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Perceiving the Environment in the Papuan Highlands: Reflections on the Ideas of Direct Perception and Attunement

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ABSTRACT

Tim Ingold has criticised anthropologists for their disregard of direct perception: the idea that people can find meaning in an environment without recourse to signs and symbols. More recently he has complemented his understanding of direct perception: perception is not only concerned with surveying objects present that provide affordances for action; it is simultaneously about a presence and awareness in the very instant of perceptual realisation, what Ingold refers to as attunement. In contrast, this article argues direct perception as well as attunement provides a limited means of describing and understanding the perceptions and actions of people in their social, environmental and cosmological contexts. What is not clarified by the notions of direct perception and attunement is the issue of intention. Why does a person or persons select and act on some affordances and attunements instead of others? This argument is made with reference to ethnography from the Fuyuge people of Papua New Guinea.

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Introduction

A number of anthropologists have taken issue with the idea of direct perception developed by Tim Ingold. Both David Howes (2022) and Webb Keane (2018) are critical of his account of direct perception, elaborated from the ecological psychology theory of James Gibson (Gibson 1966; 1979; Ingold 2000: 166–168).

As Ingold (2018: 41) has stated:

> The idea of direct perception—that living beings can find meaning in an environment unmediated by signs—was apparently too much for anthropologists who had always insisted, almost as an article of faith, that there can be no meaning without semiosis. Anthropology always wants to hide presence behind its signs, perception behind interpretation.

Ingold's critical remarks are directed not only to anthropology in general but also more specifically to Webb Keane (2018), who draws on the concept of affordances – a key idea in Gibson's ecological psychology – but in a way not in accordance with how Ingold deployed the concept. In his response Keane (2018: 45) points out that what anthropology studies – including 'concepts, thoughts, interpretations, meanings, and language' – is not by any means the sum total of anthropological interests but there is 'no warrant for ignoring them altogether'. He reproaches Ingold for rejecting all of this 'in the name of "direct perception – that living beings can find meaning in an environment unmediated by signs"' (Keane 2018; 45 quoting Ingold 2018: 41). For Keane, and for many other

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anthropologists, this is not an outlook that should direct anthropological research. What appears to be missing are all the things anthropologists examine in their ethnographies. According to Keane (2018: 46) Ingold promotes a very thin conception of what social life is.

In this paper I argue that direct perception and the associated concept of attunement are dimensions of peoples' experience and engagement with their environment. However, direct perception and attunement provide a limited means of describing and understanding the perceptions and actions of people in their social, environmental and cosmological contexts. In making this argument I initially discuss James Gibson's idea of direct perception, that of affordances and Ingold's use of these ideas. What is not clarified by direct perception and the associated notion of attunement is the issue of intention: why are some affordances and attunements acted upon and not others. I then turn to ethnography of the Fuyuge people to describe the intentional actions which structure the central enterprise of their social life. Movements along paths are key dimensions of Fuyuge action, illustrated by the ethnography and a variety of attunements feature in these descriptions. But engagements in the attunements only makes sense for the Fuyuge in connection with the symbolic forms the attunements are understood to result in. As such, although direct perceptions and attunements are a dimension of peoples' experience of their environment little sense can be made of these dimensions of experience without an understanding of the intentions and wider symbolic environment in which they occur.

Direct Perception

In *The Ecological Approach to Visual Perception*, Gibson (1979: 139) provides the following example of direct perception:

> Direct perception is what one gets from seeing Niagara Falls, say, as distinguished from seeing a picture of it. The latter kind of perception is mediated. So when I assert that perception of the environment is direct, I mean that it is not mediated by retinal pictures, neural pictures, or mental pictures. Direct perception is the activity of getting information from the ambient array of light. I call this a process of information pickup that involves the exploratory activity of looking around, getting around, and looking at things. This is quite different from the supposed activity of getting information from the inputs of the optic nerves, whatever they may prove to be.

In an earlier publication, *The Senses Considered as Perceptual Systems*, Gibson (1966: 28) emphasises a similar point to that made above:

> We tend to think of direct stimuli from the terrestrial environment as being like words and pictures instead of realizing that words and pictures are at best man-made substitutes for these direct stimuli. Language and art yield perceptions at second hand. This second-hand perception no doubt works backward on direct perception, but knowledge about the world rests on acquaintance with the world, in the last analysis … .

Ingold (2021: 31) closely follows Gibson when discussing direct perception, as the following indicates:

> When we see, Gibson (1979: 53) insists, this entire eyes–head–body system is at work. Thus visual perception is the achievement of the whole organism as it moves around in its environment; not that of a mind confined within the interiority of a body and bound to the interpretation of patterns projected onto the back of the retina. As we move around, the array of light reaching our eyes, reflected from surfaces in our surroundings, undergoes continuous modulation. Underlying these modulations, however, are parametric constants, or so-called 'invariants', that specify the properties and qualities of the things we encounter. To see these things is to extract their invariants from modulations of the optic array. Thus it is not the mind that gives shape to what we perceive. It does not shape the land, or its features. For these shapes are already there in the world, awaiting discovery by any creature, human or nonhuman, whose perceptual system is so attuned as to attend to them – or more precisely, to pick up the invariants by which they are specified.

In following Gibson, Ingold (2000: 166, emphasis added) argues that perception involves movement and is thus a mode of action. He goes on to note that 'if perception is a mode of action, then what we perceive must be a **direct** function of how we act'. The knowledge acquired through direct perception is practical: the knowledge attained relates to what an environment presents for the

achievement of the action 'in which the perceiver is currently engaged' (Ingold 2000: 166). More specifically, the perception of an event or object is to 'perceive what it **affords'** (Ingold 2000: 166, original emphasis).[1]

Intentional Action and Experience

A common supposition of the ecological approach to visual perception advanced by Gibson (and thus Ingold) is that perception is inextricably connected to action. According to this view, perception is principally of affordances. The environment affords the perceiver prospects for action. However, what this model of affordances does not clarify is the issue of intention. Why does a person or persons select and act on some affordances instead of others?

