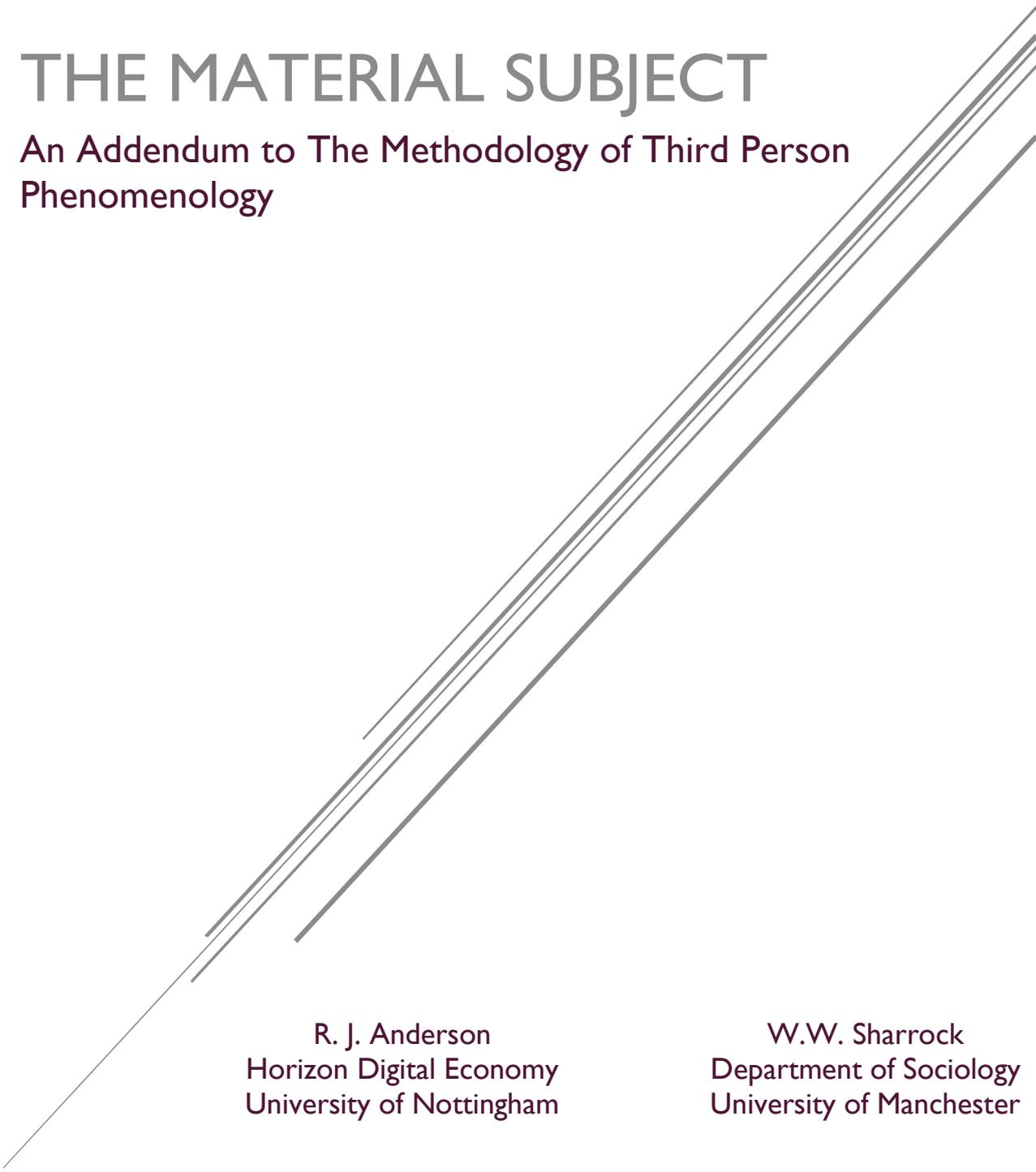


THE MATERIAL SUBJECT

An Addendum to The Methodology of Third Person
Phenomenology



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The Material Subject and TPP

