



## Philosophia Scientiæ

Travaux d'histoire et de philosophie des sciences

26-3 | 2022

Praxeological Gestalts

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Re-specifying Gurwitsch's Law of Good Gestalt to Explicate the Projective Grammar of Actions

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### Electronic version

URL: <https://journals.openedition.org/philosophiascientiae/3674>

DOI: [10.4000/philosophiascientiae.3674](https://doi.org/10.4000/philosophiascientiae.3674)

ISSN: 1775-4283

### Publisher

Éditions Kimé

### Printed version

Date of publication: 3 November 2022

Number of pages: 123-149

ISBN: 978-2-38072-087-7

ISSN: 1281-2463

### Electronic reference

Terry S. H. Au-Yeung and Richard Fitzgerald, "Multi-layered Gestalt in Real-time Interaction", *Philosophia Scientiæ* [Online], 26-3 | 2022, Online since 18 October 2022, connection on 08 November 2022. URL: <http://journals.openedition.org/philosophiascientiae/3674> ; DOI: <https://doi.org/10.4000/philosophiascientiae.3674>

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# Multi-layered Gestalt in Real-time Interaction Re-specifying Gurwitsch's Law of Good Gestalt to Explicate the Projective Grammar of Actions

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**Résumé:** Dans sa proposition de doctorat, publiée sous le titre *Seeing Sociological*, Garfinkel [2006] a formulé l'action en termes de structure mutuellement constitutive – les structures structures noético-noématiques. Cette structure peut être rattachée à la *Gestaltpsychologie* d'Aaron Gurwitsch et à la « loi de la bonne gestalt » qui théorise la manière dont les participants donnent la priorité aux gestalts fonctionnelles par rapport aux autres significations possibles de ce qui est perceptible dans leur environnement. Alors que Gurwitsch a illustré sa théorie à l'aide d'images, dans cet article, nous revisitons la théorie de Gurwitsch à la lumière des progrès de l'enregistrement de l'interaction en temps réel, afin de considérer la gestalt dans la spatio-temporalité de l'interaction en temps réel. Nous considérons la « loi de la bonne gestalt » en termes de dimensions de temps et d'espace, et postulons deux principes analytiques – le « principe de la bonne gestalt momentanée » et le « principe de la bonne gestalt temporelle » – pour analyser un segment vidéo multi-angle d'un monologue tiré d'une séance de formation. L'analyse examine comment le monologue a été intégré dans une structure de projection multicouche, de sorte que pendant le monologue, le formateur et les stagiaires peuvent être observés comme réalisant une transition entre une activité et une autre tout en poursuivant le cours de la formation. Par ce biais, l'analyse met en évidence la structure multicouche du champ de perception des participants qui constitue leur expérience de l'activité sociale, et explore une « méthode » pour reconstruire un tel champ de perception

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structuré en ré-associant les significations aux assemblages de ressources multimodales récupérables sur la vidéo.

**Abstract:** In his PhD proposal, now published as *Seeing Sociological*, Garfinkel [2006] formulated action in terms of a mutually constitutive structure—the Noesis-Noema Structures. This structure can be traced to Aaron Gurwitsch’s gestalt psychology and Law of Good Gestalt which theorises how participants prioritise functional Gestalts over other possible meanings of what is perceivable in their surroundings. While Gurwitsch illustrated his theory using images, in this paper we revisit Gurwitsch’s theory in light of the advances in recording real-time interaction to consider Gestalt in spatio-temporality of real-time interaction. We consider the Law of Good Gestalt in terms of the dimensions of time and space, and postulate two analytical principles—the Principle of Good Momentary Gestalt and the Principle of Good Temporal Gestalt—for analysing a multi-angle video segment of a monologue taken from a training event. The analysis examines how the monologue was embedded in a multi-layer projection structure, so that during the time of the monologue, the trainer and trainees can be seen as achieving a transition between one activity to another while sustaining the frame of the training event. Through this, the analysis highlights the multi-layered structure of participants’ field of perception that constitutes their experience of the social activity, and explores a “method” to reconstruct such a structured field of perception through re-coupling meanings to the assemblages of multimodal resources recoverable on video.

## 1 Introduction

Aron Gurwitsch’s influence on Garfinkel was rediscovered only recently in the field of ethnomethodology through Anne Rawls’s [2006] introduction to *Seeing Sociologically* (published from Garfinkel’s PhD proposal) and Eisenmann & Lynch’s [2021] piece on Garfinkel’s “misreading” of Gurwitsch. Garfinkel was in contact with Gurwitsch as early as his PhD days in Harvard [Eisenmann & Lynch 2021] and his PhD proposal shows how he was influenced by Gurwitsch’s formulation of perception, attention, and unity of meaning [Garfinkel 2006]. Aron Gurwitsch was a Lithuanian-American phenomenologist who spent most of his academic life in the USA after the World War II. For Garfinkel, Gurwitsch’s work advanced a phenomenological account of the organisation of perception and in particular his phenomenological reworking of Gestalt Theory [2010, 2009], theorising how the human field of consciousness is structured to enable a person to perceive Gestalts functionally out of their stream of experience. In this paper we re-engage with Gurwitsch through

an ethnomethodological analysis of real-time multi-modal interaction by re-specifying his theory into analytic principles in order to reconstruct how participants simultaneously see different levels of projectivity at their *vivid present* from video data.

The paper begins by reviewing Gurwitsch's Gestalt Theory,<sup>1</sup> which postulates how humans practically make meaningful thematic unities, or Gestalts, out of their fields of perception. The discussion focuses on reformulating the Law of Good Gestalt into two *Principles of Good Gestalt* for reconstructing how *projections*, essentially a form of temporal Gestalt, can be ongoingly maintained and perceived as such *in situ*. Following this, the principles will be applied to analyse the video extracts recorded from a communication skills workshop for new graduate students conducted in a university in Southern China. The analysis focuses on the interaction that is provisionally seen as a transition between two learning activities. During the extract only one person, the trainer, talked. Her utterances comprised Chinese temporal indexicals (e.g., 還有呢 [also], 剛才 [just now], 現在 [now], 往下 [carry on]) and membership (e.g., 我們 [we], 他 [s/he], 你 [you]), and are accompanied by non-verbal expressions produced in compact synchronicity and diachrony. The analysis will show how the two principles of Gestalts can be applied to describe the multi-modality of the interaction in terms of a multi-layered *projection* structure, in which the indexicals in the utterances were embedded, forming their sufficient senses *in situ*. We argue that this form of analysis provides a new description structure alternative to the mono-sequential ones in ethnomethodology and conversation analysis.

To start to assemble the conceptual tools for our analysis, we begin with a discussion of Gurwitsch's work on *perception* and the *Law of Good Gestalt* before then turning to the conceptual understanding of temporal *perception* through the *Principle of Good Temporal Gestalt* and the *Principle of Good Momentary Gestalt* before finally embedding these principles in relation to the *field of attention*. From this basis our analysis sections then seek to explicate a multi-layered view of projectivity in social activity and in so doing explicate further the analysis of the structure of real-time interaction, where *projections* at different levels mutually constitute each other forming participants' wholistic *perception* at any moment and over time.

