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Walking as Intelligent Enactment: A New Realist Approach

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Abstract: Walking is an activity that always unfolds within a certain landscape. Tim Ingold has used the notion of “taskscape” to denote pragmatic uses of terrain. Whilst walking, we come to intersect with a variety of taskscapes. As Julia Tanney has highlighted, formal language can only get us so far when thinking about spontaneous, non-theoretical and non-representational activities. Borrowing Gilbert Ryle’s distinction between “knowing that” and knowing how”, I argue for a concept of walking that does not privilege intentions. When somebody walks, they melt into a taskscape not entirely of their own design. Mind is inherently ecological. It is enacted within a certain ecology, and is actually inseparable from its environment. Mind is the sum of intelligent enactments. According to the position I seek to advance in this article, walking may be approached in an object-oriented manner. Each form of behavior composes an enactment that meshes with a certain ecology, what W. Teed Rockwell has called a “behavioral field.” Mind is the inherently relational enactment of a set of behavioral dispositions which are always already enmeshed within a field. When these dispositions enter what, following Markus Gabriel, may be called “fields of sense”, mind and walking become independent objects in their own right.

Keywords: ecology, enactivism, mind, ontology, pragmatism, realism, taskscape, walking

1 Taskscapes

To walk is to establish manifold connections with multiplicities. The impulse to walk corresponds with a deeply rooted impulse to lose ourselves within a landscape, an ecology of openness. At any given moment, we walk a thin line, so to speak, between picking out a certain aspect, a specific site of concentrated desire, or completely losing our sense of self. There is a gap between linguistic, theoretical representation and actual feeling. No atomistic, one-piece notion will do when confronting the phenomenon of walking. Voluntary mobility is something that cannot be rationalized or traced back to rational reflection. The challenge here is to discuss a phenomenon which is beyond any locality. The manifold, humming world we encounter never forms a complete whole. Neither perception nor its ecology form a coherent, holistic structure. Rather, both are dissected into an infinity of spatio-temporal world-slices. Practice, including the practice of walking, is a partial revelation, a becoming-alive that breaks into our interiority like a bolt of lightning that strikes down unsuspecting bathers. On other occasions, practice is more akin to the spreading of some as yet undefined sensation, filling our bodies with a certain atmosphere. This characteristic of practice stems from its rootedness in perception. According to the viewpoint we seek to advocate in this article,

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perception and perceptive practices are unlocalizable.¹ When drinking cold water on a hot summer day, we are gradually filled with relief, and become one with the coolness of the liquid we ingest. No phrase, no use of language can entirely do justice to the feelings that pervade the landscape. When we speak of “places” or “locii”, this is only ever an approximation of something vastly more complex than our own subjective reality. Becoming-alive is becoming distantly attuned to relationships far beyond our epistemic grasp. Inhabitants of a landscape cannot be reduced to any single usage of the terrain in question. Indeed, every use is a putting into question and all questioning and inquiry modifies the object.

The very concept of a landscape at first lends itself to a homogenizing, oversimplified image. When speaking of a landscape, say “the rolling hills of Tuscany”, we are prone to thinking of it as a distinct unit, a slice of the world endowed with some kind of character that differentiates it from the “Kalahari Desert.” Furthermore, common sense would seem to suggest that this landscape bears a certain quality for us, as if qualities were not wholly existent in themselves. But each individuality contains within itself a variety of individual realms. Once analysis makes its advent, once we start to peer deeper into what the landscape is actually composed of, we find that it collapses into a series of heterogeneous spatial-temporal slices. Anthropologist Tim Ingold has introduced the notion of “taskscape” to denote activities immanent to each landscape. As Ingold writes, “temporality and historicity are not opposed but rather merge in the experience of those who, in their activities, carry forward the process of social life.”² Needless to say, the notion of taskscape is by no means restricted to human activities. If we conceive of the social (as Ingold has done) as an aggregation of human and nonhuman movements, then taskscapes can be rendered separate from any residual anthropomorphism. “Task” by no means implies the presence of any intentional, preplanned human activity. But what of supposedly purposive human acts, such as walking? Surely, some level of intention is needed in the case of such pre-planned actions. As we shall see, things are by no means as simple as such a viewpoint would imply. Mind itself may be conceived of as an inherently ecological stratum.

