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Khadijah Diskin & Phil Hutchinson

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Critical praxeological analysis: respecifying critical research

Khadijah Diskin and Phil Hutchinson 

School of Psychology, Faculty of Health and Education, Manchester Metropolitan University,
Manchester, United Kingdom

ABSTRACT

In this paper we introduce *Critical Praxeological Analysis* (CPA). CPA respecifies critical studies and research by operationalising insights from gestalt psychology and, in particular, the praxeological and linguistic gestalts identified by Harold Garfinkel and Ludwig Wittgenstein. CPA offers a framework for analysing the in-situ production, maintenance, challenging, repair and overcoming of norms and structures. Using naturally occurring data, as well as fictional and imagined examples, CPA examines the meanings that situations have for the participants who constitute them. The paper provides brief praxeological analyses, which draw upon themes from Frantz Fanon's work to illustrate CPA in practice. We conclude by inviting others to apply CPA to themes drawn from the critical studies literature, in the hope that such analyses will deepen our understanding of how norms and structures are produced, maintained, challenged, repaired and overcome in interaction.

KEYWORDS

Critical phenomenology;
critical praxeological
analysis; critical qualitative
research; EMCA;
praxeological gestalt;
praxeology

Introduction

In this paper we outline and recommend a new critical approach to qualitative research: *Critical Praxeological Analysis*. *Critical Praxeological Analysis* (CPA) is based on a praxeological respecification of critical phenomenology and critical studies more generally, and is a cousin of *Situation Analysis* (Hardman and Hutchinson [forthcoming](#)). SA and CPA are approaches to qualitative research which begin by reminding us that our words and actions have sense as constituents of gestalts, or situations. Through their words and actions members are productive of the identity of the situation and their words and actions gain sense through their roles as constituents of that same situation. Having demonstrated the gestalt features of meaning, we progress to outline how CPA operationalises these in the analysis of naturally occurring data and fictionalised and imagined examples, to recover the ways in which members are productive of and make witnessable their meaningful worlds. This praxeological respecification takes an existing philosophical approach or

CONTACT Phil Hutchinson  p.hutchinson@mmu.ac.uk  School of Psychology, Faculty of Health and Education, Manchester Metropolitan University, Manchester M15 6GX, United Kingdom

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research project and transforms it by switching out analysts' formal accounts of phenomena for an approach which seeks to recover members' own situated accounts made available in their praxeological production of those phenomena in their day-to-day interactions. In this introductory paper, we introduce CPA with reference to the critical phenomenological interventions of Frantz Fanon.

Critical Praxeological Analysis is developed from insights first introduced by the gestalt psychologists (Ehrenfels [1890] 1937; Koffka 1922, 1935; Köhler 1947, [1969] 2015; Wertheimer 1912, [1945] 2020). The examples of gestalten, which populate early gestalt psychology, and their discussion in those works were taken up by a number of philosophers and played important roles in their thinking (e.g. Gurwitsch [1953] 2010, Merleau-Ponty [1945] 2012; Wittgenstein 1983, [1953] 2009, 2012, Sartre [1943] 2020). The features to which gestalt psychology draws our attention are the irreducible structural and relational features of the meaningful world. What gestalt psychology shows us is that we do not merely perceive an atomised world of discrete objects (sensory stimuli) but rather perceive a world which has meaning for us, and this meaning is at once both irreducible to discrete sensory stimuli and is situated. Objects-in-experience, phenomena, have unity (they are not merely collections of elements) and situated sense (the meaning an object-in-experience has is related to the situation in which it is experienced). These features carry over from the perceptual gestalten which were the main focus of discussion in the writings of the early gestalt psychologists to the praxeological gestalten, to which Garfinkel (1967, 2002, 2021) drew our attention through what he called his 'ethnomethodological misreading' of the writings on gestalten of the constitutive phenomenologist Aron Gurwitsch. Garfinkel proposed that we see social units, structures and norms *as* social phenomena with gestalt qualities, which are produced, maintained and repaired by, and made witnessable through, the methodic actions of their members; these actions are, in turn, given the sense they have owing to their membership of the gestalt whole (social unit) of which they are productive. One can see a similar praxeological development in the philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein's later work ([1953] 2009), in which the metaphor of language games is introduced to highlight the gestalt features of our meaningful linguistic practices, as those are woven into our activities.

What we gain from a respecification inspired by the writings of Wittgenstein and Garfinkel is a programme for studying the praxeological production and situated sense of phenomena in the stream of life. This shifts our gaze away from the theorist or analyst as the provider of unique insight into phenomena through their theories, formal analyses and phenomenological descriptions and on to the members who are productive of and oriented to phenomena in their day-to-day lives. Importantly, this *isn't* a critique but a *respecification*. We are not criticising the formal analyses of phenomenologists such as Linda

Martin Alcoff (2005), Simone de Beauvoir ([1949] 2014) Frantz Fanon (Fanon [1967] 2021), Maurice Merleau-Ponty ([1942] 1967), Fiona Vera-Gray (2016), Iris Marion Young (1980) or any other existential and/or critical phenomenologists (See: Weiss, Murphy, and Salamon 2019; Magri and McQueen 2023; Oksala 2023). We are, specifically, proposing a programme of reformulating critical phenomenology *praxeologically* as method of qualitative research and analysis. Such an approach is offered as a research-led, participant-up complement to existing phenomenological reflections and has the benefit of bringing to the fore the interactional dynamics or the praxeological mechanics of the in-situ production, maintenance and repair of meaning.

In this paper we offer *illustrations* of CPA with reference to Fanon's critical phenomenology, here respecified as a praxeological study of the situated and endogenous methods members use to navigate, cope with, challenge and transform their lifeworld as a black person living in a (neo-)colonial context and the challenges faced in a world in which a person's blackness can have meaning for others. In short, we are offering a framework through which we might recover the situated interactional processes of racialisation, marginalisation and minoritisation and the discrimination, discreditation, and degradation to which the racialised might be exposed. However, CPA also provides the resources for recovering the interactional forms of adaptation, negotiation, resistance, proactive contestation of and overcoming of the way in which the racialised, marginalised and minoritised can find themselves positioned in the social order.