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1. Gestalt Theory or Gestalt-Theorie with which Gurwitsch engages is that of the "Berlin School" of Wertheimer, Kohler and Koffka. According to Koffka [1922], Gestalt-Theorie was a tradition developed in Germany aiming to develop a theory of everyday perception. Gurwitsch drew extensively on Husserl's writing to respecify Gestalt-Theorie into a phenomenological inquiry. This study uses "Gestalt Theory" to refer to Gurwitsch's phenomenological account without addressing its difference from the broader field of Gestalt-Theorie of the Berlin and Graz schools.

## 2 Gurwitsch's Law of Good Gestalt and perception in time and space. *Perception, Gestalt, and projection*

To Gurwitsch, *perception*, or more precisely the apprehension of perception,<sup>2</sup> is a “functionalistic” concept.

In a “functionalistic” conception there is no place for privileged perceptions. All perceptions are on the same footing so far as each depends upon two variables. Each must be characterised in terms of the factors which point to the conditions in which it occurs. If two perceptions differ from one another—that is to say, if the perceived objects *qua* perceived are given as different to the simple observation which must precede all theory—this difference must be recognised as a *real one*. [Gurwitsch 2009, 23, emphasis original]

According to Gurwitsch, each *perception* had its footing upon two variables: external and internal conditions. The external condition is the external stimuli received by one's body. The internal condition is one's status of consciousness, such as one's nomological knowledge, working memory, and egoistic self. Gurwitsch's formulation of *perception* is functionalistic (or practical) in the sense that it privileges no criteria reasoning that decontextualises any of the conditions. Instead, the reflexive *perception* associated with the set of internal and external conditions given at the immediate moment should be privileged over any analysts' theoretical consideration. This conception of *perception* is practical in the sense that humans see “constants” from the unpredictable and changeable external conditions and take it for granted so that they can see a stable and sensible situation to act upon. These meaningful constants were referred to as Gestalts in Gestalt Theory. Hence, Gestalt is spatio-temporal.<sup>3</sup>

To demonstrate this Gurwitsch [2009] used a two-dimensional figure, Rubin's vase/face visual figure, to illustrate what he meant by Gestalt (shown in Figure 1). From the figure, Gurwitsch observed two mutually exclusive Gestalts: two faces and a vase. When the two faces are seen from the figure, the vase is barely perceptible; the faces are barely perceptible when the vase is seen.

Although Gurwitsch only used the figure to show the exclusive property of a Gestalt for a perceived space, his observation also demonstrates the associated temporal aspect of the perception of a Gestalt. Gurwitsch observed

2. This non-italic “perception” refers to the ordinary notion of perception as receiving sensory stimuli from the external world.

3. In another essay, Gurwitsch [1961, 631–632] emphasised that “[a]s to reality, i.e., the perceptual world of everyday experience, the most general underlying relevancy principle is spatio-temporality”.

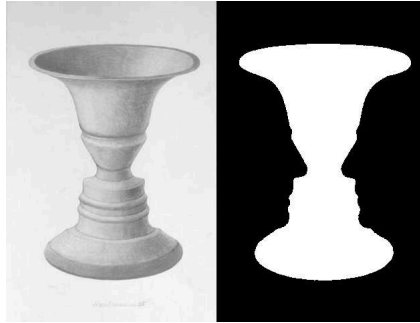


Figure 1: Rubin's vase/face figure by John Smithson 2007 at English Wikipedia CC BY-NC-ND 2.0. <https://www.illusionsindex.org/i/rubin-s-vase>.

that the two Gestalts are exclusive at a given moment (i.e., if a version of Gestalt is made from the figure at one moment, the other version is excluded from the *perception* at that moment) one can shift the seeing between the two Gestalts at two different moments. The figure is designed for this shift. Hence, even a Gestalt made from a static figure is spatio-temporal. Gestalt Theory aims to explicate the spatio-temporal organisation of Gestalt-qualities, which constitute a higher-order Gestalt quality.

While Gurwitsch demonstrated and explored Gestalt qualities with static figures and physical objects ; [e.g., “the facade of a house”, Gurwitsch 2009, 18], he did not preclude praxeological organisation in his formulation of Gestalt. On the contrary, it is clear from his discussion of “noetic analysis of perception” that he was interested in the Gestalt-coherence in a contexture of activity that constitutes the experience of it as a meaningful unity [Gurwitsch 2010]. Gurwitsch argued that underlying the Gestalt-coherence of such unity are the anticipations or expectancies given by a present perception about “certain lines of typical structure” in the future perceptual experience despite its uncertainty. In conversation analysis, “projection” or “projectivity” has been used to refer to the trajectories in conversation [Sacks, Schegloff, & Jefferson 1974], [Schwartz 1976] and story-telling [Sacks 1995], which “foreshadow”, “project”, or “prefigure” something that comes at the next moment [Jefferson 2015], [Auer 2005].<sup>4</sup> Although the term “projection” has legacy uses in philosophy, psychology, and sociology and carries all kinds of metaphorical meaning [Harvey 1996], in this paper it should only be treated as an economical label<sup>5</sup> for the technical object of thematic interested here. That is—any accountable

4. The usage was probably adopted from the “projection problem” in linguistics and philosophy. See [Sharrock & Coulter 2003] for a more detailed discussion of the “projection problem” in linguistics and philosophy.

5. We do not reject the idea that the metaphorical meaning might help readers who are unfamiliar with the treatment of projection in conversation analysis and linguistics to “reach” [*treffen*; Van de Pitte 1976] the thematic phenomenon we have in mind.

temporal structures in interaction that are produced by participants (possibly with different contribution), that synchronise their *durée* and give themselves (possibly with different extent) a common continuous retrospective-prospective “phenomenal time” [Garfinkel 2008] of intentionality.<sup>6</sup>

Neither Gurwitsch nor the early conversation analysts could sufficiently explore the spatio-temporal Gestalt-coherence of different forms of praxeological organisation, i.e., social interaction, with the “sense-data”<sup>7</sup> accessible to them. With modern data-capturing technology, video becomes accessible and makes possible studies exploring praxeological organisation’s perception from more complex sensory experience *in situ* beyond verbal exchanges [Streeck 1995], [Mondada 2007], [see Goodwin 2006, as examples]. Following these studies, along with [Streeck 1995] and [Auer 2005]’s discussions that conceptually bridge projection with Gestalt, we will treat projection as a class of Gestalt in praxeological organisation. More specifically, *projections* will be used to refer to the projective unities in a flow of participant(s)’ spontaneous acts apprehended through the *perceptions* so far. In this way *projections* have a nonnegligible difference to the Gestalt demonstrated by Gurwitsch’s use of visual figures. The *perception* of a Gestalt from a visual figure only takes the *perception* of the static Gestalt-qualities at an uninterrupted moment, while a *projection* must comprise a series of dynamic *perceptions* in which *actors* produce acts with footings that give unity to the acts. Hence, a *projection* as a Gestalt must accommodate both the Gestalt-qualities giving meaningful unity to each *perception* and the Gestalt-qualities giving unity to a series of *perceptions*. Thus, Gestalts qua a momentary *perception* will be referred to as momentary Gestalts; Gestalts qua a series of *perceptions* will be referred to as temporal Gestalts. *Projections*, as defined, are then a form of temporal Gestalts, constituted by a series of coherent momentary Gestalts.

