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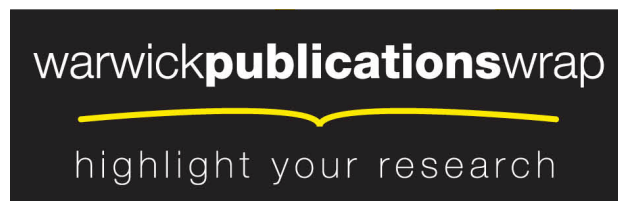
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The Agential Profile of Perceptual Experience¹

Thomas Crowther

ABSTRACT

Reflection on cases involving the occurrence of various types of perceptual activity suggests that the phenomenal character of perceptual experience can be partly determined by agential factors. I discuss the significance of these kinds of case for the dispute about phenomenal character that is at the core of recent philosophy of perception. I then go on to sketch an account of how active and passive elements of phenomenal character are related to one another in activities like watching and looking at things.

1.

Much recent discussion in the philosophy of perception has focused on the explanation of the phenomenal character of perceptual experience; the property or properties of experience in virtue of which there is something it is like for a perceiving subject to have such an experience.² Most of these discussions of the determinants of the phenomenal character of perceptual experience have focussed on aspects of mind in which the perceiver is a passive subject. That a perceiver is acquainted with some mind-independent object and various properties it possesses, for example, or that he has an experience with a correctness condition that involves some object's possessing some property, are not facts the obtaining of which consist in the exercise of his capacities to act. It isn't surprising that features such as this have occupied the attention of those interested in perceptual phenomenology. After all, there is an obvious sense in which *perceiving* things or *perceptually experiencing* things is not something that we do; it is something that just happens to us, or that goes on in us, or that we

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² For a representative sample of recent work on the phenomenal character of perceptual experience see the essays in Gendler and Hawthorne (2006), Smith and Jokic (2003) and Byrne and Logue (2009). The conception of phenomenal character assumed in the debate is inherited from Nagel (1974).

are subject to.³ But though it may be true that perceiving things is not something that we do, it may be that there are aspects of what it is like for the subject to have such perceptual episodes that are not determined solely by facts about us that obtain in virtue of respects in which we are passive, or in which we are mere subjects of such experience. Indeed, there is a family of interesting puzzle cases that emerges from reflection on the way that agency can manifest itself in our perceptual lives that suggests that the phenomenal character of perceptual experience is partly determined by active features of mind.⁴ In the first part of this essay I present a range of these cases, and explore the consequences of these types of case for some familiar views about the nature of phenomenal character of perceptual experience. I then go on to offer some further discussion of the nature of perceptual activities themselves, focussing on the structure of the phenomenal character of these episodes, and on the distinctive nature of the kind of involvement of passive sensory aspects in an active occurrence that is the mark of a core category of perceptual activity.

2.

Though perceiving is itself something in which we are passive, that is, it is not something that we agentially do, there are characteristically perceptual types of activities. Amongst such activities are watching, looking, listening, tactually feeling, as well as watching out for, and looking for.⁵ A basic form of perceptual activity, of which watching, looking and listening are the central varieties, is the agential maintenance of conscious perceptual contact with something throughout a period of time.⁶ In seeing the flash of light briefly reflected from the car on the other side of the valley, the sight of the reflected light is maintained throughout a brief moment. But in looking at something throughout a period of time, conscious perceptual contact with that thing is maintained agentially; in virtue of the agent's actively doing something. These active doings are not restricted just to the maintenance of perceptual

³ See O'Shaughnessy (2000) p. 387- 390 and (2008), p. 55-60 for a discussion of this feature of the 'will status' of perceptual experience.

⁴ For discussion of mental action see O'Brien and Soteriou (2009).

⁵ See Ryle (1949) and Ryle (1953) for discussion of what he there calls 'perceptual tasks' and of the relation of perceptual tasks to perception. O'Shaughnessy (2000), ch.14, discusses the phenomenon of listening.

⁶ It is natural to think of the determinable basic form of activity of which these perceptual activities are determinations as 'perceptually attending to O'. In this essay, I avoid the terminology of 'perceptually attending' and 'perceptual attention' as far as possible. First, not all perceptual activities are cases of 'perceptually attending to O'. Second, much of the recent discussion of perceptual attention in the philosophical literature involves commitment to the idea of perceptual attention as 'selective attention' and to particular views about the sub-personal psychology of attention. (See, for example, Campbell (1997), (2002); Eilan (1998) and for dissent see Martin (1997a)). I want to remain free of these commitments about perceptual activity here.

contact with particulars. The agent may not only be maintaining perceptual contact with some particular object, but with certain properties that the object possesses, or things that the object is doing. In these cases, the perceiver agentially maintains conscious contact with, say, the colour of the table, or the bird flying. These features of the way that agency can be manifested in perceptual experience seem to generate a distinctive category of puzzle case for any view according to which the phenomenal character of perceptual experience can be determined wholly non-agentially.