Just as the landscape is an “array of related features”, so “the taskscape is an array of related activities.”³ Relationships are there, but not all of them are awaiting discovery. Some activities shall remain forever locked away from access, whilst others are only accessible in certain ways. Access, needless to say, denotes far more than human knowledge. We must postulate an infinite variety of activity and access alike. Inhabitants of a landscape cannot be reduced to commonly held preconceptions of what a taskscape should be. Neither may they be reduced to the sum of our finite human knowledge. The many variants of conflict between various animal species, for instance, testify to the inherent incommensurability of certain taskscapes. Red algae blooms, accelerated by the unprecedented rate of climate change, make

¹ In this, we are following one of the 20th century’s most significant French phenomenologists, Maurice Merleau-Ponty. In Merleau-Ponty’s ontology, perception is decoupled from locality. Already in *The Phenomenology of Perception*, Merleau-Ponty asserts the following: “The thing is in a place, but perception is nowhere, for if it were situated in a place it could not make other things exist for itself, since it would repose in itself as things do.” Merleau-Ponty *Phenomenology of Perception*, 44. This tendency towards the deterritorialization of perception is only accentuated in Merleau-Ponty’s later work, to the point wherein all inner and outer realms of existence are completely enfolded within one another, in the form of “flesh”, an ether of mutual and completely impersonal connectivity: “There is an experience of the visible thing as pre-existing my vision, but this experience is not a fusion, a coincidence: because my eyes which see, my hands which touch, can also be seen and touched, because, therefore, in this sense they see and touch the visible, the tangible, from within, because our flesh lines and even envelops all the visible and tangible things with which nevertheless it is surrounded, the world and I are within one another, and there is no anteriority of the *percipere* to the *percipi*, there is simultaneity or even retardation.” Merleau-Ponty, *Visible and Invisible*, 123. Unusually, much of the relevant literature fails to properly appreciate the full ramifications of Merleau-Ponty’s work. Elsewhere, we have commented extensively upon Merleau-Ponty’s concept of unbounded, infinite embodiment: “To perceive is to be situated in a dwelling-place within which intangibility is a function of invisibility. Two forms of absence, two absentologies, to use an unusual expression, meet in this secret communion. Flesh can be nothing else other than the indeterminacy of this embedded meeting-point.” Lovasz, *System of Absentology*, 3. For Merleau-Ponty, perception, as embodied in the infinity of flesh is, properly speaking, limitless and indeterminate.

² Ingold, “Temporality Landscape”, 157.

³ *Ibid.*, 158.

life impossible for all marine animals unfortunate enough to be caught in their vicinity.⁴ Some activities are bound to displace other usages of the landscape's affordances, while other taskscapes accentuate one another's actualization, as in the case of red algae blooms accelerated by anthropogenic climate change. Feedback mechanisms can empower some agencies, while disempowering others. Inhabitants of a landscape or, for that matter, seascape, are perfectly capable of undoing one another's taskscapes, even unintentionally. Red algae species only become toxic through their proximity to fish. In themselves, they lack the capacity for toxicity. Whilst walking, we too unwittingly produce catastrophes, crushing ant nests underfoot. Each and every taskscape is a coupling of various agencies whose very existence depends upon their mutual co-engagement. Without others, we ourselves would never have come into being. Without others, we would could never walk in the first place. To walk is to strive for contact with the elemental. Each mound contains secrets, each cliff contains hidden surfaces, each fruit gives bountifully of its juices to all blessed with the audacity to pluck them from the branches. Lines of hearty laughter erupt from my mouth when confronted by a particularly aggressive praying mantis. The, for her species, fairly large but, as compared with my body, diminutive, bright green female follows me with her eyes, and comically attempts to attack my body – the disparity in size apparently lost on this creature. It is only later that I see a praying mantis flattened by a car tyre, or crushed underfoot by somebody's shoe, and a sorrow grips me, perhaps a sign of compassion towards other creatures, or merely an indication of my hypocrisy.