AN ADDENDUM TO THE METHODOLOGY OF THIRD PERSON PHENOMENOLOGY

1.0 THE CONTEXT

- 1.1. In our monograph *The Methodology of Third Person Phenomenology (MTPP)*, we lay out a set of principles to guide the modality of Ethnomethodology (EM) we are interested in exploring. These principles come in two broad linked packages: an investigative epistemology we label “keyed descriptions” and an investigative metaphysics we identify as “the workflow of sense assembly”. The principle of keyed descriptions is the grounding of sociological accounts in the evidence of data without a corollary commitment to veritism. The workflow of sense assembly stipulates the social objects and processes which comprise keyed descriptions are based on a conception of consociate life as interpretive social action. Central to the formation of our investigative metaphysics is a methodic principle of free variation. The choice of objects and processes is ours to make in the light of the investigative interests we are pursuing.
- 1.2. Alongside our investigative epistemology and metaphysics, we offer a pair of “specimen” analyses which demonstrate how TPP accounts of social order might be wrought using the given principles. Having completed the monograph and loosed it upon the world, it has become apparent to us that there is a mismatch between the characterisation of the interpretive social actor we provide in our metaphysics and orders of the detailed description contained in our specimens. In particular, when depicting the orchestration of manifolds of the fields of consciousness in which Jodi and Fran (our social actors) are immersed, we draw out and emphasise the importance of bodily engagement with the material world context of their actions. Unreflectively grasping, tuning into, organising and managing the world of physical objects within which their consociate actions are located is one of the ways they accomplish the ordering of contingent detail they are preoccupied with.
- 1.3. Whilst it is clear to us (now) rooting our notion of the social actor as the orchestrator of the workflow of sense assembly in Husserl’s conception of the “occasional” character of perception pre-supposes that actor’s material subjectivity, it does not explicate it. Or, putting matters in a different register, the social actor as material subject emerges to play a significant role in the resulting production but is not allocated a part in the script. The purpose of this addendum is to rectify the discrepancy. To do so, we will draw upon some of the arguments offered in Samuel Todes’ phenomenology of embodied perception (Todes 2001). In utilising Todes’ work as a resource for our interests, it is important to remember the rubric under which our investigative metaphysics is constructed. Just as our uses of Husserl’s analyses of perception, Gurswitsch’s account of the field of consciousness, Bergson’s notion of the manifold of experience and Kotabinski’s principles of good work do not commit us to adopting their philosophical projects (the Transcendental Reduction as the guarantor of certainty, a non-behaviourist Philosophical Psychology, an evolutionary creative Philosophical Psychology and the universality of instrumental rationalism), so we are not committed to Todes’ philosophical project of reconstituting the philosophy of ‘freedom’ by utilising the philosophies of Merleau-Ponty and, to a lesser extent, Heidegger to rescue us from the current alienated condition of our Being in modern society. All we are interested in is the notion of ‘embodied perceptual knowledge’ which he develops not its eventual manifestation in the tripartite fusion of the persona of the actor as material subject, rational subject and

social subject.¹ As Rouse (2005) points out, whilst the material subject and its relation to the rational subject is worked out in detail in *Body and Mind*, the synthesis of them both with the social subject is at once sketchy and unconvincing.²

- 1.4. Todes died in 1994 and if he is remembered at all, it is probably for his influence on Hubert Dreyfus and to a lesser extent on Joseph Rouse's account of the practical management of bench science (Rouse 2002). He was a partner with Dreyfus in the initial campaign against the pretensions of early AI (a campaign which led to them both leaving MIT). His thinking was also a significant resource for Dreyfus in the 'squabble' with John McDowell over the nature of perception. Todes' major work was his PhD thesis at Harvard which was eventually published as *The Material Subject* in 1990 and republished with an extensive introduction by Dreyfus in 2001 as *Body and World*. Todes was at Harvard (as was Dreyfus) when Garfinkel was there and makes a fleeting appearance in a footnote to *The Formal Structures* paper. Even though Merleau-Ponty did influence 'mid-life' Garfinkel (ie in the 1970 – 90 period), the contribution Todes might have made to this outcome is not the interest we are pursuing here.
- 1.5. Finally, it is our intention to rework *MTPP* to include the material covered in this addendum at some point in the near future. Obviously, it is likely to require some complicated adjustments which will take time to work through.

