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The aim of this book is to present the paradigm of enaction as a framework for a far-reaching renewal of cognitive science as a whole. 1 There have been many critiques of classical, first-generation cognitivism based on the Computational Theory of Mind. A distinctive feature of this book is a deliberate choice not to go over that old ground yet again, but to reserve the energy for positive exploration of new paths.

Enaction, initially articulated as a program for understanding cognition by Varela, Thompson, and Rosch (1991), has seen an explosion of activity in recent years, including a follow-up book investigating the deeper connections between life and mind (Thompson 2007), related special journal issues (Barandiaran and Ruiz-Mirazo 2008; Di Paolo 2009; Rohde and Ikegami 2009; Torrance 2005, 2007), many articles reporting on theoretical and empirical advances and several regular meetings, summer schools, and funded projects. This program makes a radical break with the formalisms of information-processing and symbolic representations prevalent in cognitive science. In their stead, as explained in the first text, by John Stewart, cognition is grounded in the sensorimotor dynamics of the interactions between a living organism and its environment. In the classical scheme, perception is relegated to a preliminary “ module ” based on sensory input alone, to be followed in a linear sequence by “ cognitive ” planning and representations of goals, and culminating in a decision to act. In this scheme, “ cognition ” is thus sandwiched between two layers — sensory input and motor output — which are not themselves considered as properly cognitive. The perspective of enaction overturns this scheme quite radically. A living organism enacts the world it lives in; its effective, embodied action in the world actually constitutes its perception and thereby grounds its cognition. The text by Renaud Barbaras takes as its springboard the observation that “ to live ” is to have intentional conscious experience of living, and engages a profound phenomenological analysis of the implications, including the relation between life and metabolism.

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