2 The mind as ecology

A certain strand of the philosophy of mind has come to reject dualistic interpretations of so-called “mind/body” problems. Some problems emblazon themselves upon the pages of the key texts of philosophy, whilst making the bare naivety of the truth invisible. Life is the constant, ceaseless search for contact. As long as one lives, one is inclined to explore. As Julia Tanney has pointed out correctly, we must “reject the idea that a formal language, however complex, can provide us with an ideal in which the relation between thought or language, and the world ‘as it is independently’, can be laid bare.”⁵ No use of language can bring us any closer to what sensation is. Ultimately, truth lies within the heart of experience. The elementary can only ever be captured in a fragmentary way. Concepts are nets, sieves that simplify reality, allowing us to construct models of what is. Philosophy tends, for the most part, to “philosophize” about everything that gets in its way, hence integrating lived experiences into some theoretical register. It is all too simple to manufacture a philosophy about some complex reality. Keep it simple, keep it theoretical, we are told. But what of keeping things complicated? As distinct from the realm of abstraction, the realm of reality stands in opposition to the desire for simplification.

Reality is a mess, and no theoretical appropriation of the real can entirely exclude the heterogeneity of that which is. Often, breaking down complex realities into more manageable pieces may be of help. When determining the ontological place of walking, or even if it has any determinate place at all, we must not forget that analysis need not entail the reduction of movement or enactment to any single register. Philosophical treatment of real-world actualization too often results in a survey of fragments, rather than a treatment of experience on its own terms. Even methods of philosophy dedicated to restoring access to some primordial, original experience have resulted in the creation of new, reified theoretical registers. Such has been the fate of phenomenology in Continental philosophy, for example.⁶ If we are to come to terms with a non-theoretical treatment of enacted activity, we must first of all answer what it is that moves. What

⁴ Staletovich, “Red Tide”. However, it must be emphasized that an exclusive focus on human agency in such cases can, at times, serve to obscure the broader relations and agencies at work. The phenomenon of toxicity caused by *Pfiesteria* or “red algae” has proven more complex than first thought. In themselves, such algae species are not toxic; it is only their proximity to fish that causes them to become deadly. This phenomenon, among countless others, lends credence to ontologies that emphasize the indeterminacy of interspecies relations. For more on a relational ontological approach to red algae bloom, cf. Schrader, “Responding to *pfiesteria piscicida*”.

⁵ Tanney, “Remarks on ‘Thickness’”, 4.

⁶ Sparrow, *The End of Phenomenology*.

is the “I” that walks? In my view, the philosophy of Gilbert Ryle provides a pertinent and fascinating answer to this question. In his work *The Concept of Mind*, Ryle famously introduces a distinction between “knowing that” and “knowing how.” In order to actualize one’s dispositions, it is not enough to have theoretical knowledge about something. Somebody can know how to swim based on extensively reading extensively detailed manuals pertaining to swimming, but such knowledge counts for nothing if this same person cannot bring their limbs to move in a manner that at least resembles that of swimming. “Knowing how” does not mean the application of preconceptions or ideas situated somewhere in our brains. For Ryle, “knowing how” is inherently ecological in nature, Knowing how is “a disposition, but not a single-track disposition like a reflex or a habit. Its exercises are observances of rules or canons or the applications of criteria, but they are not tandem operations of theoretically avowing maxims and then putting them into practice.”⁷ As with the Buddhist concept of “non-self” (*anātman*), Ryle denies the existence of a discrete self that may be separated from its various enactments and engagements with the world.⁸ We can only know what an actor knows through the actions they exhibit. The “I”, as a rarefied fiction, displays a systematic elusiveness. Others can certainly make predictions about our future activities through higher-order operations of observation, but we ourselves, trapped as we are within our lifeworlds, are forever surprising ourselves. There is an unbridgeable distance between “yesterday’s self” and “today’s self”: “my today’s self”, states Ryle with characteristic poetry, “perpetually slips out of any hold of it that I try to take.”⁹