2.0 THE MATERIAL SUBJECT

- 2.1. The classic epistemological question was simple but extremely slippery: "What guarantees the certainty of our perceptual judgements?". In Descartes' hands this became a question regarding the relationship of our outer objective life of impressions and our inner subjective life of ideas; a counterposing of sense and sensibility which, in Humpty Dumpty's phrase, was about "Who is to be Master?" Philosophers following Descartes felt (as Hume and Leibniz famously did) they had no option but to choose one or other side. As all philosophers of genius do, Kant changed the question. His re-framing asked "How are the objects of our perceptual judgements made knowable with certainty?" His conclusion was that it is through the functioning of the transcendental unity of apperception as the unification of the noumenal and the phenomenal. The categories of thought set a limit on what is knowable and thus make secure perceptual judgement possible.
- 2.2. Unfortunately Kant's solution proved less than robust. The wars over varieties of empiricism, materialism and idealism continued and continue to this day. For Todes, there was one simple reason for this debacle. Classical philosophy up to and including Descartes, Hume and Leibniz had inadvertently concealed the importance of our embodied engagement with the world of objects as the basis of our pre-conceptual perceptual understanding. Kant failed to uncover this concealment and bequeathed modern philosophy the unruly legacy he did.
- 2.3. The larger part of *Body and World* is a phenomenological reduction of Kant's solution to its presupposition. There is a world of objects which exists independent of our philosophical theories. We have direct knowledge of this world not through imaginative reflection but by directly acting upon it. The apodictic unifying function of perceptual judgement is our engagement with our perceptual field of objects by directly acting on them and responding to them. Primeordial knowledge is gained in our being moved to act upon our 'circumstantial spatiotemporal field' of objects to so transform it that it comes to satisfy our contingent

¹ There is an interesting and revealing symmetry between Todes' ultimate conception of epistemology and Merleau-Ponty's ontology as outlined in Dreyfus and Todes (1962).

² This is not surprising, of course. Todes came to it later and its only treatment is in a very brief description (for Todes) as Appendix III in *Body and World*.

needs. This transformation (adaptation/re-arrangement/re-organisation) is not based on our reflection on any form of representation of the state of our field of perceptual objects. We simply act in response to needs provoked by our encountering various properties of the objects we face—their flexibility, resistance, shape, sound and so on. Thus, when walking through a woodland, “without thinking” I bend a bramble back to open up the path. I know from grasping it that the bramble will bend and can be displaced. When I unlock a door, I know from the fit of the key in the mechanism that it will turn.³ The understanding expressed in this knowledge is the accumulation of our experience of the actions we take and the responses they generate. In a summary which almost all commentators have cited, Todes says:

.....through movement we do not merely notice but *produce* the spatiotemporal field around us, our circumstantial field, the field in which things appear to us and in which we feel alive. Without our moving in it there would be no apparent spatiotemporal field in which objects might appear.....It is *one field* in a sense exactly correlative to that in which we feel ourselves to be living *one life* in it through the efforts of our *one active body* in it. (2001, p.49-50)

The posture of direct creative perceptual knowledge, then, is movement among and engaging with objects in our perceptual field of consciousness not reflection and rational construal.

- 2.4. Dreyfus' (2014) term for this direct engagement is “skillful coping”, the ‘natural’ and hence ‘thoughtless’ performance of activities. “Coping” doesn’t really do justice to the characterisation Todes was offering. Our engagement with the world is possible because we are “at home” in it; balanced and confident in our ability to move and act ‘freely’ as an “unmoved mover”. His term for the posture which displays this balance and confidence is “poise”. Our poise as actors in the world facilitates our acquisition of direct perceptual knowledge.
- 2.5. For Todes, the point of differentiating the direct perceptual knowledge of the material self from the mediated knowledge of the reflective self was so that they could be integrated as a bi-vocal account of judgement (knowledge) rather than the univocal accounts on offer elsewhere in philosophy. To provide for that integration, he proposes ‘imagination’ as the bridge between the two modalities. The accumulation of direct perceptual knowledge facilitates a capacity to project what objects will turn out to be and how we might experience them. That is the groundwork on which philosophical reflection is built. Towards the end of the “Anticipatory Postscript” making up Appendix III of *Body and World*, Todes talks of these modalities as “stances”. The eventual social philosophy which by the time he wrote the Appendix he had decided he needed to develop, would show how the transformation produced by the fusing of these two stances is itself transformed in a further fusion producing the stance associated with our engagement as fully free personal subjects in the social world.