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However, readers should be reminded that the metaphorical uses of projection in an atemporal and spatial sense is distant to what we mean here. A more detailed treatment about how projection can be used conceptually in ethnomethodological studies can be found in [Schwartz 1976, 69].

6. In Garfinkel’s 1952 manuscript for a seminar on sociology of information [Garfinkel 2008], he directly adapted Gurwitsch’s phenomenological formulation of “retention”, “protention”, and “expectation” to refer to the retrospective-prospective aspects of human communicative experience. But these terms did not reappear in his *Studies in Ethnomethodology* [Garfinkel 1967], and arguably the aspects represented by these terms are included in the formulation of “the retrospective-prospective sense of a present occurrence” [Garfinkel 1967, 40–41].

7. Gurwitsch [2010] uses this term to refer to the raw sensory particulars that constitute the lived texture of Gestalt, contrasting the positivist formulation of data featured in other forms of social scientific inquiry.

### 3 *Law of Good Gestalt* and its application to the analysis of Gestalt over space and time

In Gurwitsch's Gestalt Theory, the most important analytic law that governs how *perception* should be analysed is the *Law of Good Gestalt* (also known as the law of pregnance, the law of simplicity, the law of precision, and the law of good figure, [Gurwitsch 2009, 29], [Lidwell, Holden, & Butler 2010]). According to Gurwitsch,

Given the internal and external conditions of perception, the perceived object tends to become the best possible and strongest Gestalt. This strength and this "goodness" of Gestalt mean, phenomenally, a maximum of stability, clarity, and good arrangement and, physiologically, a minimum of expense of energy in the corresponding processes of cerebral excitation. [Gurwitsch 2009, 29]

From this quote, the *Law of Good Gestalt* can be seen as an analytical preference for intuitive *perception*. The law predicates that a good Gestalt requiring the least mental energy shall prevail. Although Gurwitsch argued that the mental efforts could be measured by the energy expended in the corresponding processes of cerebral excitement, those internal phenomena are irrelevant to the analysis of social actions because they are not empirically apparent to the *participants in situ*. Still, the law can be applied to analysing empirical data by asserting a positive relation between the mental efforts and the change, discrepancy, and non-unity of *perception*. That is, if a participant can immediately see a more stable, patterned, and united perception of a situation, that version of *perception* prevails as the participant's immediate *perception* of the situation.<sup>8</sup> In other words, unities are prioritised over discrepancies if two versions of *perception* can be seen from the data.

The *Law of Good Gestalt* can also be applied in analysing temporal Gestalts. Applying the *Law of Good Gestalt*, the analysis of momentary Gestalts will prioritise unities in the sensory particulars momentarily perceived at a space whenever possible. In other words, if some sensory particulars—visual, audio, touch, taste, and smell—are perceivable as a unity, the unity will be taken for granted unambiguously and discriminatively. For example, if a voice can be heard as attributable to a human presence in the same space, the voice will be discriminatively heard as the voice of that human exclusively. A prioritised momentary Gestalt has to be proved by its constitutiveness in the subsequent *perception*, also meaning that the momentary Gestalt can be proven by its constitutiveness in the temporal Gestalt unfolded in the next

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<sup>8</sup> It should be emphasised that such perception may not prevail when it is subjected to discursive reasoning.



moment. This analytic preference will be referred to as the *Principle of Good Momentary Gestalt*.

In the analysis of temporal Gestalt, applying the *Law of Good Gestalt* will mean that a participant would take it for granted that unities are conceivable in a flow of momentary *perceptions* whenever possible. In other words, two consecutive *perceptions* shall be taken as a Gestalt if differences in the perceived appearances at the two moments follow some sensible patterns. For example, if an *actor* perceives the appearance of a moving ship<sup>9</sup> at one moment, looks away, and then turns back seeing a ship of the same look at a different position, the two ships *qua perceptions* will be taken as one if their positions follow a sensible movement trajectory. Experiencing a temporal Gestalt at the moment constitutes the experience through a flow of time up until that moment and portends the next moment. In other words, the experiencing constitutes a part of the experiencing of “what is happening now”. This conscious experience of now-ness at a given moment is an actor’s local conscious horizon [Brown 1999], [Gurwitsch 2010]. The prioritised temporal Gestalt has to be proved by its constitutiveness in how things unfold at the next moment. This analytic preference will be referred to as the *Principle of Good Temporal Gestalt*.

## 4 Attention—The interplay between the Gestalts in the two dimensions

When the *Principle of Good Temporal Gestalt* and the *Principle of Good Momentary Gestalt* are considered together, an analytical tension emerges. The former principle predicates an analytic preference for unity in the *perceptions* across a flow of time-space. In contrast, the second principle predicates an analytic preference for the maximum unity in the sensory particulars perceivable in a momentary time-space. These two preferences have an analytic tension because the former implies excluding part of perceivables to form a unity across *perceptions* and the latter implies including the maximum perceivables for the unity in a *perception*. This tension could be resolved by introducing the concept of *attention*.

Two senses of *attention* is our interest here. The first sense may be referred to as *the field of attention* referring to the momentary attended-or-not-attended distinction among the sense-data in the actor’s surrounding. For example, at a dining table when more than one conversation happens at the same time, it is common for a person to find him or herself focusing their listening only on one speaker and missing out the talk of another speaker of close proximity. In this case, we can say the person is attending to the first

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9. A ship is used as an example because the persistent identity of an object through time is relevant to the thought experiment Ship of Theseus [Chisholm 1976].

speaker and is not attending to the other speaker in the sense of differentiating the perceivable and the perceived.

Gurwitsch attempted to address this sense of *attention* by a *theme-thematic field-margin* structure [Gurwitsch 2010], [Arvidson 1992], modified after William James's field theory, but the structure is unsatisfactory from a third-person phenomenology's point of view [Anderson & Sharrock 2018]. For example, an observer may tell that another actor is watching a "bird in flight" [Gurwitsch 2010, 484] by perceiving the actor's orientation moving in relation to a co-present flying bird. In Gurwitsch's terminology, the flying bird is the actor's *theme*. But then it is impossible for the observer to demarcate a *thematic field* or a *margin* independent of the *theme* because the accountability of "watching a bird in flight" is embedded in the observer's total perception of the actor and the surrounding, including the bird and the sky. Still, an observer can epathetically apprehend an actor's eccentric *field of attention*<sup>10</sup> radiated from the actor's accountable focus at a given moment [Yao, Gao *et al.* 2011]. By seeing an actor as watching a bird in flight, the observer would see the bird as the actor's accountable focus, and the further away a copresent object is from the bird the less likely it is attended by the actor.