Our future self, which is walking 100 meters distant from us, is a different self from that which is walking now. Nothing can bridge the hauntingly evocative gap between our agility and practices, organizing themselves around an illusory center, and the relative absence of movement we displayed yesterday night while asleep. Relative, because in truth, everything is in a state of impermanence. Nothing can prepare me for my next experience, because the mind is not a rational faculty that we always exercise. Sensation exceeds any rational treatment. According to Ryle’s viewpoint, even supposedly intentional acts like recognition do not actually involve thinking. To be equipped with the necessary know-how means, above all else, being able to feel a sensation without having to think about it: “I maintain not only that perceptual recognition, identification, etc. need not embody any inferential thinking, but that they need not embody any thinking at all. They involve the possession and exploitation of knowledge previously acquired. But this exploitation is not thinking.”¹⁰ Knowing how does not require the presence of a thinking self. As a matter of fact, it could actually entail a disappearance of the ego, the opening up of a transitory spatio-temporal gap within the flow of thoughts that otherwise plague us. Those who ask “where is the self?” or “where is the mind?” commit a category mistake. Such a person is akin to somebody who sees the various buildings of a university, and asks “where is the University?”, failing to realize that it belongs to a class of abstract objects that differs from its their components.¹¹ Objects are a sum of the relations they manage to unite. Somebody who searches for the “true” self fails to realize that the self is nothing more than a set of environmentally enacted dispositions. The university, similar to the self, is an abstraction. We cannot prepare ourselves for our next thought.¹²

3 Walking as abiding

When walking, we melt into a contexture of various taskscapes. The present is composed of an open set of spatio-temporal slices, some of which are susceptible to appropriation, whilst others make themselves absent. A squirrel runs up on the side of an oak tree: contact with its taskscapes is only possible on our part through sonic and audio-visual disturbance. We cannot possibly access the world of the squirrel directly. Hints of previous inhabitations present themselves in the form of geological hieroglyphs, fossilized

⁷ Ryle, *The Concept of Mind*, 34.

⁸ Lin, “A Buddhist Take”, 180-2.

⁹ Ryle, *The Concept of Mind*, 176.

¹⁰ Ryle, “Sensation”, 359.

¹¹ Ryle, *The Concept of Mind*, 6.

¹² *Ibid.*, 177.

remnants of previous lifeworlds etched upon an enchanted cliff-face. Famously, Ryle asserts that the mind has no determinate place, not even in a metaphorical sense. Mind is “where people work and play stupidly or intelligently.”¹³ In other words, the mind too is a set collection of taskscapes. Here is not the place to delve into whether the environment itself has intelligent faculties, or whether the universe as a whole is somehow pervaded by mindfulness or some vague presubjective sensitivity.¹⁴ What is of interest for us at this point is how Ryle extends the concept of mind outside of both the lived body and consciousness. Understanding, in the case of skillful actors, blends in seamlessly with a certain ecology. There is no need to think when somebody acts in a skillful, meaningful way. Each act of proficiency is a display of intelligence, albeit one that cannot be appropriated by any single individual. Neither can be reduced to any single operation of consciousness. The self is a series of nonthinking, yet intelligent operations and enactments gravitating around an empty center. A life lived is a movement brought to fruition within a hospitable ecology. Life is a process of intra-active becoming.¹⁵ Movement, in turn, is the realization of an intelligence that makes itself manifest within a spatio-temporal world slice. As such, movements are inherently intersectional interagential in nature.