Consider a pair of cases in which an agent visually perceives an irregularly shaped piece of clay on a surface in front of him during a certain stretch of time. In the first case of the pair, the agent is looking at the brown colour of the piece of clay over that period of time; in the second, the agent looks instead at its irregular shape. The difference in active project over a period of time does not, on the face of it, entail any difference in the objects or properties with which the viewer is acquainted. In both cases, the perceiver is acquainted with the piece of clay and its irregular shape and its brown colour.⁷ Neither need it entail, on the face of it, any difference in the intentional content of the experience. In both cases, it seems, it may be that the experience of the piece of clay has just the same correctness conditions; that it appears, say, to be reddish brown, and shaped in such-and-such a way, and resting on a tabletop. But though the objects and properties presented, and/or the intentional content of the viewer's perceptual experience are the same, nevertheless what it is like for a viewer to be looking at the reddish brown colour of the piece of clay, it seems, is different from what it is like for the viewer to be looking at the irregular and lumpy shape of the piece of clay. That there is something different about what these experiences are like for the perceiver just seems to be a datum to be accommodated. But if that is the case, then the phenomenal character of perceptual experience cannot, it seems, be wholly determined by non-agential features of the experience, but at least in part by the perceptual activity that the viewer is engaged in. A similar case of just this type involves a pair of cases involving both static and dynamic objects of perceptual activity. A viewer may, for example, in the first of a pair of possible experiences, look at the brown and grey plumage of a kestrel sitting grooming itself and scanning the field for prey, and in the second of the pair, be watching the bird grooming itself

⁷ If the objects of acquaintance are understood according to a sense-datum theory, as mind-dependent, then the corresponding idea is that these mind-dependent objects and properties are identical.

and scanning the field for prey.⁸ In each of the pair, the viewer may be acquainted with just the same objects, properties and activities, and the representational contents of the experiences may be the same. But what it is like for the viewer to be looking at the brown and grey plumage of the kestrel is different for what it is like for him to be watching it preening itself.

Some perceptual activities have the form of visual searches.⁹ To be looking for something is different from, say, looking at a statue, in that it has a telic structure. Roughly speaking, things have a telic structure when they involve progress towards a non-arbitrary point of termination at which they are necessarily complete.¹⁰ To look for something, for example, is to scan one's visual field with the aim of noticing or finding out where something is. The aims with which such activities take place involve their own contribution to determining phenomenal character. What it is like for a viewer to perceptually look over the clutter around him on his desk for his memory stick is different from what it is like for the same viewer to merely look over just the same pattern of clutter around him on the desk without such an aim. But this difference does not seem to be manifested, necessarily, in what objects and properties are present to him, nor in how the various items scattered around him on the desk are represented as being, in having those experiences.

What it is that a viewer is perceptually doing may be an activity picked out with adverbs that qualify how it is that the agent performs it. The central cases of perceptual activity are cases of intentional perceptual activity; activities that involve the exercise of agency to the full.¹¹ But perceptual activities may be agential but non-intentional. Consider the long-distance lorry-driver who has been driving along a straight and featureless road in the desert for hours, who watches the road in front of him absent-mindedly. In watching the road absent-mindedly he nevertheless agentially maintains perceptual contact with the road. He perceives the road; he is not blind to what is in front of him, and would apply the brakes were there to be someone lying there up ahead. And though absent-minded, he nevertheless exercises capacities to act perceptually in keeping himself tuned to the unfolding road. But we can

⁸ See Crowther (2009a) for a discussion of the structure of the notion of watching according to which what is distinctive of the notion of watching as a form of perceptual activity is that it has objects which unfold over time.

⁹ The notion of perceptual searches or tasks is what takes centre stage in the important discussions of perceptual activity offered by Ryle (1949) and Ryle (1953).

¹⁰ For discussion of the distinction between telic and atelic occurrences see Rothstein (2004). Rothstein's discussion is based on the influential typology of verb classifications offered by Vendler (1957).

¹¹ For discussion of action or activity that is less than fully intentional see Frankfurt (1988), Velleman (1996).

contrast this with the case of the same lorry-driver driving along an identical stretch of road, watching the road ahead, now, carefully or deliberately. The phenomenal character of these experiences is different. Watching the road ahead with the authoritative and non-inferential knowledge of what it is that one is perceptually doing that is the mark of intentional perceptual activity has a different phenomenal character from watching the road ahead without that self-knowledge. And as in the previous cases this distinction does not seem to be recoverable from what it is that the perceiver is acquainted with in the relevant cases, or how it is that those things in his environment are represented as being.

In agentially maintaining perceptual contact with things, the viewer may have further aims. One kind of further aim is epistemic; one may maintain such perceptual contact with something with the aim of thereby having perceptual knowledge that *p*, where *p* is what is expressed by a correct answer to some question about *O*; “What is *O* doing?” or “What colour is *O*?” for example. It may be, though, that the agent may actively maintain perceptual contact with something with no additional epistemic aim, and that the aim with which a perceptual state is maintained is nothing other than that perceptual contact with that object is maintained through that time; in perceptually acting, the agent aims only at his doing so.¹² These further aims of watching and looking constitute another dimension along which agency appears to contribute to phenomenal character. There is a difference between what it’s like for the agent who watches the bird cartwheeling in the sky with an epistemic aim and for the agent who merely watches the bird throughout that time for its own sake. What constitutes success in these different processes is different; in the second case, success consists in nothing more than that he maintains sight of the bird throughout that time, though in the former case, what constitutes success is that he is in a position in which he possesses perceptual knowledge of what it is that the bird is doing throughout that time. It is not clear though how these phenomenological differences are to be accounted for in what is seen, or how what is represented as being. The case in which the agent watches the bird for its own sake may involve just the same bird represented in just the same ways throughout the relevant period of time.