The second sense of *attention* of interest is an expectation for where the actor casts his or her *field of attention* in order to participate in social activity. For example, a teacher can fault a student for "not paying attention" for missing what the latter is supposed to hear or see in the class. This sense is closer to Kahneman's [1973] conception of *attention*. He defined *attention* as a cognitive allocation policy of arousal capacity determined by an *actor's* evaluation of the demands on their arousal capacity for the primary task they are engaging and the evaluation is portended by the *actor's* understanding of what has been happening in the immediate past. Doing a third-person phenomenology, we cannot find out an actor's allocation of cognitive effort. Still, we can turn Kahneman's definition as a postulate for *attention*. That is, asserting attention to be a protentional [Gurwitsch 2010, 463] component in a *projection*—the awareness of where the continuation comes to and where the *field of attention* should cast next. In other word, *attention* is a constituent of seeing an ongoing *projection* constituted by the participants' reflexive understanding about where and how much their perceptual effort should be paid.

Taking *attention* as a constitutive part of *projections*, the analyses of *projections* can apply the two *Principle of Good Gestalt* in two hierarchical ways. First, suppose the participants appear to have stationary focused attention. In that case, the *Principle of Good Temporal Gestalt* precedes and the range of instantaneous *perception* relevant to the ongoing *projection* would

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10. Yao, Gao *et al.* [2011] conducted an experiment showing how the eccentricity of visual perceivables from a participant's focal point is negatively related to their accuracy of instantaneous *perception* of the perceivables. However, we do not suggest every sensory field has the same eccentric pattern as the visual field.

be analytically prioritised. Then the *Principle of Good Momentary Gestalt* follows in making sense of the maximum unity in the perception radiated from that range of instantaneous *perception*. Second, on the other hand, if the participants abruptly redirect their attention to previously unattended or less attended perceivables, the *Principle of Good Momentary Gestalt* precedes to make sense of the maximum unity in their redirected *field of attention*. At the same time, the previously seen ongoing *projection* can still be seen as constitutive in analysing whether the immediate seeing from the redirected *field of attention* would be seen as a part of the ongoing *projection*. In sum, two rules of application for the Principles can be postulated. 1) The *Principle of Good Temporal Gestalt* precedes the *Principle of Good Momentary Gestalt* if the *field of attention* of the participants appears to be stationary. 2) The *Principle of Good Momentary Gestalt* precedes the *Principle of Good Temporal Gestalt* if the *field of attention* of the participants appears to be redirected. From here we now move to illustrate this by presenting an analysis of the apparent transition between two learning activities from the data extract and explore how these two principles may be applied during the analysis to reconstruct the *projection* from the multi-modal contexture captured by video data.

## 5 Analysis

### 5.1 The extracts and the interactional history

The following data extract was selected from a 7-hour video recording of a communication workshop for new master's students at a university in Southern China, using Mandarin Chinese as their medium of instruction. To differentiate a *projection* transition from a turn transition, we select an episode of an extended monologue by the trainer. As we will argue through the analysis, in the episode, she explicitly constructs a transition of the temporal frame, which was "passed" [Garfinkel 1967, 167]. Figure 2 shows the generic visual appearance of the participants' configuration throughout the episode, and labels the participants who will be named in the analysis (in pseudonyms). The configuration can be seen as a classroom setting that predicates educational interaction, or namely a {class},<sup>11</sup> in progress.

We break down the episode into two extracts, Extract 1 and Extract 2 below, with an overlap in between. Figure 3 shows the symbols used to transcribe the three patterns of embodied movements appearing in the Extracts: transiting between movements, continuing a movement trajectory, and holding

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11. The labels in curly bracket denote that analysts' category for readers to better collect a facet of "the locally produced, naturally accountable lived phenomenon of order\*" [Garfinkel 2002, chap. 1, footnote 12 (asterisk original)] in terms of their own cultural experience.



Figure 2: The keys for the extracts.

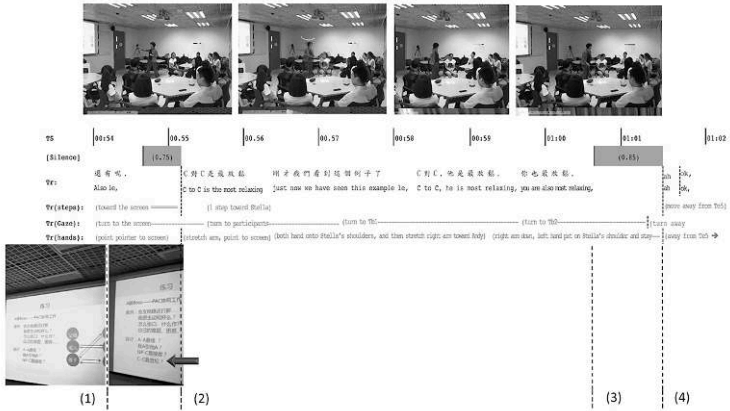
a position. At the beginning of Extract 1, the trainer was talking to the trainees about the PowerPoint slide shown on the screen. During Extract 1, the trainer talked and gesturally called attention to two trainees, Stella and Andy, who sat away from their tables. At the end of the extract, the trainer’s finished the first theme of her monologue with a pause and an “ah ok”. After the “ah ok” and from “那我們現在呢 [*na we now le*]” in Extract 2, the trainer initiated a transition into a new theme. Despite the lack of explicit formulation of what the new theme is about, the formulation of “往下練 [*carry on practice*]” was seemingly passed by the participants as sufficient to index what will happen next. The analysis below aims to describe how this apparent transition was done by the trainer and passed by the trainees.

An interactional history of what came before the episode can be described in conjunction with the visual resource available during the extract. In this episode, a PowerPoint slide was ongoingly shown on the projector’s screen before Extract 1, providing a way of tracing what had happened.

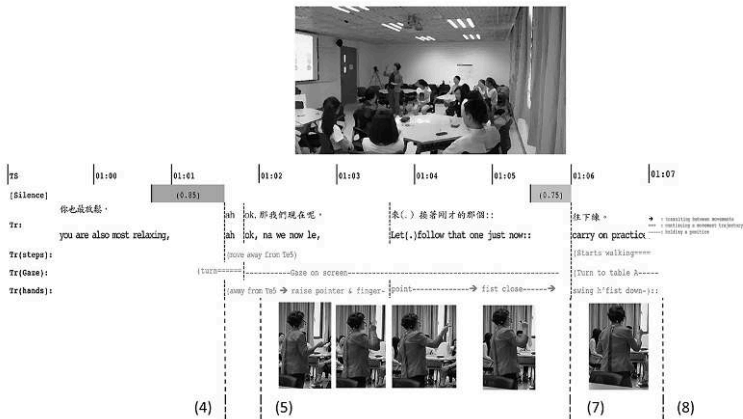
A snapshot of the slide at the moment when Extract 1 begins was shown at (1) in the extract. The slide’s header captured the content of the theme, “練習[Practice]” (see Figure 4<sup>12</sup> for the enlarged image of the slide). It referred to a planned experiential roleplay exercise based on the transactional analysis model in psychology—PAC [standing for Parent-Adult-Child categorisation of ego states, see Turner 1988]—introduced to the trainees in the previous slide.

