

Riccardo Manzotti

Biography

Riccardo Manzotti (born 1969) is an Italian philosopher, cognitive scientist, and professor of AI and Robotics at IULM University in Milan. He holds a PhD in robotics and previously worked in artificial intelligence, which shaped his interdisciplinary approach to consciousness. His research merges philosophy of mind, neuroscience, and technology, challenging traditional boundaries between the mind and the external world.

Key Philosophical Contribution

The Spread Mind Theory

Manzotti is best known for his “Spread Mind” theory, which argues that consciousness is not confined to the brain but is instead a process extending into the physical environment. This radical externalist view opposes both dualism (mind-body separation) and internalist neuroscience, proposing instead that objects and perception are co-constitutive. His ideas align with enactivism and process philosophy, drawing comparisons to thinkers like Alfred North Whitehead.

Collaboration with Tim Parks

In 2017, Manzotti co-authored *Dialogues on Consciousness* with British writer Tim Parks, a series of accessible conversations exploring consciousness, free will, and the nature of reality. The book presents Manzotti’s ideas in a debate format, making his complex theories engaging for a broader audience.

Reception in the US

While Manzotti's work is more widely discussed in Europe, his ideas have gained traction in the US among philosophers and cognitive scientists interested in embodied cognition and non-representational theories of mind. Critics question his rejection of internalism, but proponents praise his innovative approach to bridging phenomenology and science. His talks at institutions like NYU and engagement with thinkers like David Chalmers have helped his influence grow in American academia.

Major Books

Dialogues on Consciousness (with Tim Parks, 2022):

Fifteen conversations between philosopher Riccardo Manzotti and novelist Tim Parks, originally published in the New York Review of Books, that methodically dismantle the assumption that consciousness lives inside the brain.

Ich Denke, Aber Wer Ist Ich? (Hashagen & Manzotti, 2021):

A German-language collaboration between philosopher Riccardo Manzotti and author-banker Anne Hashagen that asks the age-old question, who or what is the "I" that thinks?

The Spread Mind: Why Consciousness and the World Are One (2017):

Explores the idea that consciousness is not happening inside your brain, it is the physical world itself putting forth a radical case that your mind and your surroundings are not two things, but one.