

Social Enactive Perception:  
Practices, Experience, And Contents

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To my professors, everywhere

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*Like trees we grow – it's hard to understand, like all  
life! – not in one place, but everywhere; not in one direction, but  
upwards and outwards and inwards and downwards equally;  
our energy drives trunk, branches, and roots all at once.*

Nietzsche, The Gay Science

## Table of Contents

Acknowledgements .....	iv
Introduction .....	1
Chapter I	
Perceptual Practices .....	9
1.1 Social Practices And Their Theoretical Role.....	11
1.2 The Perceptual Practices Approach .....	20
1.2.1 Contextuality.....	30
1.2.2 Performativity.....	36
1.2.3 Expressivity.....	43
1.2.4 Normativity .....	51
1.3 From Practices to Experience.....	58
Chapter II	
Perceptual Experience as the Basis for Perceptual Content.....	61
2.1 The Felt Quality of Perceptual Experience .....	64
2.2 Phenomenon, Appearances, and Relationality: The Real Object When Perceived .....	68
2.3 On Appearances, Aspects, and Properties.....	78
2.3.1 From Relationality to Activity.....	79
2.3.2 High-Level Properties.....	83
2.3.3 Pragmatic Dependence .....	89
Chapter III	
Perceptual Experience and Perceptual Content.....	101
3.1. The Relation between Perceptual Experience and Perceptual Content.....	105
3.2 The Polemics with Chalmers: Visiting the Garden of Eden for The First Time.....	106
3.3 Eating from The Tree of Science and The Presentational Desideratum .....	110
3.3.1 Directness and The Three Dependencies of Perception.....	121
a. Idiosyncratic Dependencies.....	124
b. Non-Socially Pragmatic Dependencies .....	127
c. Socially Pragmatic Dependencies .....	129
3.3.2 Are There Perfect Sensory Properties? .....	130
3.4 Eating from the Tree of Illusion and the Veridicality Desideratum .....	142
3.4.1 In Virtue of Appearances, Not In Spite of Them.....	157

Chapter IV	
Dynamic Content in The Social Enactive View .....	163
4.1 Object and Content: The Relation Between <i>Perceptual Object</i> and <i>Object-As-Perceived</i> ....	166
4.1.1 Perceptual Intentional Relation and Object-As-Perceived.....	174
4.1.2 Perceptual Intentionality, Detachability, High-Level Properties, and Perceptual Practices.....	182
4.2 Full Content Is Core Content plus Environing Content.....	184
4.2.1 Lowest-Level Interpretive Take on Physical Reality: The Roots of Normativity ...	191
4.3 The Charge of Phenomenalism .....	198
Chapter V	
The Normativity of Perceptual Experience and of Dynamic Content.....	206
5.1 Perceptual Experience as Original Intentionality .....	208
5.1.1 Perceptual Experience Grounds Awareness .....	215
5.1.2 Perceptual Experience Grounds Thought, Judgment, and Inference.....	215
5.1.3 Perceptual Experience Grounds Perceptual-Related Action .....	219
5.1.4 Perceptual Experience Grounds Perceptual-Related Emotion .....	222
5.2 The Normativity of Perceptual Content.....	224
5.2.1 Core Content Is Not Individuated Conceptually .....	226
5.2.2 Full Content's P-Properties And The Case of Attention.....	227
5.2.3 Master Argument for Pragmatic Normativity of Perceptual Content: A Pragmatic System of Possibilities .....	229
5.2.4 Environing Content at the Lowest Level .....	239
5.3. Objections .....	243
5.3.1 Crowell, Environing Content, and the Lowest Basic Level of Contact With Physical Reality.....	243
5.3.2 Siegel's Comparisons and Properties .....	249
References .....	257

## Introduction

Perception is one of the fundamental ways in which we are in contact with the world. We inhabit the world with others; our lives are determined and structured by this fact. The texture of our lives—what we do, the things we encounter everyday, and the things that are significant for us—is largely perceptual, and this perceptual character is woven into the fabric of our relations with others. Perception, as a way of relating to the world, and sociality, as a fact of our lives, belong together. This is what social enactive perception is about.

This dissertation offers the *Social Enactive Theory of Perception*, or *SEP*, a theory of perception that accounts for this mutually constitutive link. According to SEP, perception consists in socially constituted, sensory-based practices of interaction with objects, events, and states of affairs. SEP situates itself in opposition to representationalist views—the paradigm in Modern and contemporary thought about perception—, and on the side of a family of theories comprising realism, relationalism, as well as situated cognition theories and other theories of phenomenological inspiration. More precisely, and in a positive fashion, SEP is a refinement of enactivism about perception, whose most notorious representatives are Alva Noë, Susan Hurley, Evan Thompson, and Daniel Hutto.

The most distinctive feature of SEP, and a common denominator of both its rejection of representationalism and its improvement of enactivism, is its social character. It is customary to think of perception as an essentially and incontestably individual business through and through. After all, the thought goes, I smell with my nose—it is my nose, I like the smell or I don't, it is my nerves, it is my brain cells and circuits. What can be more personal than the way things appear perceptually to me? Whatever social features seem to appear in perception, the standard theory says, they are not properly perceptual. In the case of representationalism, since perception is understood as a matter of personal representations that play the functional role of inputs, there is no room *ex hypothesi* for the social. In the case of standard enactivism, perception



is conceived as a matter of sensorimotor individual correlations, so there is only room for perception as an individual occurrence. In SEP's view, conceiving of perception as an individual-only business is fundamentally wrongheaded.

For SEP, perception is neither only nor mainly an issue of smells and colors and the way they are translated or not into brain lingo. It is neither only nor mainly about *qualia*—about how it feels to smell or taste something. It is not about mental things, if that means things happening in consciousness as in an inner space.

For SEP, the problems of perception are problems of fundamental philosophical anthropology. In order to understand perception, it is necessary to understand perceivers, and understanding perception helps us understand what perceivers are. The key to perception lies in the type of life we lead—in the way we inhabit the world. What lives do we lead? This issue is largely a matter of how we see ourselves, a matter of the type of beings that we think we are. We must have a theory of perception in which we can recognize ourselves—in the one who dances and plays music, in the one who cooks handed-down recipes, in the one who pets a dog or a cat, in the one who is moved by the memories that a smell conjures. We must be able to recognize the rich, finely grained, and nuanced ways in which we do things with and about the things we perceive, and the importance these things have in our lives.

The Social Enactive View is heavily influenced by the contextualist, pragmatic view of Wittgenstein, and by the phenomenological views of Husserl and Merleau-Ponty, and of their contemporary heirs.<sup>1</sup> Through his notion of social practices, Wittgenstein proposes a way of looking at forms of life that situates what we do as partaking of the active as well as of the social. The significance of his view for perception is hinted at by Hurley, who says: “What is needed, rather, is to understand why it is no accident that only perceivers are agents, as well as why it is no accident that only agents are perceivers: to understand the interdependence of perception and action” (Hurley 1998, 242). For the phenomenologists, perception is a matter of

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<sup>1</sup> Heidegger's and Levinas' phenomenologies have also been important influences for this work, though their influence is more global than specific.

the essential link between our embodied nature and our own mode of being in the world, both as subjects and as members of intersubjective communities.

As a sort of synthesis of both influences, conceptualizing perception as a practice consisting of perceivers' interactions with the world reflects the idea that there is no proper theory of perception that does not entail substantive commitments about what perceivers are and what the world is. The interrelation between subjectivity, intersubjectivity, and world has been a central tenet of phenomenological thought, especially in Husserl and Merleau-Ponty, and more recently in the situated approaches to cognition, of which enactivism is a part.

The distinctive element of SEP is its *social* element and the way it qualifies our engagement with the world. Let me then make explicit what I mean by the *social*.<sup>2</sup> While I think that social is not exclusively a human category, I only refer here to human sociality, which I take to be synonymous with *intersubjectivity*.<sup>3</sup> For SEP, the social is an ontological condition of the human being. It is a dimension of our existence constituted by the fact that we partake in ways of doing things, and that our individual engagement with things is based on those shared styles. Our common ways of doing things, our practices, depend on the fact that human beings live together: we are born in the midst of communities, are raised by others, are taught by others, create ties and relationships with others, exert our natural capacities with others. Our social practices, which define sociality, rest upon our physically living together.<sup>4</sup>

Living together, not just physically, is defined by the participation in shared patterns of behavior. Concretely, the social is instantiated in shared ways of doing things. Sociality is expressed in families, cultures, political organizations, generations, religious communities, sexual orientation-defined communities, political communities, dominant groups, cultural elites,

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<sup>2</sup> This view of the social is embedded all throughout this dissertation, but it can be seen with special clarity in chapter 1 and in the last section of chapter 2 (section 2.3.3).

<sup>3</sup> For an account of sociality pertaining animal groups in general see my *Animal Groups and Social Ontology* (Arango, 2015).

<sup>4</sup> For SEP social practices are what we intuitively find in familial customs, cultural habits, class styles, generational similarities, which are taught to or picked up by newcomers—newborns are a type of newcomer. A language, with all its regional, class, temporal, dialectal, lexical, and phonological variations, is the paradigm of a social practice. The cultural anthropologists's objects of study are social practices in the sense here employed (Lance and O'Leary-Hawthorne, 176).

guilds, groups of friends, etc. The characteristics of human groups or social formations depend on the activities people undertake in shared ways. The political, the aesthetic, the ethical, the epistemological, and the perceptual, among others, are spheres of practices and determine communities. All practices are worldly and historical practices. There is no practice that is not a way of inhabiting a space. There is no practice that does not stand in relation to a history of practices. As for origins, in the social domain there is never truly a first time—a first time for cooking, a first time for speaking, a first time for feeling pain—for there is always a gradient of something that was there before.

Thus, wherever there are social practices, there is a social formation. And the type of social formation depends on the type of practices in common—from guilds of carpenters to nations as political organizations. Further, social formations range both in size and in duration, from the small and ephemeral to the broad and temporally stable—from families to cultures.<sup>5</sup> Sociality is a function of the endless overlapping and interweaving of social formations defined by shared practices.

SEP's conception of sociality has the characteristic that it is synonymous with *intersubjectivity*. This fundamental characteristic means that individuals are never merely subsumed under groups, for those shared practices are still performed by individuals, and while a good deal of meaning depends on shared aspects, the person still contributes to her own take on things. Individual performances do not stand in a social void. Intersubjectivity supposes subjectivity, but it does not assume either's primacy.<sup>6</sup> In the crisscross of the multiple,

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<sup>5</sup> In the discussion about what culture is, I take culture to be a pole in the continuum of intersubjective human life. Culture consists in sets of practices common to groups of people that normally inhabit the same territory and have had a similar history, that is transmitted mostly generationally, that is constantly transformed, and that encompasses beliefs, norms, rules, cognitive approaches, and material dependencies, all of which are nevertheless understood as dependent on the level of practices. I situate myself between those who think of culture as the commonality of customs and uses, of norms and rules, or of "shared routines" of people inhabiting a territory (Brumann 1999) and those who are skeptic of culture in light of social fluidity, particularly the fluidity of the contemporary world. I certainly do not think that the commonalities are about beliefs and mental representations, as mainstream cognitive anthropologists think (Atran, Medin, and Ross 2005, 744–750, Romney 1999).

<sup>6</sup> While in animal species there is a notion of individual organism that is necessary for an account of sociality (see Arango 2015), there may be other living species whose sociality does not require a notion of individuality. In the case of the human being, our individuality is a subjectivity, and our sociality is an intersubjectivity.

overlapping social formations to which a person belongs, she expresses her individuality, which is never an entirely original, isolated, and individual performance.

I would like to add a couple caveats about two things that SEP is not and does not do.

First, SEP is not a theory of the perceptual aspect of social things, but about the social nature of perceptual things.<sup>7</sup> Second, I do not examine the influence of language on perception. SEP does not conceive of perception as a linguistic issue. Our linguistic practices are in some cases part of our perceptual practices, and they are at times mutually constitutive, as in the case of speech.

SEP is not an analysis of perception in terms of the words we use or the languages we speak.

There is undoubtedly a place for that analysis, but SEP is a philosophical theory of perception in its non-linguistic aspect: in the things we do, which, I claim, are those aspects of perception that take place based upon a consensus of action with others.

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<sup>7</sup> Some enactive theorists like De Jaegher and Di Paolo (2007) and McGann and De Jaegher (2009) have proposed other ways of linking enactivism and the social domain. One strand of these social enactive proposals focuses on the constitution of meaning as it happens in interactions with the world and others—what they call “participatory sense-making” (“how meaning is generated and transformed in the interplay between the unfolding interaction processes and the individuals engaged in it” (De Jaegher and Di Paolo 2007, 486)). In this case, the object of study is the constitution of meaning in the social domain, and the analysis is not perceptual.

A different area explored by social enactivists (McGann and De Jaegher 2009) is referred to as “social cognition,” by which they mean cognition of others, specifically our understanding of the other in interpersonal interactions. In other words, it is about how we make sense of others. To put it in more traditional terms, they take up the problem of other minds, and offer an enactivist solution to it. The specific connection with perception is perhaps more clear in De Jaegher’s “Social understanding through direct perception? Yes, by interacting” (2009). Here the focus is the understanding of others, not perception. Perception is instrumental to the goal of social understanding. The difference between this social enactivism and SEP is the difference between an account of the understanding of others partly through perceptual interaction, and an account of perception itself as an interaction, which is at the heart of SEP. However, for SEP our interactions with others are also interactions with the world, however peculiar, and in that sense, they fall under the scope of SEP. See chapter 1, footnote 29, for further clarification on the relation between SEP and the perception of others.

McGann and de Jaegher have talked about understanding others as a perception-based activity that, instead of *sensorimotor contingencies* (sensorimotor enactivism), relies on mastery of *self-other* contingencies. If Noë’s enactivism cashes the relation action-perception in terms of sensorimotor knowledge, McGann and de Jaegher propose a knowledge of the ways in which the subject’s behavior is attuned to others’, that is, how the subject masters the way in which others change according to her behavior, and the way she adapts to others’ behavior’s changes. These self-other contingencies are not perceptual, though they are perceptually based. For SEP, however, something more is needed. As an understanding of perception in general, SEP requires contingencies—or dependencies, as I call them—that are part of perception in general. The result is the three dependencies of perception that I develop in chapter 3.

Thus, in contrast with the social enactive theories just mentioned, the Social Enactive Theory of Perception (SEP) does not focus on the perceptual aspect of elements of the social, including the perception of others (as if perception occupied itself sometimes with social stuff and at other times it didn’t), but rather *on the social aspects that are constitutive of perception in general*. Instead of taking the social at first as its object and inquiring for how perception serves that goal, what is distinctive about SEP is that it takes perception and inquires into how perception, in its workings, is intrinsically social, that is, in how perception is partly constituted by the intersubjective domain. The different social enactivisms just reviewed are linked and are complementary in various ways, and I consider SEP to be broadly compatible with other available social enactivisms.

In order to situate sociality in a constitutive relation to perception that takes place in the form of an active engagement with the world, SEP is deployed in two tempos or gears. Chapter 1 offers the overall framework for the understanding of perception as a matter of practices: shared ways of doing things with perceptual objects. Perception is woven into social perceptual practices that are characterized by *contextuality*, *performativity*, *expressivity*, and *normativity*. This is a *diachronic* approach to perception. The second gear is a *synchronic* approach to perception, executed in chapters 2 through 5. In those chapters I focus on the shortly temporally bounded individual interactions of a perceiver with worldly things. A central feature of SEP is that the practice-based view of chapter 1—that perception is best understood as a type of social practice—entails that *the diachronic conditions the synchronic*. In other words, that social practices condition individual interactions.

The significance of this relationship between the diachronic and the synchronic approaches is that even seemingly individual-only, practice-independent aspects and elements of perception are, in relevant respects, constituted by social practices. The aspects and notions that have been traditionally considered the descriptive and explanatory blocks of perception are: recognitional and discriminatory capacities; individuation of perceptual objects, sensory properties, and phenomenal qualities; perceptual content; and normativity of perceptual content. Thus, in chapters 2 through 5 SEP investigates the traditional topics of philosophy of perception in a broad framework that makes justice to the complexity of perception.

It is important for SEP's take on the social that it does not *reduce* perception to shared practices, as if the normative onus is on the social side alone—this goes in hand with understanding sociality as *intersubjectivity*.<sup>8</sup> Perceptual interactions operate on the basis of a baseline knowledge—the mastery of techniques in which practices consist—, in which the subject is able to interact and produce in manners that are partly individual.<sup>9</sup> As in the case of

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<sup>8</sup> See Medina (2010) for an argument rejecting both individual and social normative inflation.

<sup>9</sup> There is a second sense of pragmatic dependence, namely, that in individual interactions perceptions and their aspects depend on the personal-level activity in which a person is engaged. For instance, in a perceptual comparison between two kinds of paper (in order to choose one notebook over another, or in order to determine which one fits a

speaking a language or playing an instrument, the fact that the techniques are fundamentally social does not mean that they are the sheer repetition of models, but rather enactments of possibilities in the midst of pragmatic circumstances, in which individual goals, styles, and constraints also operate. It is the same sense in which an individual speaker of the Spanish language is likely to use a noun after an article because of grammar structure, which is a feature of our linguistic practices, even though the speaker is performing an individual activity. When a person speaks, her use of a language is not a private fact of her life, although it is certainly something she does.<sup>10</sup>

Chapters 2 through 5 present the synchronic instantiation of the diachronic perceptual practices in the following way. Chapter 2 starts by developing a notion of perceptual experience as interaction with worldly objects, events, and states of affairs, characterized by the fact that these objects are temporally extended and appear only in perspectives or appearances, and do so as a function of the materiality of perceptible reality and of the activities in which perceptual interactions consist. This constitutive link between experience and the contents of experience is further explored in chapter 3 through a detailed comparison with the way representationalism conceives the connections between experience and content. This broad scope makes this chapter be the longest one in this dissertation. Particular attention is paid to two structuring elements of the representationalist view: perception's intrinsic need for veridicality and perception's fundamental indirect character. SEP's rejection of both these features is at the very core of the Social Enactive View. SEP objects to these views by offering a series of arguments for the directness and trustworthiness of perceptual appearances. The appearing of objects in perspectives will then be qualified through the three types of dependencies or mediations at

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certain job better) the perceiver may not be aware of the color of the papers at all. Although most of this interaction can be seen as instantiating a perceptual practice—the idea of comparing papers' thickness for the socially constituted activity of notebook use—, it is possible to see in what sense the dependence is to an extent event-bounded. This sense of pragmatic dependence is secondary. It will be accounted in chapters 2 through 5.

<sup>10</sup> Naturally, SEP takes into account the existence of physiological constraints, some of which are universal or nearly universal (i.e. the range of electromagnetic spectrum to which retina's rods and cones are sensitive, or the frequencies that are normally captured by the human ear). However, even the relative significance of sensory properties (smells, flavors, colors) or perceptual categories (parts and wholes) are subject to pragmatic determination. These two elements are present all throughout the dissertation and will be specifically targeted where appropriate.

work in perception: *idiosyncratic*, *non-socially pragmatic*, and *socially pragmatic*. I argue that the appearing of things specified along the lines of these dependencies is the proper meaning of directness in perception, which provides further explication for dropping veridicality as a concern about perception.

Chapter 4 is devoted to perceptual content, where, on the basis of the distinction between perceptual object and object-as-perceived, it is argued that the *full content* of a perceptual interaction should be parsed between *core content*, which picks the always-changing, dynamic specific object or aspect of our actions and predications, and *environing content*, which picks perceptual aspects surrounding objects that play a role in perceptual transitions and variations of objects, and go all the way down to the very contact with physical properties of the world. This division between core and enviroing is not about the nature of content, but about its structure and about levels of concretion of possibilities within the whole perceptual field.

Chapter 5 further investigates perceptual normativity, now addressed under the synchronic lens. This section responds to SEP's dropping of the narrow concern for veridicality. It is shown that SEP has a more appropriate notion of normativity for perception than representationalism. This version articulates our ways of doing things perceptually, the relation of perception with other aspects of our mental life, and the relation between objects and content. In this view, normativity is about the placement of perceptual stuff in a system of possibilities and expectations—a matter of degrees of fulfillment of expectations in a horizon of pragmatic significance, where both expectations and horizon are a function of the socially constituted interactions between perceivers and a rich theory of appearances.

## Chapter I

### Perceptual Practices

In perception, we relate to worldly objects, events, and states of affairs on the basis of what we smell, what we taste, what we hear, what we touch, what we see, the feeling of our own bodies, and what we perceive through other modalities, such as the feeling of temperature, and different combinations of these modalities. Perception is about our sensory acquaintance with worldly objects, events, and states of affairs, including our own bodies.

Our mastery of things perceptual extends to every nook of our lives. Our perceptual mastery is not about abstract sounds or geometrically defined shapes. Our mastery of perception is about the food we cook, the clothing we put on, and the music we listen to, dance to, enjoy and dislike. It is about the way we speak and the way we relate to others' utterances, exclamations, and expressive sounds. It is about the importance we give to the smell of things and people, about the things or spaces we make smell as we like. It is about the fabrics, walls, and skins that surround us and whose textures matter for us. Thus, in perception, we are constantly in relation to others. In this relationship with the world and with others, we are not simply receptive. We are also active and productive. We move closer to others in order to hear them better, we present ourselves to others through fabrics and their colors, or through the smells we put on or simply allow. And in everyday life, in the food we eat, in the food we cook—that we serve, eat, smell, and taste—we are actively relating to others in complex ways that reflect our backgrounds, stories, styles, personalities, and also preferences.

In this chapter I propose the view that perception is properly understood as woven into a type of social practices that includes food, dance, dress, music, languages, etc. More specifically, I propose that perceptual practices are the *enactment of culturally structured, normatively rich techniques of commerce of meaningful multi- and inter-modal perceptible material*. This thesis



constitutes one of the central tenets of the Social Enactive Theory of Perception (SEP). On SEP's view, perception is not an individual process of recognition and assessment of perceptual properties, playing only the functional role of *input* for a separately conceived *output*, partly serving higher-level cognitive activities. SEP agrees that there are individual processes involved in perception, i.e. brain-processes, and that perception can be understood at times as receptive, provided receptivity is not characterized by passivity. SEP denies, though, that individual processes and receptivity are the categories under which perception should be placed and understood. In contrast, SEP holds that all things perceptual are defined by their being woven into perceptual practices and, as such, dependent on their motivations, methods, and goals. Perception is a social practice whose activities have significance for everyday life. While the perceptual aspect does not exhaust the nature of these practices (for cooking is also about the sustenance of the organism, and listening to music could also be for the sake of someone's emotional well-being) perception is at their core—it is essentially *woven* into them.<sup>1</sup>

This chapter follows a Wittgensteinian way of thinking about *practices*. I first outline the contextual pragmatism of Wittgenstein and extend the mostly linguistic-based arguments of Wittgenstein and several commentators to the perceptual domain. I will argue that perception is the type of thing that finds “bedrock” at a pragmatic level, instead of at a semantic or syntactic one. I will show how perceptual practices evince the triple structure Medina (2003) has identified in practices: *contextuality*, *performativity*, and *normativity*. To these three characteristics, I will add *expressivity* as an essential feature of perceptual practices.

The notion of perceptual practices shares the basic enactive insight that perception is not merely receptive, but rather, that perception is a way of acting. In this chapter I begin to distinguish the Social Enactive Theory of Perception (SEP) from sensorimotor enactivism, whose best-known representatives are Alva Noë, Susan Hurley, Evan Thompson, and Daniel

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<sup>1</sup> About language-games, Wittgenstein said: “I shall also call the whole, consisting of language and the activities into which it is woven, a ‘language-game’” (2009a, §7). German-English bilingual editions of Wittgenstein's works are confusing as to pagination, hence I give the number of the sections or remarks where quotations are located, except for the English version of *The Blue and Brown Books* (1965), where I stick to the standard pagination usage.

Hutto. Instead of talking about individual sensorimotor actions, where movement is the key to perceptual interactions, I argue that perception encompasses a richer set of determinations, namely, those that belong to the socially constituted techniques in which it plays a role.

Perceptual practices are not simply individual actions, but socially structured ways of going about perceptual things. While individual variations aren't precluded, a social background is built into practices insofar as they are the product of processes of learning. Perceptual practices are ways of inhabiting the world, and they are social. Following Wittgenstein, I hold that perceptual practices constitute *forms of life*.

### 1.1 Social Practices And Their Theoretical Role

I take the lead to think about practices from Wittgenstein and the non-skeptical branch of his commentators. On the non-skeptical view, Wittgenstein's philosophy is not occupied with *solving* philosophical problems, but rather with *dissolving* them by showing how the very conceptual scaffolding on which such problems arise is not self-evident or commonsensical, as the skeptics, and several traditional views, think.<sup>2</sup> But what are the problems that are dissolved by appealing to social practices? What are the issues and concepts that a contextualist, practice-based view addresses?

A well-established tradition of commentators takes the issues to be located in the philosophy of language.<sup>3</sup> In this case we find, for instance, the issue of the skeptical threat of meaning-indeterminacy relative to sensations and sentences: there is no non-arbitrary way of securing our utterances' references and meanings. Others think that the issues that the appeal to practices addresses have to do with the nature of meaning itself (whether it applies to sentences,

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<sup>2</sup> Non-skeptical commentators of Wittgenstein include Hurley (1998), Lance and O'Leary Hawthorne (1997), Medina (2002; 2003; 2006; 2010), McDowell (1984), Michael Williams, and Meredith Williams (1999), among others. Of the skeptical commentators (those that do not reject the basic conceptual scaffolding of the traditional picture, and hence try to solve the problems presented by it, or realize their inescapability), Kripke (1982) is perhaps the most famous.

<sup>3</sup> This is no surprise since the entry point of Wittgenstein himself into these investigations is quite often a linguistic one. Thus we read in *The Blue Book*: "What is the meaning of a word?" (Wittgenstein 1965, 1); and we see a direct questioning of Augustine's account of language learning in both *The Brown Book* and in the *Philosophical Investigations* (Wittgenstein 1965, 77; Wittgenstein 2009a, §1). The *Last Writings* begin with the author wondering about a possible word "to frightle oneself" or "to torture oneself with fearful thoughts" (Wittgenstein 1982, 2), and even his *Remarks on colour* open with a language-game of reporting comparisons between colors (Wittgenstein 2004, 2).

beliefs, or other mental objects), with the concept of truth, and with the nature and possibility of justification or other normative concepts, such as inference.

In a broader epistemological spirit, one can also see Wittgenstein concerned with the seeming separation between the inner and the outer, and with the gulf between mind and world (Wittgenstein 2009, §§281-315). Hurley (1998), on the other hand, gives linguistic views a twist and puts Wittgenstein's approach to practices in connection with themes in the philosophy of mind such as the issue of content and content's unity, both for action and for perception (which one could see as mirroring the problem of reference). For Hurley, the main problem Wittgenstein's philosophy illuminates is one of aboutness, namely, the possibility that we have targets for our actions and contents standing for the things we perceive, where perception is treated as dealing with a phenomenal experience (Hurley 1998, 221).

The central idea of Wittgenstein-inspired contextualist pragmatism, according to the non-skeptical brand of his commentators, is that the key to dissolve some traditional puzzles concerning meaning, truth, and normativity, consists in appealing to our epistemic and socio-linguistic practices. Social practices are the ground on which meaning, truth, and normativity depend for their intelligibility and correctness, if we are to understand meaning, truth, and normativity as actual phenomena and not as approximations to an *ideal* structure.

Skeptical views, in contrast, insist in searching for epistemological criteria in a domain independent from our practices, such as an autonomous grammar or the realm of logical truth. This route faces insurmountable obstacles in securing its epistemic privilege, and this is why skeptical readings find that our communicative endeavors and our lives in common are illusory, and we, delusional. This view dismisses the certainty and meaningfulness of everyday experience because it assumes that traditional theories of meaning are correct in demanding determinacy and immutability from our utterances and our epistemic repertoire (Medina 2006, 3). Non-skeptical readings dismantle these traditional requirements on meaning (and truth,

normativity, content, etc.), by focusing on the nature of social practices, in ways that will soon be clear.

The fact that these pragmatisms have arisen in the context of philosophy of language speaks of the pervasiveness of discursive, propositional frameworks as the default framework used to deal with philosophical problems in epistemology, ethics, philosophy of mind, and metaphysics. In this chapter I show how, notwithstanding this linguistic-turn inclination, the practice-based framework is the proper one to understand perception, without making perception a matter of our perceptual reports or our perceptual beliefs (whatever a perceptual belief might be).<sup>4</sup> I aim to show that the practice-based view on epistemic practices and language can be transported to the domain of perception. This transposition will reveal the phenomenon of perception, attending to its own features, in a way worthy of consideration, that is, without making perception a matter of words—a matter of our smell or color vocabulary.