The trainer added animation to the slide, so that information appeared on cue as she spoke. At the beginning only the title “練習[Practice]” was shown with the matching diagram on the right of the slide. The coloured diagram illustrated different pairings between ego states according to the PAC model, for example, Parent-to-Parent and Parent-to-Child. Going through

12. Figure 4 shows the slide along with the English translation.



(a) Extract 1



(b) Extract 2

Figure 3: Transcription symbols for different patterns of embodied movements.

the different pairings, the trainer asked the two trainees, Stella and Andy, to act out prototypical transactions of the respective pairings. After that the trainer went through the lines on the slide as she showed them one by one, introducing a forthcoming roleplay exercise, with a topic on the next line of the slide “A做 Boss—PAC 協同工作 [A to be the Boss—PAC working together]”. Then she instructed the trainees about cases from which they could choose for the roleplay exercise (see the upper cluster of points titled with “案例 [Case]” on the slide). Following that, she showed the lower cluster of points titled “探討 [Discussion]” and directed the trainees’ attention to a series of points

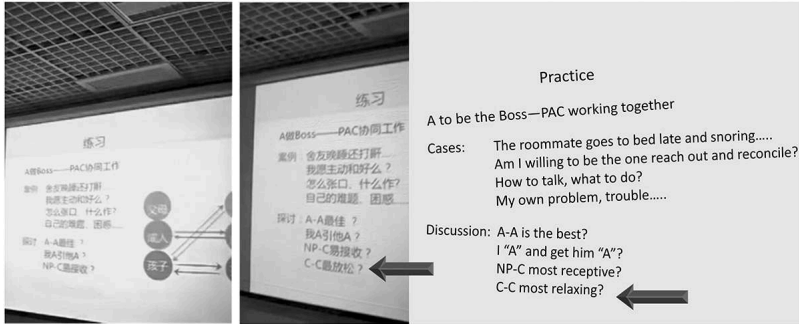


Figure 4: The new appearance of the projector's screen at (2) in Extract 1 with English translation (Extruded arrows added).

appearing on cue about what trainees could discuss in group preparation for the roleplaying. Extract 1 starts from when she finished up the third point and started the fourth point.

The slide can be seen as the footing of a temporal order, namely {slide}, portending relevance of the roleplay instruction into Extract 1. And as a new point shows up under “*探討* [Discussion]”, it can be presumed that the trainer was going to talk about another {discussion point} in a way similar to the third point.

In Figure 4, this interactional history is summarised into a *projection* structure provisionally relevant to Extract 1. The grossest level [Schegloff 1992, 213] at the top of the structure is the {class} observed from the configuration. At the middle level is the {slide} that framed Stella and Andy's acting and the following instructions as relevant to the forthcoming exercise. These two levels are framed by horizontal brackets in broken lines to denote that they are provisional observations of the interactional history before the extract. The bottom level is the {discussion point} portended to be delivered. It is denoted differently with a rounded broken-outlined rectangular block because the analysis is concerned with the organisation within this time frame. For easier reference, these three layers of *projections* will be denoted as the top oPj{class},<sup>13</sup> the middle oPj{slide}, and the bottom oPj{discussion point} respectively.

13. Here, oPj abbreviates “on-going projection”.

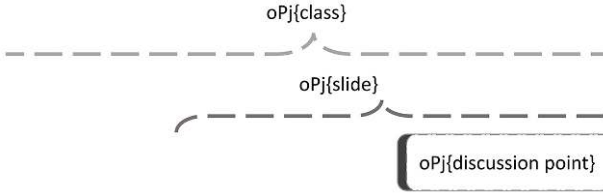


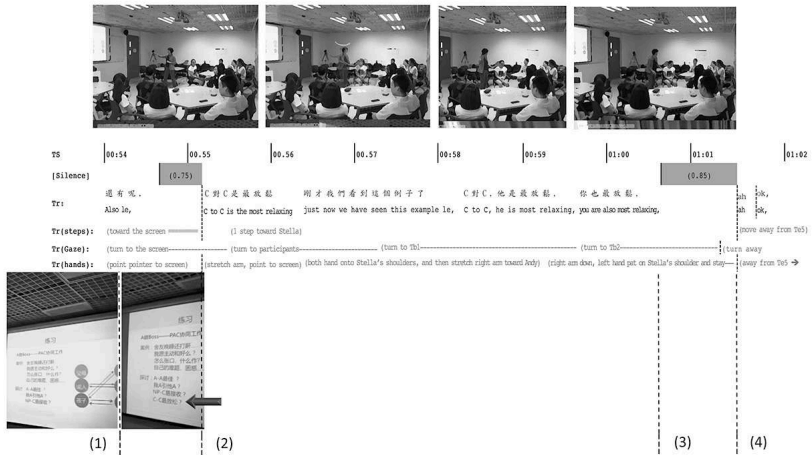
Figure 5: A provisional structure of what was happening.

## 5.2 Part 1: Prospective indexicals for an upcoming next point

Extract 1 starts with the trainer producing the conjunctive particle “還有呢 [Also *le*]” at the time stamp 00:54. Right before this, the trainer is talking with her body facing the trainees. As she produces “還有呢 [Also *le*]”, she moves toward the projector’s screen, turns her gaze toward the screen, and her right hand points the laser pointer toward the screen. In addition, between (1) and (2) in Extract 1, a fourth point reading “C-C最放鬆 [C-C most relaxing]” (pointed to by a red arrow in Figure 5) appears in the lower cluster of points on the slide. From the visual arrangement, it appeared to be subordinate to the “探討 [Discussion]”. Positioning near the lower margin of the slide, it also appears as the last or nearly the last point in the “探討 [Discussion]”, portending an ending of the {slide}. In this part of the analysis, we will focus on demonstrating explicitly the application of the two *Principle of Good Gestalt* to show how their combined application can explicate a multi-layered now-ness that constitutes the Gestalt of actors’ action *in situ*. Given the trainer has been talking, by the *Principle of Good Temporal Gestalt* the trainer’s talk can be seen as being prefigured as the focal point of the trainees’ *field of attention* and has a priority over other modes<sup>14</sup> of embodied expression (i.e., gesture and proxemics). The particles “還有呢 [Also *le*]” can be provisionally heard as a token portending a theme which is new but relevant to the previous talk. Given the synchronicity between the talk and other simultaneous modes<sup>15</sup> of expression (i.e., gesture, spatial movement, and the change in the PowerPoint slide), by the *Principle of Good Momentary Gestalt* unity shall be analytically prioritised in making sense of the trainer’s action at that moment. Hence if unity is possible, the other simultaneous modes of expression should be seen in unity with the conjunctive function of “還有呢 [Also *le*]”. Because all three expressions (change in proxemics, gaze and hand

14. Here mode refers to parts of expression characterizable by how they are produced by the body.

15. In this study, a mode refers to parts of expression characterizable by how they are produced by the actor’s body. They can be any perceivables in the space relevant and attributable to the body.



Extract 1

gestures) show an orientation toward the projection's screen, the referential meaning of “還有呢 [Also *le*]” can be heard as oriented toward the projector's screen. Together, the trainer can be seen as producing an action of directing the trainees' attention to something coming up on the screen.