As the philosophers on whose work we draw, Wittgenstein and Garfinkel do not write for us, in the sense of saying 'this is how things are', they are neither theorists nor formal analysts and nor do they provide research methods. We are not applying their ideas here but rather taking our lead from their reminders to us to pay close attention to practices, to conduct studies of the in-situ production, maintenance and repair of social order in interaction (Garfinkel) and to describe language games (Wittgenstein). The writings of Wittgenstein and Garfinkel don't provide answers but, rather, direct one to the sites of production, to where the action is, while also providing guidance in how to look at and what to look for in those situated practices. Fanon's importance for us here is to be found in the guidance he provides to critical researchers on *which* sites of production we should attend and what phenomena we might find certain members orienting to. We here focus on Fanon, but one could effect the kind of praxeological respecification we here recommend with any critical scholar or topic. The move we are recommending is to shift from the role of critical scholar as theorist or formal analyst producing a theory or formal analysis to being a critical student studying and recovering the ways in which members produce, maintain, repair and challenge, while making witnessable, meaning(s).

Linda Martin Alcoff writes 'phenomenology bases its account primarily on a *reflective description* of lived human experience as a corporeal being in the world' (2005, 109; italics ours); what we are proposing is that CPA researchers

seek to recover members' own accounts of their ongoing lived experiences as a corporal being in the world, experiences which they make available, or accountable, in co- and inter-action.

We begin with a brief overview of what we can learn from engagement with perceptual gestalten (Section 2 - Perceptual Gestalts). Our goal here is to provide neither an overview nor history of gestalt psychology, but to introduce some locally-relevant gestaltist insights. We progress to outlining praxeological gestalten (Section 3 - Praxeological Gestalts) and linguistic gestalten (Section 4 - Language Games as Linguistic Gestalts). At this point we introduce CPA (Section 5 - From Praxeological and Linguistic Gestalts to Critical Praxeological Analysis). In Section 6 (Fanon and Critical Phenomenology) and 7 (Respecifying Fanon's Critical Phenomenology Praxeologically) we respecify some of Fanon's insights praxeologically and provide brief illustrations of a possible Fanonian programme of *Critical Praxeological Analysis*.

Perceptual gestalten

The origin of gestalt psychology is usually traced to Christian von Ehrenfels' publication of 'On Gestalt Qualities' ([1890] 1937)¹ but it finds its first full statement in Wertheimer's (1912; English translation: 2012) work in which he argues for the *primacy* of the gestalt, or whole. While Ehrenfels had focused primarily on the experience of melody, the argument progresses to focus on other types of gestalten, such as the perception of motion in static pictures (phi motion/phenomenal motion), and the famous pictorial gestalten. Although pictures and melody are the most prominent examples found in the writings of the early gestalt psychologists, the point they sought to make is not merely about the perception of certain types of puzzle pictures and about melody; those examples featured prominently owing to their perspicuity in demonstrating gestaltist principles. Gestaltist ideas are of interest because they draw our attention to, or *remind* us, of pervasive features of the way in which we experience the world as a world which has meaning for us, grounded in its symbolic features. The symbolic features of the world are comprised not of elements (atoms) combined in perceptual composites, but are instead gestalt wholes, constituted by constituents and relations with structural form which are experienced as having unity or as *units*.

Melodic gestalten

Ehrenfels argued that melody could not be reduced to the elements – the sounds or tones – taken as discrete sensory stimuli. This is an argument

¹Threads of the argument, which Ehrenfels' would combine and bring unity to in 'On Gestalt Qualities', could be found in the writings of Ernst Mach (whom Ehrenfels discusses), Edmund Husserl and Alexius Meinong. See Rollinger and Ierna (2022, sec. 2) for an overview and Smith (1988) for further discussion.

against atomism (aka elementalism) and the *constancy hypothesis* (the claim that there is a direct, constant, relation between sensory stimuli and sensations). One reason Ehrenfels cites in support of his argument is that a melody can be comprised of different tones while being experienced as the same melody, so long as certain relations hold. The melody as a whole is the percept, not the elements such as the tones that comprise it. For example, take the late 1990s album *OK Computer* by Radiohead and the recent version, *OK Nintendo 64*, produced using the music-making capabilities of the 1990s *Nintendo 64* game console. The two albums are comprised of different sounds but the melodies in *OK Computer* are still experienced instantly in *OK Nintendo 64*. Similarly, compare the Angelique Kidjo cover of Talking Heads' *Once in a Lifetime*, or Easy Allstars two dub reggae versions of Pink Floyd's *Dark Side of the Moon*, called, appropriately, *Dub Side of the Moon* and *Dubber Side of the Moon*. In these examples, it is not just the sounds that might change while the melody remains, the time sequence might change too. The conclusion is that melody demonstrates that percepts, what we experience, cannot be accounted for in terms of atomistic sensory stimuli but that melody has gestalt qualities and that the melody as a whole is the locus of significance.

Pictorial gestalts

While melodic gestalts surround us, it is likely that the examples of gestalten which are most familiar to those who are not students of the movement are the pictorial gestalts. Well-known examples of gestalt pictures are the Rubin faces-vase (Rubin [1958] 2001), Jastrow's rabbit-duck (Jastrow 1899) and the later dalmatian dog against a dappled background picture, attributed to the photographer Ronald C. James. Here we will briefly discuss Rubin's faces-vase (Figure 1):

There are many observations we can make about this famous picture (and its variants), but we will here restrict ourselves to two points, which build upon the observations about melody. First, we note the *figure-ground* relation. Indeed, this picture is sometimes referred to as the *figure-ground* illusion.



Figure 1. Rubin's Faces-Vase (also known as the figure-ground illusion).

