

MEDIATIONAL FIELDS AND DYNAMIC SITUATED SENSES*

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ABSTRACT. The purpose of this paper is to introduce the notions of mediational fields and dynamic situated senses as a way to identify the structure of experiences, thoughts and their relations. To reach this purpose I draw some lessons from the debate between Dreyfus and McDowell about the structure of experience, from Cussins's conception of mediational contents, and from Evans's account of singular senses.

I notice firstly that McDowell's answer to Dreyfus consists in developing a practical and demonstrative notion of the products of our conceptual capacities. A conception that entails that human experience is not entirely characterised in terms of an abstract specification of truth-conditions. McDowell and Cussins endorse Evans's conception of singular senses. A specification that takes into account the dynamic and situated abilities involved in making reference. Whereas the first argues in favour of a conceptual conception of experience, the second one argues in favour of a nonconceptual conception. I introduce the notions of mediational fields and dynamic situated senses to argue that both converge in conceiving the contents of experience as mediational and not reducible to an abstract specification of truth-conditions.

My proposal is to define a bidimensional space orthogonal to the conceptual/nonconceptual, experience/thought, know-how/know-that dichotomies. Cognitive contents are ways to disclose the world both as mediational fields and as referential structures. The degree in which those elements are presented determine different varieties of cognition. I use the previous notions to develop the sketch of an account of singular, objective and contextual ways of cognition, and to argue that it is better to begin an enquiry about cognition with notions that do not presuppose a distinction between practical and intellectual capacities.

Keywords: *Mediational Contents, Nonconceptual contents, Dynamic Thoughts, Singular Reference, Context-Sensitivity.*

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1. Introduction

I will present an overview of what I call mediational fields and dynamic situated senses. My purpose is to show how these notions can be useful to characterise the structure of experiences and thoughts. Specifically, I will provide a first approximation, and show how these notions are useful to characterise singular ways of cognition.¹

In order to introduce the topics, firstly, I will draw some lessons from the famous debate between Dreyfus and McDowell, and from Cussins's distinction between mediational and referential contents. Secondly, I will show why the notion of mediational fields is required to complete Evans's notion of dynamic situated senses, and how this conception is useful to account for situated cases of cognition. Finally, I will provide one reason to consider that the previous notions are more useful than the know-how/know-that distinction.

2. Mediational Contents and The McDowell-Dreyfus Debate

To begin with, I would like to note that even accepting McDowell's characterization of human experience as essentially permeated with conceptuality, that by itself is not a view -as McDowell recognises- against the possibility of postulating other kinds of cognition. Experiences of non-rational animals, although non-essentially permeated by conceptuality, are still animal-involved experiences that disclose for them an environment of mediational and motivational forces.² The experience of a non-rational animal may not disclose the world as a truth-conditional structure, but it could perfectly provide openness to the world as a motivational and mediational space. A domain presented as a fabric of affordances, solicitations, and sensorimotor patterns of guidance. A space of pulling and pushing -attractive and repulsive- forces, as Dreyfus would say (2005, 2007a, 2007b, 2007c, 2013). A field of spatiotemporally situated structures of trails and rhythms of activity, as Cussins would say (1992, 2003, 2012). A realm of sensorimotor understandings, as Alva Nöe would say (2004, 2012).³

¹ By 'singular ways of cognition' I mean modes of presentation of particulars.

² See McDowell, 2007a, pp. 343-344.

³ I do not pretend to reduce the three views to each other. What I am saying is that they converge in the conception of experience as motivationally and mediationally active.

McDowell (2007a, 2007b, 2013) points out that it is a quick and not a very good argument to move from the possibility of describing the structure of the experience of non-rational animals as permeated by a kind of knowledge that presents the world as a mediational field, to the ascription of nonconceptual contents as the ground of human experiences.⁴ I will assume here that McDowell's view is, by and large, correct. That is, in order to make sense of the epistemological claim according to which *our* experiences of the world justify *our* judgments, we should admit that conceptual capacities exercised at the level of the constitution of thoughts are already operative and actualised at the level of the constitution of experiences.⁵ Conceptual capacities can be actualised in experience in a different way from the way in which they are actualised in thought. For instance as thematic and propositional at the level of thoughts, and non-thematic or non-propositional -but categorial- at the level of experience.⁶ That by itself, however, does not constitute an argument against the possibility of other ways of cognition in which the world is presented or disclosed as a space that is not or need not be truth-conditionally structured. Even accepting that human experience involves -and requires- passive exercises of conceptual capacities, that does not imply -as McDowell (2008) recognises- that the products of conceptual capacities in experience are truth-conditionally or propositionally specified.

How are those ways of experience in which the world is not presented as a truth-conditional structure? Is it *sui generis* and nonconceptual, or is it another way in which conceptual contents are presented? Those are genuine questions that are not solved by assuming McDowell's epistemological stance against the Given, and against detached conceptuality.⁷ In order to tackle those questions I will derive in parallel some lessons from Cussins's distinction between mediational and referential contents.