The notion of intention is important but not in the way criticised by Ingold (2021: 59), who understands intentions through the lens of the psychology of cognition. According to this model, for an act to be intentional 'it must be founded in an evolved capacity to grasp what is "out there" within the frame of received concepts and categories.' The person must first have knowledge of the entity they are dealing with. It is only then that some form of interaction can take place. If the interaction is with a person, again, according to this model, this presupposes that one considers their intentions. As Ingold (2021: 59) notes: 'In short, you have to be in possession of what psychologists call a "theory of mind"'.

There is, though, another model of intention which accounts for how the perception of the environment and its affordances, in particular, is directed by intentions without the presence of representations in the actor or agent (cf. Segundo-Ortin & Kalis 2024). This is the theory of intentions formulated by Elizabeth Anscombe. According to her model if we want to understand the intention of a person and why they acted in the way they did, the starting point is to focus on what they did (Anscombe 1963 [1957]: 49). To grasp this idea, it is necessary to know that actions are only intentional under a description.

Descriptions are an account of a person(s), object(s) or event(s); they are an account of what is and what is possible – whether it be a wink or a twitch (cf. Geertz 1973: 310–323). Anscombe provides a well-known example. This is of a man's action where he is moving his arm up and down while holding a handle. His action can be understood as intentional under the description 'pumping water'. But it cannot be understood under other descriptions such as 'contracting these muscles' or 'beating out a noticeable rhythm' (Anscombe 1963 [1957]: 37). Closing one eye up and down rapidly will have one description as a wink and an apparently similar action will have a different description as a twitch.

Anscombe's thesis, elaborated by Hacking (1995: 235–236), has important logical consequences for the future and the past:

> When I decide to do something, and do it, I am acting intentionally. There may be many kinds of actions with which I am unacquainted, and of which I have no description. It seems to follow … that I cannot intend to perform those actions. … I cannot feel limited by lacking a description, for if I did, in a self-aware way, feel limited, then I would have at least a glimmering of the description of the action and so could think of choosing it.

The issue here, then, is what makes an action intentional under certain descriptions? The key factor for Anscombe (1963 [1957]: 44, 46) is that particular descriptions characterise an action as a means to an end. As such, '"[i]ntentional action" always presupposes what might be called "knowing one's way about" the matters described in the description under which an action can be called intentional, and this knowledge is exercised in the action and is practical knowledge' (Anscombe 1963 [1957]: 89).

To make sense of the actions and world of the Fuyuge people who reside in the Papuan highlands[2] with whom I conducted fieldwork in the mid-1980s and in 1999, and to which I turn to below, I needed to attend to the descriptions under which their intentional actions were performed.

At the same time, their actions involved the use signs and symbols linked to their cosmology and how this cosmology shaped the landscape in which their descriptions and actions occurred.

With the above discussion of Gibson and his model of affordances in mind, as Ingold currently understands the matter, perception is not only concerned with surveying objects that are present; it is simultaneously about a presence and awareness in the very instant of perceptual realisation. The world is in constant flux – the weather, the wind, the sea. One must attune one's movements and activities in order to 'catch the moment when the forces that conspire to the success of [one's] enterprise are in favourable alignment' (Ingold 2018: 43). One must be waiting and ready for the world as the world is not always as one hopes to find it. Affordances and direct perception are still significant, but it is necessary as well to recognise that environments are also always in formation (Ingold 2022).

Nonetheless, the model of attuning with the world appears to focus on the single individual. It is not clear how a 'we' as opposed to an 'I' might be constituted in this account of perception. What are the myriad collectivities that create the 'we' of which any 'I' is intrinsically connected (Keane 2018: 46)? Under what descriptions do the actions of attuning take place? Again, for Ingold (2018: 40), 'humans can enter into meaningful relations with the world without these relations having to be mediated by the concepts and categories of a cultural tradition'.

This may be the case, but it is not the whole picture and, as I have indicated above, it does not address the issue of why different courses of actions are followed. Certainly, as Myers (2000: 77) has observed with respect to his research with the Australian Aboriginal Pintupi people and that of others (see Munn 1970) 'people do not simply "experience" the world; they are taught – indeed, disciplined – to signify their experiences in distinctive ways'. He is responding to Ingold's argument that the human condition is one of immersion: of a practical, active 'perceptual engagement' with elements of the 'dwelt-in-world' (Myers 2000: 76; quoting Ingold 1996: 120). Myers's (2000: 78) concern with the '"dwelling" approach', in a manner similar to that expressed by Keane, is that although the dwelling approach is capable of seeing the import of action, there is the tendency to imply that such experience is 'largely unmediated by social process'.[3]

As I suggested above, to understand the world of Fuyuge people – how they perceived and acted in their world – I needed to attend to the signs and transactions with which they were engaged as well as the descriptions under which they intentionally acted. These actions and transactions are as much about the phenomenology of power relations as they are about the cosmological basis of Fuyuge conventions and landscape.

Form of the Fuyuge Landscape: *Gab*, *Tidibe* and Power Inherent in Fuyuge Perceptions

In his discussion with Timo Kaartinen (Kaartinen & Ingold, 2018: 59), Ingold maintains that there is a difficulty in finding a satisfactory integration between 'a phenomenological account of landscape' – what it feels like to be in the world and how one perceives this – – and that of a 'politics of landscape'. The latter, in Ingold's words, 'is all about power relations and access and who can control what form this landscape is going to take'.