This is not the place either to launch a defense of the many deep issues that support a pragmatic outlook on philosophy of language and epistemology. In what remains of this section, I will at only offer an outline of the pragmatic orientation in general, making emphasis on a few points that are important for my ensuing discussion on perception. In section 1.2 I will defend the perceptual practices account on deeper grounds.

In the *Social Enactive Theory of Perception* (SEP), the appeal to practice tries to solve parallel problems to those present in the linguistic and epistemological discussions. Traditional theories of perception, mostly of representational lineage, are structured around questions concerning the possibility and pervasiveness of illusion, the indeterminacy of perceptual aboutness, the separation between mind and world, the seeming impossibility of directness in perception, the difficult tensions between low-level and high-level properties, and the problematic relation between perception and action in a framework that refuses to accept more than an instrumental relation between them two. Some of these issues are issues of perceptual consciousness, issues of

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<sup>4</sup> Hurley also shows how core issues about mind are understandable in connection to Wittgensteinian themes (1998, 221–244).

perceptual normativity, and issues of the phenomenal aspect of perception. In this regard, this chapter has a limited scope. In this chapter I won't show how the appeal to practices conceptualizes and attacks philosophical problems in all those areas—that is one of the tasks of the entire dissertation.<sup>5</sup> In this chapter I will offer the general outlook of perceptual practices. This outlook is aimed at shifting the way of conceiving perception, the way of conceiving the relation of perception to its objects, and the way of conceiving the relation of the perceiver, as a perceiver, to the social and intersubjective structures in which she lives. This chapter will at least start to show how and why SEP looks at perception the way it does. Borrowing an expression from Hurley, part of the goal now is to begin *to soften our confidence* on the traditional views, as well as to start to doubt their commonsensicality. Chapters 2 through 5 will account for specific aspects of perception in the framework that takes perceptual practices as its basic structure.

To think of a domain of philosophical reflection from a pragmatic point of view means to see that its “ultimate global justification” is found “in terms of its usefulness to people” (Lance and O’Leary-Hawthorne 1997, 135). “What is useful to people” does not refer to a set standard of usefulness (utility or expediency) but should be understood as that which accords to the explicit or implicit goals internal to what people do, even when the goal is the inertial continuation of the way we do things. “What people do” is what Wittgenstein calls a “consensus of action” (Medina 2002, 150), and such consensus is the basis for intelligibility and normativity, although not merely on account of being a consensus. For Lance and O’Leary-Hawthorne, a social practice—“what people do”—is “the basic vehicle of understanding” (1997, 133) and is the structure of “social appropriatenesses” (1997, 184), that is, the space where actions and reactions are subject to normative assessment. Normative assessment is also present in cases of mere conformity to the allowed ways of doing things. Further, they argue that “we must interpret the

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<sup>5</sup> Chapter 3 will articulate a *theoretical diagnosis* of the central demands that traditional epistemology places, and wrongly so, upon perception—namely, the veridicality concern and the directness concern. These are demands that cause us to settle for theories that rob perception of its natural interactive role, in fear of conceding to skeptic worries about our contact with the world. For the idea of a theoretical diagnosis see Medina (2006, 1–7).

community in terms of its practices” and the point to take from here is that there is no interpreting device for a specific community more basic than what the community does (Lance and O’Leary-Hawthorne 1997, 184).

The consensus of action on which practices consists is not only the *de facto* agreement in behaviors and attitudes, that is, in actions, reactions, and dispositions, but a style of doing things that is the product of processes of acculturation and training. The normative force of social practices lies not in the number of practitioners but in its continued existence through time in a community, where skilled practitioners train others into practices, by getting them to act according to patterns of behaviors and within domains of moves allowed. This training does not occur in an abstract space. It takes place against a background that includes a constant environment, i.e. a stable, physically defined environment, and a certain natural set of dispositions and reactions—which Wittgenstein called “natural reactions”— that can nevertheless be shaped and developed (Medina 2002, 162; see also 136, 171).

In relation to training, Lance and O’Leary-Hawthorne have said that “talk about meaning is concerned with language-learning moves, but tacitly presupposes that appropriate recognitional capacities and dispositions to non-linguistic behavior are already in place” (1997, 137; Medina 2002, 162). The extension of a practice-based view to the perceptual domain will partly deal with those capacities and dispositions to non-linguistic behavior. These capacities and dispositions will be addressed not only in the sense that they are prior to linguistic learning, but also insofar as they are constantly present in a person’s life, not simply subordinate to, but coexistent with, language and other cognitive activities.

The normative dimension of practices, issuing from the processes of acculturation by which novices are brought into such practices, configures a “space of attribution of commitments to practitioners of the practice,” that is, a space where *expectations* about actions, reactions, dispositions, attitudes, and other moves are in place, and are the basis for judgments about behavior and attitudes of self and others (judgments that may not even arise when things are

done according to the established social practice) (Lance and O’Leary-Hawthorne 1997, 174–175).

Social practices are characterized by *contextuality*, *performativity*, *expressivity*, and *normativity*.<sup>6</sup> Practices are *contextual* in that determination of meanings, truth, and other normative aspects is only decidable by the whole concrete practices that happen over against specific social circumstances, including a physical environment. Practices are *performative* because they consist in actions, reactions and dispositions. Practices are *expressive* because they express the form of life of a community. Communities, in this perspective, are not aggregations of individuals but active groups structured by patterns of behavior (Medina 2002, 170). Lastly, practices are *normative* because they feature a dimension of correctness and intelligibility—of successfulness and pragmatic meaningfulness—that is exhibited in the practices themselves and is grounded in the processes of training by which new practitioners are brought into the community and by which the community continuously develops and transforms itself. Wittgenstein’s view on practices is holistic: these four features are highly interwoven, and each of them will appear in one way or another in the account of the other three. For example, there is no talking of *contextuality* that is not at the same time *performative*, since the context is first and foremost found in a *normatively* structured consensus of ways of *doing things* that *express* the forms of life of the communities that practice them.

At the heart of the discussion on meaning, truth, and normativity is the idea that to understand what we say or what we do partly means that we should be able to tell when what we say (or do) is correct and when it is incorrect. It is also the idea that to understand what we say means to be able to tell the intelligible from the unintelligible. In both cases there seems to be an immediate appeal to a rule or norm that guides what we say or do. Counterfactually put: unless there is a rule, there is no telling (i.e. it remains indeterminate) whether acts or words are correct or intelligible. These are, at least, the terms in which the discussion has been conducted.

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<sup>6</sup> Medina has argued for the triplet contextuality, performativity, and normativity (2003, 62ff.). To that group I add expressivity.

The pragmatic take I am articulating refuses to take a semantic requirement (the idea that 'how to proceed' is fixed semantically, independently of practices), or consciousness of a semantic requirement (that there is always a 'knowing how to proceed', an interpretation of a rule) as the key to normativity. Does this practice-based view on rules surmount the classical problem of indeterminacy?

In the practice-based view, acting *according to a rule* or *guided by a rule* is not a distinction that can be actually brought to decide when an action or utterance is correct or intelligible. The distinction is not entirely ruled out. It is kept but in a very deflated sense. The issue cannot be decided either by considering an act or utterance in isolation from a social practice, or by whether someone is consciously going by (or not going by) a rule. Rather, the primacy of practice means that one is situated within a normative space when one acts in accordance to a practice in which one is skilled, even if one doesn't know why things are done thus or so, or is perhaps not aware of doing things thus or so. If there is a rule—and at this point the notion of rule starts becoming misleading—, it is something immanent in practices. The deciding factor is, once again, whether the patterned behavior is the product of the technique that was acquired through a process of training or acculturation. And this process is the one by which novices are taken to self-regulate their behavior so as to be in accord to the practices embedded in the majority. When practices are performed by skilled practitioners, by members of a community, the issue of consciously or unconsciously acting guided by a somewhat explicit rule loses its intuitive grip as a way of demonstrating what following a rule consists in. Furthermore, an action done when one is part of a social practice seems oftentimes done automatically. In this respect Wittgenstein has said that things done in the spirit of the practice are cases of following a rule *blindly*, and Lance and O'Leary-Hawthorne have referred to participation in *unreflective engagements* or *unreflective conformities*. These engagements and conformities are a matter of actions, reactions, and attitudes. In acculturation processes we not only learn to *react* in certain ways upon certain occurrence but also learn to *take* certain occurrences *as such and such*, that is,



as having a certain significance and standing in need of a certain reaction. Perceptually, we can say that a *sensibility* is learned along perceptual *behavior*. And while many actions are done automatically, and there is a ground level of automaticity and unreflective conformity, this does not mean that automaticity, blindness, or unreflectiveness are necessary for actions to be done in the spirit of a social practice.<sup>7</sup>

Our unreflective engagement with the different domains of our social practices seems to be mostly about actions, about what subjects do or don't do. There is, however, a counterpart on the side of items dealt with—sentences, actions, and objects. Let me introduce Lance and O'Leary-Hawthorne's notion of Quine-analytic sentences. For Lance and O'Leary-Hawthorne the issue of truth is tied to the issue of whether there are analytic sentences at all, even tautological ones. While they reject the existence of analytic sentences in themselves, much à la Quine, they find it necessary to postulate a quasi-analytic type of sentences, whose quasi-analyticity depends on actual social practices. These are termed *Quine-analytic sentences* and are defined as sentences that do not admit of bare challenges, that is, they do not admit of being questioned lest the questioner is taken to be an outsider, a joker, or a lunatic. In the reality of social patterns of language use there are sentences that *are taken to be analytic by speakers, and whose being taken to be analytic by speakers is in fact the mark of what constitutes to be a competent speaker, a practitioner*, to be a member of the actual community of language users. The idea of Quine-analyticity includes the entitlements carried by them: its not admitting of bare challenges is a type of entitlement, and so it is, for instance, its being taken for granted in deductions or inferences. I will get back in section 1.2 to the issue of Quine-analytic items, where I will suggest that consensus about perceptual things are comparable to Quine-analytic sentences in that questioning certain perceptual occurrences, such as combinations of flavors or ways of

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<sup>7</sup> The acknowledgement of this unreflective or automatic acting in a way that accords with rules should not be understood as an endorsement of a Dreyfus-like theory of mindless coping. Suffice it to say that, following Zahavi, the idea of mindlessness is very problematic since it limits the mindful to the conscious, in the sense of awareness. What matters, instead, is that actions that are done somewhat blindly or automatically have an experiential import that must be counted as mindful: "the level of absorbed coping involves a dimension of self-experience – at least in so far as that level is supposed to be experiential rather than simply a matter of non-conscious automaticity" (Zahavi 2013, 5).

consuming food, or what counts as perceptually appropriate when it comes to touch or color in dressing, are entitlements carried by *certainities analogous to Quine-analytic sentences*, and that disputing or challenging them amounts to place oneself outside of the community. (I will call this analog the *seemingly given*<sup>8</sup>). One takes it for granted that loud yelling is not conducive to listening to a song playing softly in the background—but a child may need to learn this. One does not question whether one can add a sound to a cup of hot coffee—although one may entertain the idea of adding a color. Those possible combinations, and the things deemed appropriate, delightful, or disgusting, are also part of what skilled practitioners take for granted and follow blindly, and thus constitutes perceptual practices.

Zooming out for a moment, the broader epistemological picture that underlies a pragmatic approach is aptly put by Lance and O’Leary-Hawthorne: “despite the fact that there is no substantive, non-circular, empirical reason to prefer [some Quine-analytic claims] to certain other incompatible claims, our linguistic practice involves a world-view which is a loosely defined set of sentences, practices, attitudes, and methodologies, each taken to be *prima facie* justified in the sense that bare challenges to them are inappropriate. That is, there is an arbitrarily stipulated onus of proof on anyone who would attempt to criticize these practices” (Lance and O’Leary-Hawthorne 1997, 111).

By means of a reflection on the all-encompassing nature of social practices for a community and its practitioners, we come to see that social practices are constitutive of *world-views* (as Lance and O’Leary Hawthorne put it), or *forms of life* (*Lebensformen*, in Wittgenstein’s terms). In fact, we find that Husserl’s notion of *lifeworld* (*Lebenswelt*) speaks of a similar reality in pointing to the world that comes to be experienced in specific manners according to the practices by which people inhabit it. SEP’s position in this respect is that our perceptual practices constitute

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<sup>8</sup> I will refer to the perceptual analog of Quine-analytic sentences as *seemingly given* perceptual instances, since the idea of *the given* plays a self-evident justificatory role in some traditional philosophies of mind, analog to that of the analytic in epistemological discussions. The *seemingly given* is a deflated notion in the same sense that Quine-analytic sentences are, that is, that their seemingly givenness or seemingly analyticity is, first, forceful yet only seeming, and second, that it is derived from practices in which it plays somewhat of a grounding role in its, once again, forceful yet seeming character.

forms of life, world-views, lifeworlds—that the way we interact with perceptible material, act on it and respond to it, is at the very core of our ways of inhabiting the world.

## 1.2 The Perceptual Practices Approach

In this section I present a series of arguments for the claim that a practice-based approach is appropriate for perception. The following sections will show how perceptual practices share the central characteristics of social practices previously described, namely, *contextuality*, *performativity*, *expressivity*, and *normativity*. Weaving all these aspects together, the specific definition I will propose is that perceptual practices are the enactment of socially structured and regulated, finely attuned, techniques of commerce of meaningful perceptible material.

**The Arguments From Seeing Aspects.** In one of the preliminary studies for the *Philosophical Investigations*, Wittgenstein observes that the visual experience of a person who sees something she recognizes is not the same than that of a person who sees the same thing but does not recognize it (1982, §§539, 574, 575). The phenomenological evidence is at an almost intuitive level, but more is needed in order conceptually to ascertain the difference. But how can this be done? “What can be cited in support of his seeing it [a smile, in this case] differently?” (Wittgenstein 1982, §576).

Wittgenstein explains that visual experience exceeds what can be accounted for by solely relying on sensory input, as his examples of the cube/box or the duck-rabbit show (2009b, §§116, 118). This is the difference between having a visual experience (*Sehenerlebnis*) and having an impression. In his view, if we relied solely on what could impact the retina, it would be impossible to explain why the very same visual properties—which he calls the visual impression (*Gesichtseindruck*)—are seen differently by the same person, or by two different people, one of which was familiar with the object. There is a different story to be told, which suggests a more complex conception of seeing: seeing is always *seeing as* or, what is the same, *seeing aspects*. The trick, as it were, is that we always *see as*, but the *as* is hidden. In other words, the argumentative

strategy in using two different visual experiences sharing the same visual impression is to highlight that while impression is necessary for visual experience to happen, it is not sufficient.

What does the *as* in *seeing as* consist in? What does *seeing aspects* entail for a theory of seeing? One way to proceed is to investigate what makes the difference between different visual experiences. One possibility is that the organization of an image and the aspects that such an organization reveals are not a “property of the object, but an internal relation between it and other objects” (Wittgenstein 1982, §517; Wittgenstein 2009b, §§247–248). These relations are not additional to what is sensed. In this version, it is someone’s being able to grasp those relations, evinced for example in the ability to describe shapes in a certain way, what makes it possible to grasp an aspect.

On one end, then, perception is different from having impressions, and *internal relations* are the key to explaining this difference. On the other end, we should try to clear up the relationship between perception, on the one hand, and thinking and knowing, on the other. Since visual experiences often involve familiarity with objects, which sometimes involve our having a concept (Wittgenstein 1982, §741), does one *see* an animal, or does one *know* that what one sees is an animal? Does one have to *think* about it before one says it is an animal? Does this mean that perception is a type of knowing or thinking because of common characteristics with them? Consider the following cases Wittgenstein examines:

“I look at an animal in a cage. I am asked: ‘What do you see?’ I answer: ‘A rabbit.’ — I gaze into the countryside; suddenly a rabbit runs past. I exclaim: ‘A rabbit!’” (1982, §549)

“I see that an animal in a picture is transfixed by an arrow. It has stuck it in the throat and it sticks out at the back of the neck. Imagine the picture is a silhouette. — Do you *see* the arrow — or do you merely *know* that these two bits are supposed to be part of an arrow?” (1982, §644)

The first step in his reasoning is that it is wrong to try to impose a separation between perceiving and recognizing, or between perceiving and thinking. To this end, one must imagine the two-stage process that would take place if seeing were different from recognizing and from

thinking. What part of the experience whose exclamation was “A rabbit!” is *recognition*, and what part is *seeing*? There is no telling. The question is ill-posed.

But this similarity is dubious because there are cases where there is seeing without recognition. Think in the case of seeing something familiar but not being able to see it right away as the familiar thing one soon comes to see it as—as when it takes a moment to recognize an old acquaintance one has not seen in years (See Wittgenstein 1982, §544). This shows that the recognition, or absence thereof, can lead to different visual experiences. Now, this would work all the same if we *downshifted* the recognitional level, as it were, and said that there was recognition—a person, a face—but not a detailed recognition—the old acquaintance. In that same vein, one could say that one *recognizes* warmth when one walks in a sauna bath, i.e. that one has a certain understanding of what goes on, namely, that it is a temperature, and that it is not cold. Notice that one does not think in that moment counterfactually, but one *would agree* to different counterfactuals: If I were wearing lots of clothing, the heat would be unbearable. Yet it would clearly be a stretch to say that one recognizes warmth in such situation. These two cases match the case of immediately seeing something, like the rabbit in the countryside in the quotation above, or like fear rising after suddenly noticing a lion outdoors (Wittgenstein 1982, §589). The common denominator in these last four cases (face, warmth, rabbit, and lion) is that the type of familiarity underlying the encounter with those cases is characterized by immediacy and bodily engagement. There is *no room* between seeing and recognition, but this does not mean that seeing is the same as thinking or knowing.

The second example, the case of the animal transfixed by an arrow, offers a *reductio* argument. If one does not really *see* the arrow but *knows* it to be one, that is, one *infers* that it is an arrow, then one does *never see* any object. But we do see, or perceive, objects, events, and states of affairs: arrows, cars, clouds, warmth, spiciness, etc. Therefore, it is not the case that the familiar recognition in perception is a knowing. It is possible to motivate the conclusion in a different way: If in the case of the drawing of an arrow one could not see the arrow because a

part of it was missing, then in every pictorial representation of an object there is always something missing visually, for even in the most detailed two-dimensional reproduction, the object would be missing the perspectival variations that only real objects could offer. Thus, in pictorial representations one could never see objects. Furthermore, and by parity reasoning, any case in which the “totality” of the object is not present is a case of the perceiver completing an image, inferring, supplying what the visual impression offers with one’s own knowledge. Still by parity reasoning, it could be argued that even in the case of a real object, there is always an inference since no perspectival totality can be given at once, and the back side of visual objects, for instance, is not given.<sup>9</sup> This would mean that we never see any objects, neither in drawing nor in normal interaction with objects. Yet we see objects.

But what do we make of the fact that perception is not detachable from a certain type of recognition? Wittgenstein’s position is that perception is not thinking or knowing even though some characteristics of perception are characteristics normally associated with thinking and knowing. Perception shares with thinking and knowing what we can describe as the *familiarity of an encounter*. The epistemological tradition of Modern philosophy takes it to be essential to “familiarity” that it requires previous instances over against which a present situation is compared, a comparison stage, and a conclusion output. To place perception in the same category as thinking and knowing assumes that perception is an intellectualistic process that requires of concepts, probably of language, employs logic, and seems separate from emotion and feeling. However, perception’s familiar encounters with things perceived aren’t rational: one finds warmth warm, as it were. It is found as something familiar, but there are no comparisons made. In perception, there is a taking of things for something (*Dafürhaltens*). In perception, this familiar encounter is behaviorally significant, even if not acted upon, and has a phenomenal element (that may or may not be strongly felt).

Sensory impressions do not account for perceptual experiences, but what is combined with sensory impressions is not a knowing or thinking process, but a type of immediate, bodily,

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<sup>9</sup> I explore in greater detail the issue of the perspectival appearing of perceptual things in chapter 3.

behaviorally related encounter with things in the world. Perception is a bodily engagement with the world. This is why I prefer to refer to the familiarity of a perceptual encounter and not to the recognition of an object or event. Recognition is located in the anatomy of inputs, in the physiology of inferences, and using it unadvisedly becomes an obstacle to making sense of a view that, like SEP, disputes the input-output picture of perception and action.

**Aspects and Doings.** Wittgenstein realizes that the difficulties in analyzing perception are associated with the many phenomena and variations at play in perceptual experience (1982, §§579–583). His remarks on perception in the *Investigations*, in the different preliminary studies for the *Investigations*, and in the *Remarks on Colour*, among other works, are full of fine distinctions involving the things we perceive, the aspects we perceive, the ways in which we perceive, the relation of things perceptual with words, and of things perceptual with things behavioral, to list only some.<sup>10</sup> But it would be wrong to try to systematize or to offer a taxonomy of Wittgenstein’s treatment of perception: the interrelatedness of aspects does not yield that type of treatment. Once again, I want to use these distinctions as a way to weave through conceptual difficulties. Here I pick one more thread of Wittgenstein’s argumentation (1982, §§686, 728).

Part of the problem with all the different concepts, phenomena, and variations one could find in live perception is not only that no one element furnishes a decisive proof of a new perspective. It is not evident either *what* concepts or phenomena are to be addressed and *how*.

Next to ‘seeing aspects,’ one neighboring perceptual phenomenon is noticing the organization of a visual array, in which a perceiver notices the dependence of a visual experience on taking certain lines of a drawing to be connected in one way or another (Wittgenstein 1982, §511). In the duck-rabbit case, for instance, one may notice that it looks like a duck when one takes the lines that form the beak to be as if to the left, and not as if on top, for then one sees a rabbit. There is also the phenomenon of suddenly becoming able to see an aspect—the *dawning*

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<sup>10</sup> These preliminary investigations include *The Blue and Brown Books* (Wittgenstein 1965), the *Last Writing on the Philosophy of Psychology* (Wittgenstein 1982) and fragments on the philosophy of psychology, known before as the second part of the *Philosophical Investigations* (Wittgenstein 2009b).

or *lighting* of an aspect—and which is the realization of a new perception, that is, of a new perceptual experience, oftentimes accompanied by a linguistic expression (Wittgenstein 1982, §§474, 495, 520).

So, what else is needed to give an account of perceptual experience additional to the insufficiency of sensory input alone and the immediate comprehension of things perceived—the familiarity? We start by realizing that we learned about perception by looking at the things we do in relation to perception.

For instance, we can ascertain that there is a difference in two visual experiences when we mimic things differently (Wittgenstein 1982, §575), or as we try to copy them (§598), or in the ways we react to them (§§601-603), or in the descriptions we offer of them, among others (§611). However, the perception and the accompanying action seem too close to each other, even entangled. Consider the two following remarks:

“What kind of man is said to be enjoying this picture’s telling expression? Well, someone who looks at it this way, talks about it in such-and-such a way, and reacts to it this way.” (1982, §471)

“I have always seen it as a rabbit could even mean: for me it always was a rabbit, I have always spoken to it as a rabbit. A child does this. It means that I have always *treated* it as a rabbit.” (1982, §§472)

In both cases, Wittgenstein is calling into question the distance and seeming difference between *perception* and *action*, specifically action ensuing from perception. In the first case, enjoying the “picture’s telling expression” requires a recognition of such type of expression. Since recognition entails something other than the mere visual impression—for we can think of someone who does not enjoy the picture’s telling expression, perhaps because she does not *see* such telling expression—, so does the enjoyment. We then find that enjoying the picture amounts to a certain way of looking and talking vis-a-vis the picture. In the second case, the implication is clearer: to see something as something means (under certain conditions, I hurry to add) to *treat it as* something. These conditions might be those of a person who does not reflect upon a perception, and just keeps on going (as we do pretty much all the time) in the very way



in which we go down the street and see many things, some of which elicit and some of which do not elicit a reaction. Similarly, in experiencing a change of aspect in an image (*Aspektwechsel*), Wittgenstein remarks how the change is expressed in what “I occupy myself with,” which makes the experience of change “similar to an action” (1982, §556).

In similar remarks, like the following ones about hearing a melody and a spotted wall, Wittgenstein calls into question the distance between *impression* and *action*:

“Hearing a melody and the movements that go along with the particular way someone interprets (*auffasst*) or hears (*hört*) it.” (1982, §584)

“It’s as if doing and the impression didn’t happen side by side, but as if doing shaped the impression” (1982, §586)

“I hear it differently, and now I can play it differently. Thus I can render (*wiedergeben*) it differently.” (1982, §587)

To begin with, notice how even though the language of impressions is gestured at, the impression appears already in experiential tones and not in the form of a raw uptake of information. A decision on whether impressions are the same in aspect changes is downplayed by Wittgenstein, since in order to decide this matter it is difficult to find criteria other than a *description* of what is experienced (1982, §§609, 611).

The case of the melody shows the entanglement of doing and perceiving so clearly that Wittgenstein asks: “Why does it seem so hard here to separate *doing* and experiencing?” (1982, §585). Sure it is the case that the doing could have shaped the impression, but there is more than an instrumental link between them. When dancing, a dancer’s listening to the music is modified by the dancing movements that put different emphases on different sections or moments that carry more significance for the dancing. At the same time, the dancing is modified by the music *as it is heard*. How is a melody heard in different ways? It is heard differently by the emphasis one puts on the melodic or rhythmic aspects, in the sounds of certain instruments, in the feeling conveyed by certain sections, etc. A dancer can only dance to nuances in the music he is able to listen to—yet not necessarily in a way that can be described or talked about. Since these nuances are more than isolated sounds, but rather melodic and rhythmic sequences, a dancer can

only relate to sequences that can be brought to have corporeal significance, including, naturally, stillness. The example has a counterpart in the case of a player that plays a melody they recognize, whom can be addressed in this way: “But surely when you play it you don’t play it *anyhow*, you play it in this particular way, making a crescendo here, a diminuendo there, a caesura in this place, etc.” (Wittgenstein 1965, 166; emphasis is the author’s).

Hearing a melody is not a plain being impacted by or an absorbing of sounds, and while it can be shaped by dancing or moving, the taking of sounds one way or another—always a “taking something for something” (*Dafürhaltens*)—is a certain *doing*.<sup>11</sup> This is a doing even if one is not conscious of such doing, and even if it seems to be a passive taking it all up—there is not absolute passivity. A similar relation is even clearer in the following remark:

“A wall covered with spots: and I occupy myself by seeing faces on it: but not so that I can study the nature of an aspect, but because I find those *shapes* interesting and because of the destiny that leads me from one to the next.  
More and more, aspects dawn, others fade away, and sometime I ‘stare blindly’ at the wall”  
(1982 §480)

In this case, the doing is the perceiving itself, and it is specified as the perception is specified. Her occupying herself with faces is her seeing faces. When she let herself be led by connections that arise on the go, there is also a doing, like when one plays to find shapes in clouds. And when the perceiver “stares blindly at the wall” it is because no specific aspect lights up (or what is the same: because the *aspect consisting of “lacking aspects”* lights up). It is not because at that moment she is merely having an impression, as opposed to moments were impressions were accompanied by something else. In fact, never does an impression exist apart from the being taken as one thing or another (*Dafürhaltens*), and the seeing one aspect or another is part of the occupying oneself with faces, or with staring blindly (See Wittgenstein 1965, 169).

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<sup>11</sup> Consider reports made in “aesthetic observations”: “‘You have to hear these bars as an introduction,’ ‘You must hear it in this key,’ ‘You must phrase the theme like this’ (which can refer to hearing as well as to playing)” (Wittgenstein 1982, §632). A few remarks below, Wittgenstein says: “In aesthetics isn’t it essential that a picture or a piece of music, etc., can change its aspect for me?” (1982, §634). Part of the point here is that artistic experience expresses very clearly the fact that aspects are essential perception. It is evident that in a lab experiment in which the subject is exposed to beeps or flashes of light there may be not be much of an aspect, however significant the results of those experiments might be for the purposes of understanding some physiological constraints or tendencies having a bearing on perception.

Notice, however, that I have been treating all seeing the same, and all hearing the same, as if what we do when we hear is always the same, that is, as if hearing is only one thing. That is a wrong assumption. Hearing, smelling, or tasting, and other modal-specific activities, along with intermodal interactions, can each take different shapes so as to account for different types of interactions. There is, for instance, an enormous difference between hearing the sounds in the streets as a person walks on her way to take public transportation on her daily routine, namely, without paying attention, and a seasoned dancer hearing a song while he dances to that song (which he enjoys very much) with a partner with whom he enjoys very much to dance. These two situations are different as well from the novice classical music spectator, listening to a long, obscure symphony, attempting (naively) to catch every detail. Or take the case of looking at a flower without looking at the color of the flower—without being conscious of it—and suddenly turning one’s attention to its color (Wittgenstein 1982, §721). Those are clearly two different ways of seeing the flower. Notice how something would be lost from each case, were they reduced to a common type. These cases also reveal that perceiving, since it is a perceiving of aspects, can be a voluntary act (Wittgenstein 1982, §§451, 453).