Cussins (1990, 1992, 2003, 2012)⁸ provides a positive characterisation of two varieties of modes of presentation relative to two different kinds of normative guidance, and relative two different kinds of epistemic commitments. Two kinds of 'being-answerable-to-the-world'. Truth-guided contents present the world as a realm of referents: objects, n-tuples, properties, relations, possible worlds, etc. Environmental

⁴ See McDowell, 2007a., p.343.

⁵ That claim is disputable but I will not dispute it here.

⁶ See McDowell, 2008.

⁷ On the notion of detached conceptuality see McDowell, 2007a, p. 339, p. 341, p. 342, p. 349. McDowell, 2007b, p. 366, p. 367, p. 369; McDowell, 2013.

⁸ For a critical revision see Murillo, 2019.

enactive guiding contents present the world as a realm of mediations: affects, affordances, solicitations, that are subject to glide-path normative feedback⁹, and have subjectivity or Janus-faced valence.¹⁰

Mediational contents present the world as a NASAS-structure: an intertwined fabric of Normative feedback, Affordances, Solicitations, Affects, and Subjectivity-valence.¹¹ This corresponds to what I call mediational fields: a disclosure of an environment as a domain of guiding forces that relate agents with objects of their cognition as mediations and motivations for their activities. All of this without pre-determining an ontological distinction between objects, agents, mental contents, and the referents of mental contents. That is precisely one of my points for calling them fields.¹²

Examples of mediational contents are states that highly depend on their conditions of production, and are motivationally active from those conditions. Profiles of pain and joy, scratchy feelings, ‘yummy’ and ‘yucky’ experiences, are basic examples of NASAS-structures.¹³ Those states drive the agent to behave in some specific way, and demand a punctual way to be committed with his surroundings. Those ways of behaving do not constitute merely reactive responses, but normative patterns linked to the environmental possibilities of action, and to the agent’s bodily constitution.¹⁴ A fabric of affects, affordances, and solicitations environmentally placed and embodied serve as mediations for developing cognitive activities, and guide the improvement of those activities.

⁹ That is, the kind of guidance that a plane is subject to when an alarm is activated just in case it deviates from its route. On the notion of glide-path normativity see Cussins, 2012, p.29; Dreyfus, 2007a, p. 258, p. 362; 2005, p.107; 2013, pp. 30-31.

¹⁰ That is, mediational contents face both mind and world at the same time. On Janus-faced valence see Cussins, 1992, p. 657. On subjectivity-valence see Cussins, 2012, p. 25, pp. 27-30.

¹¹ On NASAS-structure see Cussins, 2012, p. 29. The notion of mediational contents corresponds to Cussins’s development of the notion of nonconceptual contents, firstly introduced in Cussins (1990), and derived from Evans’s conception (1982, p. 123, pp. 157-158 and p. 227). Cussins (1992, 2003) provides a positive characterization in terms of stable mediations in activities. Cussins (2012) reviews the notion of nonconceptual contents, and introduces mediational contents as modes of cognition that present the world as a NASAS-structure. Although the characterization of nonconceptual contents as a NASAS-structure is explicitly presented in Cussins’s (2012), it can be found through Cussins’s entire work.

¹² I use the notion of field in the mathematical sense of vector field. The straightforward idea is that spaces of attractive and repulsive forces can be represented as tensors in vector fields.

¹³ See Cussins, 2012, p. 24, p.29, p. 27 footnote 6, and p. 30.

¹⁴ That at least is the idea: mediational contents are not dynamic reactive dispositions, but patterns of normative guidance.

It is useful to contrast the disclosure of an environment as a mediational field (*i.e.*, as a NASAS-structure) to a disclosure of a world as a referential domain (*i.e.*, as an extensional structure of objects and n-tuples). Mediational contents present the world as dynamic and situated patterns of trails and rhythms. Referential contents present the world as stable structures of truth-makers. Mediational contents change according to how the flow of activity in the environment changes. Referential contents are general and relatively stable: it is possible to recombine them in the construction of new thoughts. Mediational contents are punctuated and relatively unstable. They are open for all to be followed, but it is possible to follow them only from the particular situation and disposition in which the agent is related to them. Only for a particular agent in a particular position an affordance like *go out through this open space* solicits him to have an agent-involving experience of *going out through that open space*. Any other agent is able to have that experience but only the one who is placed in that specific condition is driven to do that.¹⁵

Cussins uses the distinction to draw a theoretic line between thoughts and experiences. The characteristic contents of judgments are susceptible to evaluations in terms of truth-conditions, and present the world as a realm of reference. The characteristic contents of experience are susceptible to evaluations in terms of skillful performance and activity guidance, and present the world as a realm of mediations. It seems to me, however, that in order to see the relevance of Cussins's points, there is no need to map his distinction neither onto the distinction between conceptual and nonconceptual contents, nor onto the distinction between experience and thought. It is not necessary to argue in favour of the postulation of two kinds of content in opposition to two aspects of the same kind of content to see that both elements are required to characterise human cognition. It is also possible to conceive both aspects as involved in the constitution of both thoughts and experiences.¹⁶

McDowell's arguments against the postulation of a nonconceptual level of contents for explaining humans' cognitive ability to have world-involving experiences -and world-involving thoughts- leave untouched Cussins's -and Dreyfus's- characterization of a way to disclose or present the world as a mediational field.