The point being that what you see the picture (figure) as is dependent on what you see as the background. So, if you see the background of the picture as white you thereby see the picture as two silhouetted faces in profile, facing each other. Alternatively, if you see the background as black, then you will see a white vase (or goblet, perhaps). You can, then, switch between the two aspects, faces and white background – vase and black background. The point is that the picture on the page or screen remains the same. There is no optical trick here, that changes the picture under certain conditions. The lines on the page and your sensory access to them stay the same. What changes is what you *see* the picture *as*. Further, note that when you see the picture under one aspect, let's say that you see it as silhouetted faces in profile against a white background, then you see specific constituents of the picture under that aspect: so, about a quarter of the way up the picture on the vertical axis, you see the jawline of both faces. You don't see a line between black and white, you don't see the top of the base of the vase where it meets the stem, you see the jawlines. The point of labouring this observation is to bring out Wertheimer's point which served to radicalise Ehrenfels' insights, which is that the constituents of gestalt wholes are not correctly depicted as elements from which the whole is emergent but rather are constituents (regions or members) of the whole, which have the identity they do because of their relationship to the whole (as constituents, regions or members). The whole has primacy.

Three-dimensional voluminous object gestalts

Gestalt pictures, like the faces-vase, help illustrate the way in which we experience the world. What they help us notice is that what we see is not reducible to physical features of what is looked at, because in the case of many of the famous gestalt pictures, while what we *see* changes as we go through aspect shifts, what we are *looking at*, the picture on the page or screen, stays the same. It is important then to see how this might feature in our lives, as we inhabit a world which has meaning for us. We will here, therefore, provide one further example, that of seeing a three-dimensional voluminous object: a house.

Think about looking at a house. Houses have volume, you can enter them, walk around in them, and in some cases, you can leave via a door other than the one through which you entered. Imagine you are stood in front of the house, looking at it. Now, while you see a house you are not looking at the whole house, and, moreover, it being a large three-dimensional object means it would be impossible to concurrently look at the whole house. You are looking at the front elevation. For most practical purposes and under most standard conditions you would be happy to say that you see *the house* (just as only seeing one profile of an apple doesn't preclude you from correctly saying you see the apple). Indeed, even if the occasion called for you to clarify that you are

only looking at one aspect or profile of the house you would clarify by talking of 'the front of the house'. Put another way, what you see is *the front of the house*, not merely a discrete wall with windows and a door but the wall-as-a-constituent-of-the-house. You might be looking at a wall but you see it as, what it is, the front of the house. It is experienced as a region or constituent of the house.

As we have progressed beyond melody, we have focussed on visual perception of static objects, but the points extend to other modes of sensory experience. For example, you might think of reaching, without looking, to pick up a bottle or a cup and then reflect on what you touch and what you perceive and how they might relate. In the case of the cup you might pick it up by the handle but you perceive the cup and perceive the handle as a region of the cup.

We want to make three points, based on this brief discussion: First, our experience of the world and objects is not reducible to the causal powers of physical stimuli. Perception is about meaning. Second, such that we might be able to break down objects of our experience analytically into constituent parts, we are led astray if we think this supports atomism (elementalism), because the constituent parts have the identity or meaning they do based on their relation to (or place within) the gestalt whole, what Aron Gurwitsch ([1953] 2010, 111) called their *functional significance*. Third, the relations that we perceive are immanent. That is to say, the relations are not given in an act of interpretation, by overlaying a theory, or exogenous figurations, but inhere in the functional significations (Garfinkel 2002, 84) or the meaning relations (Wittgenstein 1983, sec. 869) of the percept in the praxeological contexture. So far, we have made these points with particular focus on perception. We now want to extend the discussion to social action and the meaning the social world has for us.

Praxeological gestalts

Praxeological gestalts, as the name implies, are gestalts produced through co- and inter-action. While this category of gestalt phenomena has antecedents in Koffka's (1935, 25) discussion of molecular behaviour, molar behaviour and the behavioural environment, the idea receives full development in the writings of Garfinkel (1967) who would later identify praxeological gestalts as 'ethnomethodology's key resource' (Garfinkel 2002, 84). To more clearly explicate this aspect of Garfinkel's work, it helps if we begin with Emile Durkheim on social facts (or units). Durkheim ([1895] 2013, 15) had argued that a social fact is an emergent property which is irreducible to any particular population or individual intention. For example, the formatted-queue-understood-as-a-social-fact at any one moment might be observed as being constituted by members of the queue who are queueing; however, the queue is not reducible to those members because the queue, (say) for the restaurant,

can go through complete membership changes while remaining the same queue. Moreover, queuers don't usually set out to queue; they intend to dine in the restaurant, they leave home and head to that part of town to eat. The queue they staff is not the focal object of their trip but something they co-produce in pursuing the objective of eating in the restaurant, socialising with friends or waiting to be seated. Garfinkel proposed conceiving of Durkheimian social facts as phenomena, and, following Gurwitsch, further taking phenomena to have gestalt qualities. In light of these reconceptions of Durkheimian social facts as phenomena with gestalt qualities, we can now respecify the queue for the restaurant as a praxeological gestalt, whereby members act in such a way as to produce the queue as a witnessable, ordered phenomenon, and in turn the actions of those members have sense as the actions of people queueing. Recall, this was Wertheimer's (1912) radicalising move: the constituents of gestalts are constituents, not discrete atoms, and as such their identity is derived from their membership of the gestalt whole. The whole has primacy. As observers of the queue, we can generally differentiate queues from groups of people just standing in roughly the same location; we can do this because we can see *people queueing* and see *the queue*. People queueing act in a way that makes their membership of the queue, the fact that they are constitutive of the queue, locally witnessable or accountable for competent users of the language who have the concept of the 'queue' or of 'standing in line'.