Thus, there are clear differences as to the activity of the perceiver in these cases, including what to focus on, how attentive the perceiver is in each case, and to what concrete end she perceives at the moment. But that is only one side of the story about the differences in ways of hearing, smelling, touching, tasting, or seeing. The analysis of contextuality and performativity will explore the roles different ways of doing things play in our lives.

Perception is a bodily engagement with the world happening at the level of lived experience, in which the phenomenal and the responsive are indiscernible. This bodily engagement is a matter of degrees of engagement: “engagement that reaches its highest intensity in the original immediacy of the exclamation and its lowest in the silence of habit or indifference” (Krebs 2010, 129). As Hurley argues, the conflict felt by many philosophers in putting actions and responses together comes from the programmatic assumption that perception and action *are* about inputs

and outputs. The fine shades of behavior and of lived experience that Wittgenstein explores and that phenomenology takes as the basis of its theorizing question the input assumption and deliver a different picture. But behind the assumption, or rather beyond it, what is at stake is a way of looking at ourselves—at our lives, what we are and what we do. SEP follows Wittgenstein and the phenomenologists in looking for a theory of perception that explains the connection between the sensory and the significance of things for human existence—a theory of perception where we could recognize ourselves and our lives.

The things we perceive and the ways in which we perceive matter in our lives. Smells, tastes, flavors, textures, melodies, and others sensory aspects, have a significance in our lives, which is evinced in the way we interact with them. Perception is interaction with a perceptible world. This is the basic insight I have been trying to motivate up to now, and this is the insight that I now will flesh out and develop as *perceptual practices*. Since ways of doing things, in the sense here explored, are not individual but constitute social systems of possibilities and appropriatenesses by which people live their lives, ways of doing things are forms of life. Perceptual practices, my argument runs, are forms of life.

As I now turn to explore the four features of perceptual practices—contextuality, performativity, expressivity, and normativity—I would like to insist that these features are highly interwoven. There is no adequate discussion of each of them without reference to the other three.

One of philosophy's tasks is, Wittgenstein says, untangling knots (1982, §756). But this "untangling knots" cannot be the undoing of the braids of actual life because actual life only occurs in those richly woven braids. You can think of braided ropes with knots. It's no problem to disentangle the knots, but make sure to not destroy the rope in the process, such that we end up with a collection of loose threads that hold or tie nothing.

### 1.2.1 Contextuality

Social practices are *contextual* in that the determination of meaning, truth, and normative aspects (which depend on the type of practice: epistemic, moral, perceptual, emotional, etc.) is only decidable by the whole concrete ways of doing things that occur in specific social circumstances, including a physical environment.

*Perceptual practices* consist of shared ways of approaching, producing, and reacting to perceptible material. The behavioral significance of things perceived and the perceived perceptual properties are dependent upon established ways of interacting with object, events, and states of affairs. Consensus on ways of interacting perceptually with objects influence what we perceive, what is appropriate to do and perceive, and what is possible to do and perceive. Take for instance the perceptual interaction with a beer—drinking the beer, savoring it.

This perceptual practice consists in the custom in which a relatively bitter, low-alcoholic beverage is an object of enjoyment in specific modes and circumstances. The practice includes the “mechanical” aspect of the action (how much it is served; how it is drunk, i.e. in sips, shots, or with a spoon; whether it is normally drunk cold, or only ideally, or whether that is irrelevant, according to the community); or the social occasion, specific environment, or weather in which such practice is common, if those have social significance. In some parts of the world, for instance, beer is a common drink for hot days. A beer can be perceived in many ways and these many ways are partly dependent on context. It is the same beer, and it generates reactions and invites interactions that are roughly similar to each other in a given community. This partly means that it can have a different flavor depending on the context, but the rich and nuanced perceptual interaction with a beer is about more than the flavor.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> These considerations do not exhaust the contextual character of perception, since specific perceptual interactions are personal, hence involving a pragmatic dependency at the personal level, and a host of personal-level considerations deriving, for instance, from the perspectival properties of objects. In the case of beer, for instance, the illumination that paints the beer in golden or darker colors, on the degree of personal preference for beer over other drinks, on the freedom or lack thereof by which the person ended up drinking a beer, among others, are cases of this personal level-dependencies which I treat in detail in chapters 2 through 5 in different ways. In chapter 2 I will also explain in more detail that the perceptual experience of taste is different from the perceptual experience of flavor (cf. section 2.3.2). Taste is related to taste buds in the tongue, whereas the experience of flavor is linked to taste, smell

There is a dependence of the broad domain of taste and flavor on this practice, but this dependence is not an all-or-nothing thing, but it contributes to the delimitation, as it were, of a perceptual horizon. The contextuality of the beer-drinking perceptual practice entails that a certain range of taste-bilia and flavor-abilia —i.e. relatively bitter and non-dense liquid (a broad description only intended here for illustrative purposes)— is placed within the domain of the enjoyable. Since bitter flavors are not exclusive of drinks, the possibilities for consumption and enjoyment (or dislike) of bitter items may be influenced by the place of beer within a broader range of flavors. Since taste is connected to smell, and the experience of flavor is connected to both taste and smell (plus tact, feeling of temperature, and even vision), it is conceivable that attitudes towards beer may influence and be influenced by relevant configurations in other sensory modalities.

To be clear, I am not saying that the sheer capacity of a human being to have a perceptual experience of cold things, of cold beverages, of bitter things, or of bitter beverages depend on there being beer-drinkers. That aspect is partly determined by anatomical and physiological facts. They may be present in everybody all the same, or there may be personal differences, or developmental differences (newborns vs. adults), or they could even get altered by experience or by accidents.<sup>13</sup> Think of nuanced flavor notes that one gets used to looking for and enjoying, like wine connoisseurs seem to do.<sup>14</sup> However, the perception of beer and bitter flavors—the perceptual experience of them—depends on beer-drinking practices. It is certainly entailed by SEP’s perceptual practices approach that a member of a community where no bitter beverages somewhat similar to beer are enjoyed in the manner beer is, would have an entirely different experience of a beverage like beer —a different perceptual interaction of it— than members of a beer-drinking group would.

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(retronasal), texture (receptors in the mouth, including lips, and even perhaps in texture perception with hands), temperature, and even vision.

<sup>13</sup> In this sense, Block is wrong in “ridiculing social constructivism about phenomenal consciousness,” since it is not possible to isolate P-consciousness as sheer feeling, separate from aspects of the experience such as the disgust or delight immediately perceived with it (Block 1999).

<sup>14</sup> In chapter 2 I will expand on the hedonics of taste and smell, that is, the continuity between the characteristics of flavor and smells and the enjoyment or disgust one feels about them.

The presence of the flavor of beer as part of the repertoire of available flavors, and the constellation of possibilities that comes with it exemplifies the important sense in which perceptual properties—their availability and behavioral significance—are contextually dependent on perceptual practices. Consider the following passage, where Wittgenstein elaborates on the idea that one could *not* “normally say ‘I take that to be a knife and a fork’” (1982, §535):

One doesn’t *take* what one knows as a knife and fork at a meal *for* a knife and a fork; any more than one ordinarily tries to eat as one eats, or aims to eat. (1982, §536)

These passages build upon the “as” aspect of “seeing as” that defines perception—what I have termed as the familiarity in perception. This familiarity, as explained before, points to our perceiving objects and events with a certain intrinsic significance. The point Wittgenstein makes here is that although we always take something *for* something (since not every perceiver sees a fork as a fork), the familiarity is oftentimes so established that one takes it for granted and goes unnoticed.<sup>15</sup>

This recognitional familiarity depends on a stable world. But the world is not the summation of all objects, events, and states of affairs with which every perceiver interacts. The world of perception is brought to life by practices that reveal such world in different manners. Thus, the dependence of the phenomenal aspect of perceptual experience on practice partly lies in the things that one *cannot try* to take one way or another or *cannot aim* at doing. As explained in section 1.1, we find at the basis of all social practices that our interactions with the world are structured around our *unreflective engagements* or *unreflective conformities*, by which we take

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<sup>15</sup> The familiarity of an encounter—a certain “recognition” (if only the term did not have such a cognitive burden)—does not only operate at the level of object- or event-identification. Even an unknown object, for instance, is perceived *as an object*, or *as heavy*; or a liquid *as dense*; or a smell *as a strong smell*; or a sound simply *as a sound*. These cases are also instances of a familiarity in the encounter. At this basic level, perceptual practices also play a role establishing attitudes towards the perceptual aspect of our encounter with the world, even though the physical, material aspect of occurrences also plays a role and in that sense we may find a greater commonality between members of different communities. While no person would try to drink a solid object, different people may see a very dense liquid as having different behavioral significance, based on practice. The aspect of friction with reality at the physical level in relation to the human body has, in one sense, no need for *practice*, but, on the other hand, its specific boundaries may need to be established by practice.

occurrences *as such-and-such*, and display certain attitudes, actions, and reactions towards those things.

A central aspect of these unreflective conformities concerns the items (i.e. sentences, objects, or events) whose specific significance is taken for granted *by competent practitioners*, on the basis of processes of training or acculturation. I have followed Lance and O’Leary-Hawthorne in calling these items in the linguistic domain *Quine-analytic sentences*, and I am now offering their perceptual counterpart: the *seemingly given*. Thus, perceptual practices contribute to the establishment of attitudes and reactions towards specific perceptual properties, ranges, domains and possible combinations. In this way, if one partakes of the practices associated with beer drinking, one does not *take* beer to be beer, and one does not question whether such a type of beverage is even drinkable. There are global characteristics of types of food and drinks belonging to groups (groups of different scope) that make up the perceptual geography of members of those communities.<sup>16</sup> Cases of acquired tastes, revealed when one travels to a community different than one’s own, are a good illustration of what it means to have a background of ordinary circumstances and ordinary responses to things one perceives, in relation to which specific occasions acquire their significance. One does not respond to beer by having hot coffee along with it, although one may drink water along with it or may eat something along with it.

The *seemingly given* are, then, the perceptual occurrences that one takes for granted as perceivable or enjoyable, situated here or there in a range of perceptual properties, combinable or not, etc.—these are the things for which “bare challenges” are not in place. Disputing or challenging them amounts to “declare” oneself “outside” of the community, and understanding them and deftly navigating them amounts to be part of the community. This experience is common to most people who have traveled to worlds other than one’s own, and, with great certainty, common to all who traveled to communities that are culturally different from one’s

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<sup>16</sup> Personal preferences are built on top of community consensus. They are, for the most part, exceptional, and can for the most part be still mapped onto community preferences. Readers of affluent, industrialized, Western societies must not overstate personal preferences into the basic characteristics of perceptual practices.



own—we know, as Lugones reminded us, that oftentimes world-travelling involves no geographical trips (1987). The *seemingly given* evinces the *normative* dimension that perpetual practices establish. They are established and maintained by concrete, consensual ways of doing things about perceptual material. When the practices change, the things that are taken to be one way or another change. Except for some physical extremes (extreme temperatures for liquids or for surfaces; or sounds that are intolerable by the human ear), their significance is not intrinsic to them.

To interact with perceptual properties in one domain of perception or another is not a matter of an individual being impacted by natural kinds of properties—bitter<sub>1</sub>, bitter<sub>2</sub>, bitter<sub>3</sub>, etc. It is rather about specific ways of interacting with objects, events, and states of affairs that are located within horizons of perceptual properties, which can be broader or narrower, strict or plastic, where several factors are interwoven. This is why I have said that in perception we are not simply confronted with a world open to every individual all the same, but rather, that the world of perception is revealed—brought to life and selected—to human beings by the practices through which their communities interact with the world.

I would like to finish this section with a ground-level notion regarding the contextuality of perceptual practices. Perceptual practices constitute the *meaningfulness* of perceptual interactions. Perceptual interactions are not a natural kind in the sense that not every human being explores things perceptually in the same way. Wittgenstein says:

You need to think of the role which pictures (as opposed to working drawings) play in our life. This role is by no means something uniform. (2009b, §195)

While most humans smell, taste, hear, etc., not all of them smell their romantic partners (at least not in the same way), not all of them listen to very low music in surrounding silence, not all of them use touch to determine what constitutes a good garment. This is because not every perceiver uses smell as an ingredient in the dynamic of intimacy, not every perceiver uses

audition as a way of achieving tranquility, and not every perceiver uses touch as a variable to use in the process of selecting clothing for the different cultural uses of clothing.

Let us take that last case: comparing fabrics' textures in order to choose one—as in some cultures mostly maternal figures used to do, or still do, when choosing fabrics for their children's special occasion's suits and dresses. Perceiving a fabric by touch is not the same touching than touching the skin of a newborn. The role of things we perceive is not uniform, and this is evinced in the things we do perception-wise, that is, in our perceptual practices. Through these differences we can offer a way of tracing the contextual aspects of perception.

The very practices of comparing thickness and softness are activities that only make sense in a social context, in which thickness and softness are comparatively noticed and put in valuing systems. There is no comparing of fabrics but in communities in which people compare fabrics, following similar procedures (in a loose sense) and with similar goals in mind. Only in that context, someone is dextrous in comparing fabrics or in describing colors, in a sense in which one could be judged by others to be knowledgeable (or not) about it.

Perceptual practices belong to groups of practitioners or intersubjective formations, which can be broad or narrow. Examples of groups of practitioners can be families, generational groups, national cultures, and subcultures, among others. My interest here is not to offer a taxonomy or a set of criteria for social formations. I operate with a broad intuitive idea that there is an intersubjective formation wherever a group acts in a some relatively constant manner. A person is normally at the crossing of several intersubjective formations that influence their life. This belonging is not necessarily a matter of choice, and very common instances are in fact not a matter of choice at all—e.g. a historical belonging, as we see in our being members of societies for whom the 21<sup>st</sup> century is meaningful. Thus, at whatever intersubjective formation level we were taught how to proceed perceptually by a group's practices, our coming to be part of those groups of practitioners has formed the *fundamental* structure by which we make sense of the world. We have come to know about food and drinks—about flavors and smells—on the

basis of culturally inherited foods. We have come to know about clothing, home decoration, and visual personal appearance—about colors and shapes—on the basis of our communities’ practices. We have come to know about tones of voice, voice inflections, the loudness of laughter and crying, the music we hear, its musical scale and choice of sounds—about sounds—on the basis of our communities’ auditory-related practices.

Meredith Williams says that it is wrong to think that “the idea that grammar [...] sets the limits of sense, independently of the characterization of any actual community and actual uses of language” (Me. Williams 166). Since rules are interpretable in different ways, and grammar alone cannot individuate meaning, we need social practices. Likewise in perception. A world in which flavors are possible does not entail *what* flavors and sounds are part of a person’s repertoire, what things can be done with those flavors and sounds, or the relative significance of those flavors and sounds in people’s lives. In this way, we can also see why all things perceptual are contextually dependent on the things we do with them.

### 1.2.2 Performativity

Perceptual practices are *performative* because they consist of actions, reactions, and dispositions to act and react.

Wittgenstein criticizes traditional modes of thinking about perception by reflecting on the interweaving of action and perception that is mutually implicated by the conception of *perception* as *perceiving as*. In the bodily engagement of perception, perception is itself active. As I showed above with the case of someone whose hearing a melody is intermingled with playing the melody or dancing to it, the perceptual moment is not isolated from a full-fledged interaction with the thing. It rather occurs *in* the interaction. These interactions occur in concrete contexts that structure them and where they have significance—practices are *contextual*. Practices are not just movements, motor performances, but socially situated ways of doing things, that is, *techniques*. We interact with the perceptible world in specific ways and the worldly richness that

we encounter is the product of defined, normatively structured ways of approaching, exploring, taking, and combining the things we perceive.

We are experts in navigating the world of physical objects when we look for them, avoid them, and use them. We are skilled in our interactions with sounds and noises, with smells and flavors, with the soft and rough. We know when something is loud or low, the way smells and flavors go along, or how we should touch a certain surface in order to feel it.

First of all, our exposure to the perceptible world is rarely, if ever, a matter of an open channel that receives a raw input. In our perceptual interaction with the world, we touch and taste in specific manners. In perception, we explore auditorily by getting closer, going silent, raising the volume, or paying attention to some sounds. We explore flavors by taking bigger or smaller bites or sips, by perhaps quickly licking something, by letting the food or drink stay longer in our mouth, perhaps by closing our eyes, or by combining different pieces of food. We explore visually by looking from different perspectives and by paying attention to certain aspects or visual scenes, which we may even do unconsciously as a feature of the cultures we belong to (Norenzayan, Choi, and Peng 2007). In all these doings, the end point is rarely the gathering of sensory information for the purposes of simply determining what the thing in front of us is or what its objective properties are. The interaction with perceptual objects is mostly pragmatically significant.

Further, in our perceptual interaction with objects, events, and states of affairs, we relate to things having a significance—they are perceived *as* something—by virtue of the context in which we experience them, in virtue of the way we approach them, and in virtue of facts about its constitution and our physiological and anatomical makeup. This significance is first and foremost behavioral. In everyday interaction, there is no separation between our having a phenomenal experience of something (as something) and that thing being for us a bearer of possibilities or impossibilities. This may be clearer when a certain occurrence elicits an immediate action—as the perception of an impending direct threat is a fleeing-causing perceived

object. For instance, I can experience a given smell as a something desirable or as disgusting. If it is a pastry I really like, I may be drawn to smell it more fully, taking a big breath to enjoy the smell of it. My perceiving it is not my detecting a smell, but my enjoying it as I smell it. In contrast, when I smell something that is rotting, I act so as to stop the contact with the thing. I may plug my nose or walk away. The response is not the next step after perceiving, but an aspect of the way it is perceived (Wittgenstein 2009b, §§222ff.). Once again, there is a telling contrast between the perception of someone who fully recognizes something and someone who does not recognize it. The difference is that the one who recognizes the object or event is said to recognize it on the basis of the behavioral entailment that comes to life when the perceptual interaction takes place: “We react to a facial expression differently from someone who does not recognize it as timid” (Wittgenstein 2009b, §231; See also §§180ff, 222ff).

The performativity of our perceptual practices exhibits how perception is a way of inhabiting the world. On the one hand, perceptual practices are built on the materiality of the objects at stake. The specific possibilities for perceptual exploration —e.g. with a view to mere discovery, usefulness, or enjoyment— depend on the physical nature of objects, events, and states of affairs. In regards to flavors and smells, take the cases of slurping or taking loud whiffs, which allow a greater engagement with the object and are a part of some practices. Likewise, our ways of exploring sounds and the limits of our possible interactions with sounds are greatly constrained by the physicality of sounds. Because sounds do not have the temporal permanence or clear boundaries of most visual objects, our ways of interacting with sounds—exploring them, dissecting them, combining them, suppressing them, etc.—are devised by communities of practitioners in ways that respond to these constraints. Asking someone to repeat what they said, or being quiet so we are able to listen to sounds that will be gone otherwise are part of our auditory practices. So it is our talking quietly in spaces that call for silence and whose acoustic conditions propagate sounds more easily than normal, like cathedrals: “The excessive reverberation forces the congregation into silence of hushed whispers, because otherwise speech

is rapidly amplified by reflections and creates an ungodly cacophony [...] The acoustic has also influenced services, as the use of chanting and the slow liturgical voice counters the muddy speech in such reverberant spaces” (Cox 2014, 42).

In this manner, we see that our perceptual practices weave characteristics belonging to the social domain into the material manipulation of perceptible properties. Some perceptual performances are taken to be socially proper or polite, while others are not. It is at least curious, for instance, that expert tasters (of coffee or wine, for instance) do it in ways that increase the grasp of flavors but are normally socially non-acceptable, like loud slurping or spitting the beverages after they are drunk. Our reach into the possible perceptual properties and combinations of perceptible objects is constrained by our practices, which are built on the materiality of the objects of perception. Those same practices also impose limits on what members of communities regularly experience on the basis of other considerations, such as social appropriateness. One can imagine communities whose members never explored and enjoyed in their own clothing or home decoration the wide range of yellow and orange colors.

In our lives, though, there is no one single way of using our senses or one world that shows up for everybody all the same. Rather, as I have been showing, there are different ways of interacting with perceptible things, and these different ways reveal different aspects of the world for different people. The variety of foods and kinds of music around the world *are* the highlighting of certain palettes of flavors and sounds that make up the perceptible world. Further, the symbolic richness of our living together is reflected in perceptible configurations and possibilities that members of communities are able to encounter in their significance.

Those who partake in a form of life are those who, on the basis of training and acculturation, are able to perform perceptual practices correctly, thus being able to act, react, be disposed in certain manners, and, in that way, share meanings. In those actions and reactions, practitioners bring to play the structure of perceptual appropriatenesses and entitlements. Skilled practitioners display the character of unreflective conformity and unreflective

engagement toward *seemingly given* perceptual elements—from sensory properties and ranges of them, to harmony or disharmony relations, to possible combinations, to available moves, to objects and events. Practitioners experience the familiarity of these elements and are disposed to act in specific ways about them.<sup>17</sup>

Wittgenstein has called the partaking in a perceptual practice “the mastery of a technique” (2009b, §222). In the fact that perceptual practices are characterized by normative constraints they are *techniques*. In the fact that performances of these techniques operate within a normative domain they are said to require *mastery*.<sup>18</sup> This is better understood by thinking in those who are being trained in a technique—the infant, the immigrant, perhaps even the convalescent—or in those who are alien to a practice—the newborn, the new immigrant.

This mastery goes from the type of familiarity in encountering a perceptual occurrence, to the capacity to alter the perceived stimulus (if possible) either by changing the source of it or adjusting one’s own position, to the capacity to effect changes on items on a specific modality. Thus, Wittgenstein says that “Only of someone who *can* do, has learnt, is master of, such-and-such, does it make sense to say that he has had [a given] experience” (2009b, §224). But social practices also develop techniques for the *manipulation* of perceptual properties. This includes the determination of preferred conditions for consumption of drinks or foods (cold or not, in small portions, consumed in bits or larger chunks, more or less bitter, etc.) and the combination of ranges of flavors and tastes with others, such that a certain beverage may be commonly consumed by itself or with other foods or drinks. While the specific mastery of manipulation is a matter of the specific perceptual practice at stake, we are skilled at a general level to produce certain configurations of perceptible material for us and for others. Some may not know how to

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<sup>17</sup> My position does not entail that some social practices simply have a perceptual element in them, such that one could subtract the *perceptual* from them and *still* have a practice. The perceptual aspect is barely definable independently of the practices in which it is woven. Conversely, the practices in question would simply disappear if a perceptual element were abstracted from them. The perceptual and the social are here not in a parthood relation—rather, they are interwoven.

<sup>18</sup> As I will explain in section 1.2.4, the mastery of a technique and the correct application of it is not a volitional issue. Just as there is a learning of walking and a potential walking wrongly, it is not the case that the one who knows how to walk walks wrongly. The mastery, in the perceptual case too, amounts to a baseline on the basis of which individual perceptual interactions take place. Instead of right or wrong, this normative dimension operates in terms of successfulness and unsuccessfulness.

cook a meal successfully, but we know the effects of adding salt to our food, and we combine pieces of our food so as to interact with it in ways we consider appropriate. Likewise, we know how to modify our voices so they express what we want or how to decorate our houses so they will look good to us and to others. It is in this sense that I have said that perception is the site of *commerce* of perceptible material that is produced so as to be seen in a given way, and that is perceived as something or that elicits certain responses.<sup>19</sup> It is in this wide-encompassing sense that practices are said to be *forms of life* (Wittgenstein 2009a, §19, 23, 241).

Perceptual performances play a key role in the way we inhabit the world. The behavioral significance that objects, events, and states of affairs carry in perception arise from the fact perceptible objects, events, and states of affairs are worldly things with which we interact bodily. In a basic sense, we are appropriately situated, like every other living being, to interact with the world in a way that matters for us. This mutuality between perceiver and enviroing world is at the basis of J. J. Gibson's ecological approach to perception (Gibson 1979). While Gibson developed his ecological approach with a view to non-human animals, it is appropriate to extend his analysis and say that we are also ecologically attuned to the world we live in on the basis of our body, its capabilities and potentialities, and the different possible human forms of life.<sup>20</sup> Our world, unlike most other animals, is not only the enviroing world that we shape out of the totality of the natural world. Our world involves the world that is transformed into material culture, whether in a stable manner (as in architecture) or transiently (as in food), the immaterial yet physical world of songs and the like, and in general all the products of social practices that configure our living together, and that are products of historically situated

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<sup>19</sup> There is a certain similarity between this commerce and the way in which Putnam refers to perceptions as *transactions* (Putnam 1999). On his view, partly inspired by Wittgenstein and the classical American pragmatists, the picture we should get rid of, is best exemplified in the Berkeleyan case: we are never in direct contact with things. Putnam's *transactions* also oppose versions of perception as an *interface* between external world and internal representations. Putnam's goal is to erase the distinction inner-outer. He thinks that this separation has fatal consequences for our understanding of what we do and who we are. However, Putnam's analysis is still far from sociality. Putnam's transactions between subject and world do not require sociality. Transactions are available for individuals in their dealing with the world. My idea of commerce, instead, is thought of as suggesting a world of others in relation to whom things are done, even in the sense that individual performances are not truly individual—just as there is no private language—because they are instantiations of perceptual practices.

<sup>20</sup> This aspect will also be explored in the *Expressivity* section, when an analogy is presented between perception and animal expressive communication.



communities. Likewise, our forms of life are enacted in the social worlds that we bring to life precisely as we live together, through social practices.

Marx Wartofsky offers a formidable illustration of the ecological, social, and historical character of our perceptual practices by reflecting on hunting: "the hunter, hearing a crack of a branch, or seeing a sudden flight of birds, transforms the very sound and sight into an artifact—an instrument— of the hunt itself. But what the cracking branch is heard as is already an index of a social mode of praxis, —of hunting, in this case— and therefore, insofar as the hunt has a specific historical form or function, nature itself has become historicized and socialized, and has come to be a representation of a certain mode of praxis or human action" (Wartofsky 1979b, 206).<sup>21</sup> The human encounter with the natural world already exhibits the complexity of social practices in the form of a perceptual practice: the encountering the crack of a branch as carrying the pragmatic significance of prey. While I distance myself from the signitive and representational talk of Wartofsky, the perceptual practice remains. Furthermore, the case of hunters that are skilled at imitating the sounds of animals (or producing sounds that generate a reaction in animals) we see that the mastery of perceptual practices is exhibited at social and historical institutions, as we also saw in the case of reverberating cathedrals.

The mutuality between subject and environment of the ecological approach is also at the root of the enactive approach to perception, first presented by Varela, Thompson, and Rosch (1991), and then defended by Noë (2004; 2001) and others (Hurley 1998; Thompson

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<sup>21</sup> Despite the strong disagreement between my position and Wartofsky's as to the representational character of cognition (even though he conceptualizes perception as praxis), the richness of his analyses would merit further study. It is noteworthy the way he brings into traditional topics of philosophy of mind categories belonging to social analysis. Wartofsky articulates his social take on perception through the notion of artifact. He sees social practices as bearing the basic characteristics of artifacts, defined as "Anything which human beings create by the transformation of nature and of themselves [...] thus, also language, forms of social organization and interaction, techniques of production, skills" (Wartofsky 1979a, xiii). They are all a making, a *praxis*, and as such they are forms of social interaction for which communication is a pre-condition. Wartofsky refers to artifacts as models, and models fundamentally as representations. In contrast to the mainstream views of perception that make it a matter of a biological, ahistorical, inner occurrence, Wartofsky will say that "Perception is a highly evolved and specific mode of human action and praxis" (1979b, 189). Through the notion of artifact, we arrive to perception as a form of action—and not only as basis for it. So he says: "Extending the notion of 'artifact' as 'tool' still further, the acquisition of skills, in the process of production (or even at the level of foraging, scavenging or hunting, and prior to the introduction of agriculture and the domestication of animals) creates such skills as themselves 'artifact', even where these skills do not entail the use of tools in the ordinary sense, but only the mastery of the natural organs of the body, and of perceptual skills in pattern-or-cue-recognition" (Wartofsky 1979b, 2001).

2009; Hutto and Myin 2013). The enactive approach holds that cognition is a particular type of relation that living beings engage in with the world on the basis of a “history of structural coupling” and their own natural constitution. It is, therefore, something we actively do in our relation with the world and not something that happens in us or to us. According to the standard enactive approach, perception is a type of action governed by the mastery of sensorimotor skills, which allows the perceiver to integrate sensations into an ongoing practical life. Noë’s enactivism is the idea that perception available for action (perception one can understand) depends on a particular type of implicit understanding, namely, the dependency between our sensory and motor skills.