¹⁵ See Cussins 2012, pp. 23-29; Cussins, 2003, p. 134, pp. 149-159. For the distinction between 'affordance-facts' and 'affordance's solicitations', parallel to the point I am making here, see Dreyfus, 2007a, p.357.

¹⁶ That is the main reason why I prefer to talk more about mediational fields than about nonconceptual contents. Other reasons are that I want to introduce the mathematical notion of fields as vector fields, and ethnogeographic descriptions of fields as extensions of territory, or extensions of carved lands (landscapes). But I will not pursue these developments here.

More crucially, it leaves untouched a view in which judicative contents are permeated by, and fundamentally grounded over, our abilities to disclose the world as a mediational field. The main reason is that the distinctions conceptual/nonconceptual, mediational/referential, experience/thought can be conceived as orthogonal. Since the distinctions are transversal, we can accept McDowell's characterization of human cognition as mediational and conceptual. That is, conceptual contents give us access to worldly objects -in experience and thought- as guidances in activity and as referents. McDowell explicitly denies that the contents of human experience are nonconceptual, but he accepts that they are mediational.

In the famous debate, Dreyfus is at pains to argue that mediational fields, or as he calls them following Merleau-Ponty, the *space of motivations* or the space of *motor intentionality*¹⁷, constitute a *sui generis* space independent of the logical space of reasons and the logical space of causes. McDowell's line of defence consists mainly in noticing that his notion of conceptuality is not a notion of detached, unsituated and non-motivational contents. That is a notion that is not reduced to a specification of senses in terms of abstract and non-contextual determinations of truth-conditions. He shares with Evans a dynamic and situated conception of Fregean senses that permeates -together with his Aristotelian conception of practical rationality- his view about contents. So that, it is perfectly coherent for him to state the following:

I do not dispute that perceptual responsiveness to affordances, necessarily bound up with embodied coping skills, is something we share with other animals. And I can accept that there is a sense in which familiarity with affordances is a background for our openness to objects. But I can still hold that our openness to affordances is part of the way of being that is special to rational animals.

What perception discloses to human beings is not restricted to affordances (...) What is right about describing openness to affordances as providing a background is this: the fact that perception discloses a world to us is intelligible only in a context that includes the embodied coping competence, the responsiveness to affordances, that we share with other animals. (McDowell, 2007a, p. 344)

It seems also appropriate to continue McDowell's line of thought without disputing his point about practical and situated conceptuality adding the following:

¹⁷ See Dreyfus, 2005, pp. 56-61, and footnote 47; Dreyfus, 2007a, pp. 362-364; Dreyfus, 2007b, p. 107; Dreyfus, 2007c, p. 375. Merleau-Ponty, 2002, pp. 126-180, pp. 203-211, p. 226, p. 238, pp. 244-246, pp. 291-292, p. 346, p. 370.

what perception discloses to human beings is not restricted to an *abstract specification* of truth-conditional structures. That is, human cognitive contents are not specifiable in terms of non-contextual assignments of objects and n-tuples. We can even deny that there are two *sui generis* kinds of content. As I said before, the distinction between mediational and referential contents can be orthogonal to the distinction between conceptual and nonconceptual contents. It does not seem, however, a good idea to deny that there are two aspects manifestly present in the constitution of thoughts and experiences: the disclosure of a domain in terms of the structures required to determine the truth of a thought or the correctness of an experience, and the disclosure of the domain in terms of a field of cognitive guidance in the activities of speaking, thinking, perceiving, and moving through space. It is not necessary to argue that the spaces of reasons, causes and motivations are mutually disjoint, in order to accept that Dreyfus's and Cussins's phenomenological characterization of nonconceptual contents is not reducible to abstract specifications of truth-conditions. There may not be a way to draw a precise line between situated specifications of truth-conditional contents relative to mediational specifications. However, a mediational specification of contents is not reducible to an abstract specification of truth-conditions.

Dreyfus argues that to accept the involvement of conceptual capacities in the sensorimotor level implies to fall into the Myth of the Mental. McDowell argues that to deny the involvement of conceptual capacities in the sensorimotor level implies to fall into the Myth of the Given. I concede to McDowell that we do not need to deny the involvement of conceptual capacities at the sensorimotor and motivational level, and I concede to Dreyfus and Cussins that the sensorimotor and motivational level is not exhausted by an abstract specification of truth-conditions and correctness-conditions. That is the point in trading the notion of nonconceptual contents for the notion of mediational contents. Thus, the contents of our experience can be situated concepts motivationally active and mediationally driven. The point in trading the notion of mediational contents for the notion of mediational fields is to emphasise that the difference between referential and mediational contents is that we have available two mutually disjoint ways to structure a domain, not two mutually disjoint kinds of cognition.

3. Situated Concepts

The distinction in virtue of the type of ontology that is presented (as a mediational field or as a referential domain), or by the type of normativity that governs its structure (the normativity of truth or the normative of guidance in

activity), is useful to see that not all notions of conceptuality are situated enough to support the intrinsic motivational aspect of acting on behalf of an experience. Not all specifications of satisfaction conditions are situated enough to structure cognitions as guidances in activity.