Some perceptual episodes don’t involve the agential maintenance of conscious perceptual contact at all. One of the things that is distinctive about the aural perception of sudden loud bangs and crashes, the visual perception of sudden flashes and glints of colour and the

¹² A similar distinction, there expressed as a distinction between the further aims with which viewers may actively attend to things is suggested and discussed by Bradley (1902).

episodes of extreme perceptual reverie that unfold on the very outer edges of wakeful consciousness is the absence of the kinds of perceptual activity discussed. Consider the difference between a pair of cases of experience involving, suppose, a forensic acoustics expert listening to a recording of an explosion with the aim of determining whether there was a single detonation or two, and the same forensic expert, hearing just the same sounds, but who in a moment of absent-mindedness has forgotten what he is doing and is taken unawares by the recording of the explosion. Despite the obvious difference in the phenomenal character of the relevant experiences, it is unclear how to account for the difference in terms of either the heard quality of those sounds, or how those sounds are represented as being.

Suppose that the *agential profile* of perceptual experience, in any particular case, is how it is that the viewer's capacities for perceptual activity are disposed, in having that experience. Then it seems, on the face of it, that the agential profile of perceptual experience plays a role in determining its phenomenal character.

3.

A dispute at the centre of recent philosophy of perception concerns whether an intentionalist, naïve realist or sense-datum account best explains the phenomenal character of perceptual experience. Intentionalist theorists of perception argue that the phenomenal character of experience is to be understood in terms of the intentional content that experience possesses.¹³ While some intentionalist theorists allow for there to be differences in the phenomenal character of perceptual experiences, many mainstream intentionalists maintain the view that either the phenomenal character of perceptual experience is identical with representational content, or the character of experience supervenes on such content, so that there are no phenomenal differences between perceptual experiences without representational ones.¹⁴ Naïve realists and sense-datum theorists, on the other hand, aim to account for features of the phenomenology of experience in terms of the objects and/or properties with which the subject is acquainted in having certain experiences; things which they take to partly constitute the relevant experiences.¹⁵ Suppose we call these competing views 'familiar accounts' or 'familiar theories'. What impact do the types of case described above have for these familiar

¹³ See Searle (1983), Harman (1990), Tye (1995), (2003).

¹⁴ Peacocke (1983) argues for the view that the phenomenal character of experience consists of non-intentional sensory features as well as intentional ones. Tye (1995) and (2006) offers a 'strong' or 'pure' intentionalist account.

¹⁵ See McDowell (1982), Snowdon (1980), and Martin (1997b), (2004) and (2006) for naïve realist accounts of phenomenal character. See Robinson (1994) for the sense-datum theory.

accounts of the phenomenal character of perceptual experience that are at the centre of the literature in philosophy of perception? The face value description of the pairs of cases described above was that the phenomenal character of perceptual experience is distinct though the intentional content of those experiences, and the objects and properties present to the subject, are the same. So do the facts about phenomenology that reveal themselves in these cases show that such accounts are mistaken? Might it be that in the neglect of the agential determinants of phenomenal character these types of account are, as a body, necessarily incomplete in a basic respect?¹⁶

One natural line of response to such cases from partisans of one of these familiar theories is to insist that while the phenomenal character of the relevant pairs of experiences is distinct, closer examination of the relevant pair of cases also reveals distinctions in the properties that are putatively explanatory of phenomenal character.

¹⁶ On the basis of reflection on a case involving differences in how the agent attends to items within his visual field, Jeff Speaks (forthcoming) tentatively endorses the claim that such a case shows the intentionalist theory of perception to be mistaken. Speaks (forthcoming) takes the positive conclusion of his discussion of such a case to be that “(A) difference in phenomenal character can be generated not just by a change in *what* is noticed when one attends to one’s experience but also by a change in *where* one’s attention is focused.” (forthcoming, 7) This type of case appears similar to the suggestion just made on the basis of the examples just discussed. But it is worth being cautious on this point. For as I mention above in f.n. 6, discussions of the role of attention in the literature in the philosophy of perception are generally expressive of a commitment to an empirically grounded view of attention as ‘selective attention’ that are distinct from the notion of perceptual activity that is central to the present discussion. In the absence of further information about just what Speaks thinks about how the notion of attention is to be understood, and of what connection there is, if any, in his understanding of the notion of attention between the notion of attending and the notion of the agent’s conscious performance of a personal level perceptual activity, it would be unwise to understand the types of examples just offered as simply another version of such an ‘attention case’. It is worth noting that the differences in phenomenal character in the cases I present do not obviously appear to be explicable in terms of differences in selective attention or ‘*where* the mechanisms of attention are focussed’. Given the co-location of colour and shape, the mechanisms of perceptual attention are plausibly focussed in the same place (series of places) in a pair of cases involving the active project of looking at shape and shade. The relation between the idea of the agential profile of perceptual experience and the phenomenon of attention requires fuller, independent, treatment.

In a related vein, David Chalmers (2004) writes that: “To my mind, the most plausible potential cases of phenomenally distinct visual experiences with the same representational content involve differences in attention. Shifts in attention clearly make a phenomenal difference to visual experiences. In typical cases, they also make a representational difference: for example, shifting attention to a word may lead one to represent the shapes of the letters with greater specificity. But there are other cases that are less clear. For example, one might look at two red pinpoint lights against a black background, and shift attention from one to the other. Here it is not obvious that there is a representational difference between the two cases.” Chalmers (2004) does not explore the cases in detail, it is not clear what assumptions Chalmers makes about the nature of ‘attention’, and there is no clear endorsement of the view that such cases constitute a genuine counterexample to the view that the phenomenal character of visual experience is determined by representational content.