But just as the ecological approach needs to be supplemented by the richness of the social world and the complexity of human subjects in order to respond to the human forms of life, the enactive approach must be modified in like ways. The difference between standard sensorimotor enactivism and the Social Enactive Theory of Perception that I am proposing originates precisely in the performative aspect of perception. For SEP, perception is not only a matter of coupling the sensory and the motor to which each individual of the species is naturally disposed. For SEP, the type of things that we do in perception is far broader than sensorimotor dependencies. Instead of motor actions, SEP takes *practices* as the key concept to understand the way in which perception is an active engagement with a world on the basis of our senses. The performativity of perceptual practices is at the basis of SEP as an alternative to standard enactivism.<sup>22</sup>

### **1.2.3 Expressivity**

The expressivity of perceptual practices has two senses. First, perceptual practices take the world to be expressive and make the world express itself. Perceptual practices are ways in which social formations inhabit a world that reveals itself in perspectival and dynamic ways, by means of interactions with perceivers, which interactions are the concrete displays of those practices.

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<sup>22</sup> I offer further contrasts between SEP and sensorimotor enactivism in chapter 3 (section 3.3.1), chapter 4 (section 4.1.1), and chapter 5 (section 5.2.2).

Second, perceptual practices express the form of life of the perceivers and the social groups in which they partake.

I take the family of concepts *expression-the expressed-to express-being expressive* to refer to the unfolding of phenomena, such that what is expressed does not pre-exist its expression—it is not a plain showing or pointing to something internal—, emerges from a potentiality, and comes to achieve its specific form in the expression itself—it is not a translation (Merleau-Ponty 2002; Arango 2015).<sup>23</sup> In expression, there is no going back from what is expressed to something prior, which one may think as now being made public.

The dynamics of expression are part of the dynamics of perception.<sup>24</sup> The type of relation that expression describes is precisely what we find in perception's basic characteristic that to perceive is to perceive *something as something* (Waldenfels 2000, 93). In the "as something," there is an *encountering familiarly*, which is a type of seizing something perceptually—the occurrence of a certain configuration of sense that cannot be traced back to a sensory, non-perceived moment. What allows this encounter—this seizing of sense and being seized by it—is the necessary relation between expression and perceiver. Thus, the fundamental relationality of *meaning* is evinced in expression, for expression requires someone for whom something is expressive (Gély, 3).<sup>25</sup> This, in turn, entails that the nature of the perceiver (in the case of perception-related expression) is constitutive of what is expressed in its concreteness. This constitutive relation is this way partly because expression could not be beyond the limits of what can be meaningful for a perceiver, but also because expression, in its concrete shape within those limits, is also a function of who the particular perceiver is, the social groups whose practices she partakes of, her immediate pragmatic horizon, and her personality. Further, the

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<sup>23</sup> Expression includes both (relatively) fixed *products* and ongoing *processes*. The product case can be a painting, or a political constitution that is expression of certain relations in a political community. On the other hand, processes (including activities), are like games (as they are played), or the courting phase of a romantic relationship. Other instances of expression include a poem, a facial gesture, or an interpersonal interaction. My understanding of expression follows the orientation given to it by Husserl and Merleau-Ponty. See also Arango (2014) and Flynn (2009, 67).

<sup>24</sup> In a sense, these dynamic relations should be referred to as the aesthetics of perception, in the sense that it is the internal *logic of the sensible*—a non-cognitive logic—that pertains to embodied, animated beings.

<sup>25</sup> I thank Lisa Guenther for suggesting the dual possibility of "to seize" in this case.

concept of expression is appropriate because it is attuned to the non-input, non-inferential, affective, bodily engagement that characterizes Wittgenstein's (as well as Husserl's and Merleau-Ponty's) take on perception that I explained above.

As a fundamental characteristic of perceptual practices, expressivity further specifies the way the Social Enactive View is an embodied, non-cognitive, contextual, and practice-based theory. Defenders of representational views of perception reject the idea that perception is something other than input. In the economy of perceptual representationalism, representation is the currency that grounds (and partly defines) the activities linked to perception—identification, recognition, comparison, assessment of veridicality of possibly mistaken perceptions, and even action. To talk of perceptual *familiar encounters* with reality (as I have been doing) is, in the representational view, to talk about an enchanted nature akin to the Myth of the Given (as Sellars or McDowell would put it), that assumes that meaning is inherent in the outer world (which SEP also rejects), and does not originate on internal representations. Since in the representational view it is axiomatic that we only have true, rational access to the inner, the idea of a familiar encounter smells like magic. Representationalists do not see the denial of the inner-outer distinction, and the rejection of mind as inner as rational alternatives. Perception is treated, as both Taylor and Putnam have elaborated, as a meditational or interface tool (Taylor 2005; Putnam 1999). Whether it remains strictly meditational or is internalized in mental tokens, naturalizable or not, the basic point is still that “We can't get outside” (Taylor 2005, 26). Chapter 3 is devoted to exploring this problem in great detail, but it is fitting to connect it here with expressivity at the level of practices.

We can begin to see how this is the case if we look at expressive communication in perceivers that do not have the inferential and conceptual capacities that representational theories assume are necessary.<sup>26</sup> What makes the case relevant for our purposes is that in these cases we should be able to distinguish between communication and action-reaction, and between

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<sup>26</sup> I am not interested in reductionist theories that define every behavior in sub personal mechanisms—i.e. a matter of mere brain functioning—, as some brute naturalisms wish to do, because perception is a personal level phenomenon.

perception and action-reaction. In the case of communication, it is normally thought that the distinction lies in that genuine communication employs an intentionalistic background on the part of speakers and inferential capacities on the side of hearers. In the case of perception, it is normally thought that perception requires inferential capacities on the side of perceivers, so recognition and like processes are possible. In both cases, it is as if we want to understand the difference between understanding a command and getting a sunburn, or between perceiving that a steamy soup is perhaps too hot to drink and, again, getting a sunburn. Thus, is it true that the distinction between communication and action-reaction is a matter of intentions plus inferences?

Dorit Bar-On has argued that human communication shares some features with animal expressive behavior—behavior that expresses pain, fear, aggressiveness, excitement, playfulness, etc. (2013a, 4). Instances of expressive behavior are “growls, teeth-barings, tail-wagging, fear barks and grimaces, lip smacks, ground slaps, food-begging gestures, ‘play faces’ and play bows, copulation grimaces and screams, pant hoots, alarm, distress, and food calls, grooming grunts, open-mouth and ear-flap threats” (Bar-On 2013a, 26). In her view, treating these behaviors as symptoms or physiological indications begins to acknowledge their complexity. For instance, in the case of play fight, the same gestures that are used in a real fight are displayed, so understanding their playful nature is entirely a matter of the context in which it happens (Arango 2015). Through these behaviors, Bar-On argues, animals are able to share with other meanings about “how things are in the world and how things are with them” (Bar-On 2013b, 25). What is crucial here is that the comprehension of this behavior does not make use of intentional, propositional, and inferential capacities on the parts of speakers and hearers. Rather, expressive behavior exhibits to “suitably attuned” observers something about our mental dispositions or attitudes about things, without necessarily assuming intentions to communicate something on the part of the “actor,” or an inferential process on the part of the observer (Bar-On 2013b, 18). The determination of a “suitable attuned observer” will naturally

depend, in the case of contextual and normative practices, on those who participate in the practices themselves. Thus, expressive communication “is a form of social, intersubjective, world-directed and overt communicative behavior” that shows a subject’s relation to the world (Bar-On 2013b, 24). Lastly, expressive communication is behaviorally meaningful—it is a bodily engagement—because that is, in fact, the only clue that we have to affirm that hearers “understand” the significance of the others’ behavior. The reason we tell that an animal has understood another’s signal as playful is that it has responded in a playful manner—and in fact, the signal is understood also as playful because it is normally taken behaviorally to be such by other individuals.

This comparison allows me to articulate embodiment and expressivity, as a feature of non-representational SEP. In contrast to representationalism, SEP argues that our perceptual engagement with the world is structured according to social practices and based on perceivers’ bodily attunement or responsiveness to worldly things. In this sense, SEP is an embodied theory. To understand perception as a matter of bodily engagement with the world that we encounter is to deny that perception occurs in an inner domain. To take embodiment as fundamental for perception entails that both *perception* and *action* are part of the same *continuum* of our bodily engagement with the world. If perception is not to happen internally, inferentially, a certain attunement with the world is required in which worldly oriented perceivers encounter a meaningful world—an expressive world. Let us not forget, though, that perceptual bodily engagement is a matter of degrees: the stillness of the enjoyment of silence is as much a bodily engagement, as it is the disgust of eating some badly spoiled piece of food.

Perceptual practices reflect their expressive nature in their perspectival nature, both (intra-) modally and multi-modally. First, the world is for a perceiver a wealth of objects, events, and states of affairs that appears always aspectually. Due to the physical nature of the world, the embodied nature of perceivers, and the temporal extension of interactions, aspects are, first of all, perspectives—a terms which that shall refer not only, or even mainly, to spatial perspectives

but to the varying ways in which the same objects appear to perceivers in virtue of the physicality of the objects and the perceptual explorations of them. For instance, a smell reveals two different perspectives when it is smelled casually and when it is smelled intensely. Relatedly, the world is a potentiality regarding perceptual modalities. The perspectives in which the world reveals itself are also modally rich. The world comes to be meaningful for us in modal configurations and combinations: we not only see the world—perhaps not even mainly. We touch the world, listen to it, smell it, and taste it. We are able to discover the richness of the world through our different sensory organs. Each organ, Merleau-Ponty said, “interrogates” its objects in its own way (Merleau-Ponty 1945, 268). On top of this material and physiological facts constituting perceptual interactions between things and perceivers, individual perceivers employ their organs in specific ways, guided by social techniques.<sup>27</sup> Our ways of looking, touching, and smelling are not simply biologically fixed. In their fine granularity and fine-tuning, perceptual interactions enact social ways of exploring the world that allow for individual styles.<sup>28</sup>

As mentioned in the performativity section, practices are adapted to the richness of the world. As techniques, practices are skilled ways of exploring the world in its perspectives, both intra-modally and inter-modally. The world of food—the experiences of smell and mainly of flavor—is perhaps one of the best illustrations of this skilled orientation of social practices to a many-faceted world. Since, as said before, the experience of flavor includes smell, taste, touch, temperature, and even sound and vision (think of crunchy warm food sold commercially, just to highlight the importance of visual appearance for the experience of an edible item), gastronomies evince how different communities have historically devised ways of interacting with the world so as to interact with it in manners that are satisfying as nourishment and

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<sup>27</sup> This mastery of perceptual techniques is built upon natural capacities and, in this sense, part of our skillfulness lies in anatomical and physiological capabilities, such that we are able to perceive things within certain ranges of stimulation and under certain conditions. Only someone able to hear in the first place is able to explore sounds as such (different than sensory related phenomena, like the vibration of instruments due to the physics of sound).

<sup>28</sup> Chapters 2 and 3 elaborate the perspectival nature of perceptual experience in detail, and chapter 4 and 5 elaborate on the implications of those aspects for issues of content and the normativity of content.

considered enjoyable. In this sense, perceptual practices exhibit an attunement to the geographical world, in that those practices have been developed according to the availability of products and other relevant circumstances, such as cooking methods. It should not be difficult now to see perceptual practices as performances in expressive contexts. Due to the meaning of practices within people's lives, it is now easier to see how perceptual practices configure forms of life, ways of inhabiting the world.

To go back to the interdependency between the expressivity of the world and our bodily engagement with it, think of a plaintive melody, or of how someone's handwriting can be childish, or of a timid bodily gesture (Wittgenstein 1982, §§735–776; See also §§713, 906).<sup>29</sup> A person's bodily reaction to a cry for help, a lover's encouraging reaction to a lover's body's readiness for sex, are not separate from the perceiving of a voice's intonation or the perceiving of arms', lips' and torsos' intense movements. The "appropriate" response to one of these perceptual occurrences *characterizes* the perceptual occurrence as such. The caress *is* inviting *because* it is *responded to* as such. A person whose caresses were never taken to be inviting, whose caresses would always turn a lover away, would change their ways, realizing that the perceivable movement does not express what they want.<sup>30</sup> For those who play the game of kisses, reacting invitingly may include the evident offering of the neck in a manner that makes one recall of vampires. Offering the neck is then not just a reaction but an invitation, and there is no clear or useful distinction anymore between actor and acted upon.<sup>31</sup> In a perceptual

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<sup>29</sup> These cases show one sense in which perceptual practices are expressive, namely, in the sense that perceptual practices directly tell something about the people whose behavior one is acquainted with. The phenomenon of the *perception of others* adds a thick layer to perception of the world in general. The difference is that in the perception of others—and the argument could extend to other minded beings—the perceptual object is not simply a material object but a behaving body, a living body, whose activities and the domain of those activities also define the being itself. I somehow limit myself here to the expressivity of the world in general, with only some mentions to the perception of others, but I will not offer an exhaustive study of the richness of the perception of others because its complexity merits being treated in greater length than this work allows.

<sup>30</sup> This is a rich analog to having always seen the duck-rabbit as a rabbit, based on having always treated it as such (Wittgenstein 1982, §472).

<sup>31</sup> In a different key one might say that in the perceptual situation, a perceiver can modify the location of her sensory receptors so as to improve in one way or another the sensory aspect, eventually causing an attuned partner to modify the movements that were situated in a feedback loop, which in the present example would be acting as the causal side. Since the kisser would feel the movements of the kissed one, the kisser would also be touched, and the kissed one would be the one touching.



interaction, the interaction itself expresses something about the perceiver and the thing perceived, but the perception cannot be singled out as the receptive moment.

The complexity of social relations and structures features in the suitable attunement of perceivers that is part of the mastery of perceptual practices. Far beyond the sensory, perceptual practices are expressive of complex forms of life featuring political structures, relations of domination, dynamics of oppression along the lines of race, ethnicity, or class, romantic relationships, playful encounters, etc. The perceptual is not a naturally defined domain. In its social nature, perception is malleable. In its everyday course, it becomes dyed by the activities in which it is involved. And in becoming a matter of intersubjective commerce, other social practices are constantly perceptualized. The romantic is perceptual, so it is the oppressive and the hateful.<sup>32</sup>

To conceptualize perception in terms of socially structured practices of interactions with the world reflects the idea that there is no proper theory of perception that does not entail substantive commitments about what perceivers are and what the world is. As foreshadowed in the Introduction, a proper theory of perception is a partial account of what it means for perceivers to be in the world, and what it means for the world to be the home of perceivers. The characteristic of *expressivity* is one of the ways in which this is achieved.

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<sup>32</sup> I now wish to highlight a necessary characteristic of perceptual practices and their expressive feature. The perception of objects, events, and states of affairs is not a matter of inputs, and this means that it is not a matter of isolated chunks of information. Likewise, the meaningfulness of perceptual occurrences is not to be found in pieces of actions, or in actions disconnected from a social framework that grounds their meaningfulness and significance. We can see this by looking at G.H. Mead's account of *gesture*. A gesture must be located within the broader framework of social acts of which the gesture is a part (Mead 1967, 42ff.). The ground meaning for perceptual engagements with the world is the "matrix or complex of attitudes and responses constituting any given social situation or act" (Mead 1967, 72). We can see this is exemplified in the case of the type of animal social play known as play fight or sparring, which features complex social interactions—part of the usual repertoire of perceptible occurrences. Play fight appears in pronghorns and in several other species of mammals and marsupials. It involves "the use of species-specific patterns of agonistic behavior in a non-serious context" and the fighting bouts are combined with non-fighting behavior and context-dependent signals (Pellis and Pellis 1998, 116, 122–123; Burghardt 1998, 21). It is characteristic of play fight that isolated actions are very often, if not always, ambiguous (Watson 1998, 69). Pellis and Pellis argue that threat signals are oftentimes present in play fight in most species that display this social behavior (1998, 122). Their ambiguity disappears in virtue of the context in which they occur. Since the same action could be performed by the same organism in different contexts, and the potentially dangerous reaction depends on another organism's perception of a certain signal, the development of play fight *as play*—the perception of certain movements *as play* fight and not *as fight*—depends not just on what the individuals do, but on the shared meaning of certain actions within contexts. This is a case in which perceptual practices' expressivity is holistic.

In this mutuality perceivers-world we find the form of life of perceivers, and that amounts, to an extent, to finding out what perceivers are. At the bottom, there are only concrete systems of practices or *forms of life* and our philosophical search for explanations ends there. Perceivers are not detectors of ideally univocal properties, inhabiting a world of such properties. Rather, perceivers are agents, inhabiting a world by means of active bodily engagement with it, in which perceptual possibilities continuously unfold. It is an engagement with a world that is never offered in identical ways to others—sometimes in very similar ways, sometimes in different ways. Our world is a rich, unfinished, endless, expressive world. Our engagement is an engagement with a world where, by means of differences in modes of exploration, we even at times seem to be in contacts with different worlds.

#### 1.2.4 Normativity

Practices are *normative* because they exhibit a dimension of successfulness and pragmatic significance. The normativity of perceptual practices consists in the patterns that guide a practitioner's mastery of things perceptual.<sup>33</sup> This mastery is a knowing about perceptible stuff, such that we are familiar with perceptual properties and their aspects and interactions (sensory properties, combinations of those properties, social and behavioral significance of those properties), we respond appropriately to them, we explore them, and we manipulate them skillfully. More precisely, this mastery consists in being able to situate perceptual interactions in relation to *expectations* and *possibilities*. Pragmatic normativity is grounded in the processes of training by which new practitioners are brought into the community and by which the community continuously develops and transforms itself (Medina 2002). This means that a social practice is normative in that it exhibits a consensus of actions that is *transmitted* to newcomers.

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<sup>33</sup> This section only addresses one aspect of the normativity of perception, namely, the normativity of perceptual practices. In broader terms, both the *how* and the *what* of perception are subject to normative relations: *how* perceptual practices and individual interactions hold together (normativity of perceptual practices), how practices and interactions relate to thought, awareness, action and emotion (normativity of perceptual intentionality), and *how* the contents of perceptual experience hold together (normativity of perceptual content). Chapter 5 will be fully devoted to the last two specifications of normativity—intentionality and content. They are central in the synchronic treatment of perception, that is, in the treatment of perception as instantiated in individual interactions with perceptible stuff. Notice also that a full treatment of perceptual normativity must link normatively the *what* of perception, that is, the contents of perception, to its *how*. This is partly done in this section and partly in chapter 5.

Wittgenstein gives normativity the meaning of mastering a technique. To master a technique is to have a skill; it is also to be part of a community of practitioners. In a given social formation, there is a consensus of actions, such that members act “in the right ways under the appropriate circumstances” (Williams, 182). “The right ways,” “under,” and “appropriate circumstances” are all determined by a transmitted consensus. Now, how far does the scope of actions and reactions to perceptible stuff extend? What falls under the perceptual skills?

First, it applies to the whole domain of application of the technique. The one who is a master in an auditory practice knows about sounds: she knows what a sound is, what loud sounds and low sounds are like, the meaningfulness of sounds in speech and, perhaps, in music, sonic dynamics—sonorous things moving away or coming towards, occurring close or far—, as well as how to produce a loud sound by contact with an object, and, in the case of people that are able to speak, how to speak loud or low. Perceptual skills can be understood as a type of baseline knowledge: the knowledge of things that we simply assume and operate on. This is the domain of the *seemingly given*, in relation to which we act in an unreflective conforming ways.

Specifically, I refer here to the levels of *familiarity* we have with certain ranges of flavors, sounds, smells, and colors. Someone who partakes in a perceptual practice has a greater familiarity to some ranges of perceptual properties, as well as to possible combinations.

Notice that these skills are based on states of affairs of different kinds: physical, anatomical, and physiological. Since these facts are behaviorally relevant, they configure dispositions. On the basis of these dispositions, skills develop, and those skills acquire the fullness of socially structured ways of doing things. The tactile perception of a volume carries the expectation of regularity in the way volumes display themselves: their sides are situated spatially and contiguously in space and one can tactilely feel one surface before another surface follows. In other words, there is an enactive expectation, since some actions are part of the bodily engagement in which perception consists. These expectations are partly built upon the

stability and regularity of the world—on facts about the materiality of the world and the constitution of our bodies.<sup>34</sup>

The interactions start being more evidently multi-layered as we deal with interpersonal interactions. For instance, the “inspection” of a seemingly familiar face is partly a function of the visual nature of the object, of its sensory properties, such that one must alter a point of view in order to better engage with the object. This means, specifically, to move one’s head to get a better look at the person’s face, and perhaps come closer. Notice, however, that one cannot explore a person’s face the way one explores a painting in a museum, since both types of interactions have an element of social propriety, which a child needs to learn. One may need to engage with the person and see if she is who she seems to be from afar: if the gestures and her voice are those of an old acquaintance. Some soups, for example, require that they are served within a range of temperatures. The requirement of their being hot has to be squared with the tolerance of the human receptors and with social practices of propriety. As to the exploration, a hot soup requires that the person approaches the liquid in ways that allow a “diagnosis” of temperature while keeping in with certain norms of etiquette in which, for example, sounds are or not allowed. If found delicious, one may engage with it in involved ways that may include sounds, more intense movement of the mouth and tongue, all the while keeping with the social limits of what is considered acceptable (or not). If the soup is rather cold, one may have the chance to warm it up or have it warmed up—or would simply have it, as it is, partly disliking it.

The normativity of perceptual practices is *exhibited* in the actual practices that, as just described, range from our encountering perceptual properties to socially rich modes of interaction with the perceptual world. More abstractly, practitioners are *able to situate* perceptual

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<sup>34</sup> Notice however that, as animals, we have certain basic dispositions towards perceptual properties, which each form of life develops into specific configurations. There is nevertheless a basic level of familiarity with the perceptible world, with a corresponding skill, that pertains for instances to the basic phenomenal feeling of sensory properties. Our skilled bodily engagement with the physical world is also evinced in our knowing what a smell feels like in the first place. The social character of our perceptual engagement with the world extends to the the fact that other beings also manifest a familiarity with smells as smells, with strong smells as strong, with sweet smells as sweet. Along these lines we could find a commonality with seeing beings, smelling beings, tasting beings, auditory beings, touching beings, etc. Perception is in this sense evidence of the fact that all humans and other non-human forms of life inhabit the same world and have, in a significant sense, similar types of life.

interactions in relation to *expectations* and *possibilities*. On this basis I argue that normativity of perceptual practices is a matter of successfulness and significance, and not of correctness and intelligibility. This position entails that there are *no unsuccessful perceptions, nor entirely meaningless ones*. It also entails that our perceptual engagement with the world is a matter of *degrees* in which a notion of “best,” “normal,” or “customary” is operative.

Expectations and possibilities are tied to our acquaintance with a stable world, which is stable in different degrees in its physical and social aspects. To situate an occurrence in relation to expectations is partly to have a sense of what has come before and what is to come, of what can be done, or of whether the present occurrence is normal, uncommon, or excessive. It is a matter of having a sense of how a situation can unfold. Think for instance of drinking a regular cup of coffee. All goes as expected. It may need some sugar or already have too much, it may be too cold for our taste or too hot—all of these, starting with the flavor of coffee, are determined by social perceptual practices. Now think that this cup of coffee is a prank—a bad one of course—and someone has put so much salt in it that the liquid is saturated. I take a big sip and I spit it. It is so terribly salty that I react automatically and spit it. It is not an incorrect perception. It is a successful perception in the sense that I am able to relate to it on the basis of a system of expectations: I spit it and know that I cannot (or do not want to) drink more, and that there is nothing to do about it. We can modify the prank. Serve an ice-cold coffee on a freezing evening to someone who is expecting a warm coffee. She takes a sip and laughs about it, but takes the coffee and warms it up—perhaps adds a little sugar before having her much-desired coffee. Let’s modify it again. Instead of salt, add a spice entirely unknown to the drinker. Say it is turmeric. The drinker is surprised, and, arguably, not positively. The flavor is probably disgusting, but unknown. She may not spit it for whatever reason but certainly will not drink it anymore. She cannot identify the flavor, but knows it is a flavor and, perhaps, that is on the bitter side of things. The perception is not *incorrect*—it is perfectly successful and pragmatically significant.

Take now the case of an avid concert-goer selecting a location at a venue where one of her favorite musicians will perform. They know that music is not best enjoyed behind columns that block the sound, nor right next to speakers or cabins, since the sound does not all come out of one single speaker. Suppose they pick a good location (a good location relative to their styles, their abilities, their preferences, etc.) and move around after one or two songs in order to better listen to it. Whatever the final location of the concert-goer is, the idea I want to convey is that expectations and possibilities govern our perceptual interacting with worldly stuff, in ways that involve determinations arising from contextual practices, which also provide “tacit norms (or normative expectations) that are exhibited in the behavior of the participants” (Medina 2003, 262). Lastly, in a visual case where everything goes as expected—like when I look at the tree in front of me, and it looks nice and green and tall and moves with the wind—expectations are always at work. This normalcy is also an expression of the normative domain of our perceptual interaction with the world.

Perceptual practices are malleable and fluid. Normatively, the expectations and possibilities are present and also change at all the levels of our perceptual interaction with the world—at the level of sensory properties, of our handling of things, and also of the characteristics that have a social meaning. Perceptual practices adjust continuously within the social groups that share them, and these adjustments can be a reflection of characteristics proper of human groups. For instance, traditionalistic societies may have little variation in their perceptual practices: in their clothing customs, in the colors they use to decorate their place of habitation, or in the food they eat. The cultural products of marginal groups within a society can sometimes be seen as sort of imitations of mainstream practices, that is, as an institution of alternative practices. Kinds of music and foods that once belonged to the elites are adopted and transformed by marginal groups—instruments and ingredients may change in order to adapt to the limited means of the

marginal group. In this way new practices are established, where new expectations and possibilities are set in place.<sup>35</sup>

Expectations and possibilities of perceptual practices are a type of baseline knowledge. They make use of the notions of the “normal,” “best,” or “customary,” and these notions acquire their meaning in the social formations in which they are used (except, perhaps, for the notion of normal that depends on physical laws). Within social groups, expectations and possibilities change, and new groups or social formations come to life when a new way of interacting with perceptual stuff comes to be a way of doing things for some practitioners. On top of the normativity of practices, individuals in specific situations interact perceptually with the world in manners that also reflect their personal styles and preferences. Individuals also bring about changes. Personal preferences can turn into group practices. Such seems to be the simple case of the inventor of a recipe.

Medina has argued, in the case of discursive practices, that “normativity is not the kind of thing that can be monopolized at all and, a fortiori, it cannot be monopolized either individualistically or socially” (2010, 2). While it cannot be monopolized, the social domain manifest in perceptual practices enjoys an epistemological primacy over the individual, since it sets the domain of the perceptible and it first brings individuals into ways of interacting perceptually with the world.

Normativity does not arise out of the consensus of actions, but out of the transmission—the training and acculturation—by which perceivers come to be part of a social group. We learn to perform practices in the right contexts, in the right ways. Thus, Wittgenstein says: “We learn how to arrange objects according to their colours, how to report the colours of things, how to produce colours, compare shapes, measure, etc., etc.” (1982, §483). Echoing Merleau-Ponty on truth, of perceptual practices we can say that we have learned what is it to taste, to smell, or to hear through socially situated practices (see also Williams 1999, 166).

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<sup>35</sup> I am thankful to Melinda Hall for this suggestion.

The whole techniques of commerce with perceptible material are not biologically fixed. Having a sensory apparatus that responds to a certain range of stimuli and under certain physiological constraints is only the basis upon which the practices are built. Consider the case of research in social cognition that shows that two different culturally defined groups of individuals *see* the same visual scene differently, because one group focuses on focal points of the scene and the other group focuses on the whole scene, as judged *even by eye movement* (Chua, Boland, and Nisbett 2005; Masuda and Nisbett 2001; this evidence will be analyzed in detail in section 2.3.3). The biological configuration of the eye and of the neural correlates of vision do not account for the actual phenomenon of visually interacting with visual scenes, even at a basic level.

As explained in section 1.1 above, the view that normativity arises out of processes of training entails that there is no use for the distinction between acting guided by a rule and according to rule, because it is not possible to single out rules independently of contextual practices. In contrast, acting within perceptual practices is done blindly, and it is precisely the mark of a skilled practitioner to act correctly without engaging in inferential, cognitive processes that are supposed to be necessary for there being a properly “acting guided by a rule.”

Once again, the notion of *embodiment* at work in SEP that takes perception to be a matter of bodily engagement is at odds with views that, in order to meaningfully separate causes from reasons, which they see necessary, require that we reason about causes—that is, that we act guided by rules (see Crowell 2013, 28).<sup>36</sup> But once again, the division between causes and reasons, such that causes are responded to automatically whereas reasons are justifiable, is part of a picture that separates inner and outer and sees normativity in perception as in need of justification. In contrast, the primacy of practice means that one is situated within the normative space when one acts in accordance with a practice, even if one is not aware of why things are done thus or so. Practitioners rely on the seemingly given—a domain against which “bare challenges” are not in order. In perception, the seemingly given is the familiarity with certain

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<sup>36</sup> Chapter 5 will elaborate on the relation of this aspect of normativity to perceptual content.



ranges of sensory properties, the meaningfulness of certain perceptual interactions, and the naturalness of certain perceptual explorations and combinations. Because of this, the “*as*” in the fundamental character of the perception of something “*as something*” seems hidden: it seems to us that we see things simply as they are in themselves and for everybody else, whereas we are interacting with them, in their own materiality and from a perspective that is spatial, temporal, and pragmatic.