So, when queueing, we might walk to the end of the queue and stand. As the person in front of us moves forward, we do so too and maintain roughly similar distance through each queue move. We might acknowledge those who join the queue behind us to let them know we are part of the queue: we might do this verbally and explicitly in response to a question (e.g. 'is this the end of the queue?') or voluntarily in anticipation of someone failing to see us as part of the queue ('we're in the queue' or 'the end of the queue is there' or 'excuse me. We're before you'). This all might be done by subtle gesture, exhibited bodily comportment, and strategic positioning, without speaking. These actions, seen sequentially—e.g. we move up in the queue as it moves forward – and with reference to our 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.²

So that's a praxeological gestalt. The next move is to bring into consideration the three points about gestalten at the end of [Section 2 - Perceptual Gestalts](#). We wrote there that 1. What we perceive is not reducible to physical stimulus, and, in the case of praxeological gestalts, we might say: *and nor is it reducible to physical movement*, 2. Constituents of gestalts are not elements but features, regions or *members*, and 3. The relations between members/regions/constituents and the gestalt whole are

²For more on queues as phenomena of social order and as social units, see Livingston (1987, chaps 2–4), Hester and Francis (2004, 91–95), Ayaß (2020), and, Garfinkel (2002, chap. 8).

endogenous (not exogenously applied) features of the gestalt contexture. This third point is crucial because it means that our job as researchers is *not* to theorise about the relations, not engage in analyst's interpretations and not impose exogenous figurations or external matrices on actions so as to interpret them, but to look closely and see the relations as they figure in the production of the gestalt whole by the members and then identify the methods *they* employ, in-situ, in the production, maintenance and repair of the gestalt. Before analysts appear on the scene, or produce theories of queues, members are already seeing, recognising, joining, being removed from, jumping, and leaving *queues*. If we, as researchers, want to know about the phenomenon of the queue, let us first recover how those who join it, leave it, jump it, etc. see it and orient to it as the queue. On this view, if we want to investigate social norms and structures then we examine closely their sites of production, maintenance and repair in ongoing interactions of members.

Praxeological respecification

With the move to praxeological gestalts, we gain the resources via which we can respecify any research agenda or question praxeologically. What this means is that we can take any question a researcher wants to answer and reconfigure that question and approach it as a praxeological accomplishment of members. In practice, this means that instead of researchers identifying the phenomenon and then employing research methods to research it or a theory to answer it, we instead look at how the phenomenon is produced and oriented to, in situ, through the interactional practices of ordinary members of society.

While phenomenology can, if we are not careful, produce reifications of certain perspectives and experiences, through analysts' phenomenological descriptions, the point for praxeologists is that people ongoingly encounter phenomena, orient to them, are productive of them, maintain them and repair them, and co-ordinate their behaviour in response to them in co- and interaction. In other words, how we experience phenomena is shaped by and made available in interaction – that is to say, when we act with and react to each other. The situated sense or identity of the phenomena, therefore, are related to their sites of interactional production and it is always to these sites, as praxeologists, that we should turn.

Language games as linguistic gestalts

'Linguistic gestalt' is an alternative term for 'language game', which was the term Ludwig Wittgenstein introduced in *Philosophical Investigations* ([1953] 2009, sec. 7). What Wittgenstein called a 'language game' is a gestalt because words have meanings when put to use in situations and the relationship

between the meaning or sense of what we say and the situation in which we say it has gestalt properties, where there is a synergy between constituent (utterance) and whole (game being played). Therefore, in language use, the meaning of what we say (constituent) is dependent on the gestalt in which it is said, while, in turn, the identity of the gestalt is produced through what is said.

The game analogy and meaning

One way to understand the gestalt properties of meaning is, as Wittgenstein proposed, to think of the gestalt as a game and the words you speak as the moves you make or things you do in different types of game. While what you do in a game is what is constitutive of the game, the meaning of what you do is dependent on the game in which you do it.

For example, dribbling (bouncing the ball while moving), passing, shooting for a basket (by throwing the ball with the objective of it passing through the hoop defended by the opposing team), are actions which are constitutive of the game of basketball. The meaning of the actions of the players in a game have the identity they do because they are done in the game. A player doesn't just throw a ball, for example, they pass the ball or shoot for a basket. A player doesn't bounce the ball while walking or running, they dribble the ball. Moreover, if a player holds the ball in hand while moving or if they trip or hold an opposing player then they have committed a foul by breaching the rules.

Wittgenstein introduced the notion of language games to highlight the way in which language is used according to certain rules (like the different rules of different games) and that these rules are woven into the activities of which they are a part. Think about how, for example, carrying the ball while you run is what the player in possession of the ball should do in a game of rugby but in a game of basketball this would be to commit a foul, it would be a breach of the rules. Ostensibly the same piece of behaviour has different meaning, and therefore is a different action, dependent on the game being played and the rules which are constitutive of that game. Similarly, think of grabbing and seeking to hold onto a player from the opposing team who is in possession of the ball. This is a breach of the rules in basketball but something which in rugby is a key feature of the game, a skill to be honed. A good tackler in rugby is a good player of the game. The meaning of the behaviour is different in each game. Ostensibly, the 'same' piece of movement involving a ball is in one game constitutive of the game while in the other it is a breach of the rules.

This has obvious parallels with our discussion of gestalten, and in particular, praxeological gestalten. Even outside formal games, like most sports, the task is still to identify the language game in question³ for example, that of giving orders, of asking questions, of praying, of presenting a proof, of offering an

³See Hardman and Hutchinson 'Rules, Practices and Principles' (2023) for further elaboration.

excuse, of stating a hypothesis, of insulting, of making a ceremonial declaration, of expressing anger, of telling a joke, of roasting, of degrading, and so on. The ostensibly ‘same’ string of words might have different meaning (including, possibly no sense at all) in different language games.

Same words, different games

Let us consider some examples:

The utterance, ‘Where do you come from’ might be:

- (i) A sarcastic remark: ‘Oh, where do you come from, the land of geniuses?’ asked mockingly by a person in response to someone making a foolish, nonsensical or perhaps even blatantly obvious statement. The phrase is used ironically to express disbelief or criticism toward the person’s statement or behaviour.
- (ii) A cultural inquiry: ‘Where do you come from?’ asked by a researcher studying migration patterns or cultural heritage. In this context, the question seeks to gather information about a person’s ancestral background or family history, aiming to explore connections between individuals and their cultural roots.
- (iii) An accusatory statement: ‘So, you’re the one causing all the trouble! Where do you come from?’ exclaimed by a frustrated teacher to a misbehaving student, implying that the student’s disruptive behaviour must stem from a problematic background or upbringing.