However, as I discuss below in order to understand how Fuyuge people perceived and acted in their landscape and their world more generally – how it felt to them – I found that the landscape, and their perceptions and actions in the landscape were inherently political: they were as much about power relations as they were about cosmology. Central to this were two things that significantly structured Fuyuge perceptions and the descriptions under which they intentionally acted: that of *gab* and *tidibe*.

In anthropological terms *gab* can be categorised as a ritual or ceremony but in Fuyuge perceptions it is the central event of their social life. As Fastré (n.d.: 21) noted in his detailed account of Fuyuge 'manners and customs': 'They think about it from one [*gab*] to another, and in fact do not really think about much else'. Fastré's monograph dates from 1939, but I found the same to be true when I conducted my research. Again, in anthropological terms *tidibe* might be categorised as a

creator force or 'culture hero' (Hallpike 1977: 256). In Fuyuge perceptions *tidibe* created their conventions of conduct and their world as much as the world beyond. *Gab* is a creation of *tidibe* and in organising and performing *gab* Fuyuge people say they are following in the ways of *tidibe*.

In the terminology used by Ingold *gab* is the central enterprise of Fuyuge social life (Ingold 2018: 43). Their livelihoods are dedicated to the organisation and performance of *gab*. So, for example, money that is currently earned through coffee cash cropping is channelled into the exchanges that transpire in *gab*, now that money plays such a key part in the transactions that occur in *gab*. The world is necessarily constituted for people by the enterprises and livelihoods in which they are involved and I will show this is the case of *gab* for Fuyuge people.

By focusing on the performance of *gab* in this paper I will show how the Fuyuge landscape has been formed both by *tidibe* and by human actions that are perceived to follow in the ways of *tidibe*. The landscape is at once a cosmological creation and at the same time the outcome of the relations of power displayed in *gab* and a manifold of livelihood actions linked to *gab*. The power revealed in *gab* is made possible by *tidibe*. None of this I could know or understand until I had grasped the descriptions under which Fuyuge peoples' action take place.

What I will show is that symbolic forms enacted in *gab* – such as speeches containing metaphorical references – are inextricably connected with the intentional actions of people and how these movements are the outcome of attuning with the environment. Ingold's emphasis on direct perception is a dimension of people's lived experience but certainly in the case of Fuyuge people (and I imagine many others) such direct perceptions only provide a limited understanding of how people perceive their environment.

Although movement is a central aspect of Ingold's notion of direct perception, what is given less emphasis is the directionality of movement and the outcome or outcomes that the directionality of movement is meant to achieve (cf. Parkin 1992). As I describe below, the performance of *gab* is filled with movement but it is directed to specific anticipated outcomes that are recognised through speeches, two of which I examine below. The speeches are not incidental to the movement but are in fact expected to occur at set moments and provide a particular perspective on the movements of which the speeches are intrinsically a part. As I indicated above, my understanding of the movements and speeches was predicated on my prior understanding of the descriptions under which Fuyuge people acted.

I begin by considering a speech I recorded during my first fieldwork that was made before one of the dances that are a major part of any *gab*. Scrutiny of the speech reveals a distinctive perspective on the landscape as both the outcome of human action and the movements of *tidibe*. Aspects of Fuyuge peoples' perception are disclosed by the speech.

There are three main dances in the *gab* ritual organised by Fuyuge people. Two are in the daytime and the third commences in the evening and lasts until daybreak the next morning. Before the dancers commence their night time dance – often involving over 100 dancers – a speech is made to those who have assembled for the performance. The assembled includes not only the dancers but the audience who move in front of the dancers as they dance from one side of the ritual plaza to the other, illuminating their performance with burning cane grass and kerosene lamps. The following is the speech made by one of the dancers.

> Kag and Vari both of you hold up the burning cane grass and burn the *sama* trees until you come to the last one. You have already burned Esef *sama*. I lit the dried leaves and brought it. I see the missionaries have taken down the *sama*, Nontogese. I then brought these burning dried leaves to Ho *sama* and stood on its branches.
>
> Mange, Somb, Siwude, Siman, Obu, Vari, Feled, Hamab, Kare Bek, Esef, Gemo Kare. All of you, to make their feast you get the burning dried leaves … and go on top of Meen mountain. If it is cold there go to Avan mountain. If it is cold there go to Kogolombentu mountain and if it is cold there go through the hole of Honga python; then go through the hole of Todo python; then go through the hole of Bobe python; then go through the hole of Esav python; then go through the hole of Tabub python … [the drumming of the dancers drowns out the end of his speech].

The speech begins by referring to two women. These are wives of the male hosts of the ritual. They are known as *gab u mam*, mothers of the *gab*; their husbands are *gab u bab*, fathers of the *gab*. Women such as these form part of the audience of the dancers and help to illuminate their dancing. He speaks of them holding the burning cane grass. These women along with the other *gab u mam* are the ones who raise the pigs that will later be sacrificed and given to the dancers in exchange for their dancing performance.

The speech contains metaphorical references to the dancers; they are referred to as a species of beech tree known locally as *sama* (cf. A. Strathern 1975: 191–193). These particular trees are prototypes (*vasa*) placed by *tidibe* and reference to each tree is preceded by the name of the specific prototype. *Tidibe* placed these prototype trees in each territorial and dialect area of Fuyuge speakers.[4] The women are said to 'burn' the trees, i.e. the dancers. Although the women illuminate the dancers, the burning here refers to the productivity that the women are a part (cf. Le Roy 1978). Land is burned so gardens can be planted with yams, taro, sweet potato, sugar cane and so on that will feed the dancers as well as the pigs that the dancers will subsequently consume. Another collective of dancers also challenged to perform on this occasion is referred to by one of their prototype trees; this collective of dancers having performed some days earlier.