### 1.3 From Practices to Experience

The extension of Wittgenstein’s account of social practices to the perceptual domain is the broad framework for the Social Enactive Theory of Perception. The finely grained analysis of perception that I began to offer with the four characteristics of perceptual practices draws from all sensory modalities and accounts for the diversity of objects and modes of exploration of the different ways of perceptual interaction. Most philosophy of perception is biased by vision, and wrongly so. Wittgenstein does not entirely escape this tendency, notwithstanding some remarks dealing with other sensory modalities.

SEP is deployed both diachronically and synchronically, according to whether the focus is on social perceptual *practices*, or on the more shortly temporally bounded *interactions* of a perceiver with worldly things, respectively. The pragmatic is at work on two different levels. The distinction is between a system of social practices in which bright colors are favored in clothing and house decoration according to social notions of appropriateness (*diachronic* aspect), and specific interactions of a perceiver with clothing where certain shades of color are actively discriminated (or not) and judged as matching a different color (or not) by a perceiver (*synchronic* aspect) situated pragmatically (deciding what to wear for a social occasion). In this chapter, I have taken the diachronic approach to perception.

A central implication of the main thesis of this chapter—that perception is best understood as a type of social practice—is that the diachronic conditions the synchronic, i.e. that social practices condition individual interactions. This occurs in two senses. First, it means that the

configuration of the activity and the ways of acting are dependent on shared ways of doing things (without precluding individual variations). In the second sense, even seemingly independent, traditional basic perceptual concepts used in the philosophical discussion, such as recognition and discrimination, individuation of sensory properties and phenomenal qualities, are constituted by social practices in relevant ways. What ranges of smells we enjoy, seek, and actively combine with others; what sound combinations we find harmonic and use to dance *originates constitutively* in the social practices in which those perceptual properties occur.<sup>37</sup> In these two senses, practices carry over into the synchronic analysis.

Chapter one dealt with the diachronic and social practice-level, whereas chapters two through five deal with synchronic and individual aspects of perception, where perceptual *practices* are *instantiated* in individuals' perceptual *interactions*. It would be wrong to say that I deal first with the social and then with the individual because the individual is constituted by social ways of doing things, even though it features the particularity that comes from being in a meaningful way an individual interaction. This is why SEP is a *social* theory of perception.

The reader will certainly feel a change of register, of tempo, between chapter 1 and chapters 2 through 5. The shift is perspectival within the theory itself. This dual perspective is a matter of two necessary and complementary takes on the same phenomenon. It is justified by the complexity of perception as to its location in the lives of communities and subjects, and, as to the aspects, it reveals when it is instantiated in individual interactions. The perspective of individual interactions allows a fruitful engagement with standard and contemporary views in the philosophy of perception. Specifically, chapters 2 through 5 deal with perceptual experience, perceptual content, perceptual recognition and discrimination, sensory properties, and primary and secondary qualities, among others.

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<sup>37</sup> There is a different type of pragmatic dependence, a non-social pragmatic dependency, which I will explore in chapter 3 (section 3.3.1). The latter refers to patterned links between actions and sensory stimulation, whose mastery is constitutive of our perceptual experiences, and that are not socially constituted but belong to the physicality of the interaction.

I would now like to offer a coarse parallel and some links between social practices and the individual perceptual interactions of the following chapters. In relation to the idea that perception is contextual, the reader may look at the spatiotemporal and dynamic nature of perception (chapters 3, 4, 5). In relation to the performativity of practices, the reader may look at the interactional nature of perceptual experience (chapters 2, 3). In relation to the expressivity of perception, the reader may look at the essentially perspectival nature of the objects and contents of perception (chapters 2, 3, 4, 5). In relation to the normativity of perceptual practices, the reader may look at the normativity of perceptual consciousness and perceptual content of the last chapter (chapter 5). Lastly, I have begun to argue for the differences between standard sensorimotor enactivism and social enactivism by showing the distinction between motor actions and practices, that is, as a function of the performativity of perception. Further arguments for the differences between the Social Enactive Theory and other enactivisms can be found in chapters 3, 4, and 5.

Non-skeptical readers of Wittgenstein aim at dissolving philosophical problems that arise from some fundamental misconceptions about the objects of inquiry. In some cases, the philosopher's task is not only undoing the confusions but also showing how the phenomenon should be conceived. I think that perception is one of these cases. In addition to objecting to the representational views, I continue with the task of presenting SEP as an alternative to them, now by shifting gears and supplementing the practice-based perspective with the socially constituted individual interaction perspective.

## Chapter II

### Perceptual Experience as the Basis for Perceptual Content

What do I perceive when I taste a meal, when I smell the park in the early morning as I ride my bicycle through it, or when I hear a car coming towards me from my left. Do I perceive the meal, the park, the park in the morning, the car, the car coming from my left? Do we perceive chemical compounds and airwaves? Or do I perceive bits of worldly events, only to be later connected inferentially or otherwise cognitively? Do I perceive chunks or sequences? Do I perceive moving and changing things? Or do I perceive static objects and some other cognitive processes fill in the blanks between transitions and transformations? But wouldn't we need to be clear first about what it is *to perceive* in the first place before we talk about *what* we perceive?

What is it to perceive that is common to my smelling the park in the morning and my hearing a car coming toward me? Is it to be impacted by sensory impulses? Is it the matching of an inner impression with an outer occurrence? Is it to interact with the park and the car such that in each case I am in contact with an aspect of the world? Or may it be the case that the nature of perception and the objects of perception are constitutively interrelated?

This chapter offers a focused analysis of perception as perceptual experience and lays out the connections between experience and content, which will be further explored in chapters 3 and 4. Specifically, I will argue that perceptual experience is sensory-based interaction with physical objects, events and states of affairs in the world.<sup>1</sup> In this view, the world *presents* itself or is presented to the subject, or the subject makes the world present to her. It is not the case that the subject re-presents the world, or that the world gives rise to re-presentations of itself. On this basis, Social Enactive Theory of Perception (SEP) holds that perceptual experience and perceptual content are mutually implicated issues of *aboutness*. Questions about what we

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<sup>1</sup> While all perceptual experience is socially constituted in the sense that it is dependent on perceptual practices, as presented in chapter 1, I will not repeat this qualification here and in the upcoming chapters.

perceive—questions of content—depend on what it is to perceive in the first place, and the nature of perception depends on the type of objects perception deals with.

As this chapter begins to explore the connection between experience and content, I will situate the discussion of this chapter in relation to two broad ways of looking at perception: representational and non-representationalist accounts of perceptual experience and perceptual content.<sup>2</sup> Representational views hold that representations are constitutive of perceptual experience and perceptual content. Non-representational views assert that what is fundamental about perceptual experiences is a specific type of direct interaction with the world such that perceptual experience and content are constituted by the surrounding world (Taylor 2005; Putnam 1999; Logue 2012, 212; Campbell 2002).

In addition to these concerns, belonging somewhat narrowly to the philosophy of mind, I will also keep an eye on the epistemological concerns that McDowell has called the two “distinctive anxieties of modern philosophy,” and to which both representationalist and non-representationalists try to respond (1994, xvi). McDowell’s rendering of the opposition between what he calls ‘bald naturalism’ (of which the Sellarsian Myth of the Given is protagonist) and Davidson’s ‘coherentism’ explicates the tension (akin to what Hurley has called the Myth of the Giving (1998)). Philosophical thinking seems torn between a pole that takes reality to be given unmediated to subjects and a pole that, haunted by skepticism, claims that contributions from reality are *so* raw that they every sense of reality must be entirely added by the mind. The

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<sup>2</sup> The representationalist side dates back to traditional accounts of mind (Descartes, Locke, Hume) and extends to computational models prominent in the cognitive sciences. On the non-representationalist side, we find, on the one hand, varieties of realism, naïve or direct, as well as *some* versions of intentionalism, disjunctivism about perception, and some relationalist (Crane 2001; Husserl 1983; Husserl 2001a; Campbell 2002; Snowden 2008). On the other hand, we find a strong version of non-representationalism in the phenomenological traditions, particularly in non-idealist interpretations of Husserl, Merleau-Ponty’s philosophy of perception, and some of the contemporary situated accounts of cognition (enactive, embedded, extended, embodied). It is important to clarify that while Phenomenology is an intentionalist philosophy in the sense that it takes intentionality as a central feature, it is not, in my view, a representationalist theory. That identification I reject because it suggests, wrongly, that any view that privileges ‘intentional’ aspects of perceptual acts (or of mental states, as used in a different register) is committed to the existence of separate entities from objects called ‘representations’ of objects (Logue 2012, for example, makes this mistake). I do not agree that the intentional character of mental acts entails the existence of representations in any strong sense. I do not have the space to discuss this issue in any more detail here. (See Crane 2001, 6–33 for an interesting discussion.) For my purposes here I agree with Drummond in saying that all representationalism is a variety of intentionalism, but not all intentionalism is representational (Drummond 2012). I do not take sides on the details of Drummond’s proposal.

tension between these poles reveals the anxiety of being between the lure of each position and their felt dangers.

The beginning of the solution to the epistemological concerns is that we liberate ourselves from the apparent demand for a decision for one or the other. In continuity with the perceptual practices view inspired in Wittgenstein's non-skeptical readers, the view of experience here offered is doubtful of the assumptions on the skeptical side, and correlatively on the seeming need to move to the other extreme. If the cries of the skeptic are not really pressing, let alone urgent, the coherentist side is not as alluring. On the other end, we start overcoming the tension when we see as intellectually respectable to pause at and doubt the call of *Zeitgeist's* scientific intellectual climate that assumes we can find objectivity in the physical world.<sup>3</sup> SEP tries to carve out a middle-way position that shares the spirit of these two rejections: the spirit of the skeptic's cries and of the scientist's belief in an objective answer to our questions about perception. SEP aims at reconciling and overcoming both these epistemological and philosophy of mind worries.

In this chapter, I will first address the phenomenal character of perceptual experience, and its mutual connection to the objects of perception. I then will present the view that perceptual objects only present themselves to perceivers in appearances, profiles or perspectives, and that there is no tension between objects and appearances, as the philosophical tradition has wrongly thought. To this end, I find support in the simplicity of Augustine's view of the materiality of perceptual objects and properties. Objects are perceived through appearances or perspectives that depend on the materiality of objects and the active relations with subjects. I finish the chapter by offering three more arguments that build on top of the appearance-based view, by highlighting that the perspectival appearing of objects of perception is a matter of an active

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<sup>3</sup> Merleau-Ponty's attack on both 'empiricism' and 'intellectualism' (2002) offers a different perspective on the same tension. Other not very successful constructions of a similar kind can be found in the more recent literature. See (Logue 2012), who misguidedly and not so faithfully to the philosophers features 'Kantianism' on one side and 'Berkeleyan realism' on the other.

engagement with the world, whose everyday texture is revealed in perception—as it fits perceivers like us.

Lastly, I would like to point out that methodologically I now switch from the broad, diachronic framework of social perceptual practices of chapter 1, to the individual, synchronic interaction perspective of chapters 2 through 5. Since the two perspectives are theoretically complementary, the discussion of this chapter follows and is compatible with the preliminary analysis of experience offered in chapter 1, in discussing the way Wittgenstein departs from the input, receiving-only conception of perception.

### **2.1 The Felt Quality of Perceptual Experience**

In the most basic sense, perception is the fundamental form in which the world presents itself to a subject, as the subject is engaged with the world by means of sensory systems attuned to it, that is, able to relate to physical aspects of the world in ways that serve the purposes of living. More precisely, the world appears perceptually in spatiotemporal happenings (material, chemical, temperature-wise, mechanical, visual, etc.) falling within the different ranges of things perceivable for someone, and that are taken up by a perceiver by means of the senses of smell, taste, the experience of flavor, hearing, vision, and touch, as well as proprioceptive capacities, the ability to feel temperature, and some inter and multi-modal interactions. The world presents itself in particulars (objects, persons, and other living beings), events, states of affairs, some relations, natural and artificial kinds, as well as some of the parts and properties of all these.

Experience has a mental connotation. Experience is usually understood as the “feeling,” the “phenomenal” aspect, the “what it is like” of certain interactions. Such a view has been also held by some phenomenologists who insist that the reality of the object does not matter for the relation with the object, whose essence is part of the domain of consciousness understood, again, as a mental entity. For SEP, experience is *not* the appearing of things alone, if this appearing means the way things look, smell, hear *in my mind, in my head*. For SEP, experience is a lived

occurrence. Perceptual experience, specifically, is a type of sensory-based occurrence in which a perceiver *interacts* with an object, event, or state of affairs. As such, experience includes the physical exploration of things, the actual spatiotemporal relating to things and its development through time. In the experience of flavor, for instance, the perceptual experience is the actual touching of food or drink with my tongue, in my mouth, and not just the feeling I get when something is in my mouth and touching my tongue. The experience of touching is, to add one last example, about my moving my hand over a dog's coat, touching its hair, its thickness, and its direction as I move my hand, also in response to a body that is not inert. This conception of experience is one of the cornerstones of the Social Enactive View. In this section, I emphasize the felt quality of experience—which is part of experience but to which experience is not limited, because it is an interaction.

Perceptual experience is characterized by originality and bodily immediacy: it is an originally presenting of something in the flesh [*leibhaftig*] (Husserl 1997, 12, <14><sup>4</sup>). It is the *presenting* of an object or aspect of the world to a subject in immediate and absolute givenness as the object being there, present, *in propria persona* (Husserl 2001b, 137; 1983, 245, <205>). To say that it is an original presenting means that perception is an original way of being consciousness of things (Husserl 2001a, 40, <4>).<sup>5</sup> The *originality* accompanying the *perceived* is best contrasted with the felt source of recollection: whereas in the reminiscence of a piece of food I used to eat in my childhood there is the sense that the flavor came first from a direct experience, perception carries with it the sense of being a direct and original acquaintance with

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<sup>4</sup> Given the importance and wide presence of Husserl in this dissertation, I offer pagination according to the Husserliana edition (save for *Experience and Judgment*) additional to the English edition references. Non-enclosed numbers correspond to the English translation cited; page numbers of the German edition are given within angle brackets, where available.

<sup>5</sup> Internalists about phenomenal character, like T. Horgan, also argue that intentionality involving phenomenal character—every mental state in which there is a what-it-is-like—is the only original one. On this basis, Horgan denies the possibility of robots of having consciousness (2013). For this original sense of perception see (Loar, n.d.; Mohanty 2008, 378–79; Noë 2012). For a similar implication for consciousness see *loci classici* for this type of claim (Nagel 1974; Searle 1980). Perception (“sensory-perceptual phenomenology,” in Horgan’s terminology) naturally counts as a paradigmatic instance of phenomenal intentionality.



a perceived object (Husserl 1983, 244, <210>).<sup>6</sup> In chapter 1 I described this phenomenon of perceiving something as a *familiar encounter*.

By means of direct contact with things in the world, we become conscious of the way things actually are precisely in the manner that sensory acquaintance presents things, and not in the manner an encyclopedia or a television news show does. Perception is consciousness of realities, of actual states of things (Husserl 1983, 216,220 <183,187–88>; 2005, 26,<24>). “Consciousness” does not mean here phenomenal awareness. Rather, things are conscious if they belong to the whole of our conscious life, which includes the engagement itself with things. This means that perceiving something comes along with the sense or “root certainty” that the perceived is actually there and is thus-and-so (1997, 118, <140>; See also 1983, 250, <214–15>). In Husserl's terms, it is of the essence of perceptual experience to be incompatible with “disbelief and doubt” as to the manner in which things appears initially to a subject (1997, 21, <22>). It may be the case that I eat greens, and am doubtful about whether it is spinach or kale. Although I entertain doubts about the exact nature of the object perceived, the specific character of my perception—its unclarity and indetermination—comes with certainty: I am eating some ‘greens,’ with a flavor and texture that could be this or that. Perception is certain of its phenomenal character but implies no necessary knowledge of objects neutrally defined, and there is no reason to think that such knowledge makes perception less direct.

Perception is always perception *of* something, and its character is partly determined by the type of things it is *of*. The archetypical ‘object’ of perception is a *time-extended continuum*, in which we might or might not find “smaller” units or aspects. When available, smaller unities and aspects (a leaf in a plant, a surface on a table, the red of my pants) are also objects of perception, but not autonomously, and only under extensive qualifications (despite the common usage, philosophical, scientific, and popular that takes them to be the *only* objects of perception).

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<sup>6</sup> This is important because a traditional reading of Husserl's phenomenology implies a disregard for the actuality of the object of a mental act when considering what is essential to the mental act. In the Husserl-inspired view I am proposing, the reality of the perceptual object is essential to perception. As a matter of fact, Husserl contrasts perception with other mental acts that may be thought to share pictorial or presentative elements with perception, namely memory and phantasy, in order to delimit the nature of perceptual experience (See Husserl 2005).

The objects of perception are objects, events, and states of affairs, and also features or aspects of those objects, events, and states of affairs.

Within the perception of continua, perceptual experience grasps unities, or rather, is directed towards unities—the cake, this fabric, that sound, the texture of some pastry, the top of that tree (Husserl 1997, 28–30, <33–36>). The grasping of this unities, which I will discuss at length in chapter 4 (for it fits better in relation to content rather than to experience), is implied in some of the things we do perceptually, such as discrimination, recognition, the finding of similarities or differences (Husserl 1997, 29–30, <35>). However, perceptual experience is not limited to such grasping of unities, because perception is also about what is not yet unitary, about the transitions between units, or about the whole continua we are discussing.

Thus, a total perception can be initially thought of “a chain of resting perceptions, unified by transitional phenomena, in which various sides and parts of the thing present themselves in a stable way” (1997, 83, 76, <98,89>).<sup>7</sup> Consider the following sequence:

If we observe an unchanging object at rest, for example, a tree standing before us, we pass over it with our eyes, now we step closer to it, now back away from it, now here, now there, we see it now from this, now from that side. During this process the object is constantly given to us unchanged, as the same: we see it as such; and yet a slight turn of attention teaches us that the so-called perceptual images, the modes of appearances, the aspects of the object constantly change. In a constant variation of modes of appearances, perspectives, that is, during a constant variation in the actual lived-experience of perception, we have a consciousness that runs through them and connects them up, a consciousness of the one and same object. (Husserl 2001a, 34, <374–75>)

This example features variations in perceptual experience that consist in the *interaction* between subject and object. There can be changes in the object, either because of intrinsic changes (like a balloon as it's inflated) or because of movement (like the sound of the ebb and flow of the ocean); changes in a medium on which perception depends (a silent our loud environment in the perception of someone's speech, or open space that gets foggy); changes in the perceiver, physically speaking (sensory fatigue for someone trying several different

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<sup>7</sup> A full qualification of the sense in which the perceptual object is a sequence or a continuum is presented in chapter 4.

perfumes, a hand that grows numb, a finger that gets a bit burned but is still able to touch); changes in the perceiver, psychologically speaking (as mood affects perception, in a Sartre's Nausea-like way, or simply as attention changes); and changes in what the perceiver does.

The perceived object tells us something about the activity of perception. Perception is what it is partly because it relates to certain objects and not to others. In perceiving a given object as it changes, or as the relational position of perceiver and object changes, such object is placed in a context that partly determines what it comes to be for a perceiver. In turn, this pragmatic and spatiotemporal context underlies our relation with the perceptual world. For instance, the relationship between specific perceived objects and the total field of things perceivable at a given moment—the way the background colors the possibilities of perceiving those objects—must be thematized into perceptual experience.<sup>8</sup>

## 2.2 Phenomenon, Appearances, and Relationality: The Real Object When Perceived

SEP's take on content is one piece with a perspectival understanding of the perceptual object. In other words, the idea of content depends on the idea of *appearance*. A perceptual object is an object of the world, which in virtue of its physicality or material-dependency, and in virtue of

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<sup>8</sup> In talking about this relation, Husserl says that each separate, partial moment that “remains in continuity with the underlying total apprehension, is brought along with the latter into the synthetic unity of the consciousness of identity,” that is, with the conscious perception of one and the same object or unity (Husserl 1997, 77, <90>). Compare with Heidegger criticism of Fichte's suggestion to “think the wall, and to think the one who thinks the wall.” Heidegger goes on: “In our natural comportment toward things we never think a single thing, and whenever we seize upon it expressly for itself we are taking it out of a contexture to which it belongs in its real content: wall, room, surroundings [...] Sitting here in the auditorium, we do not in fact apprehend the walls—not unless we are getting bored.” And further along: “If we are actually thinking the wall, what is already given beforehand, even if not apprehended thematically, is living room, drawing room, house” (1988, 162–64). The ‘underlying total apprehension’ of which Husserl talks in perceptual, epistemological terms is *part* of what Heidegger calls the ontological presuppositions of handiness [*Zuhandensein*] and of worldliness [*Weltlichkeit*] (Heidegger 2010, 53–87). I agree with Husserl in thinking, however, that a rich lay of the perceptual land—and not only in the sense that we do not perceive noises but a creaking wagon (Heidegger 2010, 179), or that the farmer does not perceive an objective meteorological wind, but the south wind as an omen (Heidegger 2010, 79)—in perceptual terms must be secured.

It seems to me that the ontological flavor Heidegger gives in *Sein und Zeit* (1927) (or in his *Basic Problems of Phenomenology*, from a 1927 lecture) to these themes certainly amounts to a difference between Heidegger and Husserl. However, Husserl addressed these themes since his *Untersuchungen* (1901) and more explicitly in this *Ding und Raum* lectures (1907), or later in *Ideen I* (1913) and *Ideen II* (1914). We will encounter later in this dissertation more of these Heideggerian appropriations-with-a-twist of Husserlian ideas. In particular, the deeply developed system of indications or references [*Hinweise*] that forms the core of Husserl's theory of fulfillment is later appropriated by Heidegger under the idea of a context of references (*Verweisung*) that underlies the notions of relevance and significance (*Sein un Zeit*), or the idea of *functionality contexture* in *Basic Problems* (See also Heidegger 1988, 161–170). The pragmatic-centered reading of Husserl that I offer contains these features.

the modes in which a perceiver encounters it, is presented itself to a subject or a community of subjects in manners best referred to as ‘appearances’ or ‘aspects.’<sup>9</sup> We could also refer to the manners in which the object is present as a matter of ‘perspectives’ or ‘profiles.’ This understanding is the coupling of two ideas: (i) the perceptual world is a materially-based reality, and (ii) the world presents itself to perceivers never at once, but in spatial, temporal, pragmatic or otherwise perspectival or aspectual configurations.

Thus, *appearance* does *not* entail *distance* between object and subject. By the same token, appearance does not entail distortion of the object. The appearances of an object are the way the very object exists as a perceivable entity, in the conditions in which it appears to a thusly-determined perceiver. This means exactly this: it is of the nature of straight sticks to appear crooked when they are placed in the water, and an observer sees the stick through the water. Its appearing crooked in the water reveals something about the world: the interaction of a medium like water and the visual appearing of something—the manifesting of something through reflected light. By the same token, it is of the nature of spatiotemporal objects placed on earth to grow bigger or smaller according to relative distance to subject. A spatial object is precisely the type of thing that presents itself to perception (that is perceived) in such variations. Were such variations not to take place, our confidence in the reality of the object and, with it, our confidence in our actions about such object would decrease. An ‘impartial’ and ‘full’ definition of objects, or the idea of knowledge understood as adequacy between an object impartially sizeable in its entirety and the seizing of such object, are unfit to understand perception.

Most theories of perception commit a category-mistake that bears a close resemblance to Ryle's attack on dualism. Particularly, to insist that the perceptual object is nowhere to be seen if we only have appearances is like the person that visits a university and, after seeing students, professors, buildings, classrooms, libraries, etc.m is still looking for the university. It is about looking for the “wrong type of thing” (Ryle 2002, 35).

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<sup>9</sup> Nothing at this point commits me to a description of objects in the world as natural particulars or kinds, partly because I do not limit ‘world’ to the sum total of naturally existing objects. I use the term “object” in a loose sense—and include properties, events, and states of affairs. I do also consequently with the term “world.”

The fundamental mistake I am pointing to is that we lose perception if we focus on the narrowly conceived epistemological role of perception. It is an epistemologist saying: “I don’t care what perception is, for whatever it is, it deceives us: deception defines perception.” There is more to perception than knowing something *adequately*, and that to call perception deceitful is not only misleading but is also wrong. It is not even entirely clear that the accusations brought upon perception are not accusations about the structure of the world itself, namely, that vagueness and lack of certainty are a feature of the world and not of perception.

Let me now spin this line of thought in a different direction. My interest is not an ontology of the world—objects, events, states of affairs—but a theory of perceptual content, which subscribes to the presentational character of objects in a direct realist context. What I am interested in is this: What type of contact with the world does perception afford? How does perception relate us to objects and objects to us? What are worldly objects or happenings for a perceiver?

A habit of thought, to borrow Hurley’s expression, about the relation between objects and perception is clearly captured in this passage from Hume: “The table, which we see, seems to diminish, as we remove farther from it: But the real table, which exists independent of us, suffers no alteration: It was, therefore, nothing but its image, which was present to the mind” (1977, 104).

From the unwarranted conclusion that only an image “can ever be present to the mind,” a bolder one is derived, namely, that the senses are on the hither side of a cleft between mind and objects. The thrust of the argument is the inadequacy between the object (which doesn’t change) and our perceptions (which change). Inadequacy is an objection to the natural *sense of direct contact* that perception affords, to the natural trust and confidence in our dealings with the world based on perception (it is not, to be sure, an objection on our trust on the ‘deliverances’ of perception, for this framework of *perception as deliverance* of the senses is already part of Hume’s picture). It is an objection only because adequacy or correspondence is thought of as a criterion

of valid acquaintance. Valid acquaintances between minds and objects are those in which strict, objective co-variation obtains. But where does the idea of a valid acquaintance as correspondence get its validity? What is it that makes so prevalent this centuries-old objection so that it grounds such a wide lineage of arguments from error or illusion that try to characterize perception's nature from precisely this 'defect'? More precisely: What type of thing is the table thought to be, so that our seeing it would only give us remote images of it? Does it even make sense to say that perceptions are inadequate?

I now suggest we look at Augustine's understanding of the materiality of the perceptual, which he arrives at by a comparison with the nature of truth and true knowledge.<sup>10</sup> Although Augustine may sound like an unlikely choice (certainly a strange one), methodologically, there are two advantages that make him a useful source. First, he does not share the modern "commonsensical" division between the inner and the outer, and yet he allows for talk of subjective happenings that are not representations or intermediary images between things and consciousness. Augustine takes perceptual objects to be objects in the world and not images or individual impressions: "You would not say that what the eyes of two persons see belongs to the eyes of one or the other of them. It is a third thing towards which both direct their regard" (Augustine 1953, 156). Second, the subjective aspect of perception has a sense of interaction between the perceiver and the world that is not the detached view of the epistemological gaze, but instead is very much anchored in the transactions themselves with the world. Thematically, we'll get two things from this analysis: a sense of what perceptual objects are and why their nature entails that their modes of appearance are essential to them, and a sense of how the idea

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<sup>10</sup> There is a trans-historical terminological difficulty here. What is the genus of truth? Is it only a property of thoughts or propositions? Or is it an object-like proposition or intuition, or the set of all these thoughts? While for the Modern rationality truth is a property of thoughts or propositions, for some ancient philosophers (clearly the Platonists and friends) truth is more a type of object that one can possess, and that equips one with an understanding of the essential nature of things. (Notice that in a certain mindset this does not mean that the one who "possesses" truth actually understands things or acts accordingly, whereas in a different mindset one cannot know the truth and not act correctly). This ancient way of looking at things lends itself to talk about *the truth* as something one possesses, or lacks. One could give a *formal* account of truth in general, regardless of content. I do not have the space to expand on this here, nor it is relevant to the use I make of Augustine here. My purpose with Augustine is not exegetical. I just intend to present a contrast between two formal ontological regions: between things that are public, unitary and persistent (like "Truth" and true knowledge) and some that are not (like the objects of the senses), because this type of category mistake is at the basis of common confusions about perception.

of truth is so easily understood through the senses but how it dramatically departs from them. My goal is to suggest that we can start feeling at ease with appearances, and to elicit some surprise about the seeming validity of Hume's analysis of our perception of the table, hence softening the confidence in that outlook.