It is difficult to motivate the suggestion that the objects and/or properties with which the perceiver is acquainted across the relevant pairs of cases are different.¹⁷ If they are to have a response to this type of case, the naïve realist or the sense-datum theorist must, it seems, pursue a different route. But perhaps it might seem plausible that there are differences in the intentional content of perceptual experiences across the pairs of cases of experiences described. In the course of a discussion of seeing blurrily, Michael Tye (2003) draws on the idea that the nature of the intentional properties that perceptual experience possesses might be partly determined by the *amount* of representational content bearing on certain objects and properties that the relevant experiences possess. Of cases of squinting one's eyes or taking off one's glasses and coming to see blurrily, Tye maintains that in these cases "(O)ne simply loses information" or "(O)ne undergoes sensory representations that fail to specify just where the boundaries and contours lie." (2003, p.18) Might it be then the phenomenal difference across at least some of the cases is to be explained in terms of a difference in the amount of information that the experiences carry about the relevant objects or properties? The thought would be that in cases of perceptual projects directed on the shape of something, the experience carries more specific information about the shape of that thing, and there is a reduction of this information when there is change of active project to one of looking at the thing's colour. And, again, perhaps the difference between the phenomenal character of the perceptual experience pair in the lorry-driver case is that between circumstances in which perceptual experience delivers a relatively low amount of information about the perceptual environment, and one in which perceptual experience delivers a relatively rich amount of information about that environment.

Even setting aside worries about how the notion of an 'amount' of information about the environment is to be understood, however, there are a number of difficulties with this suggestion. The first is that it is not clear what motivates the thought that there is any connection between the idea that something is the target of an active perceptual project and the idea that more information is being received from that thing than things in the visual field which are not the objects of such activity. If I am looking through a space in the nearby laurel

¹⁷ One of the few even remotely plausible thoughts here might be that the objects of acquaintance have different objective 'looks' properties, and that changes in active projects are to be explained in terms of acquaintance with distinct looks properties. (For a discussion of objective looks properties see Travis (2004)) But it is unclear why acquaintance with such looks properties should require the occurrence of perceptual activity targeted on the relevant property if acquaintance is a basic, non-epistemic relation. In general, we seem quite capable of being acquainted with, and indeed, capable of having perceptual knowledge of, the looks of things, independent of the relevant perceptual activities.

hedge at the barely visible walkers on the ridge many miles distant I am receiving more perceptual information about the laurel hedge than I am about what I am consciously looking at. The second worry is that it cannot be enough to explain the particular kind of change of phenomenal character in these cases that one comes to have less specific information about certain aspects of one's environment than another. Suppose I am looking at a blue cup on the desk in front of me in good conditions of visibility, and then for some reason a thick fog descends, all but obliterating my view of it, until only a small darker patch is visible in front of me. In this case, my second experience of the cup involves a reduced quantity of information about it; where its boundaries fall, precisely what colour it is, etc. But then it cannot be the mere fact of loss of information that is relevant to the determination of phenomenal character in the relevant cases, for clearly the phenomenal character of the experience in such a fog case involves something quite different from the character of the experiences that occur in the agency-involving cases at issue. So some further explanation would need to be forthcoming of what is distinctive about the kinds of changes in specificity or amount of intentional content that are manifested in the changes of perceptual activity cases.

One way to respond to these worries may be for the relevant theorist to argue that the differences concern not the amount of information present about the relevant objects and properties but rather the degree to which the relevant bits of information are in some sense 'available' or 'accessible' to the subject. A thought here might be that when looking at the colour of the object, the colour contents of one's experience are accessible to one in a way that the shape contents are not. Leaving aside the question how exactly we are to understand 'accessibility' here, this line of thought would appear to simply amount to the concession that the phenomenal character of experience is not wholly determined by the representational content that the experience possesses. It won't do at this point for the intentionalist to insist that some notion of accessibility is internal to the very notion of the representational content of perceptual experience, so that the very distinction between content and the accessibility of content is out of place. For the minimal notion of accessibility that is familiarly taken to be constitutive of the notion of content seems to be satisfied by the things which aren't the objects of the relevant kind of perceptual activity. It seems clear that in a case of the kind mentioned, even though the subject's active perceptual project is directed on the colour of an object and not its shape, say, the perceiver remains justified in believing that the object has

such and such a shape, and would act rationally in reaching out to grasp something that's shaped in just that way.

4.

Despite the apparent failure of these attempts to show that differences in phenomenal character are matched by differences in either the intentional contents or the objects of acquaintance, it is precipitate to take these phenomena to constitute a prima facie case against familiar theories of phenomenal character. The intuition with which the essay started was that a core part of our conception of perception or perceptual experience is the conception of a type of perceptual occurrence in which we are passive, or to which we are subject. Whether it is explicit in statement and discussion of any of these types of account or not, we ought, I suggest, to understand these familiar theories as accounts targeted on the explanation of the phenomenal character of perceptual experience understood as an event of this passive type. If this is the case, there is no inconsistency between the kind of phenomena at issue here and any of these familiar theories of phenomenal character.

Before looking more closely at the nature of these activities themselves, it is worth emphasizing just how the kind of phenomena we have discussed here highlight the need for care in the formulation of what it is that these familiar theories of the phenomenal character of perceptual experience are theories of, and the importance of the role of the will status of the relevant events in grounding the relevant explanatory project.