Every animal accesses its environment through its own agent-involving way of cognition. Those different cognitions can be characterised as varieties of ways of structuring its surroundings. From more punctuated (structures anchored to one particular point of view) to more general ways (structures enforced through different points of view). A continuum that has at its *limiting points* ways of disclosing a world as a *pure* field of mediations, and as a *pure* domain of referents. Cognitions are attempts that have as their products items (contents or representations) whose structure is more or less close to one of those ways to disclose a domain. There may not actually be in the sublunary realm a form of cognition as *purely* referential or *purely* mediational. But environmentally situated specifications of mediational fields and abstract specifications of truth-makers can serve, in turn, as orthogonal dimensions to specify different varieties of *stable* kinds of cognition and representation. The characterization of a biological, artificial, or a socio-technical being as a cognitive being, and the way in which a being cognitively structures its environment, ought to be the end -not the beginning- of the enquiry. In this task, mediational and referential specifications can serve as orthogonal dimensions to empirically identify kinds of stable cognitions in different niches.

Evans developed the idea of relating having thoughts about particulars to the requirement of being cognitively able to discriminate one item from others of the same class (he called this idea Russell's Principle).¹⁸ The point is to establish a connection between the objectivity of a mental state, and the intrinsic possibility for thoughts of being able to be decomposed. Evans claimed that, at least ideally, thoughts can be decomposed in states that can be recombined with states of the same type (he called this regulative principle the Generality Constraint).¹⁹ So that, in order to be in a state that allows me to discriminate objectively a feature -a state that allows me to have a thought about that feature as an objective particular- it should be possible for my mental state to satisfy the generality constraint. The crucial points here are the following: firstly, thoughts are decomposable -at least in the ideal case-. Secondly, in order for a mental state to be directed to an objective worldly feature -a reality independent of the agent and its actual and dispositional states- that state should be able to interact with other mental states in a way that

¹⁸ See Evans, 1982, p. 75, pp. 89-93.

¹⁹ See Evans, 1982, pp. 100-105.

guarantees that it is not anchored to its situation of production. That is, a mental state about an objective worldly feature should be generalisable enough to be able to be had or applied in other situations.²⁰

To the extent that [this pain], [this red], [that hue], [that cube] are concepts -constituents of propositions- it must be possible to articulate them with other concepts. Perceptual states -insofar as they are directed to independent items- should also be able to obey to a grammar of combination. In this context, it is important to note the following: a sensory state like [appears red], a physiological state like [irritation x in the retina] or a neurological state like [activation x in the brain] are states whose conditions of individuation are relative to the subject, or to the representational apparatus of the subject. Those states, like the first ones, can be conceived as internal. However, only the first ones are available in the experience of the subject as states that are about things independent of the subject's constitution. Evans demanded that in order for internal states to be available in the experience of the subject as states about things independent of the subject's constitution, they should be able to be articulated with other states that can be prompt in other situations.²¹ The point is that the specification of objective states²² depends on those states being part of a logical space. The sense of the thought [that cube is red] is determined by the position it occupies in a logical space as the point of intersection between two logical dimensions: (1) ..., [that sphere is red], [that cube is red], [that pyramid is red] ...; and (2) ... [that cube is red], [that cube is green], [that cube is blue]²³ The complete thought takes priority over the form of decomposition. That is, only in the context of a complete thought does it make sense to ask about the contribution or value of each constituent and about the form of composition. But the complete thought and its form of decomposition is dependent also on the dimensions of the logical space in which it appears.

To be able to satisfy the generality constraint should not be identified with being detachable. A content specified by an abstract condition clearly satisfies the constraint. An abstract specification of [cube], for instance, satisfies the constraint and can be detached from specific samples of particular cubes. But that is not true neither of all species of concepts nor of all species of contents. As McDowell

²⁰ See Evans, 1982, p.103.

²¹ Evans prefers to talk about conceptual abilities, and not about episodes (see Evans, 1982, p.101). I do not see too much danger in talking about states only to introduce the general points.

²² Objective states in the sense of being states about objective features of the world.

²³ See Evans, 1982, p. 104. For a similar requirement to the case of sense impressions see Sellars, 1991, p. 94.

explains, the *demonstrative* concept [that shade] exploits the present of the sample, and in virtue of its relation with the sample need not be characterised as detached –or as an abstraction- from its occasion of use. *Demonstrative* concepts are specified relative to their situated conditions of production but are not anchored to those situations. They are specified relative to the sample demonstrated, but can be recombined with other concepts in the conceptual-box of the subject.²⁴ Something similar can be said about McDowell's (2008) categorial characterization of the contents of humans' experiences. To be singular and situated does not necessarily exclude neither generality nor conceptuality.²⁵

The generality constraint is useful to draw the limits of *conceptuality* (pure or impure, abstract or situated). A *concept* must be something capable of being recombined with other concepts in the conceptual stock of a subject. Purely referential contents satisfy the generality constraint. But it does not follow that the limits of mindedness and contentfulness are traced by the generality constraint. Purely mediational contents do not satisfy it. Since they are anchored, like neural and physiological irritations, to their situation of production. In their pure form, mediational contents are not recombining with other contents or with contents in other situations.