In *De Libero Arbitrio* Augustine debates over the nature wisdom and truth. He does so by contrasting true knowledge with the objects of the senses (1953, Book II). It can be said that three criteria characterize true knowledge: *publicness*, *unitariness*, and *persistence*. True knowledge has the property of being *public*: many can be related to it, that is, someone's access to truth does not limit anyone else's access. True knowledge is *unitary* in two senses: in being related to the (so to speak) same piece of true knowledge, the many get the same one thing; and, second, that to know a part of something is *eo ipso* to know the whole. This unity-character of true knowledge is unity in the archetypical sense of a geometrical point: it has no dimensions, it has no aspects—to get it would amount to get it all. True knowledge is *persistent*: it cannot be changed, used up or depleted. A conjunction of the three concepts defines true knowledge: *it is public without restrictions, unitary without restrictions, and persistent without restrictions*.

*Publicness* is that which the objects of touch don't have, but that the objects of sight and hearing do: "But you cannot say that each of us has his own private sun or moon or stars or the like, though each of us sees these things with his own particular sense of sight?" (1953, 145). Objects of touch aren't public in this sense (actual availability, at a given moment, for everyone desiring and able) for my touching something impedes others from touching it, that is, we both can touch the object but not the same 'side' at a given moment (1953, 146).

*Unitariness* is a characteristic of the objects of sight and hearing, for they seem to have no parts—'part' including here *parts*, *sides*, and *aspects* in general—, so that if they are perceived, they are perceived in their totality. This is not the case for the objects of smell, taste, or touch. They are not unitary in the sense that parts 'of air' carrying a smell enter someone's nose, but cannot enter simultaneously two noses. Because of this, smell is only seemingly (or potentially)

public: for as soon as someone draws a good breath, it restricts others' access to smells associated with that air (1953, 145). This case is structurally analogous to taste.

*Persistence* is predicated of objects of sight alone. It is not predicated of sounds because they disappear as time passes; not (generally) of smell because air (normally) takes it away; not always of touch, because materials normally wear out. The contrast is nicely reached through the objects of taste, whose associated property, the taste itself of something, depends on physically consuming food: "It is true that nurses give infants food which they have chewed, but the part which has been squeezed out and been swallowed, cannot be recalled and used to feed the child. When the palate tastes something pleasant it claims a part, even if only a small part, which it cannot give up, and does with it what is consonant with corporeal nature" (1953, 147). (The fact that the 'matter' is 'preserved' sets this example apart from the case of taste not being unitary.)

The idea of the palate 'claiming' a part of flavor underscores (i) the physicality (or material dependence) of the perceptual object (Augustine's "corporeal nature," *corporalia*), (ii) the dependence of properties perceived on such physicality, (iii) the dependence of the perceiving such properties on a specific interaction between perceiver and object.

It is precisely this line of thought what gives Augustine resources to set true knowledge apart from sight, the only sense that from a snapshot point of view is public, unitary, and persistent. One can see, once again, the seduction of the visual (quite related to what Augustine himself called the 'lust of the eyes,' or what Rorty has referred to as "the Platonic quest for that special sort of certainty associated with visual perception" (2009, 181)).<sup>11</sup> I want to focus on two arguments Augustine offers.

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<sup>11</sup> The point is certainly epistemological and not moral, as we read in Confessions, X: "For seeing belongeth properly to the eyes; yet we apply this word to the other senses also, when we exercise them in the search after knowledge. For we do not say, Listen how it glows, smell how it glistens, taste how it shines, or feel how it flashes, since all these are said to be seen. And yet we say not only, See how it shineth, which the eyes alone can perceive; but also, See how it soundeth, see how it smelleth, see how it tasteth, see how hard it is. And thus the general experience of the senses, as was said before, is termed "the lust of the eyes," because the function of seeing, wherein the eyes hold the pre-eminence, the other senses by way of similitude take possession of, whensoever they seek out any knowledge" (Augustine 2009, 303). The thrust of the remark applies *mutatis mutandis* to the bulk of contemporary philosophy of perception.



The first argument (trailing (i) above) is based on the corporeal nature of perceptual objects themselves and is perhaps best directed towards sight: “however small the object may be, it has at least a right-hand part and a left-hand part, an upper and a lower part, a further and a nearer part, one part at the end and another at the middle. We must admit that these parts exist in any body, however small, and accordingly we must agree that no corporeal object is a true and absolute unity” (1953, 148). The objects of sight aren’t like truth-objects (in Augustine’s conception), for they have parts.

The second argument (see (ii) above) is based on the perception of perceptual objects and presents what appearances are: “Truth, therefore, is less like the things we touch or taste or smell, and more like the things we hear and see. For every word is heard as a whole by all who hear it and by each one at the same time. And every sight offered to the eyes is exactly the same for all who see it, and is seen by all at the same time. But although there is a similarity there is also a great difference. A whole word is not spoken all at once. It is extended over a period of time, one syllable being pronounced first and another after it.” And then he goes to turn things inside out, for it is of the nature of such objects to be encountered in precisely certain ways: “Every visible sight varies with the place from which it is seen, and is nowhere seen in its totality. And certainly all these things can be taken from us whether we will or not, and there are difficulties in the way of our enjoying them” (1953, 158). And what he means by “difficulties” is only salient over against the desire for *full apprehension*, as people desirous of hearing the one who sings “sweetly for ever” but even getting closer only affords them “transient fugitive sounds”; or as the one who wishes to eternally see the sun and is yet disappointed at sunset.

In contrast, the beauty of truth and wisdom “does not pass with time or change with locality. It is not interrupted by night or shut off by shadow and is not subject to the bodily senses. To all who turn to it from the whole world, and love it, it is close at hand, everlasting, bound to no particular spot, never deficient” (1953, 159). Over against the background of publicness, which is always available depending only the an act of the will (in contrast with

difficulties of enjoyment derived from the bodily senses), unitariness is here spelled as the absence of spatiality, and persistence is tied to uninterrupted continuity, to ever-fullness, to everlastingness.

Augustine's business is not to discredit the senses. He very much values them in their idiosyncrasy. Furthermore, it seems to me that Augustine's spelling out of truth's characteristics in perceptual terms touches upon a deeper point, to wit: that one of our central ways of knowing, full stop, is perception; and that one of our central ways of understanding what knowledge of truth is, full stop, is based on understanding perception.<sup>12</sup> Perception is, following Merleau-Ponty, the way how we learned what it was for things to be thus-and-so: to be thus-and-so is the type of thing you encounter when you see something, when you hear something, when you touch something.<sup>13</sup>

Let us leave behind us this half-anecdotal, delightful and greatly informative episode in the history of Philosophy--where the love of truth has often harvested the delights of perception and discarded the limitations of those delights: the perspectival, temporal, spatial character of the objects that we perceive.<sup>14</sup> When truth is demanded of perception, there is a disregard for the essential characteristics of the perceptual field: it is Hume accusing the table of being a

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<sup>12</sup> Merleau-Ponty has said that "there is indeed one human act which at one stroke cuts through all possible doubts to stand in the full light of truth: this act is perception, in the wide sense of knowledge of existences" (2002, 40). Merleau-Ponty even defined perception as "access to truth" (2002, xvi). There is a deep connection between this notion and the thick notion of 'world' that Husserl came to develop in his late years and which Merleau-Ponty elaborates in the Preface to his *Phenomenology of Perception* (2002).

<sup>13</sup> To be sure, I am not making an argument for the usefulness or uselessness of everyday visual or tactile perception for the purposes of developing a scientific theory of the universe, or a body of knowledge that responds to the scientific idea of truth.

Those favoring the type of theories I've been attacking would possibly reply saying that the insistence on the possibility of perceptual deception is an indisputable fact. They would say they are not being 'unfair' to perception. Whatever way you define perceptual experience, they would say, the case is that we sometimes fail to see things the way they are: we jump as if a certain distance was shorter, we smell food at home and get excited about dinner, only to discover that the meal was other than we thought, we thought we heard a friend talking but it was a stranger. Perception can deceive us, and the more powerful we think perception to be, the greater the possibility of deception (See Silins 2013).

<sup>14</sup> Consider the following outstanding passage in *Confessions*, X: "But what do I love, when I love Thee? Not beauty of bodies, nor the fair harmony of time, nor the brightness of the light, so gladsome to our eyes, nor sweet melodies of varied songs, nor the fragrant smell of flowers, and ointments, and spices, nor manna and honey, nor limbs acceptable to embracements of flesh. None of these I love, when I love my God; and yet I love a kind of light, and melody, and fragrance, and meat, and embracement when I love my God, the light, melody, fragrance, meat, embracement of my inner man: where there shineth unto my soul what space cannot contain, and there soundeth what time beareth not away, and there smelleth what breathing disperseth not, and there tasteth what eating diminisheth not, and there clingeth what satiety divorceth not" (Augustine 2009, 261). In conjunction with the passages from *On Free Will*, we can now appreciate that the idea of taste such that it doesn't diminish with eating captures the denial of the materiality of things, in which the idea of truth and the denial of the senses consist.

spatial object; it is Descartes complaining about the susceptibility to heat of wax, or about spatial nature of tower and large statues; it is Russell concluding that that which is not 'inherent' in the table is not conducive to any kind of knowledge of the table. This has been to a great extent the origin of skepticism about perception, and we now start to see why it is possible to dismiss that skepticism: it is based on a misunderstanding about perception.<sup>15</sup> Demanding truth in perception is like complaining that a visual object cannot be seen and cannot be known in the darkness, and criticizing perception on that basis.

We are now in the position to see the insight in the following passage by Husserl:

When we view the table, we view it from some particular side, and this side is thereby why is genuinely seen. Yet the table has still other sides. It has a non-visible back side, it has a non-visible interior; and these are actually indexes for a variety of sides, a variety of complexes of possible visibility [...] But this thing is not [merely] the side genuinely seen in this moment; rather (according to the very sense of perception) the thing is precisely the full-thing that has still other sides, sides that are not brought to genuine perception in this perception, but that would be brought to genuine perception in other perspectives (Husserl 2001a, 40, <4>)

As I read Husserl in this respect, there is a difference between (a) objects as they *would* be defined in some sort of all-encompassing abstraction and universal language, and (b) the perception of an object (Levinas 1963, 88; Drummond 1990, 143–44; Zahavi 2003, 59–60). The reason for this distinction is that perception has a perspective on the object, which is *of* the object but is not *the* object.<sup>16</sup> In my Husserlian view, the status of the object as an object of perception is understood through the notion of appearances [*Erscheinungen*], that is, as that which presents itself in appearances. Consequently, no idea of adequacy or correspondence that

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<sup>15</sup> For more on the dismissal of skepticism see Snowdon (1992), who argues for a direct realism that simply does not answer the skeptic, and McDowell (1994) and Putnam (1999), who recommend a philosophical dismissal of skeptic worries.

<sup>16</sup> Objects are both nominatives and accusatives—prolonging a clever metaphor of Zahavi. Worldly objects and events are only neutral—in the *nominative*—when we name them and as the intentional pole of our acts—as reference for predication and, in a sense, for action—, but when we observe them, when we interact with them, they're in the *accusative*. When we perceive, objects come as accusatives: they are appearances. Insofar as the world appears, we ourselves are “datives of manifestation, as those to whom objects appear” (Zahavi 2003, 51). Appearances would be *genitives* of the world. To put everything in the nominative (or rejecting doing otherwise), to keep the analogy, amounts to a stubborn *flattening* of the philosophical discourse. The *allergy to modulation*—like the modulation of grammatical cases—is sometimes thought of as proof of sophistication.

is not constrained by space, time, and the other perspectival determinants of perception could have any positive role to play in addressing perception.<sup>17</sup>

We begin to be at ease with this tension between *being* and *appearances*, by insisting that the tension is not a contradiction fundamental to both terms. My claim is indeed that some things are of such a nature that their *presenting* themselves to perceivers is essentially a matter of appearances. For perception, the question about the being of objects in themselves is of little avail, for whatever determination is furnished there (e.g. the diameter of a planet), it is a determination that, if perceptually meaningful (I could see such planet), would enter into the perceptual field *eo ipso* as an appearance of the object to a perceiver situated here or there, perceptually constituted in this or that way. This position is both *entirely realist* and *entirely perspectival*, and that there is no philosophical conflict whatsoever in this pair.

Further, there is a difference between the physical *qualities of* objects and a perceiver's take on those qualities. A physical property, like a frequency in the electromagnetic spectrum, within such and such ranges, is a *color* only for some seeing beings. Alien non-sensitive-to-light-at-all scientists, with a science somewhat similar to ours, would detect the range of the electromagnetic spectrum that is visible for us, but would not refer to *colors*. By means of advanced imaging techniques (sophisticated spectrographs), these scientists even engage in discriminative behavior based on the frequencies that we call colors. Although they detect such frequencies they don't perceive them—it is not just that they don't feel them, it is that they don't encounter them in the immediacy and familiarity that characterizes perceptual experience. Along the same lines, it may very well be the case that gamma radiations or radio waves—above and below the range of the spectrum we call visible—have a direct perceptual payoff for a certain class of perceivers. This is not an ontological point about the perceived objects, but about the objects' appearance in perception.

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<sup>17</sup> This applies directly to what were called the primary qualities: extension, shape, solidity, gravity, motion, and rest. However, I do not take a position about the correctness of this category, but my inclination is that it is not very useful anymore, since even the secondary ones can be correlated to physical concepts.

Individual perceptions are partial, underdetermined in relation to the objects of which they are appearances, and are always open-ended. There is no absolute knowledge of an object through perception: not only can objects and events be present to a subject in a potentially infinite number of ways, but those individual perceptions cannot be held at the same time by the same subject.

But just as the perceptual object is the one that exists in space and time and is related to in perspectival determinations, it is of the essence of perception that, as a whole, we find a continuous “braid of partial synthesis of increase and decrease [of the relative givenness of sides and parts of things], in which, to be sure, the individual strands of the braid have and can have no autonomy” (Husserl 1997, 95, <113>).<sup>18</sup>

We are directly acquainted with objects, events, and states of affairs *in their perspectival appearing*, because we could not be related to them otherwise. I will now offer a broad analysis of aspects and properties *in* which we perceive worldly things: as relational, as including high-level properties, and as pragmatically dependent. This initial analysis will be supplemented in chapter 3 by a fuller relational account of the fundamental ways in which the appearing of things is conditioned by facts about the perceivers and the specific interaction in which an experience consists.<sup>19</sup>

### **2.3 On Appearances, Aspects, and Properties**

All the aspects or appearances we perceive, insofar as they are the take of a perceiver on an object, and not simply a determination of the object in isolation from a perceiver, are a function of the specific relation between perceiver and object, such that the object is only presented in

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<sup>18</sup> This braid constitutes the whole over against which each appearance “refers to possibilities of fulfillment” of perceptual acts (Husserl 1997, 105, <125–26>). I referred to these possibilities in chapter 1 as playing a role in the field of perceptual interactions, and with specific relevance for the normativity of perceptual practices (section 1.2.4), and I will take them up again in chapters 4 and 5, in the discussion of perceptual content and its normativity.

<sup>19</sup> These are the three types of dependencies of perception, namely, idiosyncratic (facts of personal and species embodiment, and otherwise idiosyncratic), non-socially pragmatic, and socially pragmatic, which are discussed in chapter 3 (section 3.3.1).

appearances or aspects to a perceiver. Ontologically, appearances or aspects are not on the side of objects, but on the side of relations to perceivers. They are relational.

More than offering conclusive arguments for the view that experience consists of interactions in which objects appear perspectively, I have started to delineate a realist and relationalist way of looking at perception. The initial arguments, relying importantly on Augustine's view of the materiality of perceptual objects, had the purpose of beginning to soften our confidence in the commonsensical incompatibility between being and appearance that is at the heart of the philosophical tradition.

I examine now three specific argumentative lines that show that objects, events, and states of affairs are only perceived in appearances, that is, that there is no internal contradiction in the one-many relationship between object and its appearances. These three arguments, although of different in character, have something in common and fundamental for SEP: perception is an active engagement. These arguments are also meant as a way to populate the stage of perception as the scenario of rich interactions with the world that express what the world is and what we, worldly inhabitants, are.

These three arguments are of different character: that some aspects we perceive depend on the pragmatic engagements of subjects with things perceived; that the quality of the perceptual world in everyday life is such that it requires that we perceive high-level properties attributable only to perception, which show the interaction between a contextually situated perceiver and the world; and that since the human perceiver is who she is and perception is what it is in a perceiver's life, objects have to appear in appearances and in concrete pragmatic contexts.

### **2.3.1 From Relationality to Activity**

Of all the aspects, properties or qualities objects, events, and states of affairs that we perceive, *some* can be *predicated of* spatiotemporal objects, events, and states of affairs neutrally defined,

but some cannot. We can attribute a texture to a surface, but we cannot attribute a reflection to a body of water in which the reflection occurs.

Notice however the ambiguity we have here, which has been a source of confusion: In perception we are indeed acquainted with objects, but only through aspects or appearances. Since we are indeed acquainted with objects directly we are led into thinking that the aspects we perceive are features of the object. That is correct. But we are often led into thinking, rather, misled into thinking, that those aspects are features of the object *in an unqualified way*: that they belong to the object, not matter who perceives, under what conditions, from what position, for how long, etc. That is incorrect. That is the ambiguity that makes Hume puzzled about a table having a size, and appearing both of size S, smaller-than-S, and larger-than-S at different times to a moving perceiver.

A good deal of what we perceive depends evidently on the *way* a perceiver relates to what she perceives, that is, on the pragmatic engagements of subjects with things perceived. These are essential aspects of the quality of the world as we perceive it.

I first want to put pressure on the often-implicit assumption that in perception we are passively impressed by the world—a perspective that is easy to fall in if one limits the perceiver to their perceptual organs, and which is very much reinforced when we focus excessively or perhaps uniquely (as most philosophers do) on vision.

Let's start with an argument about texture issuing from the mechanical interaction between a perceiver and an object. Texture requires a sort of action on the part of the skin that touches, that is, it requires a mechanical event (pressure, with or without movement) in order to make itself be felt.<sup>20</sup> One can attempt at a physical description of the conditions that give rise, for instance, to a texture: the product of an object-surface topography in a mechanical relation with such and such sensory receptors having certain thresholds (ranges of stimulus energy)

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<sup>20</sup> For instance, orientation- and direction-sensitive neurons (e.g. Meissner's corpuscles) are precisely excited in the event of the presence of direction or orientation, which requires movement (Kandel and Schwartz 2000, 466, 432). Texture-sensitive neurons (Merkel disk receptors) are subject as well to a mechanical input (Kandel and Schwartz 2000, 432–33). The case is even more clear in the face of neurons that are activated when the hand is manipulating an object (Kandel and Schwartz 2000, 469).

such that mechanical force (a specific pressure vector) is needed in order for such receptors to “feel” this or that texture as such. Perceiving is a matter of doing because, without the stimuli that come from the doing, there would be no perception—without a type of action or movement, there would be no touching.<sup>21</sup>

This reference to the way touch depends on mechanic interaction is an indication of how many of the properties we perceive in things are not properties that could be obtained of objects neutrally defined, or properties that only depended on the condition of an organ (in the manner vision requires the capacity to ‘see’ certain frequencies of the electromagnetic spectrum).<sup>22</sup>

There is one additional step here and that is that a specific *type* of interaction is needed in order to obtain certain tactile experiences. The sensory contact of the sense of touch requires specific action *on the part of the perceiver* to be individualized: if one touches two similar yet different surfaces (for example, two kinds of paper) just as gently, one may not perceive any difference between them. One may need to touch both papers in some detail, applying more pressure, or moving one’s fingers more extensively over the surface of the paper.

Let’s now extend the argument further, in order to show how these pragmatic interactions are socially defined. As we just saw, a mechanical vector (combination of movement and pressure) is a feature of the interactions of our fingers, hands, feet—our skin and even our tongues—with things. But if we reflect on the type of tactile properties that we perceive, we would notice that many of the tactile properties we perceive in everyday life (texture, shape, etc.) are correlated with specific activities: with the pressing of our feet over rocks, with the moving of our tongues around food in quite specific ways. The movements required to feel the

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<sup>21</sup> A virtue of my account is that it lends itself to the idea that sensory organs are the product of biological evolution responding to a world of physical forces a living being needs to interact with in order to carry on with the activity of living. Thus, we came to be sensitive (and selectively so) to a range of, in this case, textures, that are relevant for our type of life.

<sup>22</sup> There is more to vision than the relational character of colors. One may initially think that all that there is in vision is a sensory contact with something visible. This is an all-or-nothing scenario, such that the seeing person’s having their eyes open cannot help to be presented with images. But this is incorrect. I will postpone a discussion on vision to section 2.3.3 below, where I will argue that vision is indeed more similar to touch as has just been described than to the traditional view of vision.



texture of objects as they are experienced and for the purposes of the activity in which they are immersed are defined by the practices of touching as it happens in context.

While the idea of texture, in general, can be conveyed in physical terms (as suggested above: object-surface topography plus types of receptors plus a mechanical vector), the reality of the perceived texture—the texture of the bark of a tree, of velvet, of gravel in the ground, of a banana in the mouth—requires a description of a “movement” that is highly dependent on the specific way of touching things. Specific textures are oftentimes individuated by specific interactions. The perceptual experience of gravel, for example, is tied to the activity of walking or standing with my feet, or even perhaps sitting, over a certain terrain. While I can feel the texture of silk of a scarf with the skin in my neck when I wear it, I could not feel the texture of gravel in the way I feel the silk, and I could not feel the silk in the way I feel gravel. Ranges of movement and intensities of pressure are a function of an activity happening at the pragmatic level.

The fineness of grain of our tactile contact with the world is dependent on specific tactile interactions. It is properly specified by reference to interactions that are pragmatic in kind, of which their physical description is only an incomplete description. A beginner tailor that learns about fabrics and textures learns how to touch, that is, learns what movements to make and what pressure to apply. So does the beginner printer that learns how to compare papers and decide which one is best for a given job. Thus, there are aspects of the action that exceed this physical description: what the tailor does when he compares two fabrics. We can see here an individual interaction that instantiates *a social practice*: the mere mechanical interaction lacks the determination that the practice offers, and lacks the normative social aspect that determines the correct modes of exploration, as well as the possibilities and expectations that are in place when encountering the world haptically.<sup>23</sup> Certain practices—certain surfaces and certain textures—are more defined than others, like the textures encountered in the verification of softness needed

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<sup>23</sup> This argument here is a specification of my argument for perceptual practices of my first chapter, where the primacy of practice was established.

in some wooden-crafted pieces such as in the craft of the highly sophisticated luthier, whose violins or guitars are subject to the standard of the learned touch.

The experience of texture often requires a combination of movement and pressure (a mechanical vector), which consists not on a passive perceiving but on an engagement between subject and object, in ways that are not fully defined by a physical description of a mechanical interaction (however informative those can be), but to a practice-based engagement with things. By suitable modifications of the type of activity or interaction that is required in the sensory acquaintance with perceptible objects, according to each sense, it is possible to see how this argument applies to other modalities. The argument has been here defended for the case of touch, but situations that fall within this framework have been offered in chapter 1 (the section on performativity featured cases in the auditory and olfactory modalities) and will appear continuously all throughout this dissertation (section 2.3.3 will present a case for vision where the characteristics just exposed can be found).

### **2.3.2 High-Level Properties**

The question about high and low-level properties is about how rich our perceptions are. On SEP's view, we do not only perceive low-level properties (shape, color, size, hardness, illumination, motion, depth, location sound) but also high-level properties (particulars, natural kinds, defined objects, agents performing actions, processes, relations like harmoniousness or causation, among others).<sup>24</sup> Other cases of high-level perception include emotionally loaded situations like seeing someone is angry or hearing someone's cry as urgent, or more basic cases like perceiving speech and written language immediately as meaningful linguistic expressions.<sup>25</sup> This means, for instance, that when I interact with another person perceptually, I am actually perceiving a person, say, a woman, and not just a volume, surfaces, movements, and colors. Do I *perceive* a person in the person, a woman in the person? Do I hear meaningful words?

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<sup>24</sup> I do not put much weight in a technical definition of properties. I rather take a minimal, nominalist approach: *property* is a placeholder for the things that can be said are proper of an object.

<sup>25</sup> So far I am casting my discussion in terms of *objects*, see also (Hopp 2011, 60). My discussion in the next chapter makes clear why this talk of objects fits with talk of content.

In what follows, I provide phenomenological evidence for high-level properties, backed by research in other social cognition, social psychology, and cognitive anthropology. While it seems to me that the way things appear (this is what some people call “the phenomenology of x”) provides evidence enough to establish the higher-level content positions, the illustrations that follow are meant to be compelling in an additional sense, namely, that what is perceived cannot be adjudicated to something else than perception, i.e. that it cannot be conceived as issuing from inference, judgment, or other cognitive processing.

The view of perceptual experience I have been presenting has as an essential component the *direct* perception of more-than-low-level-properties. The quality of the perceived world requires it. To hold, as I do, that in perception we are directly *related* to worldly stuff, means, among other things, that the texture, the flavor, the specific tone of the world as we perceive it is partly constituted by the world itself. Thus, the properties we perceive are at least partly constituted by the world as it appears perspectively to perceivers suitably ‘situated,’ and this means situated *spatially*, here or there, or *enactively*, that is, perceivers interacting in this or that way with the world.<sup>26</sup>

The chemical senses count perhaps among the clearest evidence that perception is of more than low-level properties. Specifically, the experience of the two senses of smell and taste, along with the combined experience of flavor (which stands experientially on its own), include as intrinsic to them the phenomenon known as *hedonics*. Smells or flavors are experienced not only as sensory qualities (bitter, sweet) but in terms of an affect that accompanies them, a liking or disliking (Barthosuk 1991; Stevenson 2009, 159–161).<sup>27</sup> Hedonics are thought to be present at birth in the case of taste but not in the case of smell, and to be subject to change in both cases depending on biological development, behavioral history, and physiological specific states. As a

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<sup>26</sup> It is possible to read this section as an entailment of the relational view I backed before (Campbell 2002, 116), or as a corollary of disjunctivism about experience (Haddock and Macpherson 2008b; Byrne and Logue 2008; Logue 2012).

<sup>27</sup> A difference is made between liking and preference. *Preference* is referred to intake (which features other evolution-based nutritional aspects, as well as perhaps some cognitive conscious operations, as in the case of a person that wishes to lose weight), while liking refers to a positive (or negative) affect accompanying the sensory quality, which may be related to a desire for it or an aversion to it (Zellner 1991). For the topic of hedonics, the collection of studies in (Bolles 1991) features a wide array of studies surrounding the phenomenon.

matter of fact, previous theories of hedonics tried to place the ‘liking’ factor in the object itself—in the case of food, its orosensory properties. Further studies showed that the phenomenon can only be explained by recourse to a “dynamic interaction” between properties of the food (its sensible properties and its nutritional ones) and attributes (historical and contextual) of the perceiver (Sclafani 1991, 60). Further, it is worth noticing that the phenomenon of hedonics of taste, smell, and flavor features a neural counterpart that even features separate systems for approach and acceptance and for avoidance and rejection (Schulkin 1991, 98–99).

Along similar lines, the experience of creaminess in food points in the direction of a high-level property. For one, creaminess, like the experience of flavor in general, is understood as a “preservative emergent property” (Stevenson 2009) that only takes place as it is experienced in the mouth, even though visual influence sometimes occurs.<sup>28</sup> Now, creaminess is interesting because unlike several other specific flavors, it cannot be neatly analyzed into a specific sensory interaction—different senses can contribute to it. Also, creaminess is a good case of “information redundancy,” a type of multiple realizability for flavors: the presence of the property is perceived even with variation in “single or multiple physical features of the stimulus” (Stevenson 2009, 70). What makes it special, and the reason why it is a great example for a high-level property, is that these two features make the experience of creaminess immediate available for identification, detection or appropriate response in the moment (Stevenson 2009, 4, 69–72).

Object recognition seems to imply that we are immediate and directly acquainted with specific objects (my desk) or kinds of objects (a desk). Haptic object recognition is everywhere: “When we dress, we do not have to fixate on buttons to fasten them; we can find the button and buttonhole by touch. When we drive a car, we can shift gears and adjust knobs without bothering to look” (Klatzky and Lederman 2003, 106). In the perceiving of an object, several material properties of objects (texture, shape, temperature, surface (dis)continuities) can lead to

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<sup>28</sup> The phenomenal experience of flavor includes sensation in the olfactory, gustatory, somatosensory modalities (tactile and chemaesthetic aspects, i.e. chemical stimulation plus temperature)—the interoceptive flavor senses— and in the exteroceptive senses of vision, audition, and (orthonasal) olfaction (Stevenson 2009).

recognition (Klatzky and Lederman 2003). Similarly, visual object recognition seems to be able to be singularized into a single neurophysiological system, which would further support the point that not only low-level properties are perceived (Tarr and Cheng 2003; Logothetis 2000). Further, recognition of objects is also dependent on task, experience and feedback (Tarr and Cheng 2003, 29), such that these extra-perceptual factors influence the tuning of object recognition capacities.