Suppose we take it that a conscious perceptual appearance is an event such that there is something it is like to have it, and which is 'transparent', which is for it to possess some property or properties in virtue of which it is correct to describe that episode in terms of elements of the mind-independent perceptual environment.¹⁸ In the light of the kind of cases we have discussed, it cannot be that familiar theories are accounts of the phenomenal character of experiences understood merely as conscious perceptual appearances in this sense. It is reasonably clear that events of watching or looking at objects are transparent: they possess features in virtue of which it is correct to characterize those episodes in terms of elements of the mind-independent world. We certainly do characterize such events in terms of elements of the mind-independent environment. After all, what is being watched is, say,

¹⁸ For discussion of transparency see Martin (2002).

somebody moving, or what is being looked at is, *the shape of the pot*.¹⁹ But if events of this kind are appearances, then the kinds of cases discussed above do seem to constitute a problem for such familiar theories. In the face of this, it won't do to simply insist that whatever the transparency of active episodes is, it couldn't be the relevant *perceptual* kind. For the role of the concept of transparency here is precisely to determine a sense for 'perceptual' in 'perceptual experience'.

An obvious thought may be that the events the phenomenal character of which is the target of explanation of these familiar theories aren't merely conscious perceptual appearances in this sense, but that they are *sensory events* that are appearances. It is perceptual experience understood as a type of sensory event that's at issue in the relevant dispute. The question then is what sort of thing a sensory event is, such that it is the phenomenal character of a particular kind of sensory event, that is, an appearance, that is the relevant target notion of this issue in the philosophy of perception. It cannot be that a sensory event is an event that *involves* the senses or that *involves* a bodily organ of sense. Setting aside the fact that not all sensory events do seem to involve a bodily organ of sense, events of watching and looking clearly do both involve the senses, and involve bodily organs of sense, so count as sensory events by this type of criterion. And to say that a sensory event is an event that is the manifestation of a sensory capacity, at least, by itself, does nothing to answer the question about the content of the notion of 'the sensory'. A difficulty at this point is that it is not clear what to say about the notion of the sensory which is neutral between competing conceptions of phenomenal character, something which can then serve to help explain the kind of element of mind the nature of which is in dispute across these familiar theories without involving any assumptions about how this dispute is to be resolved. For intentionalists, the substantive content of the notion of the sensory is that of an event with a phenomenal character and which possesses representational content. For naive realists and sense-datum theorists, the content of the notion of the sensory is to be understood in terms of the idea of a conscious event that acquaints the perceiver with some category of entity.

It seems to me to be here that the notion of the 'will status' of the relevant types of event is crucial. The notion of the passivity of the relevant conscious mental events provides for the

¹⁹ This is not to propose any particular explanation of the transparency of such active episodes, however. It may be that these episodes are transparent given that it is not possible to engage in such activities without one seeming to see the relevant things. But it may also be that these events are transparent, in addition, in virtue of being episodes with perceptual aims; that is to say, episodes which involve the maintenance of awareness of objects and properties in the mind-independent environment.

possibility of a characterization of the notion of a sensory event that is neutral between competing substantive conceptions of the nature of the senses, where falling back on the notion of ‘phenomenal character’ is an option that’s not available. The thinnest notion of ‘the sensory’ is a marker for the idea of the passive will status of a conscious event. According to this thin conception of the sensory, sensory events are events that possess phenomenal character but which are occurrences to which the perceiver is merely subject, or which merely go on in the perceiver. Sensory capacities, on this thinnest of conceptions, are capacities which are actualized in the perceiver being subject to events such that there is something it is like to undergo them. The form of the phenomenal character of events of this kind is not just that there is something that it is like for the perceiver to *have* such an event, but that there is something it’s like for the perceiver to *undergo* or to *be subject* to an event of this kind. It is what it is like to be subject to a certain class of these events—conscious appearances—that is the target of these familiar accounts.

5.

But if we accept this account of what conception of ‘perceptual experience’ is in the background of this debate in the philosophy of perception, what now remains of the thought that was expressed in the initial description of the cases: that what the cases show is that the role of agency makes a contribution to determining the phenomenal character of perceptual experience? How can perceptual activity make a contribution to determining the phenomenal character of perceptual experience if we are to understand perceptual experiences as passive events? A natural thought may be that the cases do not show much about the phenomenology of perceptual experience at all; they only show something about the phenomenal character of a kind of active event that’s merely contingently related to the sensory phenomenology.

I initially introduced the cases in terms of the idea of different kinds of perceptual activity. The most satisfactory way to characterize and understand these cases, I suggest, follows from facts about the structure of these perceptual activities. Though perceptual activities like watching and looking at things are not passive sense perceptual episodes, there is a perfectly acceptable sense in which they are perceptual experiences. Perceptual activities of these kinds are (i) experiences, in that there is something it is like to have them, and (ii) perceptual, in the sense that they involve passive sense-perceptual occurrences. In the light of this kind of claim, what the cases reveal is that there is a kind of perceptual experience, the phenomenal

character of which is not wholly determined by the passive sensory phenomenal character that it necessarily involves.

But how exactly is passive phenomenology involved in the active phenomenology of these episodes? What is the nature of the relation of 'involvement' that underpins this notion of perceptual experience, the character of which cannot be individuated wholly in terms of passive phenomenology? In the remainder of the paper, it is this question I take up.

