Tones, rhythm and melody (e.g., hearing familiar noise as music) in which sounds are organised according to rhythmic time sequences and tonal patterns and heard not as sounds or noise but as constitutive parts of a melody, as when I hear the tape loops of sped-up and slowed down traffic noise samples as rhythmic beats and tones in an electronica dance track, in contrast to hearing the sound of the traffic through my open window as I try to concentrate.
4. Praxeological – Actions-Social Fact (e.g., members' queuing and the queue) in which actions are seen as part of sequences that constitute a social fact. For example, I walk to the end of the queue and stand. As the person in front of me moves forward, I do so too and maintain roughly similar distance through each queue move. I might acknowledge those who join the queue behind me to let them know I am part of the queue: I might do this verbally and explicitly in response to a question ("is this the end of the queue?") or voluntarily in anticipation of someone failing to see me as part of the queue ("I'm in the queue" or "the end of the queue is there" or "excuse me. I'm in front of you"). This all might be done by subtle gesture, exhibited bodily comportment and strategic positioning, without speaking. My actions, seen sequentially—I move up in the queue as it moves forward—and with reference to my fellow queuers, are constitutive of the queue and at the same time are intelligible as the actions they are as part of the queue, as queueing.<sup>19</sup> Restating what I wrote above: the action's sense derives from the internal relation between the action<sup>gloss</sup>-as-meaningful-item-on-this-occasion-seen-as-"waiting<sup>specific</sup>" has to the social fact<sup>gloss</sup>-as-meaningful-item-on-this-occasion-which-we-see-as-"queueing<sup>specific</sup>", where *waiting is something one does in a queue*.

There are two features of action-social fact Gestalt contextures, which we might call praxeological Gestalts, I'd like to draw attention to here.

19. For more on queues as phenomena of order and social fact, see Livingston [1987, chaps. 2–4], Francis & Hester [2004, 91–95], and, of course, Garfinkel [2002, chap. 8].

1. Praxeological Gestalts have a temporality, they unfold and are extended over time. A queue forms, becomes longer, gets shorter, it lives through complete changes in its members while remaining the same queue (e.g., for the coffee bar at the conference), but also dies (generally at the end of the day as the bar closes) and is reborn (the following morning as the coffee bar opens for the day). In this respect, action-social fact Gestalts, praxeological Gestalts, differ from aspect diagrams and pictures and from profiles and 3D objects. But there is some similarity to tone, rhythm and melody Gestalts.
2. The constituents of action-social fact Gestalts are active and agential, such that their constitutive membership of the Gestalt/social fact is a reflexive rather than passive membership. I do queueing through the ethno-methods I employ in joining a queue, retaining my place in the queue and making accountable my membership of the queue. Note: I can choose not to join the queue but I cannot choose to wait for coffee with the other people without being in the queue, without queueing. My identity as a queuer is not determined by my intentions nor my actions considered atomistically or as elements. Of similar note, I cannot will a queue into being, there must be something to queue for, I must not be able to get what I came for instantly, on-demand and without delay and so on. The sense my actions have, as a member of the queue, are occasioned, which means they have sense in the contexture provided by local circumstances.

Traditional social psychological or sociological theories overlay a sense-conferring formal structure (theory) so as to give indexical properties generalisable and discrete sense; the interactional approach recognises such a formal structure only in so much as it is ongoingly and endogenously produced as an accomplishment of persons who are members of the community of natural language users, and the way they orient to the features of the setting and each other. As Garfinkel & Sacks put it in 1970 [1986]:

We offer the observation that persons, in that they are heard to be speaking a natural language, somehow are heard to be engaged in the objective production and objective display of common-sense knowledge of everyday activities as observable and reportable phenomena. [Garfinkel & Sacks 1970]