The case of speech perception is quite telling. Evidence to the effect that we perceive speech as meaningful from the beginning is abundant. In the auditory experience of a language we know, we perceive the meaningfulness of words and utterances (Butterfill 2011; Smith 2010; Mole 2010; O'Callaghan 2007; Heidegger 2010, 158; Husserl 2005, 26,<25>). In speech perception, we perceive rhythms in languages familiar to us, and this phenomenon is crucial for hearers to understand speech (Cutler 1994).<sup>29</sup> Regardless of whether the motor theory or another theory about *how* of speech perception takes place, the *what* seems clearly established: we perceive words and not sounds.

We visually perceive words as wholes (of languages we know) and not just ink or chalk traces later to be inferred to be words. Further, there has been identified a specialized 'visual word form area' in the visual cortex, specifically in the fusiform gyrus (McCandliss, Cohen, and Dehaene 2003). The fact that changes in size or shape of letter or some changes in orientation in written text do not affect visual word recognition offer additional support for a form of high-level content.

Both speech perception and visual perception of words furnish a great case for the idea that we directly perceive things in the world. Many philosophers find unpalatable the idea that

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<sup>29</sup> Seen from the point of view of a theory of sensible qualities, which in the case of sounds are pitch, loudness, and timbre, it seems unlikely that an objective physicalist account of such qualities is possible: "contemporary psychoacoustics researchers commonly reject the identification of pitch with frequency or periodicity. The received scientific view thus holds that pitch is a subjective or psychological quality that is no more than correlated with objective frequency (see, e.g. Gelfand 2004, Houtsma 1995)" (O'Callaghan 2009, 33; O'Callaghan 2007). It is common among philosophers to take some scientific bits of information and develop wrong folk-educated-scientific views about, for example, sensory qualities. Many philosophers take the uninformed, pseudo-scientific view that for every sensory quality that is theorized, there has to be *ex hypothesi*, a physical configuration independent of perceivers that allows for such quality to exist. Somewhat careful examination in olfactory, gustatory, or auditory perception, among others, dispels those common views.

meaningful speech *is* in the world and not projected or inferred by hearers. While I have no time to discuss the issue in length, the contours of the debate are quite those of the polemic on appearances in general. The traditional view thinks that, either, *properties are in the objects themselves, neutrally described, or they are a subjective construction of perceivers*. As I have incessantly remarked, the dilemma is to be rejected. Things can be in the world itself and yet specific properties may not be there independently of a perceiver's interacting with them. Once the perceiver (and in the case of speech, the producer of the sounds as well) is such that the interactions with the world are culturally informed, the world itself is able to present itself in ways that are precisely dependent on such interactions. To say that in a person's utterance meaning is in the utterance itself is not to say that those sounds are 'intrinsically' meaningful as if their meaningfulness didn't depend on a language. But they are not merely a projection of the hearer on the sounds. It is the interaction of a suitably situated (not spatially but culturally) hearer with sounds that become words. I treat the case of illusions as in the case of visual illusions, that is, like the disjunctivist does: real utterances constitute perceived speech, whereas the illusion of speech is not constituted by real utterances. There is no common core between them. The treatment is similar to accidental shapes that may resemble words. The opposite views seem fated to take a good deal of the intersubjective quality of the perceived world to be a massive illusion, and to reduce the perceptual to the sensory, in a way that, if pursued carefully, will make the sensory a mere brute impingement on sensory endings that can do nothing alone.

These past four cases (visual and haptic object recognition, and visual words and speech) have in common the influence of familiarity or background knowledge. We can derive from this a further argument. In that respect, both Peacocke (1992) (although in a strictly conceptual fashion) and Siegel (2006, 490) have argued that the fact that an experience's phenomenal character changes before and after acquaintance or knowledge entails that there is something that is new in what is perceived. The difference between the before and the after cases has then

an unmistakable perceptual payoff. This differential also shows that such high-level contents are part of perceptual experience.

There is another case that I will treat in some detail in the next two chapters, and which suggests as well that perception is of high-level properties. This is the case of sensorimotor-dependent aspects, which I will put in the broader category of non-socially pragmatic dependencies. Some properties we perceive are not properties of the objects by themselves, but properties of the objects or situations as they can be acted upon. For example: when riding a bicycle, a curve is perceived as a curve that requires a certain turn (of the handle bars); a soccer ball in movement towards oneself is perceived as a ball that calls for a certain kick; and touching a knife's blade in order to check for sharpness is not only a detection of a material feature but also a behavioral implication, namely, the limit at which one would cut oneself if too much pressure is applied. In these cases, it is the immediacy, automatic, and continuous/feedback-loop character of the action-perception interaction that makes the case for such aspects being *perceptual* and for being not just aspects of the objects (hence, not a low-level property).<sup>30</sup>

Lastly, I would like to briefly mention the visual perception of causation relations between objects.<sup>31</sup> At least in some cases, it can be argued that we perceive causal relations between objects, e.g. when a billiards ball hits another, the movement of the second one is perceived as caused by the first one. We also perceive things like *a bird making a branch bend* by descending on it (Butterfill 2011; Siegel 2011b). Considerations of space prevent me from examining these aspects in more detail. I am here however only interested in reviewing illustrations of high-level content.

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<sup>30</sup> This interactive intuition is compatible with Gibson-style ecological formulations (see Gibson 1979), as well as enactive insights particularly akin to Hurley's (1998; 2006).

<sup>31</sup> Inter- and multi-modal interactions furnish plenty of cases of high-level aspects that are perceived, as in the perception of music aspects like duration are products of visual plus auditory clues. I have not time to discuss these cases at this point, but a full theory of perception must be sensitive to the idea that perception is not only an intra-modal affair.

### 2.3.3 Pragmatic Dependence

I have been urging a relationalist, realist understanding of perceptual objects, events, and states of affairs in which appearances or aspects are essential to perception. I have offered a few initial arguments for these appearances to be understood as correlative to specific sensory-based *interactions* between perceivers and objects. I have also argued that high-level properties are appearances or aspects of objects, events, and states of affairs. Perceptual interactions between objects of the world and subjects do not happen statically, but in the nuanced interactions between worldly occurrences (temporally extended continua) and perceivers, which interactions are constituted, for the most part, by socially constituted practices.

A central aspect of the arguments so far deployed is the view that in perceptual experience we are presented with objects belonging to our everyday world, or as Husserl had it, belonging “to the sphere of culture, the sphere of actual life” (Husserl 1989, 243–59, <231–47>). We smell *colognes* as we walk by someone, we hear *cars* as they pass by, and we see *animals* and *plants*. We also see an angry friend as he evades us, or our pet in distress when treated by a vet. The world of experience is the scenario “which furnishes the ground for all cognitive performance,” in which perception is linked to action and judgment. In the case of perception, individuation of perceived objects, events, and states of affairs “can take place only in practical activity itself” (Husserl 1973, 41; see also 65).

In this section I offer a *philosophical anthropological* account, in the spirit of *second nature naturalism* of the fact that the objects, events, and states of affairs that we perceive appear in configurations pertaining to persons in their everyday pragmatic engagements with the world.<sup>32</sup> This explanandum involves higher-level properties, for which a different argument has already been offered, but the scope of pragmatic determination goes beyond: it includes the individuation of objects, events, and states of affairs. To talk about the individuation of, say, a perceived tree, is not to talk about what makes the tree a tree in itself, but about the way in which the tree is presented to me in perception as I relate to it in determinate pragmatic

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<sup>32</sup> For an extended and more specific treatment of the second naturalism position see Arango (2014).



dispositions: as I climb it, or as I contemplate it, or as I feel its trunk's bark). The argument is philosophical anthropological because it articulates the notion of person and the structure of perceptual experience through the idea that a person is essentially, in part, a *perceiver*.<sup>33</sup> In order to understand what a perceiver is is essential to understand what it is to perceive, and in order to understand what *to perceive* is, it is essential to understand what *a perceiver* is.

This argument is phenomenological. It is an articulation of Husserl's treatment of the idea of person in his *Ideas II*. Because of this origin and style, the argument comes with methodological and content commitments that many readers may find difficult to accept without further explanation, or simply not at all. SEP does *not* depend on this section's argument. It is one more argument among the many that I have already offered and others that will come in following chapters.

Further, I think that the connections between a pragmatic orientation in the world, on the one hand, and higher-level properties and object individuations, on the other, holds good independently of the ontological account of "persons." In that sense, the interpretation I offer in this section of social cognition research (i) debunking the Müller-Lyer "illusion" and (ii) showing that seeing in terms of attention and eye movement can be culturally constituted, should be of interest for any reader. This section can be read in a fuller or in a deflated manner: as arguing for the pragmatic dependence of perception *with* or *without* considering it a matter of a phenomenological conception of person.

**The Husserlian Argument.** I follow somewhat closely one of the ways Husserl thinks about the relation between perception and everyday life. I purport to offer a deeper grounded argument—an argument cast in a philosophical anthropology key, that is, an argument that takes perception to be a basic component of (and grounds perception in) the life of a *person*. The

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<sup>33</sup> Interestingly, a similar type of strategy has been recently utilized in contemporary contributions to the way traditional philosophical debates can inform contemporary discussions on cognition. Patricia Kitcher's *Kant's Thinker* (2011) purports to examine Kant's theory of the cognitive subject by reflecting on what type of subject Kant's is, namely, a thinker (Kitcher 2013). Ginsborg has recently offered a compelling reply, entitled *Kant's Perceiver*. In Ginsborg's view, "we cannot understand Kant's thinker without considering her also as a perceiver, given that thought, for Kant, is operative not only in self-consciously rational judgment but also in perceptual experience" (Ginsborg 2013, 222).

experiencing subject is a being that is a perceiver, a thinker, an emotional being, as well as a social, historical and biological being. The Husserlian line of argumentation I will follow is that of Husserl's *Ideas II* (1989). The central idea is that perception is to be understood as a function of a more basic category, *position-taking* [*Stellungnahme*] and its related comportment [*Verhaltung*]. This line of thought proves to be compatible with recent research in social psychology and cultural anthropology on the nature of cognition and perception.

In order to investigate the lived experiences of a subject, we start with an inquiry into the constitution of the experiencing subject—this is the thrust of Husserl's theory of constitution. For Husserl, the subject is constituted by multiple 'levels' (or 'dimensions,' if the reader so wishes to read) which are different Ego-formations, ranging from, roughly, a mostly bodily level, to the theoretical-transcendental pure Ego, to the empirical, intersubjective Ego of everyday life (Husserl 1989).<sup>34</sup> All these abstract formations (which to be sure do not 'act' isolatedly or modularly) are Ego-like in that they carry with them or entail a sense of *mineness* or *for-me-ness*—whether it is the actional affirmation of a bodily contact with the world (i.e. avoiding fire) or whether it is the pure transcendental Ego performing a thought experiment of doubt, or whether it is the social empirical subject, feeling compelled to make a value-loaded decision. This concept of *mineness* (a certain sense of the first person) at work here is not plain awareness. It is a sense of things pertaining to one's self, or being about oneself, that is not only revealed in waking awareness, but also in the structure of experience itself.<sup>35</sup>

Of special interest for us is the case of the basic dimension of the sensory body, which Husserl calls the *aesthetic body*. The sensory body is a system of psychophysical conditionalities

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<sup>34</sup> For the purposes of this section I do not pay much attention to the details of the different subject-formations (pure Ego, Ego, empirical Ego, and subject) that Husserl conceptualizes. In the present case, the level of the empirical Ego is the appropriate one to bring on for a discussion on the dependence of perception on the pragmatic. It is important to bear in mind that the empirical Ego—the subject, as we normally understand it—is a formation with a thick underlying multi-level basis always operating in it, and not a given, ready-made singular independent stratum.

<sup>35</sup> In this, as in other places, are the differences between phenomenology in the phenomenological tradition sense, and 'the phenomenology of X,' in the sense of descriptions of lists of appearances. By investigating the structure of experience itself, a thicker account of the first-person domain is available, one that belongs to the structure of experience (a variety of the conditions for the possibility of experience) in manners other than awareness, and is either revealed in another phenomenon like attention or by means of phenomenological analyses of phenomena. Considerations of space prevent me from expanding on this issue.

that pairs sensory occurrences (or objects understood thereof) with subjective occurrences in the body. The body determines in an important sense "what it is that, as world, stands over and against the subject" (Husserl 1989, 70–80, <65–75>). For one, this purely sensory sense of the body, the corporeal self [*Ichleib*] has the particularity of being a center of reference in relation to which perceptual happenings take place: perceived things are above, to the left, or near; they are disgusting or agreeable; actable upon or not, etc. (1989, 61, <56>; 1997, 124). In fact, every experience of a perceived object or event, in its being perceived as a spatial one, carries with it a sense of *mineness* in the sense that it is indexically situated in relation to me.

Further, the very possibility of coherent perceptions lies in the sense of normality intrinsic to the experience of one's own body, and its contrastive abnormalities. Husserl proposes the following example: "touching something with a blister on my finger, or if my hand has been abraded [...] all the tactual properties of the thing are given differently" (1989, 66, <61>). And yet, in many such cases, it is possible to navigate the world and use a burned finger, being able to successfully deal with the way things feel. The point is that the mere sensory system, not getting yet to higher-level objects and events, configures a domain in which it has authority by virtue of being the sensory body.

There is certain continuity between this line of thought and the analysis offered above about the nature of haptic mechano-receptors. While the previous section examined how the nature of the sensory organ determines part of what can be perceived, Husserl's reflection adds to it the element of mineness that makes part of the corporeal self [*Ichleib*]. The sensation of pain through specialized receptors—e.g. thermal nociceptors that excite fiber groups A $\delta$  and C (Kandel and Schwartz 2000, 432, 442)—is often invoked as primal evidence of what it is like to have a first-person perspective. Keeping up with the tactile case I've offered before, it is plain that whatever sensory configurations a person has, they determine the range of possibilities for a perceiver, and such ranges feature in more nuanced activities: this is why sensory practical expertise is obviously partly an exercise of the basic level of sensory thresholds coupled with

“efferent signals that contribute to motor control,” which in turn constitutes a feedback loop between action and perception (Gallagher and Zahavi 2008, 133). Thus, the skilled tailoring activity of comparing fabrics is partly constituted by the more basic bodily dimension of feeling the fabrics’ thickness. In sum, the workings of the simpler, more basic bodily dimension are constitutive of the activities of ‘higher,’ more comprehensive levels (Husserl 1989, 70–71, 269, 292–293 <66, 257, 280>).

It is fundamental to notice that I am not claiming that the perceptual is *only* the bodily dimension. Instead, the point, so far, is that the perceptual is *partly* constituted by the sensory, bodily level. The perceptual is, in general, determined by the pragmatic level, in which it is nested. For the tailor sensing a piece of fabric, the perceptual element is guided by the pragmatic activity of precisely evaluating a fabric, which is more than a mere touching of a surface.<sup>36</sup>

Nor do I claim, that the sensory or bodily is *only* biological or physiological. In the perceptual interaction with the fabric, there are at work determinations belonging to the sensory aspects of touch. But they are not limited to the physiology of touch, for personal or cultural constraints also shape a person’s sensitivity or a person’s way of using the sensory apparatuses. Notice, however, that to invoke intersubjective (cultural and otherwise) influences in the use of the sense of touch, as belonging to the sensory, bodily level (sensitivity, modes of touching, that is, of applying pressure to the skin), while at the same time claiming that the pragmatic domain (the domain where the subject acts, perceives, values, judges, etc., and which is evidently intersubjectively constituted) determines the workings of perception, makes difficult to regiment what belongs where. What this difficulty shows is precisely the mutually constitutive relation between perceptual and non-perceptual pragmatic aspects.

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<sup>36</sup> Studies in cognitive anthropology, such as Lave and Wenger on learning (1991), or Lave on apprenticeship (2011), are geared towards a different level of analysis: the social organization of the learning process, which includes the activities apprentices are put to as they learn a craft or occupation. Particularly, Jean Lave has studied the case of Vai and Gola tailors in Liberia. In Lave and Wegner we see how apprentices start observing masters do their job and are progressively given tasks, from sewing a button, hemming a cuff or pressing clothes, to more complex activities like cutting and sewing entire garments. While the authors do not speak of the processes of sensory learning, we can safely assume that part of what apprentices learn is a perceptual expertise that becomes one with a social, productive one (1991, 69–72). I regard the continuity of my view with socially rich processes as a strong advantage of it, for it shows the relevance and relatedness of philosophical reflection to sociological and anthropological concerns. I have also shown how my approach is entirely compatible with biological and psychological studies of perception.

Take the Müller-Lyer (so-called) illusion. To this day, the Müller-Lyer case is taken by most philosophers of mind as a proof of the representational character of perception and of its modular character (one can't see the lines of equal length despite knowing they are so). As some social psychologists have shown, however, there is nothing universal or necessary about the perception of the drawing. Some people, the San foragers of the Kalahari, do not see the illusion. Further, the differences in perceived length between the two lines varies, with American and South African-European populations occupying one extreme of the distribution (Henrich, Heine, and Norenzayan 2010, 62). The results are explained thus:

[...] these findings suggest that visual exposure during ontogeny to factors such as the “carpentered corners” of modern environments may favor certain optical calibrations and visual habits that create and perpetuate this illusion. That is, the visual system ontogenetically adapts to the presence of recurrent features in the local visual environment. Because elements such as carpentered corners are products of particular cultural evolutionary trajectories, and were not part of most environments for most of human history, the Müller-Lyer illusion is a kind of culturally evolved by-product (Henrich 2008) [...] this work suggests that even a process as apparently basic as visual perception can show substantial variation across populations. If visual perception can vary, what kind of psychological processes can we be (Henrich, Heine, and Norenzayan 2010, 62).<sup>37</sup>

Whether it is specifically the exposure to carpentered corners or other complex social influences, what is key here is the illustration of Husserl's claim that the bodily dimension, however important it is, can be influenced by intersubjective constraints. The perceptual element is not simply about what sensations *follow* what sensory worldly occurrences. It is about ways of encountering, taking in, and relating to worldly occurrences. As this interaction is pragmatic I now turn to the pragmatic experiencing subject who is the perceiver.

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<sup>37</sup> As scientists start to recognize the possibility of skewed results based on methodological problems, namely, on the fact that brain imaging and psychological experiments are done in more than 90% of the cases on WEIRD populations (Western, educated, industrialized, rich and democratic), the explanatory seeming scientific uniqueness of the biological is rightly called into question (See also Jones 2010). It is impressively telling, to say the least, to see the wide agreement across disciplines that followed Heinrich et al.'s *The WEIRDest people in the World?* in *Brain and Behavioral Sciences*. Commentaries (published in the same issue) by Astuti and Bloch, Boesch, Ceci et al., Chiao and Cheon, Fernald, Fessler, Gächter, Karasit et al., Khemlani et al., Kesebir et al., Konečni, Lancy, among others researchers in social psychology, cognitive anthropology and other behavioral sciences, provides scientific support to the idea of cultural variability in broadly speaking cognitive processes. Particularly for my purposes, the seeming ultimate status of the biological and physiological in discussions of perception seems quite dubious and considerable support is found for the type of mutual constitutive relation between the pragmatic and the perceptual I am arguing for.

- a. *The subject is an active position-taking.* The subject, for Husserl, is not a substance but rather an active being in which a complex underlying basis is in action and is made manifest in the *way* things are dealt with, and even in the *things* that are dealt with. The subject *takes position* in relation to things, goals, persons or situations, and exercises faculties and habits that determine relational stances regarding things (Husserl 1989, 265, <253>). This position-taking of the person is the pragmatic, actional ‘thematization’ of a relation of the subject with aspects the world—*themata* are posited and acted upon them (Husserl 1989, 119–120, <112–113> See also 265ff., <253ff.>).
- b. *The subject’s being in her position-takings is at the level of the full person.* This notion of subject is one that we find in the “fullness of the person,” i.e. concrete human beings in their idiosyncrasies. This is why what is proper of the subject, its business, or what it has a stake in, is to take position according to motivations. Motivations, which Husserl call the “lawfulness of the life of the spirit,” are like reasons, and are opposed to causes. (Husserl 1989, 231, <220>). Thus he says:

[The fullness of the person is] the Ego as human, the ‘I take a position,’ the I think, I value, I act, I complete works, etc. Then there also belongs to me a *basis of lived experiences* and a *basis of nature* (“my nature”) that is manifest in the play of lived experiences. This nature is the lower psychic layer, but it extends even into the sphere of position taking: the position-taking Ego is dependent on its substratum insofar as I, in order to be motivated in my position taking, must have precisely the motivating lived experiences, which stand in an associative nexus and under rules of associative dispositions. (Husserl 1989, 293, <280>)

- c. *The identity that can be accorded to full person is a function of the consistency evinced in her position-takings and comportments.* It is part of the idea of a subject that the subject is the same in all her position-takings, and that in all her position-takings the subject is the same: “As long as I am the one I am, then the position-taking cannot but ‘persist,’ and I cannot but persist in it” (Hua IV, 118–119, <111–112>).

This is an identity thesis between the subject and its activities, that is, between the subject and its positioning itself pragmatically over against things and events: “My thesis, my position-

taking, my deciding from motives [...] is something I have a stake in" (Husserl 1989, 119, <122>).<sup>38</sup>

The identity of the subject is presupposed conventionally but never fully actually determined. Constitution is an ongoing business, which reveals itself in continuous position-takings and comportments of the subject. Thus, we must rather speak of an interactive correlation between a subject and the activities (and objects and situations proper of such activities) pertaining to it, such that the subject determines the character of those activities and is at the same time influenced and further shaped by those activities themselves (see Husserl 1989, Supplements VII, X). In this correlation we find an explanation of a more general idea according to which "the subject develops by living" (Husserl 1989, 264, <252>).

Summarizing, the person as an active, position-taking is "expression" or the "blooming" of lower levels always acting "in" it. We find in person a style of being, a mode of acting, a manner in which things are done, a host of tendencies and preferences, of likings and dislikings. Because of this, it is possible to say that individual positionings and ensuing perceptions or actions are gathered together under the idea of *comportment* [*Verhaltung*] (Husserl 1989, 226-238, <215-226>). The perceiver that we are trying to understand in order to understand her perceiving life *is* or *has* a mode of comporting herself in the world—which is really nothing other than saying that she has—that she *is*—a way of regarding, relating to, an acting upon realities.

Let's us now focus back on the perceptual aspects of pragmatically informed interactions with the world, so as to illustrate and provide some additional arguments for the dependence of the perceptual on the pragmatic that I have been arguing for.

In the view I have been advancing, the 'workings' of perception are not only the contact with already individualized objects, events or state of affairs. The reason is that the focusing on a given particular, with such and such spatial and temporal boundaries, is itself a perceptual happening. When listening to a favorite song, listeners may find themselves paying more

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<sup>38</sup> "Meine Thesis, meine Stellungnahme, mein auf die Motive hin Mich-entscheiden [...] ist meine Sache" (Hua IV 1989, 119, <122>).

attention to the voice or to the drums, or to the melody itself. This focusing on a specific aspect or unity is already perceptual and naturally underlies the more specific perceptually interacting with it. Let me illustrate this.

Research in social cognition has shown differences between the way some Americans visually perceive and the way some East Asians do. Measurements of eye movements when confronted with a visual scene in which focal objects and background can be distinguished yield differential results. “Americans fixated more on focal objects than did the Chinese, and the Americans tended to look at the focal object more quickly. In addition, the Chinese made more saccades to the background than did the Americans” (Chua, Boland, and Nisbett 2005, 12629). Another study by Masuda and Nisbett (2001) presented American and Japanese subjects with a drawing of an aquarium, which included focal objects (mainly fish) and background objects (a section of ground and water bubbles). As reported by Winerman, “Americans were more likely to begin by recalling the focal fish, while Japanese were more likely to describe the whole scene, saying something like “it was a lake or pond.” Later, the Japanese participants also recalled more details about the background objects than the Americans did” (Winerman 2006; Masuda and Nisbett 2001; See also Watters 2013). What these scientific studies show is that basic aspects of visual experience can be culturally constituted, and can’t hence be assumed to be universal: “eye movements can differ as a function of culture” (Chua, Boland, and Nisbett 2005, 12631).

Thus, the subject plays a role in the specific thematization of objects and events she faces—whether in observing a copper bowl it is the entire bowl that is the object of perception, or rather parts of it, or even the scene in which the bowl is placed (Husserl 1973, 117). Not only the singling out of objects and events is the product of a position-taking of the subject; both the span in which attention is paid to things, and the specific interaction between perception and action are also influenced by the positioning of the subject vis-à-vis aspects of reality. Chua et al. conclude also that “Easterners and Westerners allocated attentional resources differently as



they viewed the scenes” (2005, 12631). Well-known change-blindness cases well illustrate that perception is not about the passive receiving of ‘*the way the world is,*’ but is rather a take on the way the world is. As a matter of fact, one thing in common to the experiments I just reviewed and to the view that links perception and attention is that they entail the falsity of the claim that perception is a one-one reproduction of sensory impulses.<sup>39</sup>

Further, in Husserl’s view, we perceive unities (objects, events, states of affairs) and not isolated properties of mere bundles of them. Oftentimes, though, unities are perceived *as* also having other aspects or properties of different sorts (importantly *parts*), which allows for switching of attention between aspects (Husserl 1997, 28–30, <33–36>; Husserl 2001b, 116–119).<sup>40</sup> For Husserl, unities are not simply grasped, but rather ‘posited,’ that is, objectivated or individualized in the very grasping of them. It is not that we *create* the unities that we perceive. Rather, in our perceiving determinate unities, we are active in focusing on such unities: “The activity of perception, the perceptive orientation toward particular objects [...] is already an active performance of the ego” (1973, 71–72).<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Cognitive anthropology research is a burgeoning area of research in which evidence for the pragmatic-dependence of perception can be found, but only after such research is subject to critical analysis. Part of this research program focuses on inference-based reasoning in decision-making contexts, and on categorization and conceptualization between different communities shows such cognitive processes vary across cultures, depending on a variety of factors (See Atran et al. 2002; Atran, Medin, and Ross 2005). These researchers mostly work within theoretical frameworks of modularized minds with impenetrable perceptual modules (Medin and Atran 2004, 963). However, the findings of their research, when subject to a careful conceptual analysis partly using the view of perception I have been putting forth, would instead imply that perception does not only feed cognitive processes but that such cognitive processes influence perception. Upon careful analysis, it seems difficult to hold that communities that are more aware of ecological relations between living beings are only conceptually and inferentially aware, and not that part of their awareness has to do with a perceptual sensitivity, perhaps similar to the structure of vision of East Asians and Japanese people I reviewed above. As Bang et al. note “Recent research, however, shows that content and process cannot be neatly segregated, because cultural differences in what people think affect how people think. To achieve a deeper understanding of the relation between process and content, research must integrate the methodological insights from both anthropology and psychology” (Bang, Medin, and Atran 2007, 13868). A somewhat close reading shows that their research is not only about what we *think*, but about what we deal with, that is, with pragmatic objects in which perception occupies a central role. And, in fact, philosophy can also contribute to such deeper understanding.

<sup>40</sup> Affordances, that is, opportunities or impediments for action afforded by the object-in-context to the individual, are also part of these perceived unities. They will be treated in terms of content in the next chapter. I urge the reader to not yield to the temptation to equal the talk of unities or objects with talk of content. A clear construction of the idea of content requires a different strategy that I do not employ yet.

<sup>41</sup> One last piece of evidence for the pragmatic dependence of perception on research on what’s called the *cognitive penetrability* of perception, namely, that perceptual experience is can be affected by other cognitive, extra-perceptual aspects of the actions one is involved in. For a related discussion see (Deroy 2012). A recently published study, *Rituals Enhance Consumption*, found that participants that engaged in “ritualized behavior” regarding consumption of chocolate, experienced chocolate much more positively than those that didn’t engage in such behavior (Vohs et al.

Think of a tree. Looking at the tree as a whole or focusing on one branch of it is not a process that depends exclusively on the nature of an external reality—as if to one scene only one perception could belong. Rather, the grasping of the tree, or of a branch of it (or even of the landscape of which the tree is a part) is an accomplishment of perception, which is properly described as a ‘positing’ or establishing of unities (Husserl 1983, 278–282, <241–245>).<sup>42</sup> To put it in terms of appearances, each of these cases is about taking in one or another of the many ways in which the tree appears. And this is, I have been urging, *entirely* direct and realist. The tree is just as real as the branch. Perceiving on one or the other, or switching between them is clearly our doing, but is not an invention—it is a *take* on reality. Lastly, as I have been arguing in this section, this focusing on different aspects that are perceived as unities is dependent on the pragmatic level. The possibilities for attentional and actional changes *over time* (in the temporally extended perceptual nexus we have been focusing on, instead of snapshot perceptual instants) are also pragmatically delineated depending on what I want to do with something, even if I just want to contemplate an object.<sup>43</sup>

SEP holds that the right account of perceptual content must accurately reflect the complexity of our perceptual experience, their dynamism, and their objects’ nature. We also want a theory of content that helps us understand how all these elements hang together, from basic sensory contacts in with the world to higher-level perceptions—chapters 3, 4, and 5 will deal with these desiderata. Thus, on the basis of this account of perceptual experience, I now turn to the relation between experience and content. In the following chapter, I will look at how a conception of experience entails requirements and desiderata for a theory of content. I will

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2013, 1714). In this case, researchers highlight that ritualized behavior increases engagement in the action, hence causing a heightened, and more pleasant, perceptual experience.