The “I” is never anything, if not the haunting dispositional aspect of an ecology it has adapted to during the course of its evolution. Momentary evolutionary success reinforces the dangerous and ultimately self-destructive illusion that these hills and plains have come into being so as to be trampled under our feet, just so they may be subordinated to anthropocentric desires and goals. As Chien-Te Lin has noted, the philosophy of the extended mind, as expounded by Ryle and Buddhist philosophers alike, contains fundamentally soteriological implications.¹⁶ If the mind is truly inseparable from its environment, and it recognizes this enmeshment as something more than a mere theoretical construct, it can potentially achieve an awareness of the necessity for emancipation from egoism and ecocidal narrow-mindedness. W. Teed Rockwell has introduced the notion of “behavioral fields” to denote the inherently ecological nature of cognition.¹⁷ While undeniably there exist transitory borderlines between the organism and its environment, these borders are in a state of perpetual flux. Unskilled walkers, such as young children or puppies, exhibit a comical inability to walk, while proficient walkers are capable of hiking several dozen kilometers at times, blending into their behavioral fields. The self has no place apart from those behavioral fields it has learned to abide in. Having a mind means, above all else, skillful abiding. Those who inhabit an environment are at home within at least one taskscape, albeit one that is always open to contestation and violent occupation. Walking is one method among many of extracting and enacting intelligence. We use the verb “extract” here to denote a geological mode of inhering within the behavioral field. Fleeting images of a yellowish sunset intersect with our breaths, as well as the brimming, humming, flying and migrating multiplicities that collectively shape this shared ecosystem.

In a particularly evocative example of prose, Ryle suggests that feeling is a way of becoming responsive to one’s environment. Life means responsivity. The suddenness of feeling, the way sensation creeps up and grabs us from behind, means that experience cannot be anything if not surprising and ecstatic. A strong smell enacts our faculties, opening us up to the variety of flows and invitations: “the way I become alive to the smell has some kinship with the way the hedgehog comes to be seen when the torchbeam is directed upon it. But then the way in which a strong smell so forces itself on my attention that I cannot *not* notice it is much more like a piece of barbed wire catching me than like an object being picked out by my exploring torch-beam.”¹⁸ New thoughts and new experiences alike pick us out. Some objects invite attention upon themselves, struggling for recognition, striving aggressively for sensual contact. Other objects evade the spotlight. The human element is situated, paradoxically, between the two poles: capable of exploring, the human can itself become the object of inquiry, like the hedgehog caught by torch beams (or the light of a

¹³ Ibid., 38.

¹⁴ For an excellent genealogy of panpsychism, see Skrbina, *Panpsychism in the West*.

¹⁵ Barad, *Meeting the Universe*, 353-397.

¹⁶ Lin, “A Buddhist Take”, 189-191.

¹⁷ Rockwell, *Neither Brain Nor Ghost*, 204-7.

¹⁸ Ryle, “Pleasure”, 343.

smartphone), or someone caught up in a barbed wire fence. Attention can entail suffering, for while though it is sometimes occasionally given freely, it can also be exacted involuntarily. Who could not sympathize with a hedgehog caught in the stupid cold glare of smartphones held by curious, albeit insensitive children? Or worse, the hedgehog cornered by a wild cat intent upon feasting on its hot innards?