Language games, therefore, can be understood as types of linguistic gestalts, where the language game is the whole and the expressions that constitute it are the constituents of the whole. One crucial qualification here is that, for Wittgenstein, language games are not purely linguistic, so the language game is ‘the language and the activities into which it is woven’ (Wittgenstein [1953] 2009, sec. 7) taken as a whole or gestalt. This important qualification shows Wittgenstein anticipating Garfinkel’s praxeological gestalts and provides a key feature of their complementarity and alignment. So, in examples i-iii above we might offer the preliminary identification of the language games of i. Sarcasm ii. Formal enquiry, and iii. Accusation. Another, we argue simpler, way to conceive of these language games (or linguistic gestalts) is as situations. In some of these cases, the question of the language game (gestalt) being played remains open, and wider situational and perhaps further sequential unfolding of the conversational exchange might be required before we can identify the language game or linguistic gestalt which gives sense to the utterance in which we are interested. The sorts of analyses one finds in the examples of Frank Ebersole (2001b, 2001a) and the conversational analyses of Sacks (1995) and what Hardman and Hutchinson have outlined as investigative ordinary

language philosophy (2022) show us how this might be done. The key here is, however, that we are seeking to recover the meaning for the participants, by identifying the ongoing linguistic production of the gestalt by those same participants in their linguistic exchanges, and the activities in which they are woven.

From praxeological and linguistic gestalts to critical praxeological analysis

In the preceding sections 1–4 we have introduced gestaltism and outlined the idea of praxeological and linguistic gestalts via which we might recover the situated sense the lifeworld has for members. Such an approach is concerned to recover the experiences of first- and second-person participants in interaction. As analysts, in the third-person perspective, we must resist the temptation to apply interpretivist lenses and instead seek to recover praxeologically the sense for the members. In addition to requiring a degree of discipline so as to resist the urge to impose one's own interests as analyst this also requires a degree of what Garfinkel called *unique adequacy* (1996, 5; 2002, 175–76). In ethnomethodology, the researcher requires unique adequacy to meet the competencies for producing a good description of the praxeological gestalt. Researchers must acquire the practical skills and knowledge that any individual participating in a particular setting or activity would typically possess. The researcher's competence should be readily identifiable by others in that context, and it should enable them to adequately describe the praxeological gestalt. The objective is not solely to become familiar with or gain access to the context, as in ethnography, but rather to be able to recognize and be acknowledged as actively engaging in the local methods that establish the gestalt contexture.

Critical praxeological analysis: extending unique adequacy and acknowledging social vision

Unique adequacy, as we briefly summarised it above, is usually understood to be about practical competencies of the researcher, or basic proficiency in the practices the researcher is describing, which afford the researcher the ability to be with and see how the members see. So, for example, while most researchers might have practical competency in queuing (which is why it serves as a perspicuous example in introductory texts) they might not do so in practices such as rock climbing (Hofstetter 2022; Smith 2020), split-rim tyre replacement (Baccus 1986), or optometry (Gibson and Vom Lehn 2020), and so on. What is required, therefore, is a degree of proficiency or know-how in the practice you are researching. However, there is an additional way in which we might think about unique adequacy and that is from the perspective of

members who, for whatever reasons, might experience practices in a way that might otherwise not be witnessable by the researcher. Here we are thinking about how a person's lived experiences might prime them to experience the world, or *see aspects* of situations, in a way that is *prima facie* unfamiliar or not available to a researcher who has not had those lived experiences. One example might be how a person living with HIV experiences stigmatisation in virtue of living with HIV and (all-too) pervasive attitudes to HIV. This lived experience might contribute to a competency in seeing HIV-related discrimination, degradation or discreditation in interaction that might be difficult to see or simply not available to someone who doesn't have those experiences and who is viewing from the third person perspective (Hutchinson 2022). So, we propose extending unique adequacy to encompass a kind of social vision which comes from the lived experience of the stigmatised, marginalised, racialised and minoritized. So, the researcher must address two forms of epistemic asymmetry: that of second-person/third-person asymmetry and that of experiential asymmetry.

These considerations allow us to introduce our first sense in which what we are proposing here is *Critical*. *Critical Praxeological Analysis* builds upon the insights afforded by the unique adequacy requirement and extends those by taking seriously the sense in which certain social groups might have a kind of localised experiential competency which affords them a social vision which is not automatically available to those whose life experiences have not provided them with that experiential competency. For example, someone who is regularly pulled out of immigration queues for questioning will develop a social vision more attuned to such features of queueing in certain situations than someone who has never had that experience. CPA is interested in bringing out these sometimes-overlooked features.

Critical praxeological analysis: selecting studies

A second way in which we might bring a critical edge to PA, is through the selection of topics for study. The critical praxeological analyst might, for example, deliberately select the immigration queue at a European airport as their study site, they might deliberately select a site where there have been reports of discrimination, discreditation and degradation. The important point is to resist the temptation to interpretation or imposing of exogenous figurations. The objective is the recovery of the praxeological gestalt and the members' experiences. One way in which this might be done is in studying discordant gestalts, via the study of naturally occurring, fictionalised or imagined examples. Examples of existing studies can be found in Hutchinson's study of discordant gestalts in a fictionalised stigma scenario (Hutchinson 2022) and in Watson's study of contested motives in naturally occurring data from a murder case (Watson 2023). In such studies, there appears, at first

glance at least, like there is a breakdown in communication or disagreement as to what is happening. What is found, in both cases, is that there is the emergence of discordant gestalts owing to an asymmetry in social vision (Hutchinson) or contested gestalts, based on a diversity of objectives (Watson). Finding the source of this discord in the interaction will help us make sense of the disagreement or communication breakdown. As we suggested in §5.1 (Critical praxeological analysis: extending unique adequacy and acknowledging social vision), it might be that some of this both requires the kind of social vision that comes from the sedimentation of lived experience and is related to differences in social vision. As the unique adequacy requirement reminds us, sometimes seeing an action for what it is requires a certain type of competency that *primarily* emerges from relevant lived experience.