One way to make progress with this question is to explore some ways of thinking of the involvement of sensory episodes in active occurrences that seem to fall short of the way in which in which passive phenomenology is an ingredient of the phenomenology of perceptual activity. One might try to understand the idea that there is a relation of involvement or parthood between different aspects of what it's like for a subject in terms of ideas that emerge from recent discussion of the unity of consciousness.²⁰ Tim Bayne and David Chalmers (2003) suggest that as well as there being something it is like for me now to be moving my fingers across the keys of the computer, and something it is like for me to be jiggling my leg up and down under my desk, there is something it is like for me to be moving my fingers across the keys of the computer *and* jiggling my leg. That there is something it is like for me to feel my fingers moving across the keys *and* jiggling my leg is a function of the fact that there is something it is like for me *overall* at the present time, of which these individual elements of what it's like for me are constituents. Suppose one took these ideas about the relations between phenomenal properties as a model for the present case. The thought then would be that there is something it is like for one to be subject to certain types of sense-perceptual episode, and something it is like for one to look at the shape of the object in front of one, and that the passive phenomenology is part of some active phenomenology in the sense that there is something it is like for one overall to look at the shape of the object and to be subject to passive sense-perceptual episodes of a certain kind. On this approach, there are distinctions in the phenomenal character of perceptual experience in the relevant cases because in one of the pair, what it is like for one overall at a time is different from what it is like overall from one in the other of the pair. In one of the cases, part of what it is like for one overall involves what it's like to look at the shape of something and in the other what it is like for one overall involves what it's like to look at its colour.

²⁰ See Bayne and Chalmers (2003); Bayne (2004) and Dainton (2006).

But this way of thinking of the phenomenal distinction between the two types of case, and the way of thinking of passive phenomenology as an ingredient in active phenomenology that grounds it, seems wide of the mark. It is a consequence of this approach that there is no more unity that obtains between what it's like for one to be looking at the colour of something and what it's like to be subject to certain sense-perceptual episodes than there is that obtains between what it's like for me to move my fingers across the keyboard and to jiggle my leg under the desk. But it seems that the sense in which passive perceptual experience is an ingredient in something with an active phenomenology goes deeper than this. That is not to argue that there is nothing it is like to look at a shape and be subject to a passive experience of its shape, in virtue of the fact that there is something it is like overall. It is just to dispute that it is the fact that they are aspects of how it is for one overall which explains the nature of their relation in the types of case in question. One basic manifestation of the way that the model for phenomenal unity is problematic is that one can conceive of what it is like for one to move one's fingers across the keyboard without conceiving of what it is like for one to jiggle one's foot under the desk. But it is not, it seems, possible to form a corresponding conception of what it is like for one to look at the shape of something independently of a conception of what it is like for one to be subject to sense-perceptual episodes. If there is something it is like for the perceiver to look at something, at a time, then there must be something it is like for that perceiver to be subject to sense-perceptual episodes at that time. What could it be to actively look at something independently of the obtaining of passive visual phenomenology? One can certainly point one's head and eyes in the direction of something and hold them there for a period of time without being subject to passive sense perceptual phenomenology, if one is blind, say. But even if there is a notion of looking at something that is merely the notion of the pointing of the relevant organs of sense in the right direction, there remains a notion of looking according to which any such blind subject couldn't be looking. There is, it seems, a basic notion of perceptual activity such that the passivity of sense-experience is an ingredient in that activity in a way that prevents us from understanding what it is like to engage in such activities in abstraction from what it is like to be subject to those passive events.

It also does not seem plausible to model the structure of the core cases of perceptual activity in terms of the type of complexity involved in instrumental act-structure. An action like shutting the door has an instrumental structure; the door shuts in the agent's doing something understandable as an attempt to shut the door that brings about the door's coming to be shut.

Successful shittings of the door are complex events that involve events which are tryings or attempts to shut the door, and events the occurrence of which constitute the success of those attempts. The thought may be that this may be how an event can have both active and passive sense-perceptual constituents. There is a type of perceptual event that is a successful perceptual attempt, such that its occurrence entails both the occurrence of an active perceptual attempt and a passive sense-perceptual episode the occurrence of which constitutes the success of this attempt. But while successful visual searches or successful attempts to spot things may have this structure, there is a core type of perceptual activity—that exemplified by looking at something and watching something—that does not. In cases of instrumental actions like shutting the door or successfully visually searching for something, one can understand the phenomenology of the events which manifest the agent's active powers independently of the occurrence of the events that constitute the success of the attempt. There is something it is like for one to visually scan the scene for something without that entailing that there is something it is like for one at that time to spot or notice what one is looking for. But cases of watching and looking at things do not have this instrumental structure. For an agent to look at something is not for the agent to successfully attempt to bring about a perceptual event that has a passive phenomenal character. Looking at something is an atelic process; a type of going on that does not have an endpoint determined by the nature of the activity at which point it must be complete. In cases of looking, passive perceptual experience of an object cannot be an occurrence that constitutes the success of an exercise of agency in looking, for unless there is something it is like for the agent to be so subject the perceiver could not so much as *begin* to exercise his agency in this way. Given that a condition for starting to look is that such events obtain, those events could not constitute the achievements that constitute the instrumental success of looking.²¹

²¹ In discussion, Michael Martin suggested that there could be such a thing as trying to look, in a sense that is consistent with a failure to look, where these cases are not simply to be understood as cases of the 'breaking off' of perceptual activity through loss of interest or distraction. He proposes a case grounded on the fact that autistic subjects find it difficult to maintain eye contact with other people, though such eye contact is a necessary condition for looking at them (where looking at them is, here, 'looking into their eyes' or 'agentially holding the gaze of someone'). Given that there exist such difficulties, we can make sense of an autistic subject who is in a condition in which he has someone's eyes in sight, trying and yet failing to look at such a person. But to hold that in actively looking or watching, the exercise of one's agency is not to be understood as an instrumental activity; as a trying to bring about some result (where that trying is consistent with failure to bring about that result) is not to deny that there might be instrumental activities or actions related to activities of looking that might reasonably be characterized as 'trying(s) to look'. The case that Martin suggests appears to be of this type. In such a case, we ought to understand 'trying to look at x' as the instrumental action of 'trying to overcome the anxiety about eye contact with someone that is an obstacle to one's being in a position to