Following “還有呢 [Also *le*]” is a 0.75 s silence where the trainer portends a turn but stops speaking while maintaining her spatial position, gaze, and hand gesture. It is during the silence that the new point “C-C最放鬆 [C-C most relaxing]” appears on-screen at (2). Because the trainer's gesture is sustained during the silence, the referential force of “還有呢 [Also *le*]” can be seen as maintained over the silence, forming a temporal Gestalt of indexing fulfilled when “C-C最放鬆 [C-C most relaxing]” appears on the screen. In other words, “還有呢 [Also *le*]” works as a “prospective indexical” [Goodwin 1995, 117].

### 5.3 Part 2: Indexicals invoking a multi-layered now-ness

After “還有呢 [Also *le*]”, the trainer reads the new point on the screen producing “C對C是最放鬆 [C to C is the most relaxing]”, glossing a new oPj{discussion point} started. In the middle of producing “C對C是最放鬆 [C to C is the most relaxing]”, the trainer changes parts of her bodily orientation, turning her gaze toward the trainees and then moving a step toward Stella. She keeps directing her pointer toward the screen until she completes the utterance. By the time she completes her utterance she has moved close to Stella and is



standing next to her. As soon as she starts producing “剛才我們看到這個例子了 [just now we have seen this example *le*]”, she puts down her pointer and puts both of her hands above Stella’s shoulder. The movement is shown by an overlaid image in the second frame of the snapshots in Extract 2 and enlarged in Figure 6 below. In this part of the analysis, we will show a multi-layered now-ness made relevant by the trainer’s action. Despite the changes in the



Figure 6: The overlaid image showing the trainer transition from pointing at the screen to putting both hands above Stella’s shoulder.

trainer’s bodily orientation and the pauses between her utterances, there is always a mode, the physical mode or the verbal mode, which sustains a sense of continuity. And a changed physical mode always redirects the trainees’ attention to an object in the space relevant to a next utterance. Figure 7 illustrates this organisation and flow of action shown, highlighting how the relay-like multi-layered diachrony in the trainer’s expression. By the *Principle of Good Temporal Gestalt*, the relay produces a sense of continuity that sustains the oPj{discussion point} because at any point of time at least one mode of the trainer’s expression is uninterruptedly produced. This diachronic pattern can be referred to as a *continuity relay*, sustaining a smooth continuity despite changes within the frame of the oPj{discussion point}, presented in Figure 7.

Here we are interested in the final utterance “剛才我們看到這個例子了 [just now we have seen this example *le*]” in the *continuity relay*. This utterance has three indexicals: “剛才 [just now]”, “我們 [we]” and “這個例子 [this example]”. We argue that the sufficient senses of what they index are embedded in a multi-layered sense of what is going on, i.e., now-ness. And this sense of multi-layered sense of now-ness is constituted by both the *continuity relay* within the oPj{discussion point} and the *projection* structure portended by the interactional history achieved before the extract (cf. Figure 4 above).

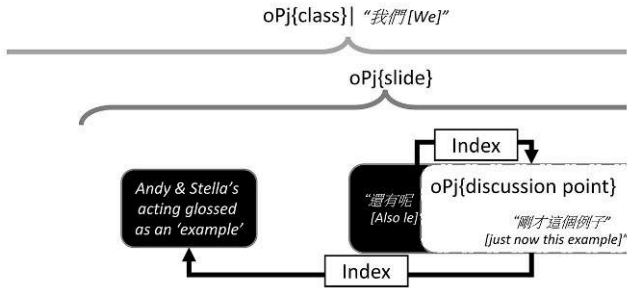


Figure 7: An abridged flow of the trainer’s work in the provisional  $oPj\{\text{discussion point}\}$  so far.

Situated within the *continuity rally*, “剛才我們看到這個例子了 [just now we have seen this example *le*]” is portended to be a part of the  $oPj\{\text{discussion point}\}$ . In the utterance, the “剛才 [just now]” can refer to a recent past experience, and “我們 [we]” can invoke the ongoing participatory framework, i.e., the omni-relevant device “class”, comprised by the trainer and the trainees. Hence, “this example” in “我們看到這個例子 [we have seen this example]” can index an experience commonly “seen” by the class during its relevant *projection*, i.e., the  $oPj\{\text{class}\}$  so far.

By the *Principle of Good Temporal Gestalt*, the trainer’s multi-modal expressions in the utterance should be comprehended<sup>16</sup> by prioritising their unity. And they should be comprehended according to their sequential order. First, the trainer gesturally refers to Stella and produces “剛才 [just now]” synchronously. Together, “Stella” (Stella as a sign) and the lexical indexical can form a contexture to invoke a common experience relevant to “Stella” “看到 [seen]” by the class in a recent past. Then, “這個例子 [this example]” narrows down the past “Stella” experience to an “example” of sequential proximity. The overall assertive stance in the utterance predicates a preference organisation that the trainees should know this recent “example”, warranting the trainer to “bring this past to the present” for the class.

Here, the interactional history becomes relevant to specify what this “example” is. As mentioned when introducing this extract, Stella and Andy were assigned as role-players to act out some prototypical transactions according to the pairings in the PAC model shown at the beginning of the current PowerPoint slide. Assuming the temporal sequence of  $oPj\{\text{slide}\}$  has followed the slide’s visual order, Stella and Andy’s acting can be seen as a subordinate *projection* of  $oPj\{\text{slide}\}$  preceding the series of  $\{\text{discussion points}\}$  being delivered. Hence, “剛才 [just now]” can be heard as invoking this intra-

16. In the analysis, the word “comprehend” refers to the analytical practice of discursively analysing how the participants may apprehend an utterance.

*projection* sequence to refer to the just-completed subordinate *projection*. And this just-completed *projection* is glossable as “examples” because the acting exemplified the psychological theory taught.

In other words, the PowerPoint slide, the gestural referral to “Stella”, and the utterance are “indexical particulars” [Garfinkel 1967, 181], which constitute a Gestalt invoking the multi-layered *projection* structure to index a strip of past experience as an “example” for the current point oPj{discussion point}.

This Gestalt can further apply to comprehend the trainer’s next utterance: “C對C,他是最放鬆,你也最放鬆 [C to C, he is the most relaxed, you are also the most relaxed]”. The utterance reuses some of the lexical particles shown in the PowerPoint slide and used in the utterance “C-C最放鬆 [C-C most relaxing]”. However, additional indexicals “他 [he]” and “你 [you]” are added to the formulation, with synchronous indexing gestures of stretching hands toward Andy and Stella respectively. Given the synchronicity, “他 [he]” and “你 [you]” can be heard as referring to Andy and Stella. Situated in the temporal Gestalt so far, the references to Andy and Stella can be seen as referring to the “Andy” and “Stella” seen in the “example”. So the utterance can be heard as establishing the relevancy between the abstract discussion point “C-C最放鬆 [C-C most relaxing]” and the specific detail of Andy and Stella’s acting co-experienced by the class earlier within the oPj{slide}.