4 Walking into fields of sense

At this point, it will be helpful to introduce Markus Gabriel's notion of "fields of sense" this concept as this concept meshes in many ways with the idea of behavioral fields referenced above. To exist, according to Gabriel's new realist ontology, is something akin to referring. An object exists if it appears "in specific fields of sense."¹⁹ When an object becomes mobile, it makes a transition from one domain to another. Certain existents can even persist within several domains at once. The transition from one domain to the other is a step or break within a set of loosely coupled processes. All domains are individuated in one way or another "by having different or overall predicates contingently ranging over everything that appears within them."²⁰ This by no means implies that the individuating characteristics of object domains should in any way be conceived of as constituting metaphysical principles. Domains are composed of moving, intersecting and predicating objectivities, each endowed with their own characteristics. Referring back to our example of behavioral dispositions enacting themselves through a skillful walk, we should say (following Gabriel's approach) that walking is an enactment of these dispositions, objectivated in the form of objective sensual objects, commensurate with a certain field of sense which corresponds to walking as an intelligent activity always already embedded within a taskscape. Not just any field of sense will do. Behavioral dispositions as forms of emergence can only actualize themselves if they are situated within a certain environment, a taskscape suitable for this particular enactment. If the ground beneath us is slushy, or were to be suddenly transformed from one moment to the next into molten lava, the walk would never become a reality. Gabriel is insistent that we not presuppose the existence of any universal metaphysical properties. "There is no bare existence", Gabriel asserts, "but only existence as this or that."²¹ One cannot say that the class of walkers has anything substantial in common. The commonality among all walkers is the circumstance of their being able to walk and their realization of walking, either skillfully or unskillfully. To put it differently, everything depends on the set of relations the behavioral dispositions enter into. Not any and all bodies may walk: certain relations must adhere inhere prior to each and every successful enactment of walking. It must be the case that relations exist which permit walking to actualize. The act of walking is itself an object, inasmuch as it enters into a field of sense. Anything that enters a field of sense in any manner can be considered objective in its own right. Outside of its relations, exemplified by the domain most suitable for the unfurling of its existence, an object has no substantial existence. Ryle too is adamant that outside of enactment, no preexistent subject lies behind these actions. What we are is exhibited by what we do, as well as the relations we enter into.²²

The word "sense", in the context of Gabriel's new realist ontology, may easily give the impression of referring to the zone of any and all possible experience, as if existence meant the ability to be experienced. But this would be a grievous error. As we have seen, Ryle asserts that even intelligent animals such as humans experience their environments in a noncognitive manner. Enactment, once it becomes intelligent, tends to blend into its ecology unconsciously. Reflection cannot access the entire depth or thickness of any act. Those who have learned to walk are not compelled to ceaselessly think about what they happen to be doing: their dispositions are actualized unthinkingly. One does not need to keep a grip on one's head while traversing a familiar terrain. Interestingly, when participating in a walking competition, those racers tend to lose track of their actions and burst into sprinting (which results in a warning and then a ban, according to the rules governing in such walking contests) who agonize over whether they are walking or running. A

¹⁹ Gabriel, *Fields of Sense*, 44.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 55.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 61.

²² Ryle, *The Concept of Mind*, lx.

fine line separates inept and stupid enactments from intelligent ones. One could even say that the unskilled walk has absolutely nothing in common with the skilled one. But Gabriel's point is even more radical: even the various skillful walks, as exhibited by racers in a walking competition, have little in common with one another. The most we can say is that these enactments are situated within the same competition, or that the walkers are competing for the same trophy. If we accept the implications of Gabriel's ontology, every object belongs to a different field, and "fields cannot be unified into one big field."²³ There is no universal field-of-fields that would unite all fields of sense. Indeed, for Gabriel, there is no universe as such, insofar as we conceive of this term as denoting some "completeness" or final unity.²⁴ Similarly to Ingold's concept of "taskscape", fields of sense are "generally unconstructed, and their force is felt by the objects entering them."²⁵ The word "felt", in such a context, betokens the possibility of an extremely wide expansion ranging extension of sensation. However insistently he seeks to deny this possible insinuation, Gabriel cannot avoid the impression that the phrase "sense" seems to denote something sensate, an affect that is situated within one or more environments. While a walking race would certainly qualify as something constructed, at the very least artificial, it may be stated that the general contexture of the competition is nevertheless unconstructed.²⁶ The participants themselves definitely do not construct the proceedings, as the event has been organized in advance, but the environments that host such sporting events are also preexistent fields.