The speaker continues with the burning metaphor – of dried leaves – to refer to his collective of dancers that he 'brings' to the *gab*. He speaks of a prototype tree that had to be removed in order to construct the airstrip; its construction was overseen by the missionaries. The dancers travelled through the place occupied by this former tree on their way to the *gab*; the place of the *gab* is referred to by another prototype tree on which the speaker metaphorically 'stands' – he is now visible in the *gab* plaza itself.

The speech-giver then calls out the names of the men and women whose *mal* rite is being celebrated in the *gab*. *Mal* refers to white hair. These are women and men who are perceived as 'old' because their hair has begun to turn white. It is especially for them that a *gab* is staged by their relations – sons, daughters, brothers, sisters, wives, husbands, etc. Rites for the young and dead also occur in a *gab*, but it is the *mal* that are perceived as most significant. The speech giver addresses the hosts and says that to make the feast for the *mal* you needed to call in the dancers. This is followed by the names of several mountains and the names of several prototype pythons. All of these names are associated with the places the dancers both came from and travelled through on their way to the ritual village. The speech is both outlining and recounting a movement across the landscape as the dancers formed the collective that was about to perform in the *gab*. The speaker is drawing attention to the potential power of the dancers before they commence their performance. By summoning features of the *tidibe* created landscape associated with the places of the dancers the speech is also aligning the dancers with the power of *tidibe*.

This is just one of several speeches I recorded, made at various points in the ritual by both hosts and different groups of dancers. Other speeches use similar imagery as found here as well as drawing on river names and named pathways for analogous evocative purposes. In all cases the imagery is grounded in aspects of the landscape. These landscape features are mentioned but what they evoke are named persons and collectives of persons; persons connected with places that exist across the landscape that have now been gathered at the *gab* village.

Because the organisation and performance of *gab* is so central to Fuyuge peoples' perception and action I need to describe something of the setting of *gab* and how it constitutes other connected areas of Fuyuge peoples' social life.

The coming together for a common purpose in creating *gab* is made possible by one or more *amede*, men of divine origins (see below).[5] Fuyuge people conceptualise this as becoming one mind (*har fida*) and one skin (*hode fida*) – becoming a unity. The idea of skin is significant here.[6] People understand themselves as composed of skin they acquire through their maternal and paternal relations.[7] The 'skin names' are the outcome of the past actions of men (and by implications women) in collective and personal undertakings (e.g. in *gab* ritual or in cultivating gardens). Skin is formed by these past actions of men and women that are recreated in the present through

analogous collective and personal endeavours. The notion of skin can also be translated as that of a relative or relation. Skin in this sense is a form of collective and personal identity and a person is composed of several 'skins' depending on their relations.

In the context of *gab* diverse ways of thinking (mind/*har*) and diverse social differences (skin/*hode*) are transcended through the agency of the *amede*. The notion of skin realised in the collective unity of *gab* ritual is analogous to the image of a tree branching: the single base holds numerous branches all visible on the skin/bark (*hode*) of the tree. The *amede*, as comparable to the base, is what enables the plurality of men and women – all comparable to the branches – to come together and be amalgamated. A person is composed of skin (relations) and skin is how the person is perceived (her or his external appearance). The same applies in a comparable manner to a collective of persons, such as what occurs when people concentrate together to perform *gab*. At the same time, though, the perceptible skin is where internal and hidden capacities and actions are revealed. The skin, then, is 'read' to see what it discloses about the person or persons and those 'things' persons are connected to such as other persons or garden foods or pigs (see O'Hanlon 1989).[8]

The skin of those participating in *gab* are assessed for their effectiveness. This is true for the dancers as their performances are evaluated. It is true as well for the hosts in the way they conduct themselves throughout the proceedings of *gab*: from the appearance of the *gab* village, to the way the dancers are invited, to the display of betelnut bunches (see below), to the conduct of the rites for the young, *mal* and dead, to the pig killings and distributions of pork and food that occur at different stages of *gab*.

A *gab* village is a specially constructed structure and is also known by the name *gab*. It is built by the men and women related to a *mal*. It has an oval shaped structure with two men's houses, one at each end and other houses built around a central plaza. The village is built either in a previously uninhabited place or a hamlet connected to relations of one or more of the *mal*. A key requirement is that it is a place that can contain a wide, level plaza.

For the duration of the *gab* the hosts of the ritual – the *gab u bab*, *gab u mam* (see above) – the *mal*, supporters of the hosts (see below) and invited guests, reside in the village – either in the men's houses or in the other houses around the plaza. Another structure is constructed by the hosts some distance from the *gab* village and this houses all the dancers while they prepare their dancing adornments. For most people involved this is not their conventional place of residence. What a *gab* does is gather together hundreds of people in one place for the duration of the ritual. It is an enterprise that is evaluated by those assembled in the *gab* village to determine whether those involved possess the power and effectiveness they profess.

A *gab* is a competitive undertaking. The hosts and dancers each seek to appear powerful in the eyes of the other as well as those scrutinising the event from the sides of the *gab* plaza. The ability of the hosts to appear effective is linked to the quantity and size of the pigs they can assemble at the *gab* and the amount of food they can similarly concentrate, display and distribute to satisfy the dancers and guests attending the ritual. The dancers' capacity to appear effective is related to the number of dancers they can draw together and how their adornments and dancing performances are assessed.

In order for all of the above – pigs, foods and adornments – to exist and to flourish is dependent on the existence of the prototypes that were placed by *tidibe*. The past movements and actions of *tidibe* are what makes life possible for Fuyuge people. They understand *tidibe* as creating not only their world but the world more generally and if asked why they perform a particular action will often say that they are following in the way of *tidibe*.