Generally stated, these three stances are: the *standing-up* of perceptual bodily understanding...; the *standing-back* of imaginative, mental understanding...; and the *standing-for* of social understanding.....The end of social life is to fuse the divergent stances of standing-up and standing-back into the whole-some stance of standing-for. (2001 p.289)

³ None of which implies of course, that I am never caught out and then do have “to think what I am doing”. The Gibsonian notion of “affordance” is a handy shorthand for this perceptual engagement. But like most shorthands, it conceals more than it reveals.

- 2.6. We have no need to follow Todes along the passageways between these stances. Our interest is not in developing an argument which will provide for the reconstruction of epistemology and with it the foundations of modern philosophy. We will simply take Todes' description of our poised posture of balanced direct perceptual knowledge and fold it into TPP as one of the stipulated features of the social actor within our investigative metaphysics; another of the dimensions of the experiential manifold which TPP seeks to address and describe. In other words, we will do exactly what we did with the ideas of Husserl, Gurwitsch, Bergson and Kotarbinski, namely seek to proceduralise the philosophical descriptions of the material self and its acquisition of perceptual knowledge as strategy for making apodictic features of the in-situ production of social order visible.

3.0 PERCEPTUAL KNOWLEDGE AND TPP

- 3.1. The 'specimen analyses' given in *MTPP* show how this might play out. Take Jodi's arrangement of her workbench as part of her preparation for action. The stack of edges to be milled is located to the right and on the fringe of her field of perceptual objects. Placing it there not only facilitates the maximally efficient pass for routing but also allows her 'unthinkingly' to reach out, grasp and bring into line an unmilled edge as she places a milled edge on the stack on her left thereby maintaining the maximally efficient and effective rhythmic traction of work *without, at the same time, disattending to the spinning bit in the centre of her field*. Preparation for action is the arrangement of the spatiotemporal field to enable the management of the 'poised' and 'balanced' flow of work in the most effortless way. Or again, take her tuning into and responding to the 'chatter' as the edge passes across the bit. This is not an analysed concatenation of spatiotemporal positioning, felt resistance and reverberations and machine sounds heard, together with the composition and shapes of wood fragments and particles thrown off. Rather it is a synthetically perceived whole 'state of the cut' to which she 'unthinkingly' responds in the midst of its production.
- 3.2. Of course the sheer material physicality of Jodi's task makes it easy to see how the category of direct perceptual understanding might reveal some of the effortless management of contingent detail in her performance. But the same is true for Fran as well. Her worksite is a tiered structure of physical and virtual objects which she integrates and co-ordinates with ease. By this we mean more than the occasioned 'toolic' use of mouse, keyboard, pens and paper arranged to have them 'ready to hand' or the ordering of objects in the panes laid out on the screen so they can be 'seen at a glance'. Take Fran's extensive search to find where `installr` had hidden her transferred R packages. Her decisions over where Stack Exchange search terms and their responses are leading, how likely the files in her `Appdata` folder are to be the ones she is looking for and whether their time stamps are definitive are not reflective assessments but judgements of the relationships between virtual objects made 'in the moment'. Similarly, when beginning her ordinations, the information provided by the diagnostic bar graphs she constructs is not deduced by interrogating the plots but an unreflecting immediate grasping of the import of the physical coincidence of data blocks and confidence interval marking.
- 3.3. When chasing down her files and clocking through her analyses, Fran moves across the space of perceptual, reflective and consociate knowledge with ease, even if, in the midst of the flow, she is occasionally puzzled, unsure and hesitant. The same is true for Jodi in producing her stack of milled edges. For both, the identification, scaling and management of the contingencies emerging within the detail of their work is the socially constructed workflow of sense assembly.

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