It seems that human experience and thought is neither purely punctuated nor purely general. One feature of *our* experience and thought is that their contents are holistic. Human experiences are not reduced to punctuated perspectives nor to an objectivity from nowhere. We have the ability to develop more objective views from punctuated ones, but at every time situated from a point of view. A frisbee coming from here in this way and with this seeming circular shape can be perceived as the same frisbee coming from there in that way and with that seeming elliptic shape. We can react with a movement here and now, and with different movements there and a few seconds later, to capture the same stable perception and the same stable thought. The structure of the content is dependent to some extent on our abilities to transform *this punctuated feature here and now* to something more general and objective. Is *this feature here and now* something that can exclusively be experienced from a particular point of view and not be experienced from other points? The

²⁴ Or so is argued in McDowell, 1990; and McDowell, 1996, ch. 2. For a counterargument see Anderson, P. and Murillo, A. 2011; and Kelly, 2001, 2003.

²⁵ McDowell endorses the generality constraint even after clarifying the propositional conception that emerges from (1996, ch. 2) by making explicit his commitment with a non-propositional and categorial conception of the contents of experience in (2008). This can be appreciated in his reply (Lindgaard, 2008, pp. 258-267) to Travis's 'Reason's Reach' (Travis, 2013, pp. 118-143; Lindgaard, 2008, pp. 176, 169).

answer depends to some extent on the abilities we possess: if we are able to develop a more stable structure of objects and referents from the presence of features distributed through our surroundings.

McDowell's argumentation is directed to show that in order to guide our actions, the structure of our cognition does not need to exclude the postulation of conceptual guidance in the flow of activity. It should be so if we are able to justify our judgments based on our perceptions, and rationally respond for the consequences of our actions. *Demonstrative* concepts need not be detached from occasions of use. Furthermore, they play a practical role. That argumentation entails that the structure of our cognition does not exclude the disclosure of the world as a mediational field. But demonstrative concepts are still concepts. They constitute a *sub-region* of stable cognitions in a wider space of possibilities determined by our dimensions: mediational and referential specifications.

The characterization of conceptual contents in terms of situated truth-conditions entails to attribute a mediational role to them. Consequently, it should be possible to specify the product of conceptual capacities in terms of the relations and abilities that mediate and motivate activities relative to the embodied constitution of the agent and its environmental possibilities of action. Conceptual contents would not be entirely characterised as situated if they were not able to be -at least partially- specified in this embodied and ecological way.²⁶ But there is no need to oppose McDowell's view to a position that takes our abilities to disclose a motivational and mediational world as fundamental and essential to all animated kinds of cognition.

Reflecting about the notion of nonconceptual contents introduced in Evans's (1982, p. 123, pp. 157-158 and p. 227), McDowell (1996, p. 49)²⁷ notices that when Evans talks about perceptual experience he links the level of sensorimotor connections with our abilities to think, reason and apply concepts.²⁸ McDowell (1996, ch. 3) accuses him of falling into the Myth of the Given: 'in Evans's account of experience, receptivity figures in the guise of the perceptual element of the informational system, and his idea is that the perceptual system produces its

²⁶ If our understanding capacities were specified as independent to embodied and ecological abilities, there would be some reasons to insist in accusing McDowell of being intellectualist. McDowell's characterization of engaged intellects implies that the characterization of understanding capacities is dependent on embodied and ecological conditions. I use the qualification 'at least partially' to point out that conceptual capacities should be understood in the context of *a species* of embodied coping skills. There should be both rational and non-rational varieties of embodied coping skills. See McDowell, 2007a, p. 339.

²⁷ See also Cussins 1992, p. 655.

²⁸ See Evans, 1982, p. 158.

content-bearing states independently of any operations of spontaneity' (McDowell, 1996, p. 51). But McDowell also notices that precisely because Evans relates the sensorimotor level of nonconceptual contents with exercises of rational abilities, his account of perceptual demonstrative reference is compatible with McDowell's claim about the unboundedness of conceptuality.²⁹ The view that takes our abilities to disclose a motivational and mediational world as fundamental does not need to exclude the involvement of conceptual abilities. That is, the motivational and meditational level of cognition does not need to be conceived as 'an outer boundary of the conceptual realm' (McDowell, 1996, p. 107). Furthermore, it should not be conceived as an outer boundary if we are to avoid the Myth of the Given. What we need, if we would like to insist in the importance of the sensorimotor level, is to complete McDowell's story with the Evansian part, and to provide a notion of nonconceptual contents that does not introduce them as outer boundaries to the space of modes of presentation and normativity. That is precisely the point of resorting to Cussins's definition of nonconceptual contents.

4. Evans's on Singular Reference and Dynamic Situated Senses

Evans (1982, 1985) and McDowell (1996, 1998a, 1998b, 2005) argue that specifying cognitive forms of access to the world involves specifying the semantic structure accessed. As a consequence, they reject descriptivism, the postulation of senses as situation-independent criteria that serve as intermediaries in the determination of reference³⁰, and conceive the notion of object-dependent senses.³¹ The reading according to which Fregean senses are equivalent to context-independent criteria of identification is no more than a surplus of the descriptivist view. They showed how to ascribe senses to indexicals and demonstratives³² -the paradigm of context-dependent expressions and direct reference-, and to names³³ -the paradigm of rigid designation.