I found that a *gab* is a reciprocal undertaking. When the hosts of a *gab* challenge dancers from a 'home'[9] to perform, the dancers will at a later time challenge the hosts to perform as dancers in their *gab*. At that point the exchange relation between hosts and dancers is complete, to be potentially reactivated at a later point in time. The men and women that host a *gab* are supported with pigs and foods from numerous people through their relations of kinship and marriage. The same is the case for the dancers challenged to perform. They are supported through their relations of kinship and marriage, thus increasing the size of the dancing collective that subsequently performs.

The people that support the hosts or dancers in this way can in a reciprocal manner at a later date seek support from those they initially supported. In this way, numerous cross-cutting exchange relations exist across the landscape.

One effect of these relations is that a person needs to continually anticipate that they will be involved in a *gab* ritual close to hand or more distant. This means the person needs to ensure that he or she have pigs of sufficient number and size and that their gardens have sufficient numbers of foods like sweet potatoes to feed their pigs and themselves as well as foods like yams each of which can be taken to a *gab* in support of the hosts. How the environment is perceived will be influenced by these expectations.

As I noted above, a *gab* is organised to mark the life-cycle changes of the young, old and the dead. As Fuyuge people grow, age and die, their relations are compelled to organise a *gab* to mark these life changes.[10] The compulsion to stage a *gab* is thus always on the horizon. Since the advent of the mission and government and the cessation of warfare and revenge killings *gab* are organised more frequently with numerous *gab* occurring on Fuyuge lands at any one time. The power and effectiveness that men and women seek to achieve in *gab* is ever-present on the landscape. The places where *gab* have been performed in the past and the garden land associated with each *gab* provides a form to the landscape that is recognised by Fuyuge people. When I would walk with a Fuyuge person in an area that appeared unremarkable to me, my Fuyuge host would often tell me about the *gab* which had occurred in that place, the details of who attended and the large gardens that were planted with yams that were later displayed around the ritual village. None of this would be visible to me but my host was able to see the effects of these past achievements and educate my perceptions.

As I have also indicated earlier, Fuyuge people understand their lands and their conventions to have been formed by *tidibe*. According to Fuyuge narratives *tidibe* journeyed from east to west and disappeared when approaching the coast. People are uncertain what became of *tidibe*.[11] Although *tidibe* disappeared the powers and conventions *tidibe* established endure.[12]

Tidibe is both one and many. *Tidibe* exists as a single, disembodied creator force and as multiple human-like figures that feature in mythic narratives, also known as *tidibe*. Fuyuge people speak in general terms about the movements of the creator force from east to west while the specific movements of *tidibe* are narrated through particular mythic narratives. The myths describe how such things as child birth became possible or the origins of human death occurred or the beginnings of the convention of killing pigs in *gab* became possible. The narratives are all based on reference to unique places and in detailed descriptions of movements across the landscape by the mythic human-like figures. These are places that Fuyuge people routinely encounter in their everyday social life. The landscape is, so to speak, filled with these places of cosmological significance. Aspects of their significance derives from the actions and movements of *tidibe* as both a single and multiple entity.

I mention all of the above about *gab* and *tidibe* because these not only structure Fuyuge action and how they perceive the world but it is what Fuyuge people told me about their actions and their world so I would be able to understand it – it was by understanding their descriptions that I was able to understand the intentional actions they perform in coming together to create and re-create *gab* ritual. None of this would be intelligible if the focus was solely on direct perception and attunement. Those dimensions of perception and action are evident as Ingold suggests (and to which I turn to below) but it is the descriptions under which Fuyuge intentional actions occur that makes this all meaningful to Fuyuge people.

Movement along Paths

In their everyday movements to gardens, to hamlets, to villages (including *gab*) Fuyuge people walk along numerous paths, many of them named. As Roy Wagner (1986a: 21) noted: 'Not only do [people like the Fuyuge] gain their living by following [paths] … but [they] also spend their lives making [paths] themselves'. Wagner goes on to observe that following and creating paths is an

'endless repetition of domestic and productive acts, a "following" of custom and technique … a retracing of [paths] that had been known from time immemorial'. Ultimately, then, '[t]he life of a person [can be seen as] the sum of his [paths]', this last point being one highlighted by Ingold (2000: 144; Ingold 2007: 72–103).

Recognition of the centrality of paths to Fuyuge social life is one that is often made apparent in *gab*. The following speech I recorded is from the same *gab* reported above. This is a speech that was given by an *amede* – one of the hosts of the *gab* – during the second daytime dance performed by the visiting dancers. The *amede* entered the plaza and his presence compelled the dancers to stop in the middle of the plaza where he stood. He then spoke:

> Hodgode, Dekhalo, Halume, Gamenfide, Onongegode, Ofange, Minakume, Elfide. I am taking the *kes*, Yabdu *kes*, *kes* Yabuge, *kes* Idebode, so you will feel good … for your headdresses. It is up to you if you want to keep dancing. Just for this dance you have come and stayed a long time. Therefore, you dance until the time is up.

The speech begins by listing eight names. These are the names of paths. They are the paths that the dancers travelled on their way to the *gab*. Many paths on Fuyuge lands are named and are associated with places that they connect. As I mentioned above the dancers reside in a number of distinct places and they gather together to form one dancing group. There are the dancers explicitly invited by the hosts and there are the supporters of the invited dancers related to the invited dancers through kinship and marriage. By referring to the named paths the *amede* was openly speaking to the dancers now standing in front of him. The named paths symbolise the persons now united as a group of dancers. To refer to the paths is to speak of the persons that traverse those paths. The dancers seek to be recognised through these names and the *amede* is simultaneously emphasising his capacity of being able to summon such a group of dancers before him.