The key point, in all these examples, is that while seeing what we see is dependent on the internal relationship between what we see and the concept of the whole, what we see is the constituents-as-constituents, i.e., *the items they are as the parts they have in the whole*. As Wittgenstein pointed out, this isn't a matter of interpretation, much less cognition, it is a feature of the grammar of our language. As Gurwitsch noted in the quote above, it is not about overlaying the phenomenal character on something thought to be more basic or real; the phenomenal character, the sense, is not secondary or

supervenient. I do not see the front of my house as a collection of bricks, glass and uPVC and then interpret it, mentally process, or overlay it with its phenomenal or conceptual character as the “front of my house”, *I see the front of my house*; its identity as the front of my house is not supervenient on or secondary to its existence as a collection of bricks, glass and uPVC.

## 6 Conclusion: Praxeological endogeneity—throwing away the Gestalts

It can be natural to assume that what is decisive here, what is doing the work, is the discovery of Gestalt phenomena and the rejection of elementalism (analytic thinking) and the constancy hypothesis. But this only tells half the story. The other half of the story is how we make sense of the unity of Gestalten, or more generally the unity of phenomena. This is a problem which has similarities to other problems in the history of philosophy, such as the problem of the unity of the proposition, which preoccupied early analytic philosophy and, particularly Wittgenstein and Frege. As I proposed above, approaches to accounting for the unity of Gestalten and phenomena can be split into 3 categories of approach:

- (i) External or Transcendental Matrix;
- (ii) Constitutive—Functional Significance; and
- (iii) Meaning.

Wittgenstein, Garfinkel and Gurwitsch are immanentists and as such reject (i)—the invocation of an external or transcendental matrix. As we have seen, Aron Gurwitsch proposes that the unity of phenomena is just the unity of Gestalten and this unity is to be located in the functional significance of the members, or constituents, of Gestalts, which are identified as such owing to their functional signification of the whole. This account invokes a kind of immanentism and synergy between constituent and whole: both the constituent and whole are dependent on their relation to the each other for their identity. It is immanent to the identity of this constituent (member) that it is seen as a constituent of this whole (Gestalt). Therefore, Gurwitsch propounds (ii).

Harold Garfinkel explicitly endorses Gurwitsch on this very point and remarks that it is an oft-missed “key resource” of Ethnomethodology. However, *pace* Garfinkel, it is my contention that Wittgenstein and Garfinkel embrace (iii). Garfinkel locates the unity of phenomena praxeologically in members’ accounting practices. Invoking members accounts Ethnomethodologically is not to merely appeal to the accounts members give as glosses or formulations

for practical purposes but is rather to note that the productive work of members that Ethnomethodologists are interested in is also that which makes phenomena accountable or viewable. In queueing, the ethno-methods I employ that make me a member of the queue are both constitutive of the queue as a social unit or phenomenon and are what make the queue accountable or make it witnessable as a queue. Wittgenstein locates phenomenal unity in the use of language embedded in social practices (language games) and the grammar we can discern from that use. Grammar is where the logic of phenomena resides and is witnessable.

The shift from analysts' formal accounts of the unity of phenomena, such as we find in Gurwitsch, to members' accounts and language games serve as a respecification of the task of unifying phenomena away from a formal account offered by an analyst to one of recovering the everyday unity in members' accounts, which they produce and make witnessable and accountable in interaction, and the grammar exhibited in language use. From this perspective, Gurwitsch's formal analytic specification of functional significance as that which unifies phenomena is at best an analyst's gloss, in need of praxeological respecification, at worst it is a metaphysical remark yet to be given sense. As I remarked in my introductory paragraphs, it is tempting to depict Garfinkel and Wittgenstein as phenomenologists, of sorts, perhaps depicting Garfinkel as praxeological or interactional phenomenologist and Wittgenstein as a grammatical or praxeo-grammatical phenomenologist. Given the observations here, I propose that Garfinkel and Wittgenstein should be seen as post-phenomenological thinkers who make significant progress beyond traditional phenomenological thought.

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