Mind is inseparable from the field of its application. The field "provides objective structures" and is always "already there", being something more than a merely epistemological construct or subjective viewpoint.²⁷ When mind enters a field of sense, it becomes an existent object. Outlining itself in a locale, the torchbeam of the mind illuminates a setting that is hospitable to its intelligent execution. Intelligence is a seamless blending-in with the environment, a unification that does not require any prompting or prior mental computation. Appearance, according to Gabriel's view, is synonymous with "being in a context."²⁸ To appear has nothing to do with being accessible to the eyesight of some agent endowed with visual organs. Things can appear without being accessible to any type of vision. It is the field of sense that gives space for distress, entanglement, articulation, success, failure, disqualification and selectivity, among a myriad of other activities. Ryle's hedgehog enters an inhospitable agricultural space, filled with barbed wires and the beams of incoming traffic. Each activity is evocative, communicating with the ground, along with any or other entities responsive to these entreaties. What makes Gabriel's new realist ontology truly radical is its pluralist commitment to the existence of illusions and false objects. Is it possible for somebody to feign walking? Apparently so, if the appearance of walking is not disqualified by a variety of other, stronger facts. "My false belief has a structure", writes Gabriel, "and this structure consists in its being embedded in some set of facts or other."²⁹ For something, even an illusory something, to exist in a minimal sense, it must embed itself among a set of facts. The field of sense never contains mere data, blobs of formless sensation. Perception, or for that matter any form of contact, brings objects into connection with other objects. Ryle's observation pertaining to the object-oriented nature of perception serves to underscore Gabriel's point that relations, as mediated by fields of sense, too are inherently object-oriented: "talking about looks, sounds and smells, about expanses, shapes and colours, just as much as talking about perspectives, hazes, focuses and twilights, is already talking about common objects."³⁰ Such atmospheric forms of objectivity too manifest themselves in an inherently fragmented manner. But fragmentation need not imply finitude. Sense always comes in the form of an object: never do we encounter anything but existents in the plural.

²³ Gabriel, *Fields of Sense*, 153.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 44.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 157.

²⁶ Here I use this phrase in the limited sense of denoting objects that are not the products of human construction, or merely in a limited sense. A law, for example, would constitute a highly constructed object, whereas a distant galaxy would be a highly unconstructed one (from a human perspective, needless to say). The aim is not to deny the ability of nonhuman agents to construct their own realities, but rather to differentiate objects in a transitory manner based on their degree of artifice.

²⁷ Gabriel, *Fields of Sense*, 157-8.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 158.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 159.

³⁰ Ryle, *The Concept of Mind*, 198.

The new realist ontology advanced by Gabriel allows us to recognize the multiple and unstable nature of objecthood. There is never one Existence or Being or Objectivity, spelled written with capital letters. While certainly not a relativist, Gabriel nevertheless does give expression to a certain epistemological humility when he claims that “objects appear in indefinitely many fields of sense at the same time.”³¹ Nobody may hope to achieve an understanding of every single field of sense. With this move, Gabriel implicitly smuggles in a skepticism relating to the epistemology of fields of sense. If each object exists in an infinity of fields of sense, the content of these domains can never be fully exhausted by even the most effective practice of science. Some objects fall under concepts, while others do not. Not every object corresponds to a concept.³² If there is a continuity between mind and life, as well as mind and environment, as presupposed by the enactive approach to cognition as outlined by Miriam Kyselo, this would also entail that there must exist some form of continuity among at least two fields of sense.³³ The body, as it enacts itself within the environment, while partially dependent upon its environs, is also autonomous in a limited sense. Living agents can program themselves, learning to exhibit new, innovative behaviors while also defending themselves against forces that would undo and foreclose their embodiment. Identity, as enactive theories of embodiment have shown, “is not passively given but brought forth through interactions with the environment.”³⁴ Sense is constructed, yet this process of construction is also one of co-construction. It is impossible to take steps upon a pyroclastic flow. One cannot be disqualified from a walking race if one lacks legs to run upon or if there is no surface to traverse. A certain field of sense is necessary for the enactment of intelligence. For Gabriel, everything exists equally, as every object is situated within a field of sense.³⁵ This equality is nevertheless troubling from a theoretical point of view, and actually forms what might be called a lacuna in Gabriel’s ontology, for we have already seen that certain objects can be embedded within more contexts than others. However much he denies relativism, Gabriel tends toward a distinctly perspectivist ontology, albeit one that does not depend upon any privileging of interpretation or cognition. Insensate objects too can open up new perspectives, in spite of their inability to interpret their environs. At the very least, one could argue that some objects have a greater degree of strength, or a higher-order existence than less well-embedded existents. As we have seen, unskilled walkers who travel too fast and start sprinting find themselves swiftly disqualified from walking competitions; likewise, an inexperienced walker who fails to see an abandoned mineshaft can easily suffer a serious injury.