In the centre of the plaza an uprooted tree has been planted with its leaves removed and branches shortened. On its branches have been placed bunches of mountain and coastal betelnut that have been brought to the *gab* by the host and invited guests. Betelnut is known as *kes* in the Fuyuge language. Mountain betelnut is handled by the *amede*; it is the *amede*'s 'thing'. As I described above, an *amede* is like the base or truck of the tree and other men and women are like the branches that are unified by the base. This is made visible in the centre of the plaza with the tree unifying all the betelnut present.

The *amede* takes down a bunch of mountain betelnut and utters the prototype names of this betelnut before splitting the bunch – he does this in recognition of the dancers' appearance (headdresses) and performance. Everyone in the *gab* is silent and motionless when the betelnut bunch is split. A singularity of those present is achieved at that moment.

The second daytime dance is known as *kere*. These are feathers that before the advent of white people were worn only by *amede*. *Kere* is the dance of the *amede*. What transpired in the *gab* plaza was that the host *amede* faced the *amede* in the dance when he halted the performance and split the betelnut. A unified group of dancers was able to measure its efficacy against a unified collective of hosts as symbolised by the betelnut unified in the centre of the plaza, having been placed on the tree by one or more *amede* (cf. Strathern 2022 [1999]: 197–220).

The above accounts of *gab* and *tidibe* are, I have indicated, central to how Fuyuge people perceive and act in their world – their landscape and their social relations. Although *gab* and *tidibe* significantly structure Fuyuge perceptions, the recurrent anticipation of *gab* and its organisation and staging as the principal Fuyuge enterprise involve a whole range of tasks that are related to Ingold's emphasis on attunement and direct perception. I now consider two of these.

Attuning to the Environment

The rearing of pigs is fundamental to the livelihood of Fuyuge people and the enterprise of *gab*. The final pig sacrifice in *gab* may include 250 sacrificed pigs. Other, smaller pig sacrifices occur at various stages of a *gab* (e.g. for the rites of the young). Pigs roam freely during the day, scavenging

in the bush and forest before returning to the hamlet of their owner before dark to be fed sweet potatoes and other scraps of food. Over a period of several years a pig reared in this way will be ready to be taken to a *gab*. The key point is that the pigs grow well through a combination of scavenging and food supplied by their owners.

When pigs are taken to a *gab* they must be constrained and led. A pig may have to be led for considerable distance as not all pigs contributed to a *gab* exist in the immediate locality. A rope is tied to the pig's leg and it is led to the *gab* village in this way. Pigs resist this constraint. The rope on its leg often leads to the pig developing open sores in this area. Given the pig's size it is frequently difficult to handle the animal. Once outside the confines of the *gab* village where pigs are kept before their sacrifice they are tied up; they cannot roam freely as this is not their home territory and they may escape or be killed. The only source of food for the pig is that provided by its owner. But the owner and his wife or wives can only carry so many sweet potatoes for the pig to eat.

By being tied up in this way and with more limited food a pig will begin to lose weight and lack the heft an owner desires. To contribute a pig to a *gab* that does not appear of the appropriate size is shameful and reveals a person as lacking effectiveness.

A dilemma arises for the pig owner. When to take one's pig or pigs to the *gab*? If one arrives too early the pig will remain tied up while waiting for other pigs to arrive. If one arrives too late there is the danger that the sacrificing of the pigs will have commenced and finished before one's arrival. This is not a good outcome for someone bringing a pig and it is an outcome a person seeks to avoid at all costs.

At the same time, the *gab* hosts want the pigs to arrive quickly as they have many guests and dancers waiting for the killing to begin. The hosts need to supply the guests and dancers with food while they wait for the final, large pig sacrifice. However, the supply of provisions is not unlimited and this places pressure on the hosts to begin the pig killing sooner rather than later. The hosts call out to those bringing pigs to hurry, to not delay. Those with pigs must continually assess the state of affairs.

The situation I have just described is captured well by the following quote from Ingold (2018: 43):

> [T]o carry out almost any kind of livelihood on land or at sea, it is necessary to attune your movements, and the timing of your activities, so as to catch the moment when the forces that conspire to the success of your enterprise are in favourable alignment. The world is not always ready and waiting; you have also to be ready and waiting for the world. The symmetry must be re-established, and this can be done only by reinserting both environment and perceiver in the current of real time.

The success of the enterprise in this case is the movement of pigs to *gab*. When is the appropriate moment? Those with pigs to take to *gab* need to attune themselves to this 'environment' in an effective way. Some of this attuning will be based on previous experience of *gab* held in the past and the amount of time it took for all the pigs to be gathered. But the hosts of any *gab* are different and will have different expectations about when they will commence the pig sacrifice. There is the matter of distance, the size of the pig or pigs being moved and the temperament of the pig or pigs. How long will this take? Will one need to sleep on the way if the distance is considerable? The state of the paths is another consideration. If the weather has been dry the paths are easier to navigate compared to when there has been rain and the paths often may turn to mud.

Similar considerations influence the dancers' movements to the *gab*. Unlike the hosts and their guests, the accommodation that houses the dancers while they construct their adornments is very minimal. It is in effect a large roof that slopes to the ground but has no constructed floor. It is an entirely communal space. Although the dancers perform as a single group they do not all come from the same place, as described earlier. And even those from the same place do not necessarily travel to the *gab* at the same time.

Given the structure the dancers need to live, sleep and assemble their headdresses in they do not want to be in there for an excessive time. It then becomes a question of when they travel to the *gab*. Unlike the men and women bringing pigs to *gab*, which is largely an individual affair, one or more *amede* will be among the dancers and will attempt to coordinate peoples' movements. Nonetheless, not everyone travels with an *amede*. Although some people have all the feathers they require for constructing one or more headdresses others need to borrow feathers from others and this may require travelling to other places where relations reside thereby delaying one's movement to *gab*.