Evans's main point consists in arguing that speakers' knowledge of truth-conditions are intrinsically related to exercises of the dynamic abilities that allow them to maintain the same informational links to the same objects through successive

²⁹ See McDowell, 1996, pp.106-107.

³⁰ In this line of thought see McDowell, 2007a, p. 239, p. 342, p. 344, p.345 and footnote 13.

³¹ Contrary to Searle (1980), Kaplan (1989), Perry (1977, 1993), Recanati (2004), (2005), (2009a), (2009b), (2010), Travis (2008), among others, who argue that context sensitivity entails abandoning the project of a Fregean theory of meaning.

³² Evans 1982, ch 6; 1985, pp. 291-321.

³³ McDowell, 1998a.

experiences, and to locate the same objects through their changing sensibility to features distributed in the environment. This demand requires to specify the capacities and situated relations that allow speakers to maintain a stable relation with the referents of their perceptions, thoughts and actions, through spatiotemporal changes. He requests to provide a substantive characterisation of Russell's Principle. That is, a framework for enquiring about the links between the speaker's knowledge of truth-conditions and his ability to identify referents. Such framework corresponds to what Evans called the Fundamental Level of Thought. At the Fundamental Level, the difference between one object and another depends on a canonical discrimination in a *fundamental ground of difference*.³⁴ A fundamental identification that can be captured -in the case of thoughts about material objects- with a criterion like the following: 'the object of the category C located in (x, y, z, t)', since objects of the same type in different spatiotemporal positions can be qualitatively identical and numerically different.

Evans's view is to a good extent derived from Strawson's ([1959/2005], ch. 2). According to Strawson our ability to locate objects is a precondition for having states directed to items independent of those states. A conception of a universe of distributed features as an objective world requires for the subject to be able to identify and re-identify those features even when he is not experiencing them. The requirement of re-identification involves the development of a criterion that makes it possible to numerically distinguish states that are qualitatively identical. Strawson considers the case of a universe constituted exclusively by sounds, and argues that for the subject to be related to sounds as objective features it is necessary that he has something analogous to our experience of space. This analogous of our experience of space -a pseudo-space- can be extracted from purely auditory features if each experience is accompanied by the experience of a master-sound whose variations in tone allow to place sounds at different levels, enabling in this way the numerical distinction between qualitatively identical features. Under those conditions it would be possible to formulate hypotheses such as the following: sound *M* preserves its continuous existence in the tone (or position) *l* of the master-sound, although *S* (the subject) in position *l-k* does not perceive it. If *S* moves to position *l* of the master-sound from the position *l-k* he would be able to perceive the sound that is in *l*. Therefore, it would be possible for *S* to postulate the continuous existence of the sound *M*, whether or not experienced, because apart from the experience of *M* there is a condition that coincides with experiences of *M*.

³⁴ See Evans, 1982, p.107.

Evans objected to Strawson that the postulation of a pseudo-space is susceptible to a dispositional reduction,³⁵ and consequently cannot help us to derive the construction of objective properties from a universe of placed features.³⁶ He, however, did not question the general enterprise of relating wayfinding abilities (abilities to locate things in the world, and to locate himself relative to those things) with conditions of objective reference. In fact, he states the following: 'it is, then, the capacity to find one's way about, and to discover, or to understand how to discover, where in the world one is, in which knowledge of what it is for identity propositions of the form $[\pi = p]$ to be true consist' (Evans, 1982, p. 162). Where the identity proposition $[\pi = p]$ identifies, p , a non-fundamental identification of a place, with, π , a fundamental identification of a place. That is, to know the conditions of identity between an identification of a place relative to the sensorimotor dispositions of the agent, and the identification of that place as distinct from other places in the *fundamental ground of difference* (for instance, as a location in a cognitive map), is required in order to understand indexical thoughts about places (here-thoughts). Later he will extend this fundamental requirement to the understanding of demonstrative thoughts about concrete particulars (that-thoughts), and self-ascriptions of thoughts (I-thoughts).

The postulation of a fundamental level of thought is required to explain how a cognitive agent is able to develop an objective and stable representation of a domain from a subjective representation of distributed features. There are three elements in Evans's work from which it is possible to derive the main tenets of such explanation. The first element is the postulation of dynamic capacities. Reference to an object has as a precondition a propensity that manifests itself in the course of a series of experiences. The same singular content is preserved by exercising the dynamic ability of keeping track of the object.³⁷ The second element is the postulation of serial system of location. It is possible to distinguish between qualitatively identical objects by their position in a regular order based on travels; a map of courses whose order depends on both the way the world is arranged and the movements of the subject through the world. Those travel-based representations are subject to a degree of regularity such that they allow us to formulate conditionals of the following form: if I would like to have an experience of class e_3 , and I am in an experience of class e_1 , I would have to go through an experience of the class e_2 , since every time I have an experience e_1 , it follows a e_2 experience, and every time

³⁵ See Evans, 1985, pp. 249-290.

³⁶ See Evans, 1985, pp. 254-255.

³⁷ See Evans, 1985, p. 309; and Evans, 1985, p. 311.