In this part, by applying the two *Principles of Good Gestalt* we have shown that the sufficient sense of the trainers’ utterance is embedded in a multi-layered now-ness. Figure 8 summarises these layers of now-ness that have been invoked and sustained in the part of Extract 1 analysed so far. In the

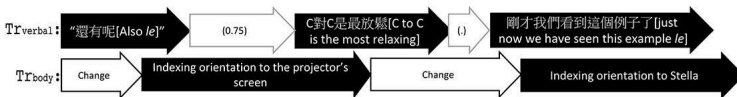
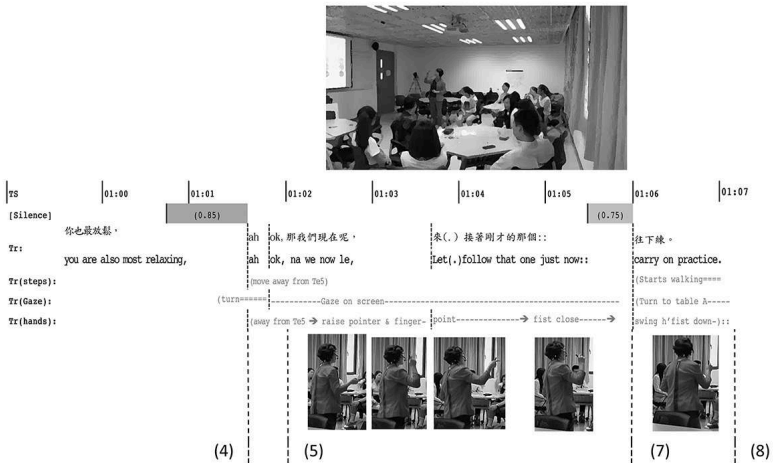


Figure 8: The refined multi-layered structure of what was happening.

figure, two indexing relations are highlighted. The first one is denoted by the black arrow leading from the top of the oPj{discussion point} containing “還有呢 [Also le]”, to the right to the main body. It represents that the multi-modal expression of “還有呢 [Also le]” prospectively indexes the oPj{discussion point} and reflexively constitutes its start. The second indexing relation is marked by the black arrow leading below from the main body of the oPj{discussion point} to the left. This represents that oPj{discussion point} retrospectively indexes the prior acting performed by Stella and Andy within the oPj{slide}. In Garfinkel’s [2002, chap. 6] terms, the trainer has achieved the pairing between an “instruction” (i.e., the abstract discussion point) and the relevant “instructed action” (i.e., Andy and Stella’s acting).

## 5.4 Part 3: Transiting to a new now-ness within the multi-layered projection structure

In the final part of analysis we will build upon the multi-layered temporal structure explicated in Extract 1 in examining the next Extract 2 below. Following the demonstration of how a *projection* is started and sustained within a multi-layered temporal structure. This part of the analysis will explicate how ongoing projections can interactionally reach their ending and then transition into a new now-ness. Specifically, we will explicate what the trainer was trying to do with the 0.85s silence and “ah ok” following the *continuity rally* explicated in Part 2. Upon the completion of “C對C，他是



Extract 2

最放鬆，你也最放鬆 [C to C, he is the most relaxed, you are also the most relaxed]”, the oPj{discussion point} produces an instruction-and-instructed-action pair about a point to be discussed by the trainees when they go onto the preparation for the roleplay exercise. At least two sequential structures have been achieved, projecting an ending of some ongoing projections and a transition into new ones. First, within the oPj{slide}, an “unexpanded version” [Jefferson & Schenkein 1977] of an elicitation-response-feedback (ERF) sequence [Heap 1985] has become accountable, comprising asking Stella and Andy to act, the acting, and then feedback on the acting. The accountable achievement portends a potential ending for the oPj{slide}. Also, going through the slide part by part (from the coloured diagram, the upper cluster, and then to the lower clusters) and line by line (the points within each cluster), the slide becomes filled out. This visual sequential structure portends that

the trainer may have gone through all the planned content in the slide and therefore portends an ending and transition from the oPj{slide}.

Upon this projectivity, the trainer pauses for 0.85 s and then produces the utterance “ah ok” at (3). Given the projectivity, the pause can signal a completion of the discussion point. But at the same time, the trainer almost freezes her hands’ gesture, keeping her left hand on Stella’s shoulder. Again, like in the *continuity rally* when her verbal mode of expression changes, her gestural mode does not.

Consider the silence first. The silence can be heard as a possible transition relevant place (TRP) [Sacks, Schegloff, & Jefferson 1974]. At least two conditions of the Gestalt accomplished so far enable the silence to be heard as such. First, as analysed above, a sufficient pedagogical sense of the discussion point is achieved. Someone else initiating a turn here will not interrupt the accountable projection structure. Second, during the silence, the trainer suspends her talk and gestural movement, producing a momentary Gestalt of a vacant time-space for other to self-select. Combining these conditions, the silence can be heard as a TRP for the reciprocal category trainees to self-select to speak.

The production of this vacancy can be seen as the trainer’s method to “make the floor accessible” [Mondada 2013] and hold the “floor” at the same time. The holding-the-floor part is produced by the trainer’s frozen gesture and proxemic that deviates from their “home position” [Sacks & Schegloff 2002]. According to Sacks & Schegloff, “home position” is the accountability of some phenomena of variation—“the departure from and the return to home” [Sacks & Schegloff 2002, 138]—dependent on the “so-called contexts of interaction” [Sacks & Schegloff 2002, 137]. In our case, a stand-up gesture of the trainer at the central area of the classroom was the home position for the oPj{class}, which the trainer departs from and returns to when she did not direct the trainees’ attention to a particular object in the space. Hence, as the trainer moved next to and leaned forward toward Stella, she departed from her home position. And as she does it in conjunction with elaborating the discussion point, that departure becomes a part of her floor—or more accurately her attention directing device—specific to her ongoing business in the oPj{discussion point}. The departure from the home position portended a return to home when the oPj ended. Hence, while the trainer produced a TRP at the turn level, freezing her away-from-home position allowed the trainer to hold a degree of attention upon her and to resume action with a return-to-home act in her own time. Besides maintaining the trainer’s attention, this method of making the floor accessible avoids a strong preference organisation for a question (i.e., a moral organisation in which the absence of a question in the next turn is dis-preferred and consequential) because the trainer can resume her turn as if the ongoing *continuity rally* were not interrupted.

The simultaneous expression of “ah” then ends the making-the-floor-accessible and holding-the-floor. First, the trainer produces new expressions

both verbally and gesturally. She produces “ah” ending the silence and at the same time moves her hands away from Stella while simultaneously stepping away from Stella and thereby ending the frozen posture. These expressions clearly terminate the suspension sustained through the silence and resume the floor to talk.

But situated at the oPj{discussion point}, the trainer also ends the sustained projectivity by stopping the gestural referral to Stella, fulfilling the ending of the oPj{discussion point} portended. In addition, the making-the-floor-accessible-and-closing-up-the-floor pair can be glossed as an absence of question from the trainees. Situated at the oPj{slide}, it can also be heard as a “passing device” [Garfinkel 1967, 167] for that the instruction about the upcoming “練習[Practice]” has been heard and will be followed (i.e., let it pass unless the trainees expressed otherwise). Hence, the production of “ah” not only ends the oPj{discussion point} but also portends the ending for the oPj{slide}. Therefore, the subsequent “ok” can be heard not only as an “utterance-final conjunctive particle” [Haugh 2008], [Sato 2017], completing the extended utterance about the discussion point, but also as a “procedural relevant particle” [Looney, Jia, & Kimura 2017] that ends oPj{slide} and portends the transition.