Reality is dazzling, in and of itself. When somebody speaks about their dazzlement, they are talking not only of a subjective experience. Ryle asserts that when somebody says “the searchlight is dazzling”, they are conveying their perceptions in “a way which involves talking about the searchlight.”³⁶ Involvement within an environment is a case of something being the case. To “be the case”, something must be enmeshed within a field. Fictional objects such as unicorns, or extinct animals such as dodos, or hypothetical but as yet undiscovered entities such as Planet X are all endowed with existence. Everything depends on the way a field of sense individuates the objects that come to be enfolded within their interstices. Objecthood, for Gabriel and Ryle alike, is “a functional concept”, denoting the manner in which an object appears within a field of sense.³⁷ What differentiates Gabriel’s ontology from Ryle’s approach is its thoroughgoing deanthropomorphization of pragmatism and perspectivism. If mind is intelligent enactment mediated by a field of activity, then one can extend this thesis by following Gabriel and stating that “existence in” as a general property, as manifested within particular objects, is an enactment that seamlessly appears within at least one field of sense. To appear means to come forth from a background, irrespective of whether sapient creatures are present.³⁸ Objects are what fields of sense contain. This containment is functional, because it lacks any substantive content aside from its being the case. Each field contains other fields, and each field

³¹ Gabriel, *Fields of Sense*, 160.

³² Ibid.

³³ Kyselo, “The Body Social”, 5.

³⁴ Ibid., 6.

³⁵ Gabriel, *Fields of Sense*, 162.

³⁶ Ryle, *The Concept of Mind*, 199.

³⁷ Ibid., 165.

³⁸ Ibid., 166.

is in turn contained by a larger field, without end. Gabriel's ontology lacks a field-of-fields: objecthood is functional to "some field or other."³⁹ One does not need to identify a field of sense identical to walking "in itself" in order to be able to speak of walking as a more or less intelligent activity. Objecthood is the barbed wire that catches our attention, the insect crushed by a motor vehicle, and an infinity of other things that vicariously inhabit an infinite set of fields of sense.

5 Conclusion

As we have seen, a strand of the philosophy of mind has attempted to extend the concept of mind by transforming it into an ecological thought. Such theoretical reversals, above all, necessitate a thoroughgoing remapping of actions as well as of their components. Emblematic of this mid-twentieth century shift is the work of British philosopher Gilbert Ryle. When reconceived as a complex, environmentally enacted entity, or rather as a set of enactments, we are better positioned to understand mind on its own terms. Far from reducing experience to mental or physical data, we can arrive at a knowledge of its enmeshment with the ecology it inhabits. Each and every mind is actually a component of a larger network, what W. Teed Rockwell has called the "behavioral field." Walking allows us access to the inherently ambiguous nature of embodiment. The mind is a collection of ecologically embedded tasks. Borrowing Markus Gabriel's notion of "field of sense", we have shown that the concept of mind too may be reconfigured in object-oriented terms. Gabriel's new realist ontology serves as a non-anthropocentric extension of pragmatism, allowing for an enactivist and constructivist viewpoint that does not privilege any single form of objecthood. To be an object means to be enacted within at least one field of sense. From the realization of unity with the behavioral field, it necessarily follows that egoism becomes an impossible position, an exercise in futility, hence the soteriological ethical potential of the theory of extended mind. Once it explodes into its environs, the mind becomes more like a an intersection of heterogeneous taskscapes than a single, individual entity. Mind is nowhere to be found, nowhere in particular at least. This non-theoretical realization corresponds to the experience of walkers who lose themselves in the moment.⁴⁰

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³⁹ Ibid., 167.

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