I have an experience e_2 , it follows a e_3 experience.³⁸ That is, experiences can be arranged dispositionally around the agent's actual experience in an egocentric stream. The third element consists in conceiving spatiotemporal relations as not reducible to the serial conception. That is, the postulation of a simultaneous system of relations in which the identification of each location depends on the relative positions occupied by objects, not of the place they occupy relative to the subject's motion. A system that allows to formulate hypotheses about the subject's routes from different positions, and that is not reducible to each route of the subject's motion.

If the features experienced count as objective, the subject should be able to locate them as independent to each dispositional arrangement of his experience. He can update such allocentric arrangement by taking into account changes in the things he finds through his navigations, but the allocentric arrangement is not reducible to his dispositional findings. Equipped with the serial system it is possible for the subject to formulate conditionals of the form: If I have an experience of class e_1 and I would like to have an experience of class e_3 , I would have to go through an experience of class e_2 . Equipped with a simultaneous system, it would be possible to know how to locate different streams of experience, so that he would be able to formulate conditionals confirmed by independent courses of experience.³⁹

What I call dynamic situated senses corresponds to an intertwined conception of the previous conditions: (1) Objects' location in a travel-based order depends on the possibility of locating them in our conception of space as a field of simultaneous relations, and our ability to track dynamically each object in that field. (2) Objects' location in our simultaneous conception of the space is dependent on our travel-based serial system of location, and our dynamic ability to track them. (3) Our ability to track objects depends also on both our ability to develop a serial and a simultaneous system of location. Dynamic adjustments between a system of spatial egocentric travel-based representation and a system of spatial allocentric public representation, would allow the agent to be in possession of knowledge in virtue of which it is possible to discriminate objectively the referent as something independent of his states, and as something independent of an absolute frame of reference.

³⁸ see Evans, 1985, pp. 255-256.

³⁹ See Evans 1985, pp. 289-290.

5. Dynamic Situated Senses and Mediational Fields

Like Evans respect to Strawson, Cussins (1999) raised some internal objections to Evans's project without objecting to the general enterprise of relating wayfinding and tracking abilities with the conditions for having singular thoughts. His main point is the following: the identification of an object based on the *fundamental ground of difference* is frame-dependent. If the *fundamental ground of difference* is introduced as an absolute framework of reference, it will not provide a base to explain how to develop objective representations from distributed features. If the identification of an object depends on a frame of reference (*e.g.*, a predetermined cognitive map), it becomes difficult to draw a difference between cases of reference to real objects, and reference to fictional objects, since what counts as an object is determined by the frame.

The difficulty that Cussins raises lies in postulating a formal and absolute criterion to determine the difference between numerical and qualitative identifications. Just as in the case of Strawson's pseudo-space, the postulation of a *fundamental ground of difference* as a condition for objective cognition requires to determine discriminating profiles non-reducible to an absolute frame. That is, it is necessary to conceive the *fundamental ground of difference* as something that is constituted by their occupants, their relations, and their abilities, and not as something independently pre-given. It is crucial to develop a conception of fundamental identifications as something different of dispositional identifications, but also as something different of identifications dependent on a frame of reference. Here is where the notion of mediational fields becomes useful.

According to Cussins (1999) to avoid fame-dependent identifications, our ability to refer should depend on continuous adjustments of several mediational fields. That is, to refer to singular requires to develop stable referential cognitions through a fabric of adjustable mediational fields. The presentation of a stable world through situated structures that change is dependent on constantly adjusting different patterns of activity. Thus, fundamental identifications will be conceived as identifications dependent on the relations and the abilities of the occupants of the ground of difference.

The resulting view corresponds to the following: It does not make sense to enquire for the content of an item in an isolated way, or abstracted from the intertwined set of situations in which the tracking and locational capacities are exercised. Referential contents in a situation are determined relative to a series of situations. Through all those situations the agent keeps track of activity patterns to preserve the same referential content. Forms of thinking the referent are ways of

keeping track of the referent through minor changes. So that, a subject is thinking about the same referent despite minor differences in the background, because the occasion in which he grasps a referential content depends on adjustments that stabilise the content to each situation. Referential contents are determined by how they are stabilised relative adjustments of mediational fields.

This view can be applied to different cases of situated cognition. Consider for instance the following cases:⁴⁰ (1) I perceive a cup in front of me, my perception carries information about the cup. But also about my position with respect to the cup, so that I am able to move my body to grab that cup. (2) It is raining and I utter the sentence 'It is raining'. My utterance carries information about the weather. To adequately understand the utterance -an act on behalf of its content- I should be able to determine the place where it is raining. (3) I drive avoiding obstacles without looking at the speedometer in my motorcycle. I have knowledge of the speed that guides me, even if I do not know that *I am going at speed x*. In the first case, I do not represent the position of my body as part of the content about which my perception is. In the second, I utter 'It is raining' but I do not register the place as part of the thought expressed. In the third, I have a practical knowledge of the speed that allows me to avoid obstacles without crashing. All these cases share something: it seems necessary to have a knowledge (of my position, of the place, and of the speed) that guides my actions, although it is not necessary to have a referential knowledge of it. What I know is not presented as an object about which the perceptual content is, or as an articulated constituent of the thought.⁴¹ It is presented as something that allows me to carry out the action. To know my position allows me to move my arm properly to grab the cup. To know the place where it is raining tells me if it is necessary to take the umbrella. To environmentally know the speed draws me to drive skilfully in traffic. The knowledge of the positions of my body, the knowledge of the place where I am, and the knowledge of my speed relative to the grade of proximity with respect to other bodies, is crucial to determine the truth of the thoughts [I will grab that cup], [it is raining], [I am going too fast]. Nevertheless, it is not a knowledge that presents all features as objects of my experience or my thought. Neither the first content is about a position, nor the second about a place, nor the third about a determinate speed. If I want to grab the cup in front of me, I can move my hands in many ways avoiding obstacles. Adjusting my perceptual states to the pattern of activity is what allows me to keep the content stable despite changes in ways to reach the goal. By adjusting my sensorimotor