Fanon and critical phenomenology

We move toward conclusion by saying a little more about the kinds of respecification we are recommending with specific reference to the work of Frantz Fanon. Fanon is one of the genuinely essential writers of the twentieth century; his analyses of his own experiences as a black colonial citizen in France and Algeria and of the black colonial subject more generally serve as important correctives to writings in the fields to which he contributed: existentialism, phenomenology, psychoanalysis, and Marxian thought, just as much as they deepen our understanding of the human, existential, and psychological costs of colonialism. However, as we have intimated above, the strategy of praxeology, and more specifically, *Critical Praxeological Analysis*, is to reorient our attention away from phenomenological description toward members' methods of production, maintenance, and repair of phenomena in and through which they make those phenomena witnessable.

Sociogeny

One of the most well-known contributions made by Fanon in *Black Skin, White Masks* ([1967] 2021) is the notion of sociogeny, a concept that he utilized to elucidate the connection between social phenomena, like poverty or crime, and specific population groups. Fanon argued that racialised groups are often perceived as biologically or naturally inclined towards such phenomena as poverty or crime and depicted this as a merging of, or collapsing together of, sociogeny and ontogeny. This collapsing together of sociogenic factors (social phenomena) and innate predispositions (biological features or evolutionary traits) plays a significant role in the meaning 'race' has. As Critical Praxeological Analysts, our proposal is that we turn to seeing how the meaning of 'race' is produced in interaction, in such a way as to imply or

associate it with innate characteristics. The objective is to look at theoretical claims (however powerful and insightful the theory might be) and then turn to the sites of production in language and practice.

Double consciousness and *Tacit Racism*

Before we move on to our examples, we will say something about W. E. B. Du Bois's concept of double consciousness. We discuss this because these ideas have recently been redeployed in amended form by Waverly Duck and Anne Rawls in their influential book *Tacit Racism* (2020) which, in its focus on interaction, might be thought to be similar to CPA. While we have learned much from Duck and Rawls' work, what they do differs in significant ways to what we here propose. Duck and Rawls don't propose a praxeological respecification, but rather frontload their interactional analyses by reframing Erving Goffman's idea of the interaction order, via Du Bois, as two clashing interaction orders, which clash owing to what Duck and Rawls write is 'a near absolute' black/white binary existing in the US for 350 years (2020, 6). CPA differs from what Duck and Rawls propose in that we resolutely resist such front-loading of the analysis because we want to see how the praxeological gestalts speak for themselves. The distinction comes down to the question as to what our interests in interaction are. Duck and Rawls conduct their analysis of interaction to illustrate and demonstrate their thesis about the dual interaction order and in doing so offer a powerful contribution to the literature on the threat ongoing racial divisions pose to the foundations of and continued prospects for democracy in the USA. In contrast, CPA turns to interaction to recover the praxeological dynamics through which discriminatory, discrediting, degrading, exclusionary, marginalising, racializing etc. norms and structures are maintained, repaired, challenged, strengthened, weakened, made plausibly deniable, etc.

Respecifying Fanon's critical phenomenology praxeologically

As first step in illustrating CPA we will return to the social phenomenon of the queue as a praxeological gestalt.

Witnessing discordant gestalts

We here discuss some examples of queues which were witnessed in person by one of us (KD). KD is a black woman who grew up in Ghana and London, and now lives in Manchester, UK. We offer these as brief illustrative examples. These are not studies but serve to briefly illustrate CPA.

On entering a bank, I see a queue and move to join it. A young black man and his white partner are in the queue together and having followed and contributed to the production of the established norms of the queue, moving up as the queue-member in front of them moves, maintaining roughly similar distance between themselves and the person in the queue in front of them, they eventually arrive at the front of the queue. After a little time, the light above the teller window indicates the next in line should leave the queue and go to the counter window. The white partner steps forward and heads to the next available desk, her black partner follows behind her. A security guard then approaches the black man and begins to ask him questions.

Before we discuss this, we will introduce a second example.

There is a queue at the boarding gate for a flight and the flight steward asks those who have priority boarding for first class passengers to approach the gate. A black traveller joins the queue, follows the established rules of the queue, yet is approached by a member of the ground crew who says to him, and only to him, 'this queue is only for first class passengers.'

There are many such examples. One can find numerous examples of this kind in Elijah Anderson's ethnographies; we have in mind particularly Anderson's discussion of the 2018 Philadelphia Starbucks incident (Anderson 2021, 18). However, our point is *not* an inductive point. As critical praxeological analysts we are looking for the logic in the interaction, seen through the lens of praxeological *gestalts*. Single cases are sufficient to this task. In both our examples, someone is acting methodically so as to be productive of and make accountable their membership of the queue. In doing so they are acting in the same way as other members of the queue. Recall, that part of the reason we talk of members here is to invoke Wertheimer's foundational point about *gestalten*: that the *gestalt* or whole has primacy. People comprising a queue aren't merely individuals *constructing* the queue, as depicted in social constructionist approaches, but are members of the queue and their membership is exhibited in the way they act so as to queue. However, in both our examples, there was an observer (the security guard and the flight attendant-ground crew) who questioned the membership of one person. Why? Why was the legitimacy of membership questioned in both cases? We make a number of preliminary observations. What we say here is not intended to be a complete analysis, much less exhaustive. Our discussion is meant to be illustrative and is offered in the hope that others will join the discussion.