So what kind of conception of the way in which passive phenomenal character can be the ingredient of an event that has an active phenomenal character is implicated here? Fleshing out the kind of account sketched at the outset of the paper a little more affords a way to explain these puzzling features of the way that active and passive aspects of what it is like for one relate to one another in the relevant type of activity. I have suggested that the core variety of perceptual activity is to be understood in terms of the idea of the agential maintenance of conscious perceptual contact with things. What it is like for the perceiver to be agentially maintaining conscious perceptual contact with things over a period of time cannot be understood independently of what it is like for the perceiver to be subject to sense-perceptual episodes because the very activity of maintaining that contact with things over a period of time in this way involves the occurrence of sensory episodes. And the mode of involvement of these passive sense-perceptual episodes is distinct from that generated by mere 'unity of consciousness' considerations and the involvement that is the mark of an instance of successful instrumental act-structure. Let me briefly explain.

engage in the activity of looking at them'. That is certainly something the autistic can fail to do successfully. But it does not show that the exercise of one's agency in an act of looking itself has an instrumental structure. A more graphic case that illustrates the same point would be one in which one 'tried to watch the autopsy being performed' in 'trying to overcome the revulsion at the sight of the Y-incision being made in the corpse's chest cavity which stands as an obstacle in the way of one's watching the autopsy being performed'. (Perhaps this might even be a struggle to remain conscious). One can certainly fail to do such a thing successfully. But one's failure to do this would not indicate the possibility of the failure of the perceptual activity that constitutes the watching of the autopsy itself.

In his discussion of non-instrumental mental actions and activities, Brian O'Shaughnessy (2000), and (2009) makes some similar observations. O'Shaughnessy (2009) (section 4(b)) describes how the performance of a non-instrumental piece of mental activity (a form of 'willing' that is not a 'trying to bring about a result') might involve the subject's making an effort to overcome the influence of distractions from some active mental project. He describes two different types of cases. The first kind of case is one in which one 'tries to make possible a non-instrumental mental activity through trying to retain the attentive space necessary to such a project'. O'Shaughnessy describes how one might, for example, with intense concentration, overcome the obstacle of the sound of a loud drill in managing under those circumstances to engage in a piece of non-instrumental imagining. But he says that there are also cases of 'trying to get oneself to' do something. '(J)ust as I am about to imagine moving a limb, a sublime piece of music swims into my hearing, or a juicy piece of gossip from the next table does the same. In either case... there proves to be insufficient attentive space for the imaginative enterprise, although here the cause lies within my own inclinations or tastes rather than from without... Here what I must fight is myself! I must not allow myself to be deflected from the task in hand. And to whatever extent I win that battle, an achievement has occurred: a success as opposed to a failure. A desired effect has been effected, and a correspondingly successful trying has taken place. In such a situation a trying has occurred, but once again it was not a trying to imagine: rather a trying to *get myself to imagine*.' (2009, p.171) The cases discussed here are of this latter type, though in our cases the distracting influences have their grounds not in the viewer's inclinations or tastes, but in involuntary affective responses like fear and disgust. Thanks to Michael Martin, Lucy O'Brien and to Matthew Soteriou for helpful comment and discussion of this point.

The notion of the agential maintenance of conscious perceptual contact has the idea of conscious perceptual contact at its core. Conscious perceptual contact is a state or condition of the subject; a way that the subject is or can be. As I understand it, conscious perceptual contact with O is a relation that obtains between the perceiver and O when the perceiver is in conscious perceptual touch with O, say, when O is consciously within the perceiver's sight, or O is consciously within hearing. In being a condition of a subject, conscious perceptual contact is not an event or a process, something that has broadly occurrent structure. One of the original purposes behind the early literature distinguishing states and conditions on the one hand from events and processes on the other was that the subject can be in a state of belief or desire without that entailing the occurrence of any mental events or processes. But while there are many mental states such that the subject's being in such a state does not entail the occurrence at that time of any events or processes, distinguishing between conditions and things which have an occurrent mode of existence does not entail that there cannot be conditions that one can only be in given that certain events or processes occur. The state of conscious perceptual contact is one such condition.²² While conscious perceptual contact is not itself an event or a process, for a subject to be in a state of conscious perceptual contact with O requires the occurrence of passive sense perceptual experiences; episodes such that there is something it is like for the subject to undergo them and which are transparent in the relevant respects. It is wholly unclear what it could be for a perceiver to be perceptually in contact with O—to have O within conscious sight or hearing—without being subject to sense perceptual experiences.²³ Given that the condition of perceptual contact with O, then, requires the occurrence of sense perceptual experiences of the relevant kind, the obtaining of such a condition entails that there is something that it is like for the perceiver to be subject to those passive experiences over that time. Given that maintaining conscious perceptual contact of O over a period of time entails that the perceiver is in a condition of such perceptual contact over that period of time, it follows also that the perceiver is subject to passive sense perceptual episodes of O throughout that period of time.

²² The state of perceptual knowledge that p is another example of such a state. Immediately below I will argue that the idea of such a relation between a condition and of occurrent events and processes is crucial for understanding the non-instrumental character of the exercise of agency involved in perceptual activity.