⁴⁰ The first two examples come from Perry (1993, pp. 205-226). The third example comes from Cussins (2003).

⁴¹ The notion of 'articulated constituents' comes from Perry (1993, pp. 205-226).

states to the activity pattern, I have knowledge of my position relative to other objects. A knowledge that remains stable across adjustments required at every moment. What unifies the determination of the same content through minor changes is to adjust patterns that enable my activity in different ways, so that the same referential content is preserved. These adjustments allow me to group representations of different spatiotemporally distributed features as pointing to the same stable object of perception, action and thought. It would not be possible to assign referents to representational vehicles, if there were no such tendencies to preserve stable senses through different situations.

6. Concluding Remarks

Mediational contents can be specified resorting to the embodied abilities required to cope with the surroundings, not to the conditions of the world that makes the content true, correct, or accurate.⁴² Mediational contents are ‘correctings of activity’ (Cussins, 2012, p. 30), not correctness-conditions.⁴³ They can be specified also as structures that mediate and improve the performance of an activity. Referential contents are usually specified by determining the conditions that make them true, correct, or accurate. They can be specified also as the products of ecological and mediational conceptual capacities.

Let us consider now the know-how/know-that distinction. Some philosophers believe that it is useful to describe the structure of experiences as the products of sensorimotor capacities in terms of know-how clauses, and to describe the structure of thoughts as the products of understanding capacities in terms of know-that clauses. Some of them think that a nonconceptual characterization of the contents of experience and a conceptual characterization of the contents of thoughts can be mapped onto the distinction between these two kinds of knowledge. So that we should say things like the following: the same person in different ways or in different states can have or exploit different kinds of knowledge about the same domains. That person is in one cognitive state when she is *doing* something, and is another cognitive state when she is *thinking* about or expressing what she is doing. An expert, for instance, has practical knowledge of his domain of expertise when he is *performing* the task, and intellectual knowledge when he is *explaining* what he is or was doing. When I catch a frisbee I am able to exhibit my knowledge simply by catching frisbees in different occasions; but I am also able to exhibit my knowledge

⁴² See Cussins 1992, pp. 655-658.

⁴³ See Cussins, 2012, p. 26.

by explaining all the states and transitions of activity required to complete the task, from the initial move to the final one. Whereas non-human animals have practical knowledge of their surroundings and know how to perform a task according to what the environment affords and solicits, human animals have intellectual knowledge and know that something is the case.

Unfortunately, the know-how/know-that distinction will not settle the debate between conceptualists and nonconceptualists. Knowing how to catch a frisbee in the air, and knowing that that is a frisbee coming from there, can be characterised as cases of conceptual or of nonconceptual cognition. A nonconceptualist will say that when I and my dog know how to catch the frisbee, what is going on is that the frisbee affords or solicits to be caught. We both are able to perform the bodily movements required to catch the frisbee (maybe after a period of training). Only I know that those performances realise the concept [catching a frisbee], but that is the product of intellectual -not practical- capacities, and corresponds to another kind of knowledge. A conceptualist will say that whereas my dog is not able to, and does not need to, grasp the concept to be drawn by the affordances and solicitations of the situation, I am able to grasp the concept when I am thinking and when I am performing the activity. The point of dispute is if I grasp -or if I need to grasp- concepts to have experiences, and to know something. Since ascriptions of know-how will be compatible with a nonconceptual and a conceptual characterization of the contents of experience, the distinction will not be useful to determine if I need concepts to have experiences. Even more, knowing how to do something can be characterised as a mode of presentation under which states of the environment are presented as referents. My knowledge of how to catch a frisbee coming from there can be specified as the instantiation in my brain of a sentence of the language in which my sensorimotor system is programmed that is true just of the triple <I, Frisbee, There>. The distinction does not determine if what I know when I know how to catch frisbees is how to deal with n-tuples, or how to follow salient features placed in the environment.

My proposal is to define a bidimensional space. Cognitive contents are ways to disclose the world as mediational forces and referential structures. The grade of presence of those elements determine different varieties of cognition. Whether those varieties are instances of conceptual or nonconceptual contents, or instances of know-that or know-how, depends on presupposing a distinction between intellectual and practical abilities. A distinction we are not entitled to assume from the beginning of the enquiry.

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