First, we want to suggest that queues, like most social phenomena, are not and should not be analysed as general categories. A queue is not reducible to its present membership but neither is it just a queue *simpliciter*. It is this queue, for service at the bank. It is this priority queue for boarding this flight. The reason for making this point is to guard against a too generic understanding of the required membership criteria for a queue. This sets up one side of our analysis. Queue membership is not merely about *acting* in such a way as to queue, but to act in such a way as to be a member of *this* queue. This point

gives us two things to consider: 1. What are the specific features of acting in such a way as to accomplish membership of *this* queue. And 2. Is membership always within the reach of all those with practical competency and who are acting-so-as-to-accomplish-membership? In both our examples the black men who had their queue membership questioned were acting in such a way as to make accountable their membership of the queues they were in. However, in questioning them as they did, the security guard in the bank and the ground crew at the airport made accountable their own scepticism about the legitimate queue membership of the two men. The questioning from the security guard and the ground crew makes witnessable further membership criteria that are in play over and above the actions of those joining the queue. Put another way, for these two observers of the queue, the security guard and ground crew, membership of the queue also involves a kind of categorisation work and despite their actions these two men weren't in the category of people who were likely, irrespective of their actions, to be *seen as* legitimate members of their respective queues. In both cases, we might say, their blackness meant that their actions were viewed as constitutive of a different gestalt: not of queueing for service at the bank or priority queueing for a flight, but as *seeking to pass* as a member of the queue for the bank teller or priority boarding. The security guard and ground crew took themselves to have identified that this is what was happening. Another way to put this, perhaps, is as follows: what these examples testify to is that one's blackness can transform what otherwise would be seen as a member's enactment of a constitutive rule (i.e. a rule that constitutes their membership) into a breach of the same rule. The reason is that the security guard and ground crew in our examples seem to see blackness as a barrier to membership, which meant they saw queueing *as* seeking to pass at queueing and therefore in need of their repair work.

In both cases, under this analysis the phenomenon of blackness is brought into relief: for the two black men their blackness is experienced on this occasion as having led to a denial of their membership of the local situation. Their actions are denied their meaning. For the security guard and ground crew, the way they orient to blackness is as a potential exclusion criterion for the local situation. In both cases, we are gaining some insight into the local production of blackness.

Whether this is an example of the collapsing of sociogeny and ontogeny (or phylogeny) is not really the point here. We aren't seeking to *test* Fanon, as if he had produced a hypothesis for which we are now providing a praxeological test. What we are doing is looking at the way in which blackness, and what Fanon sought to capture about its phenomenology, features in and is made witnessable in interaction, in the ongoing production of blackness via the ways it is oriented to. The point is that certain characteristics, what Goffman (1963) called *attributes*, are operationalised in certain situations. Attributes are not things like melanin levels, regional accents, visible features like scars or tattoos

and such like, but are, rather, the *significance accorded to* and the local *practical entailments* of such things in specific interactional contexts. It is in such interactional contexts that the meaning of blackness (or queerness, disability, sexuality, class, etc.) are produced, maintained, repaired and contested ongoingly. This is the worksite, the shopfloor, of meaning and it is, therefore, where we should look in order to understand and challenge certain structural features of our societies.

We hope to have said enough so that our readers can produce their own analyses. The goal is not one of testing hypotheses praxeologically and nor is it one of providing the final word on the critical topic of interest. The point is to see how meaning is ongoingly produced and how structures are maintained and repaired in interaction.

Hearing a familiar tune: the categorisation work in the question “where are you from?”

Before we conclude, we will revisit the examples from [Section 4](#) (Language games as linguistic gestalts), which we used to demonstrate linguistic gestalts. We listed three examples of the use of the utterance ‘where are you from?’. We here list a fourth example, with which some readers might be familiar. The transcript⁴ is of an exchange between a royal aide, Lady Susan Hussey (SH in the transcript), and an invited visitor to a Buckingham Palace reception, Ngozi Fulani (‘me’ in the transcript), who was representing the London-based charity Sistah Space.

- (1) SH: Where are you from?
- (2) Me: Sistah Space.
- (3) SH: No, where do you come from?
- (4) Me: We’re based in Hackney.
- (5) SH: No, what part of Africa are you from?
- (6) Me: I don’t know, they didn’t leave any records.
- (7) SH: Well, you must know where you’re from, I spent time in France.
Where are you from?
- (8) Me: Here, the UK.
- (9) SH: No, but what nationality are you?
- (10) Me: I am born here and am British.
- (11) SH: No, but where do you really come from, where do your people come from?
- (12) Me: ‘My people’, lady, what is this?

⁴The transcript was produced and shared publicly by Ngozi Fulani, based on her recollection of the conversation and that of three witnesses. The veracity of the transcript was not challenged by Buckingham Palace or Lady Susan Hussey. The transcript is widely available online. The transcript we share is that reproduced on the BBC website (BBC News 2022). There is no audio of the exchange.

- (13) SH: Oh I can see I am going to have a challenge getting you to say where you're from. When did you first come here?
- (14) Me: Lady! I am a British national, my parents came here in the 50s when. . .
- (15) SH: Oh, I knew we'd get there in the end, you're Caribbean!
- (16) Me: No lady, I am of African heritage, Caribbean descent and British nationality.
- (17) SH: Oh so you're from. . .

Again, there is much to discuss here. We will restrict ourselves to two points pertinent to what we said above (Section 5 - From praxeological and linguistic gestalts to critical praxeological analysis) about epistemic asymmetries. We said there that epistemic asymmetry can emerge from the different vantage points of 2nd and 3rd person perspectives and the potential differences in social vision, based on experiential differences or differences in lived experience. Both are pertinent here.

First, recall how we began our discussion of gestalt psychology with the discussion of melody. We noted there both Ehrenfels arguments about melody not being reducible to its constituent sounds and Max Wertheimer's extending of this argument to emphasise the primacy of the gestalt. One of the consequences of these arguments is the observation that familiar melodies can be heard early in the unfolding of the melody, because the constituent sounds are experienced as regions or constituents of this melody. We want to say that something similar can be observed regarding linguistic gestalts. Certain actions or phrases can be experienced as a particular gestalt whole, for those whose lived experience has exposed them to these gestalts before. The phrase or action sequence is like the opening of a familiar melody. Just as a couple of bars are heard by someone familiar with the melody *as the melody*, and as pregnant with the rest of the melody to come, so a particular phrase or action sequence for someone with a particular lived experience can, in a particular context, be heard or seen as the whole gestalt. This is an example of what we discussed in Section 5 (- From praxeological and linguistic gestalts to critical praxeological analysis) when we discussed the social vision which might emerge from the sedimentation of lived experience and how this is a kind of development of the unique adequacy requirement.