²³ I emphasize that this is not to rule out in advance of further argument that there could not be such a thing as a perceptual state in the absence of occurrent sense perceptual experiences of the relevant kind. Nothing in what I say here implies that blindsight could not be such a case. I here only claim that the type of perceptual state that lies at the core of the notion of perceptual activity—the state of conscious perceptual contact with something—is not a state that can obtain without the occurrence of the relevant phenomenal episodes.

But agentially maintaining perceptual contact with O at a time, or over time, is not an activity that has the occurrence of a perceptual episode of a certain kind, or the occurrence of an event that is a change to a sense-experience-entailing state of perceptual contact, as a mechanistically-produced effect. One way to approach this is to focus on a different aspect of the relation between the state of being in conscious perceptual contact with O, and the occurrence of passive sense perceptual experiences which relate one to O. The occurrence of passive sense perceptual experiences that relate one to O, where they occur, is not for events to occur which cause the perceiver to come to be in a state of perceptual contact with O or which bring it about that he is so perceptually related. The point of onset of such phenomenally conscious sensory occurrences is itself a point from which the relation of perceptual contact with O obtains. The unfolding, the very occurrence of these sense perceptual episodes is what, in the circumstances, constitutes the perceiver's being in the condition of being perceptually in contact with O. A further way to illuminate this relationship is to consider the relation that obtains between the state of radioactivity and the event or process of radioactive decay. Being radioactive is a condition of an object; it is something that obtains, rather than something that occurs or unfolds. The occurrence of events of radioactive decay does not cause, or does not bring it about, that the object is radioactive. The state obtains just in case those events occur; where the object is radioactive, its being radioactive consists in its being subject to the relevant type of process of decay.

The example of radioactivity is instructive because it has features that distinguish it in an important way from the perceptual case. If something is radioactive its being so necessarily consists in the occurrence of the type of event: radioactive decay. But as is obviously implied by the mere fact that the occurrence of passive sense perceptual experiences which relate the subject to O can themselves constitute a subject's being in perceptual contact with O, subjects can be in conscious perceptual contact with O over time without that state consisting in the active maintenance of conscious perceptual contact with O. In a case in which one is taken by surprise at the blast of the explosion, one does not actively maintain perceptual contact with the source of the sound. The maintenance of this condition of contact is something in which one is passive. And even in cases in which the viewer agentially maintains perceptual contact with something, facts about the distribution of elements within the visual field will ensure that there are many things with which he is in contact which are not the objects of the relevant perceptual activity. In the type of puzzle case discussed at the outset, for example, the agent who looks at the shape of the cup is nevertheless in a state of conscious perceptual

contact with the colour of the cup throughout the relevant period of time, though he does not agentially maintain perceptual contact with that colour.

But what is distinctive about cases of watching or looking at O, I propose, is that where a perceiver is actively maintaining conscious perceptual contact with something, his being in that state of perceptual contact with such a thing over that period of time consists in his actively doing something over that time. For the subject to be in the right perceptual position with respect to an experienced object over a period of time, where he watches or looks at it, involves the occurrence of the relevant type of perceptual activity; and involves the relevant type of active event in the way that some object's being radioactive involves its being subject to passive events of radioactive decay. The subject's being in that condition over time consists in some active process going on over that time. But what is it, the doing of which constitutes the subject's being in such a condition over time? One of the things that is unusual about the case of active perceptual processes like watching and looking at things is, I suggest, that the nature of the type of processive exercise of agency can only really be characterized in terms of the type of state of conscious perceptual contact over time the obtaining of which the doing constitutes. What it is that the agent is doing is, precisely, actively maintaining conscious perceptual contact with something. In reflection on what it is like to be perceptually active and what it is like to be subject to perceptual events, it seemed to be the case that the phenomenal character of the exercise of agency in an activity like looking at something cannot be understood independently of the idea of there being something it is like to be subject to perceptual occurrences. I suggest that it is this idea, that perceptual activity is a type of active process such that the doing of it over a period of time constitutes the agent's being in that state of conscious perceptual awareness over a period of time, in which this peculiar feature of the phenomenology is grounded.

There is clearly a good deal more to be said in development of this type of view. In particular, there is more to be said about the precise way in which the agency of the perceiver is realized in this type of activity. But this will have to wait for elsewhere. The present intention is only to spell out the structural ideas that determine a sense of 'perceptual experience' as a kind of episode that is genuinely sense-involving but that has its phenomenal character determined partly agentially. While the notion of sensory occurrence is at the core of the notion of such activity in such a way that what it is like to be doing such a thing essentially involves what it is like to be so subject to these episodes, what it is like to be undergoing these episodes can't be understood only in terms of the phenomenology of those sensory occurrences.

6.

One of the most obvious features of our perceptual consciousness is that so much of this mode of involvement with the world is active. Our perceptual consciousness is not exhausted by our passive subjection to sense perceptual episodes, but is for the most part a life of consciously looking, watching and listening, in various states of engagement. But despite the seeming obviousness of the role of activity in a perceptual life, it is easy for these aspects of the phenomenology to go missing in theoretical reflection on what perceptual experience is like for one. If what I have said here is correct, though, insufficient attention to these aspects of one's conscious perceptual life runs the risk of one losing sight not only of the fact that broadly perceptual phenomenology is not wholly determined in terms of one's passivity, but also of losing sight of a correct understanding of the nature of the kind of question about phenomenal character that has been at the heart of so much discussion in recent philosophy of perception. Perhaps this issue about the nature of phenomenal character, indeed, is just one of a number of questions in which the neglect of this active aspect of perceptual consciousness has deprived of us a valuable explanatory resource.

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