There is also the issue of food. The hosts supply the dancers with some food but this is never sufficient and women often have to return to their home gardens to collect food that is then brought back to *gab*. The longer the dancers are in their shelter before their performance the more times food needs to be brought back from their own gardens. The hosts do not want the dancers to take too long to prepare their dancing adornments as this depletes the supply of food they have to give to not only the dancers but their guests and themselves.

Once all the dancers have arrived in their accommodation they must agree the style of the headdresses for the three dances and who will perform in which dance. This cannot occur until all the dancers have arrived. For this reason, a person (or persons) does not want to arrive at the structure for the dancers too early. There is the issue of food and the nature of the accommodation. As in the case of the pig sacrifice, the hosts seek to have the dancers arrive at the *gab* quickly and prepare their adornments quickly. But there is only so much in their power that they can do to achieve this. The dancers, on the other hand, do not want to rush in the preparation of their adornments as these will be assessed as part of their performance and people will 'read' their skin to see what it reveals about their efficacy.

The success of the enterprise in this case is the movement of the dancers to *gab* and the preparation of their adornments. When is the appropriate moment for this? The dancers need to attune themselves to the 'environment' I have just described in an effective way. As I wrote above in the case of pigs to be taken to *gab* some of this attuning will be based on previous experience of *gab* held in the past and the amount of time it took for dancers to arrive and prepare their dancing adornments.

The movements of people, pigs, and dancers I have just described are instrumental in shaping the form of Fuyuge peoples' landscape. Their movements along paths to *gab*, to gardens, to hamlets, and so on are all elements of this formation as is the construction of a *gab* village and the gardens planted to sustain the people therein. There is also the idea of the landscape having initially been formed by *tidibe* and that Fuyuge people conduct their social lives within this creation.

Direct Perception, Descriptions and Symbolic Forms

Pig sacrifices and dances are central elements of *gab*. In the first part of this paper I considered how these were enacted as competitive power relations between hosts and dancers, who were in turn understood to be following the ways of *tidibe*. I described some of the signs and symbols that Fuyuge people enacted in *gab* and which are understood as crucial for a successful *gab*. Not all men[13] can give speeches as I have described above; it is a capacity learned from others and there is a specific form it must take.

As I have proposed in the latter part of the paper those bringing pigs to *gab* as much as the dancers travelling to *gab* in order to prepare their adornments must attune their movements and how this is timed so they seize the 'moment when the forces that conspire to the success of [their] enterprise are in favourable alignment' (Ingold 2018: 43). In principle, this is true at any point in the performance of *gab* – whether it is when the group of dancers perform or when the final pig sacrifice commences or when the betelnut is placed on the tree in the centre of the plaza. In fact, it is true of any undertaking Fuyuge people engage in from planting their gardens to mourning the dead. My ability to make sense and understand such attuning was only possible

because I had understood something of the descriptions under which such intentional actions transpire.

In one sense, then, *gab* and the activities connected with *gab* can be analysed as a series of attunements – but a single focus such as this misses the significance created by the related phases of *gab* as a whole (cf. Wagner 1986b: 213).

In addition, what this attuning to the environment ignores or overlooks are symbolic forms created in *gab* that people attend to and relish. The speeches I have reported above derive their power from how Fuyuge people attune their movements in distinctive ways but also how they are able to identify with the speaker's imagery. The speech giver is refashioning ordinary experience into a form for the audience to evaluate and reflect upon. In doing so the speakers are emphasising the origins of their world as the outcome of movements by *tidibe* and in which Fuyuge people create their movements that result in the creation of *gab*.

Ingold's (2018: 41) assertion that people 'can find meaning in an environment unmediated by signs' appears to miss the mark as far as the Fuyuge people and I would guess many others are concerned. Not all meaning is associated with semiosis, but as I have suggested, making sense of direct perception is only possible by simultaneously understanding a world filled with symbols and signs and the descriptions under which intentional actions occur. But this can only occur, as Ingold asserts in his chapter, 'Confessions of a semiophobe', by joining with them [in this case that of the Fuyuge people] in the mutual production of a shared world (Ingold 2021: 345).

Symbolic forms would not have a resonance without the ordinary movements people routinely engage in and the attuning that makes such movements possible. But peoples' engagement in those movements and its corresponding attuning does not make any sense divorced from the symbolic forms those movements are understood to result in. This is because these symbolic ways of speaking, for instance, that *amede* and other men perform are anticipated by the myriad movements of Fuyuge people: to their hamlets, gardens, to *gab*. These are both part of how the speaker and those he is referring to have their effectiveness recognised; how their skin is read and assessments made of their diverse actions and words.

Conclusion

Although this paper has drawn only on ethnography of Fuyuge people in order to critically evaluate Ingold's idea of direct perception and attunement I think the argument I have made has more general applicability and aligns with the arguments made by Howes and Keane.

Howes (2022: 450) for one argues that Ingold is silent as regards 'the constraints of social structure or politics of perception'. Although he acknowledges as much in his interview with Kaartinen, cited above, a more useful strategy would be to avoid this separation in the first place. This is a position taken by a number of authors referred to by Howes (2022: 451) who recognise that perception is highly political (see Lamrani 2021). It is unlikely that Fuyuge people are alone in having the central enterprise of their social life (i.e. *gab*) being not only highly political but that such power relations structure the experience and form of their environment more generally.