With this in mind, let us consider the questioning in the transcript. As the questioning unfolds, through the question-and-answer sequence, it becomes clear that the question is very specific: each answer offered by Ms Ngozi, such as when she answers that she is there representing Sistah Space (line 2), and then that Sistah Space is based in Hackney (a region of London) (line 4), is subject to a repair, in lines 3. 'No' and line 5. 'No'. On each occasion the repair is followed by the question being asked in a newly-refined form. What becomes clear, therefore, is that the opening question 'Where are you from?'

and its subsequent refined versions is a question doing categorisation work. The categorisation work is something like: black people come from Africa or the Caribbean/don't come from Europe, or similar. So, we see in line 15 'Oh, I knew we'd get there in the end, you're Caribbean!'. Ngozi Fulani's initial recognition of the familiar gestalt, as she heard the opening question, is reaffirmed with each repair of her answer and each refinement and restating of the question, until the sequence of repairs and refinements climaxes in line 15 with the declaration that 'I knew we'd get there in the end. You're Caribbean', before recommencing as Ngozi Fulani rejects this categorisation in her next contribution to the conversation.

In the aftermath of this exchange going public, many commentators contributed opinion and formed judgements which sought to answer the question as to whether the line of questioning constituted racism and whether Ms Fulani was overreacting. We want to make two points in this regard. First, the question of whether a commentator judges the line of questioning racist misses the point. The question should be what 'work is being done in the exchange by the speakers?' On the second point about whether Ms Fulani overreacted, third person observers can comment on what they believe someone should feel in response to such questions in the same way a sport fan might comment on whether a player should be getting to their feet quicker following being fouled on the football pitch, or having received a low blow in boxing. But these are commentaries based on third-party judgements not on the second-person *experience*. CPA is not interested in such third-person commentary on events, but in understanding what happened. This is to reiterate the point about second person-third person asymmetry. The question as to who has seen the action correctly, which the commentators seek to answer, is commentary not analysis. In the world the harm is done. The commentator's move is like saying that seeing the faces-vase picture as a vase and not as two silhouetted faces in profile is correct because the commentator has a similar vase at home. Sure, this helps clarify to us *why they* see it as a vase, but this does not carry-over to general claims about the *right* way to see the picture for the members.

Conclusion

We have introduced a new approach to critical qualitative research, based on respecifying existing critical studies praxeologically. We here focused on questions of the interactional production, maintenance and repair of blackness in the British context, taking our lead from Frantz Fanon's critical phenomenology. However, much more could be said, even about the examples we have discussed here. We hope to have done enough to encourage others to pursue CPA studies. In conclusion, we will outline key features of CPA, which we introduced in sections 1–7.

In Sections 2–4, which were on perceptual, praxeological and linguistic gestalts, we outlined the key philosophical moves that preface the praxeological respecification we recommend. We began by outlining the insights afforded by work on gestalt features of perception (Section 2 - Perceptual gestalts). As perceivers, we don't merely respond to stimuli in the environment, we perceive and act on the meaning our world has for us, and the meaning we perceive is based on the primacy of the gestalt qualities of the objects-in-experience. In Section 3 - Praxeological gestalts, we showed how this gestaltist insight is extended to social phenomena. We briefly outlined how Harold Garfinkel inherited and developed these gestaltist ideas, reconceiving social facts as phenomena with gestalt qualities. Now, the social fact, such as the queue, is studied as a praxeological gestalt, which is produced by its members while also conferring the identity of membership (queuers, doing queuing) on those members. In Section 4 - Language games and linguistic gestalts, we showed how Ludwig Wittgenstein's metaphor of language games was based on a similar gestaltist insight about our linguistic practices. At this point we had established the resources to effect a praxeological respecification of phenomenological descriptions and other approaches to formal analytic research and we call this Praxeological Analysis. In Section 5 - From praxeological and linguistic gestalts to critical praxeological analysis, we outlined how we might move from Praxeological Analysis to Critical Praxeological Analysis through a praxeological respecification of critical scholarship and a deepening of the ethnomethodological unique adequacy requirement in recognition of the way in which lived experience might lead to an enhanced social vision. In Sections 6 - Fanon and critical phenomenology and 7 - Respecifying Fanon's critical phenomenology praxeologically, we explained and sought to demonstrate how CPA might be done by reference to and praxeological respecification of some of the insights of Frantz Fanon. The motivation behind CPA is to return us to the sites of production of social phenomena, to see how such phenomena are produced etc., to guard against depicting those we are interested in as cultural, psychological, theoretical etc., dopes and to make space for the acknowledgement not just of the productive agency of members but of their social vision.

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Notes on contributors

Khadijah Diskin She/Her is a PhD candidate in the School of Psychology at MMU. Khadijah's PhD research is on black students' experience of university life. Khadijah co-developed the successful advanced core Qualitative Methods unit at MMU with Phil. This unit pioneered teaching via deliberative fora and data session, focussed on the use of non-interview generated data and fully intergrated critical research into qualtiative methods.

Phil Hutchinson PhD. He/Him is Senior Lecturer in Applied Philosophical Psychology in the School of Psychology, Manchester Metroplitan University. Phil has a background in philosophy but has always worked across disciplines, having published work in Philosophy, Sociology, Psychology and Ethics. He works on Wittgenstein, EMCA, Praxeology and non-representational approaches to cognition and has also written on shame, stigma, the placebo response and bioethics. Phil also facilitates the weekly online Ethnomethodology reading group and is the unit leader on the core advanced qualitative methods unit at MMU which focuses on non-interview based qualitative research: QMiP2.

ORCID

Phil Hutchinson  <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-6244-1747>

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