The protention for transition constituted in the meaning of “那我們現在呢 [*na we now le*]”. It uses “現在 [now]” to prospectively indexing a relevant new now-ness “我們 [we]” the class is transiting into. Ending of the oPj{slide}, this new now-ness can be perceived as a *projection* subsequent to the ending one at the same *projectivity* level. Hence, “現在 [now]” retrospective-prospectively delineates the new now-ness from the proceeding time, marking the oPj{slide} as a past, i.e., a completed Pj{slide}. Here, it can be said that the transition between the two *projections* have been achieved. The transition and indexing relation are summarised in Figure 9. This figure

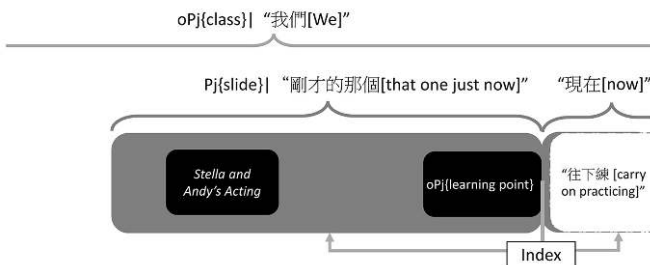


Figure 9: The transition illustrated in terms of the multi-layered projection structure.

shows an important implication of applying the two *Principle of Good Gestalt*. In a broader frame of an ongoing *projection*, a sufficient ending of a subordinate *projection* portends the start of another subordinate *projection*, and they

are reflexively constitutive. By the *Principle of Good Temporal Gestalt* an important property of an ongoing *projection* is that its *participants'* work in the relevant space is always potentially attributable to the *projection* until its ending is sufficiently achieved, unless its underlying orderliness is abruptly violated. With no irrelevant change in the members' *field of attention*, the *Principle of Good Temporal Gestalt* precedes the *Principle of Good Momentary Gestalt*. Therefore, the layers of temporal Gestalt accomplished within the ongoing *projection* are always potentially relevant and should be analytically prioritised in making sense of any new momentary *perception* within time-space relevant to the ongoing *projection's attention*. In other words, a new momentary *perception* should be comprehended according to the *attention* portended by the ongoing *projection* and taken as attributable to it, unless the projectivity of the ongoing *projection* is accountably discontinued. So if the broader *projection* does not come to an end, the ending of its subordinate *projection* would portend the start of a new subordinate *projection* because the broader *projection's attention* portends a relevant next to re-occupy the interactional time-space left vacant.

## 6 Conclusion

In this paper we have explored the relevancy of Gurwitsch's Gestalt Theory in analysing the multi-layered understanding of what happened to participants in an interaction. Two analytical principles are formulated out of the *Law of Good Gestalt*: the *Principle of Good Temporal Gestalt* and the *Principle of Good Momentary Gestalt*. Throughout the analysis, the principles were useful in analysing how the class achieved a transition between two learning activities between Extract 1 and 2.

The analysis of Extract 1 shows how the trainer's multi-modal expression *in vivo* mutually constituted and sustained a multi-layered *projection* structure in delivering a discussion point. It shows how the trainer's temporal indexicals gained sense through the multi-layered *projection* structure and how they form a Gestalt that invoked the prior practice within the current instruction sequence as a resource to reformate the abstract discussion point on the screen into the discussion point *of* the practice. The analysis of Extract 2 then shows how the mezzo-level<sup>17</sup> *projections* in the multi-layered *projection* structure—delivering a discussion point and the broader delivery of its slide—came to their endings. It shows that the trainer temporarily opened the floor for the trainees' questions and then produced (with the trainees) an absence-of-question-and-acknowledgement pair to end the discussion point and pass the “learning” as achieved. They made the ending of the slide relevant

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17. The word *mezzo* is used to denote the phenomenal field relatively grosser than the moment-to-moment speech and acts but more granular than the event. The use is not intended to establish a codified schema of phenomenon.

and portended a new activity at the same temporal level. The ending was realised by the trainers' retrospective-prospective reference for the sequentiality between now-nesses and hence achieved the transition from the last learning activities to a new one.

The analyses of the extracts also evince how meanings of action are embedded in a multi-layered *projection* structure reflexively constructed by the real-time co-production of multi-modality by participants, even during silence.<sup>18</sup> The trainer made pauses in both extracts producing the 0.75 s and the 0.85 s silence respectively, and they did very different things *in situ*. The first 0.75 s of silence in Extract 1 was embedded in the referential force cast by the utterance “還有呢 [also *le*]” and sustained and developed by other embodied acts orienting toward the projector screen. In our analysis we show that the silence was not vacant of the trainer's actions, but it was instead the continuation of an action of drawing the trainees' attention to the upcoming point on the slide. In contrast, in the trainer's 0.85 s silence in Extract 2 she paused her talking and also froze her gesture. Embedded at the time when the ongoing instruction is ending, the act of halting her verbal and non-verbal expressions together is accountable as opening up the floor for questions. So, while the trainer suspended her turn of talk, she was still producing an action by being silent.

Two characteristics of the *perception of projections* are therefore manifested. First, Gestalt is not only applicable to the *perception* of static physical objects, but also to that of *projections*, i.e., praxeological assemblages of speech and acts over time. These *projections* are perceivable by participants in a face-to-face interaction through their multi-sensorial spatio-temporal fields of *noesis*. Using video as our data, we can partly recover these fields of perception through observing the audio-visual appearances to which the participants would attend as per their embodied orientation. We can then make sense of those appearances from a third-person perspective as exhaustive as possible through constructing robust noema-noesis structures using analytical principles derived from Gurwitsch's *Law of Good Gestalt*.

Second, the adequate meaning of a praxeological Gestalt, or an action in short, in interaction is not only predicated by its sequential antecedent. It is also constituted by *projections* projected at some broader temporal levels (i.e., started earlier than the action concerned and portending a longer time frame than it) and sustained by their respective projective order. Reflexively, these broader projections are retended, portended, constituted, and fulfilled by the continuous production of actions at the lower temporal levels, and those lower-level actions can also constitute mezzo-level *projections* that transit sequentially like the actions. Therefore, underlying such analysis is a constitutive logic, where *projections* at different levels mutually constitute

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18. This multi-layered *projection* structure is also a time structure of the social activity, which couple participants' Kairos about what is happening with how things happen in Chrono. See [Au-Yeung & Fitzgerald In press] for more detailed discussion.



each other forming participants' wholistic *perception* at any moment (i.e., momentary Gestalt) and over time (i.e., temporal Gestalt). They all interweave to form a reasonable "total picture" [Sacks 1995, I, 119] that gives the social activity in question its "haecceities" [Garfinkel 1991].

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