Keane (2018) is similarly critical of the seemingly asocial nature of attunement that appears to operate with a single, perhaps solitary individual in mind: '[I]n the end, this approach seems to leave us with an extremely thin notion of what social life is, and how a "we" (as opposed to an "I") are constituted'. Some of this was evident when I was describing the movement of pigs to the *gab* before they were sacrificed or the movement of the dancers in order to prepare their adornments. The attunements of Fuyuge individual men and women when travelling to *gab* make little sense unless seen in the context of the networks of relations in which they are involved and the anticipated outcome they are seeking to achieve in *gab* which the speeches I provided highlight what these outcomes should be.

At the end of his critical remarks directed at Keane, Ingold (2018: 43) makes the following observation:

> Do we not, in walking, continually place ourselves at risk by falling forward, tumbling ahead of ourselves into the void, only to regain our footing in a skilled adjustment of body posture to the irregularities of the ground? Imagination sets us loose to fall; perception restores our grip so we can keep on going. One is aspirational, the other prehensile. It is in their alternation that all life is lived.

As I have hoped to have demonstrated in this paper what Ingold says here might make sense of those Fuyuge people bringing their pigs to *gab*, but it does little to assist us in understanding how *gab* significantly structures the environment of Fuyuge people and their perception of that environment in which those pigs are ultimately sacrificed once moved to *gab*.

Notes

1. In developing this point Ingold (2000: 168, emphasis added) observes that 'objects take on their significance … they afford what they do – by virtue of their incorporation into a characteristic pattern of day-to-day activities'.
2. The Fuyuge people live in the Wharton Ranges of Central Province, Papua New Guinea in an area approximately 100 km north of Port Moresby, the national capital. At present, there is no road from Fuyuge lands to the coast. Mission and colonial incursions into the Fuyuge area began sporadically in the late nineteenth century and then systematically in the early twentieth century. By 1905 French Catholic missionaries established a base in one river valley and over the next several decades expanded their proselytising activities into the other four Fuyuge river valleys. Government stations were initially established at or near the coast and over the decades as patrolling in the mountains increased police camps and patrol posts were created in various Fuyuge locations associated with the 'pacification' of the natives. By the early 1960s a permanent government station was built in the Fuyuge area at Woitape.
3. Myers (2000: 78) underlines the fact that the activities engaged in by peoples such as Australian Aborigines, among others, and the named places where such activities occur are not just 'the environment of experience'. They are also manifestations of earlier experience and action. Such places and their value are created as 'objects of exchange' between persons and as elements of how persons are socialised. In other words, forms of mediated social action bring places as much as people into being. To ignore such mediation – to ignore the signs that people transact in their social relations – is to ignore things fundamental to how people perceive their world.
4. The area I lived in, called Visi, had several of these named prototype trees.
5. An *amede* must be capable of standing in front of men and women in the *gab* plaza at specific moments of the ritual and speaking in public. Not all men feel capable of speaking public. For example, several generations ago an *amede* lost his eldest son to sorcery because of jealousy, it was said. His younger son refused to take the place of his father as *amede* as he was fearful of speaking in *gab* and the jealously this might provoke.
6. This paragraph and the next two draws on material previously published in Hirsch (2021).
7. In Visi, for instance, there are several 'skin names'; these names are associated with the land as much with people.
8. For example, a man whose yams do not grow properly or whose own skin becomes affected by disease will be seen as one who did not properly follow conventions: he may have committed adultery or had sexual relations with his wife before planting yams when this is forbidden. Yams of poor quality – with poor skin as this is expressed – or a man with diseased skin are both shameful states of affairs. The skin is where matters hidden and unseen are revealed. The poor quality of the skin renders this visible. Matters hidden, such as broken taboos, are revealed on the skin and the truth disclosed. Skin is the point of contact between what is hidden in the person (their mind, will or actions) and the world (see A. Strathern 1979).
9. In each Fuyuge river valley people divide themselves into a number of named units based on shared ideas of territory and dialect. These are generally known as places/land (*bu*) or houses/homes (*em*). I have chosen to refer to these by the English term of 'home'.
10. When this does not occur, a person can feel great shame. I knew of one woman who expected her husband to organise her *mal* and arrange for pigs to be killed in her name. She wanted this to occur together with other *mal* whose relations were organising a *gab*. Her husband had several wives and he refused on this occasion. I was told the woman felt great shame because of his refusal and committed suicide by throwing herself off a cliff.
11. In 1910 Robert Williamson, a solicitor and ethnologist, spent three months in the Fuyuge area, five years after a mission had been established among Fuyuge people. In the book he published, Williamson (1912: 264–265) wrote that Fuyuge people believe that *tidibe* 'ultimately reached and remained in the land of the white man … and that the superior knowledge in manufacture … has been acquired from [*tidibe*]'. He goes on the note: 'The idea of his ultimate association with the white man can hardly, however, be very ancient tradition'.

12. Prior to the movement of *tidibe* from east to west across Fuyuge lands there were people present on the land, what are known as the 'true people', but their knowledge of appropriate forms of conduct was lacking. They were like plants that 'grew wild' (Fastré n.d.: 339). Among these true people were the original inhabitants of the land, the 'fathers of the land' (*bul bab*) and the 'people of the land' (*bul u an*).

    However, before the movement of *tidibe* the lands were not formed into their present productive state. When *tidibe* travelled across the land the *amede* (leaders who watch over the people and land) 'were planted', the prototypes (*vasa*) of things of importance to Fuyuge social life were placed, and tame and foreign spirits (*sila*) were established across the landscape (Fastré n.d.: 336). As Williamson (1912: 265) noted: 'As traces of [*tidibe*'s] passage through their country [Fuyuge people] will show you extraordinarily shaped rocks and stones, such as fragments which have fallen from above into the valley, and rocks and stones which have lodged in strange positions'. Over many decades later I was shown similar evidence on the landscape of the actions and movements of *tidibe*.
13. It is only men that speak publicly in *gab*.

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