<sup>42</sup> For Husserl, any intentional act whatever “even emotional and volitional acts—are objectivating, constituting objects originally [and are thus] necessary sources of different regions of being [*Seinsregionen*] and (with them) their belonging ontologies” (1983, 282, <242>). Perception is one instantiation of this ‘archontic’ character of intentional acts.

<sup>43</sup> In chapters 4 and 5, I will have occasion to flesh out this idea. Specifically, I will show how focusing on certain objects in specific ways is intrinsically structured in terms of content, both self-referentially and in relation to other relevant aspects of the environment. This means that internal and external horizons of possible fulfillments are already at work in the objects we perceive, such that they determine the possibilities and impossibilities of perceptual nexuses (See 1973, 103–106, 122; Husserl 1970, 165; Husserl 1983, 322–23, <279>; Drummond 1990, 150–151).

analyze the representationalist take on that connection and will articulate the way the Social Enactive View deals with that problem.

## Chapter III

### Perceptual Experience and Perceptual Content

An important difficulty for theories of perceptual content issues from the multiplicity of discussions in which perceptual content is invoked, dealt with, used for or against. It has a place in theories about the nature of perception and perceptual experience (Husserl 2001b; Husserl 1983; Merleau-Ponty 2002; Snowdon 1992; Logue 2012; Schellenberg Forthcoming), the relation between perception and action (Hurley 1998; Noë 2004; Hutto and Myin 2013; Schellenberg 2007; Thompson 2009), the relation between perception and environment (Gibson 1979; Almäng 2008; Heidegger 2010; Hurley 1998), in discussion about the use and need (or lack thereof) of concepts in perception (Tye 2005; Bermúdez 2007; Toribio 2007), and, prominently, in discussions about the connection between perceptions and epistemological justification, that is, about the specific justificatory role perceptions ought to have in regards to belief and action, mostly in conceptualist frameworks (McDowell 1994; Peacocke 1992; Hopp 2011; Brewer 2005; Schellenberg 2011). This diversity seems to pull the concept in every direction, making it difficult to offer a comprehensive, stable account of it.

Let's start off with a common (but useless) definition of content: *perceptual content* is what is *contained* in the perceptual act. This is far from clear, for, what would it mean for the objects of perception to be contained in such container? If what is at stake, as I have been arguing, is the general question of what perception is *about*, i.e. it is not clear what and how should be contained in the mind, and not at all clear that, as to their content (not to mention others aspects), perception's contents are common factors with other mental states such as beliefs or hallucinations. If perception is about the direct acquaintance with sequences and transitions, and not just with static objects, how would exactly the container metaphor work? Does the mind contain the world? Or is it perhaps a replica?

I propose that instead we begin with a minimal idea linking content with aboutness: content is *that which the perceptual experience is about*—the *what* of the perceptual aboutness relation.<sup>1</sup> We start with perceptual experience as I have described in the previous chapter.

The previous chapter's account of perceptual experience makes some headway in treating the problem of content. Perceptual experience, I argued, is not an inner occurrence, product of external interaction, although it is 'accompanied' and partly characterized *by* the phenomenal character or 'what-it-is-like' of a thing perceived. Perceptual experience is *of* spatial and temporal extended occurrences in the world—objects, events, and states of affairs, each of which I referred to as perceptual continua. I argued too that each of these continua can be understood as "a chain of resting perceptions, unified by transitional phenomena, in which various sides and parts of the thing present themselves in a stable way" (1997, 83, 76, <98,89>).<sup>2</sup> I have proposed to understand these "sides and parts" of things according to the basic insight that, in perception, perceivers are presented with aspects or appearances (perspectives or profiles) of real objects; such appearances being the way in which physical occurrences are presented, and can only be presented, in perception. Physical occurrences—material objects but also smells—cannot be experienced by perceivers but in perspectival sequences: not even a God, Husserl has said, would *perceive* material objects in their fullness (and unless God enjoyed an embodied existence it would not *perceive* at all) (Pietersma 2000, 62); the idea of a full, immediate, total grasp of a spatiotemporal event is a misleading fiction. Lastly, I argued that the aspects we perceive in things are dependent on interaction with perceivers—they are relational properties; perceivers are situated over against things not only temporally and spatially but also pragmatically.

The account I propose conceives of content as constituted by, and methodologically derived from, perceptual experience. Experience is the actuality of the aboutness of mind of minded

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<sup>1</sup> I follow Husserl in the basic definition of intentionality that puts it at the core of our mental life—which is not the same as "inner" life. "Every conscious process is, in itself, consciousness *of* such and such [...] intentionality signifies nothing else than this universal fundamental property of consciousness: to be consciousness *of* something" (Husserl 1999, 33, <71–71>, emphasis is Husserl's; See also Husserl 1983, 73, <64>). Although Brentano can be credited with bringing the notion of intentionality into philosophical psychology, I follow, though critically, Husserl's treatment of it. Husserl was a student of Brentano.

<sup>2</sup> A full qualification of the sense in which the perceptual objects is a sequence or a continuum (already mentioned in chapter 2) is presented in chapter 4, section 1.

beings and content is a type of specification of aboutness, thus, content is constituted by the actual experience of things. For SEP, content is partly constituted by, not just supervenes on, perceptual experience.<sup>3</sup>

I will thus start clean of a commitment to perceptual contents as inner structures. This can be called a version of intentionalism without representationalism. It could also be referred to as a type of externalist relationalism that conceives of relations as practical engagements, as *interactions*, instead of the more general *relation*. In particular, it is a type of externalism as to the contents of intentions that could be called *interactive externalism*. I prefer, however, the denomination *enactivism*, because of the explicit emphasis on the active aspect of perception and its positioning in contrast to the orthodoxy in philosophy of mind. Because of the constitutive role I assign to intersubjectivity at multiple levels of analysis (practices, experiences, properties, and contents), the appropriate label is *social enactivism* (that would be a *social interactive externalism*).

In this chapter, I develop an account of the constitutive relation between experience and content. Whatever roles content may play in relation to a theory of perception overall—to the relation between perception and action and behavior, to the role of the environment, to the need for concepts, or to epistemological justification—it depends on what perceptual experience is. While in this chapter I will talk some more about experience and will start discussing content in particular, but my focus is on the *relation* between these two concepts.

I situate my positive account over against representationalism, the main and longest-standing line of thought in the literature. This view keeps mind and world separate, mind inner, and perception mostly a matter of a detached acquaintance of a mind with a world, in which reason is called to sort out the contingent results of perception. These elements resonate at the level of perceptual content in the shape of an intellectualistic concern for ‘veridicality’ that operates in the distinction inner/outer, in the role of reason, inference and judgment in

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<sup>3</sup> It is worth noting already that on this view, the objects of perception are also contents, pace (Hopp 2011), but not every aspect, part or property that counts as content is an object.

perception, and in the extension of linguistic analysis of content to analysis of perceptual content.

I take Chalmers (2006) to be a representative example of standard theories of perception. The way of thinking he represents takes the notion of *veridicality* (roughly understood as correspondence) to be *central* to perceptual experience and to perceptual content. I attempt to reveal how this concern for veridicality synthesizes a wrong way of addressing perception. Continuing the line of thinking I began to craft in chapter 2, I will offer further arguments against the supposed epistemological incompatibility between the reality of perceptual objects and the multiplicity of their appearances on which the central concern for veridicality depends.

As I will show in chapter 5, SEP has a proposal to offer regarding the narrow concern for veridicality of representational theories. Normativity in SEP is not about confirming whether our perceptions correspond to the world but about the placement of perceptual things in the system of possibilities and expectations that I first presented in chapter 1. This account is not intra-perceptual but rather pragmatically nested, and sensitive to intra-modal and multi-modal relations.

This conception of the relation between experience and content furnishes one more element for the social enactive theory of perception I am building—a conception of perception that feels at home in the actual world. SEP is a theory that finds our contact with the world neither *mysterious* nor *deficient*, as Chalmers does, and thus need not resort to extra-perceptual inferences from appearances to reality in order to get by, or to hypothetical perfect worlds to understand the intrinsic consistency of the world.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> This social enactive account of perception aims at dealing with not only technical aspects of the philosophy of perception but with key epistemological issues regarding the relation between mind and world—it is not only about the details of our perceptual engagement with stuff in the world, but also about the way in which our perceptual engagement with the world constitutes the basis of our knowing, full stop, and of our knowing the world. In this way, I express the belief that a philosopher's theory of perception certainly marks her epistemology. This is undoubtedly the case in Husserl, and in Merleau-Ponty as well, who have been a great influence on the account I offer. The social enactive view of experience I am arguing for is sympathetic to realist (naïve and direct), relationalist, and disjunctivist views of perception (Sellars (2000), McDowell (1994), Cussins (1992), Snowdon (1992; 2008), Martin and Campbell (2002), among others).

### 3.1. The Relation between Perceptual Experience and Perceptual Content

Experience constitutes itself the ground on which perceivers are able to be in perceptual relation with the world, and which explains the diverse connections between world and subjects in terms of perception, action, and thought. The dependent relation between experience and content also justifies my constant looking at experience in order to derive insights about content. Experience determines the content of our perceptions, both thematically and phenomenally. It is not possible to talk about perceptual content without deriving it from the specificity of perception as experienced.

It is hard to overestimate what is entailed by the conception of experience as interaction I am offering and its relation to content, for it stands in a diametric contrast with standard theories of perception. It is an extended view among philosophers, both classical modern and contemporary, that experience in general—not just perceptual—is an inner occurrence endowed with content. Content is thought of as abstractly detachable from the experience, propositional in structure (even if not always conceptual (See e.g. Tye 2005)), and accompanied by (perhaps sometimes constituted by) a certain what-it-is-like to be in such state, what-it-is-like to possess such content (possessing such content being determined by being in such state). The experiences themselves are mental, inner states—to experience something is to be in a mental state—and the contents themselves are abstract entities—propositions—essentially modeled after the manner of beliefs, indicated in *that*-clauses. Because of their propositional nature, contents are in a way common currency for different types of mental states. On this view, experiences of different kinds are (at least partly) individuated according to their contents, and perceptions, memories, or desires may have common content.

In representationalist views about perception, to perceive an object is thought to be having an inner experience that is caused in a sensory appropriate way by the object perceived. The perceptual experience itself is a mental state with content, composed of representational and phenomenal aspects. Representational content represents the world to be a certain way; and



some take it that the phenomenal content is representational content that is determined by phenomenal character (Chalmers 2006, 50–51). Content is a “condition of satisfaction of the experience,” and philosophers hold different opinions about the details of these contents: they feature objects and properties (Russellian content) or modes of presentation of objects and of properties (Fregean content), or mixes thereof. The content is a ‘condition of satisfaction’ in that it can render the experience veridical, in case it corresponds to the world, or non-veridical, if it doesn’t. In other words, contents are partly derived from their inferential role in the life of a rational subject (See Chalmers 2006, 100). A perceiver is guided, on this view, by rational patterns of *judgment* about what they *seem* to perceive.

The representationalist view requires a greater analysis, to which I now turn. I will use Chalmers’ *Perception and the Fall from Eden* as a foil. I do find Chalmers’s account of content to be profoundly illuminating in a number of ways—albeit illuminating in virtue of the ways in which it is wrong. I can anticipate two reasons why I chose Chalmers. The first one is that, while he tries to sort out different representational views, he is still committed to the general tenets of representationalism. The second reason is that he does not simply *assume* the truth of such a view (which he does). He also tries to account for its main features, by mean of the rhetorical strategy of a *myth*. In my view, this *mythologizing* strategy allows us to lay bare the ideal character of representationalism about perception, especially as seen in the concern for veridicality.<sup>5</sup>

### **3.2 The Polemics with Chalmers: Visiting the Garden of Eden for The First Time**

I am going to be using Chalmers’s account as a foil, thus, let’s state in a few lines the main theses of his account of perceptual content (2006). Chalmers’s position is that the content of perception is a propositionally structured content, satisfying two central desiderata, namely, veridicality and presentational phenomenal character. Following these two desiderata, Chalmers

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<sup>5</sup> In this sense SEP is a *non-ideal* theory of perception since it does not idealize its objects, or its modes of exploration, or its goals. The engagement with Augustine in the analysis of the materiality of the perceptual object done in chapter 2 also has the purposes of showing this contrast between ideality and non-ideality.

concludes that content should be understood as a combination of Fregean content and of Edenic content. Edenic content (featuring perfect instantiation of ideal perfect properties) deals with the *phenomenological adequacy desideratum*, or *presentational desideratum*, that is, with the idea that perceptual content must account for the presentational sense in which objects and properties look to us.<sup>6</sup> Edenic content carries the idea of perfect veridicality: an experience is perfectly veridical when it instantiates a perfect property in a perfect world: “The perfect veridicality of color experience would require that our world is an Edenic world, in which objects instantiate primitive color properties” (2006, 69). Fregean content (featuring ways of presentation of objects and properties) deals with the *veridicality desideratum*, that is, with content being a condition of experience, such that the experience is veridical iff the world turns out to be the way perceptual experience (re)presents it to be. Fregean content veridicality, though, is imperfect veridicality: “it is plausible that imperfect veridicality is the property that our ordinary term ‘veridicality’ denotes. We speak truly when we say that a phenomenally red experience of an ordinary red object is veridical. It is just that the experience is not perfectly veridical” (2006, 70). The idea is that the veridical aspect of an experience is determined by content that needs only to *match* perfect properties, that is, “to play the role that perfect redness [properties] plays in Eden” which is to normally bring about red (property-specific) experiences (2006, 72). The content of the veridicality desideratum is an (imperfect) veridicality derivative of a true veridicality, which is captured Edenic content captures. On Chalmers’s view, only one type of content is unable to explain both salient aspects of perceptual content, so we need to be ‘pluralists’ about content. Chalmers’s investigation, to be sure, centers on visual perception, with a special focus on color perception. Despite this narrow focus, he contends that this model can, without substantial modifications, be extended to all other perceptual modalities.

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<sup>6</sup> Chalmers rules out Russellian content (featuring objects and properties) as phenomenal content, on the grounds that it would treat identical phenomenal experiences as having different contents, that is, there would be, for instance, “no Russellian content that is shared by all phenomenally red experiences” (2006, 57), which seems to Chalmers an intuitive must-have of phenomenal content. Edenic content though would be a pseudo-Russellian content that takes perfect properties as the properties it is associated with. Siegel (2011a, 29–30) reads Chalmers’s Edenic content plainly as another type of Russellian content.

But what exactly, and how, is wrong with the view that I take him to represent? And why is it incompatible with the view I propose? I want to explore some fundamental aspects of the standard way of looking at perceptual experience and perceptual content, which I find quite clearly exhibited in Chalmers.

Chalmers articulates his position through a myth of a perceptual Eden. Chalmers thinks this myth helps us make sense of our perceptual situation, by understanding ourselves as being engaged in a perceptually deficient manner with the world. Chalmers says that our perceptual predicament is that of beings that were once in a Garden of Eden, directly perceiving object of the world and perfect properties. We were acquainted with objects directly, and directly perceived “gloriously, perfectly, and primitively” their perfect properties, the roundness and redness of round, red apples. “Objects were presented to us without causal mediation, and properties were *revealed* to us in their true intrinsic glory” (Chalmers 2006, 49. Emphasis mine). Then we ate the fruits of two trees, the tree of illusion and the tree of science.<sup>7</sup>

We ate of the Tree of Illusion. After that, objects and their properties, which before appeared as they were, now appeared with “different colors and shapes at different times.” Perspectival differences in shapes or loudness of sounds, for instance, are to be sure a product of our eating of this tree. After this change “we could no longer accept that visual experience always revealed the world exactly as it is” (Chalmers 2006, 49).

We ate of the Tree of Science. After that, direct perception was not possible anymore, for there was a “long causal chain,” from the microphysical structure of objects responsible for the physical occurrences that affect our sensory endings, through a medium (e.g. air for sound or for light on earth), to the anatomical and physiological structure on our part that ‘mediates’ the

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<sup>7</sup> Carefully observed these are the two strategies belonging to the well-known argument from illusion, called the phenomenological argument (corresponding to Chalmers’s tree of Illusion) and the causal argument (corresponding to Chalmers’s tree of Science), with which H.H. Price objects to naïve realism, in his classic *Perception* (1950). It is notable as well that while sense-data theory has long been discredited, the two varieties of arguments that were there actually heavily argued for, are now presented in this mythical way that requires of no justification. On the argument from illusion see (Price 1950 ch. 2; see also Ayer 1947 esp. ch. 1). For a contemporaneous critique to that view see (Austin 1962). As a matter of fact, the natural opposition between the argument from illusion and naïve realism in which Price frames his theory mirrors very closely in the contemporary discussion, for instance, in Chalmers and in Siegel (Siegel 2010, 28–29).

nerve stimulations ‘before’ we ‘experience’ the ‘qualities’ of objects and their properties. These facts make the connection between our ‘experience’ and objects merely contingent, and motivate the reasoning according to which “there was [is] no good reason to believe that objects in the world had [have] these properties at all” (2006, 50)

The upshot of the narrative is that tree-eating gives us reasons to be worried about the veridicality of our perceptions but still gives a sense to what it is like to perceive. Edenic pre-tree-eating states provide notwithstanding philosophical substance to what we should rationally expect from the contents of perception, as well as an account of the feeling that we have when we perceive: they should satisfy a presentational and a veridicality desiderata. Eden is the standard for both desiderata. Perception of the perfection of objects and properties gives content to the idea that there is something like a veridical perceiving of things (of which our illusions are but defects)—a *veridicality desideratum*; and the perfect, non-causal type of acquaintance with objects in Eden gives content to the idea that in perception things are directly presented to us—a *presentational desideratum*. Chalmers’s account will be a two-stage one: “experiences have two layers of content, an Edenic content that reflects their phenomenology and a Fregean content that determines their veridicality” (2006, 93).

Chalmers’s rationale connects ideality and veridicality and is specified in his case in terms of both the presentational and the veridicality desiderata depending on the ideal of Eden. This ideal presentation is as a matter of fact derived from the actual presentation of the world, but idealized and then turned back against the real world and the perception of it, which are then both labeled as lacking. Chalmers’s characterization the situation of perception is erroneous and his use of this myth makes it easier for us to see how and why this philosophical outlook is basically at odds with perception, both conceptually and in the everyday workings of perception.

If my argument is sound it should serve as a rejection of Fregean accounts of content, first, but also of other specification of content, i.e. Russellian, that operates on the idea of a veridicality desideratum. The reason is that I not only attack the specification of content but

mainly its original epistemological motivation. While Chalmers's attempt at accommodating the presentational character of experience is far better than Fregean-content-only accounts it is still dependent on a conception of perfection with an epistemological aim, in the sense of a narrow concern for *things telling the truth*. Thus, my objections are fundamentally against views that articulate perception as lacking in relation to an ideal perception, perfect acquaintance with objects or properties, or truthful knowledge of things. Most representational theories are of this kind and so my objections extend to them.

### **3.3 Eating from The Tree of Science and The Presentational Desideratum**

According to Chalmers, the presentational character of a perception, namely, that objects and properties of objects appear as if they were presented to us "directly and immediately" must be accounted for in a theory of content (2006, 65). This entails that we perceive things as if they were in Eden: "the phenomenology of visual experience is the same in our world and in Eden" (2006, 98). Lastly, in this ideal place, "visual experience presents a world where perfect redness and perfect blueness are instantiated on the surface of objects, as they were in Eden" (2006, 66).

The seeming clarity in Chalmers' claim that perception in Eden was direct masks a deep confusion. Austin has rightfully noted that 'directly' is "one of the less conspicuous snakes in the linguistic grass" (15). According to Austin, 'directly' only operates *in contrast* with 'indirectly,' both at home in the visual perception case. In vision, indirectly would mean, for instance, seeing something with a periscope or a mirror. If this is the case, then the confusion is easily dispelled: we are directly looking at the reflection and 'indirectly' only signals a certain strangeness about the situation. Or it can be an extreme case we may not be perceiving at all as with the case of someone that 'hears indirectly' could only be the case of that person being told something (Austin 1962, 15–19).

Chalmers define directness first, and he does in reference to an ideal world: as *lack of mediation* and as *contact with perfect properties*—which would allow for "appearance of directness,"

which we witness. In the analysis I am about to provide, I will argue that such a notion is empty, because there is nothing that can back it up—it is the typical type of rationalistic notion to which Berkeley’s Hylas would object. I will also show that the characterization of directness in Chalmers’ terms is only compatible with the metaphysics of gardens of Eden, but not with the structure of the material world as we know it.

In contrast, SEP begins with the phenomenological idea that for something to be direct is to be experienced. Or as Husserl puts it: “Experience in the first and most pregnant sense is [...] defined as a direct relation to the individual” (1973, 27), where relation is not simply an inner occurrence. Although the burden of the proof is in the view that insists on indirectness, I will show that the constraints Chalmers’ imposes on “directness” do not make sense in relation to the sensory-based interaction between perceivers and world that we call perception. In keeping with the theory of appearances I have been developing, we will be able to see that actual perception is nothing but direct.

The burden of the proof lies in those that deny directness, for surely in their objection, to borrow Austin expression, “perceiving indirectly wears the trousers” (Austin 1962, 15). So, can Chalmers make a plausible positive case for what he thinks is *real perceptual directness*? Thus, These are two points mixed up in Chalmers’s notion of the presentational desideratum and the fruit of the tree of science, namely: one point (A) is about the idea that *to directly perceive objects and properties is incompatible with any form of mediation*, and the second (B) is about a (confused) notion of an ideal of the perception of objects and properties, embodied in the idea that *to directly perceive objects and properties is to perceive perfect properties*, and that to actually perceive objects and properties is to be understood in contrast to that ideal.

I start with the first point (A), namely, that directness is incompatible with mediation. The rationale is that direct perception is not possible after the fall, for there is now a “long causal chain” from the microphysical structure in objects responsible for the physical occurrences that affect our sensory endings, through a medium (e.g. air for sound or for light on earth), to the

anatomical and physiological structure on our part that ‘mediates’ the nerve stimulations ‘before’ we ‘experience’ the ‘qualities’ of objects and their properties, to the actual experience of those qualities. This is, in other words, that microphysical structure is not transparent, as it were, and needs a decoding or deciphering, an anatomical and physiological structure on our part that ‘mediates’ the nerve stimulations ‘before’ we ‘experience’ the ‘qualities’ of objects and their properties, and a processing that underlies out actually perceiving.

In order to conclude from the existence of the causal chain that direct perception is not the case for perception, Chalmers needs to have in mind something that *does* count as direct, immediate perception, i.e. that which was the case in Eden. Roughly, it has to be something like this: perception is the *revelation* to a subject of objects and objects’ intrinsic properties. These objects and properties must be some non-reducible properties on the part of the object—let’s call it a one-dimensional-property—that coupled with a one-dimensional-property-*feeler* (on the part of the subject), ‘excitable’ in an all-or-nothing way by the presence, period (no intensities or thresholds allowed), of the one-dimensional property. Such ‘excitation’ itself constitutes the revelation-like acquaintance that Chalmers wants to refer to as direct, immediate perception in Eden.

I object to the first point with two arguments: the first one (i) is about what it is to perceive physical, spatiotemporally characterized realities—a more exclusively metaphysical argument, although not exempt from epistemological implications—, and the second one (ii) is about the phenomenal aspect of perception—also metaphysical but with more evident epistemological implications.

My first argument (i) is about the most basic structure of this particular type of active engagement with things in the world that we call perception. What idea of one-dimensional property and its relative ‘feeler’ Chalmers had in mind? This notion may be found in something as basic as the repulsive force of a negative and a positive electrically charged particles, one of them taking the hypothetical place of the property and the other of the feeler, and their

perceptual interaction being simply the reacting to each other unqualifiedly in virtue of nothing else than their nature, no process mediating, where the feeler is not only excited but where there's something that it is like to feel that property. Does this model apply somehow to perception?

The closer we can get to such a revelation-like acquaintance with things would be something defined as a case of one-dimensional signaling. Let's consider the case of a tick, studied by von Uexküll and reported by Clark, "which is sensitive to butyric acid found in the mammalian skin. Butyric acid, when detected, induces the tick to lose its hold on a branch and to fall on the animal" (Clark 1998, 24). While it is fairly clear that the tick is not able to entertain a phenomenal experience so that we are actually witnessing mere behavioral response, let's imagine for a moment that there is something for the tick that it is like to detect, to perceive, butyric acid. Details aside, Chalmers's argument is that by definition not even this supposed one-to-one matching of acid and detection can amount to direct perception because butyric acid has a chemical composition (in this case micro-chemical, not microphysical, structure) and certainly the tick possesses a detector-reactor system, a system that biochemically processes or interprets the impulse at stake.

First, I just don't see an argument for the presence of a structure or composition in both objects of perception and the perceiver as a requirement on direct perception. If one understands the world as perceivable in virtue of being a material world made of physicochemical stuff—as I think we should conceive of it—, and observes that some living beings take heed of that world in the manner that we call perception, which is precisely their being able to take up such physicochemical reality, in ways that are idiosyncratic to them and indescribable outside the perceiving relation, then we can only say that the perceivers' *experiences* are constituted by both object and subject sides and are the only possible way of defining what it is like to perceive something. And this is the case because there are conceptual reasons to suppose, for instance, that the stuff that we humans perceive as colors is *not necessarily* something that must be



perceived *visually* by every perceiver able to discriminate or react to that specific range of the electromagnetic spectrum. By the same token, in the case of visual perceivers I see no obstacle to the effect that two subjects, or communities, will experience, for instance, the same physical reality in different ways. Inverted spectrum scenarios pose no problem to my view, as I hold that perceiving a certain property is not only a matter of the physical existence of the thing but about the interaction between perceiver and thing, provided a *constitution* is present on both sides. Additional considerations of intersubjective coherence and consistency in ranges of properties (in the case of systematic inversion) still at work in inverted communities (which I have no space to touch upon here), rule out plain exceptional misperceptions. And yet, only a full view of the way I conceive of the domain of *normativity* in perception as opposed to the narrow concern for veridicality, which shall wait until the next chapter, will allow me to offer a positive account of ‘misperceptions.’ These considerations should suffice for the moment to explain my position regarding inverted spectrum-like worries.

And yet, for those perceivers equipped like humans in regards to this range of the spectrum, to perceive frequencies within that range means to *see* them: *seeing* not having other definition than that which is felt or perceived when we use our visual system and direct it, in the broader context of our perceived world, to what is usable under it, that is, to reflected light, to *visibilia*<sup>8</sup>—a domain physically described as a range of frequencies of electromagnetic radiation, all of which is not visible; and some of which could be, for other living perceivers, perceivable in manners that would be impossible for us to feel or describe.

Chalmers may object that I have not refuted the idea that the perceptual causal chain forbids directness, which rests on a description of such causal chain that goes like this: emission of physical events that would count as stimuli *precedes* their transmission through a medium, which is *prior* to the arrival of such stimuli to sensory receptors, and the excitation of sensory receptors is temporally *previous* to processing in the brain and its final perceptual output (which

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<sup>8</sup> For a view along these basic conceptual lines see (Aristotle 2001, 100 (418a25-418a30)).

may in itself feature a certain temporal *sequence*, say between centers processing the sensory modal-specific information and centers enabling the awareness of such information in sensory-specific manner). My answer to this is that, first, arguing that pre-neural temporal sequence amounts to lack of directness is question-begging, for it is like saying that I don't directly see the paper in front of me *because* the light takes time, however infinitesimal, from its surface to my retina, or that I don't directly smell the freshly-baked bread in the bakery *because* smell is transmitted through the air. Whatever the details we find in these pictures of perceptual contact with the world, situations like those just described are what we in the first place call *direct*. This physical aspect of the perception of things in the world is not what is philosophically relevant as to the directness (or lack thereof) of perception. Mediation is not a sufficient condition for the denial of directness, insofar as the presence of a medium for light or sound cannot be interpreted in any important sense as preventing directness.

Further, there is a more significant answer, one dealing with the neurological aspect of it. My answer to the possible objection that causality finds support in object temporality—that there is a *percept* that is the end-product of a chain of events preceding it—is that while there is an objective time dimension involved in the neurological processing that is a necessary condition for perception to occur, this means neither that the temporality of perceptual experience is that of objective time (so that the 'final product' is to be taken as 'final'), nor that objective time sequences of neural events somehow proves that experience is an inner event, in this case identified with a brain event (so that we can speak of one perception finishing with a mental event, i.e. a mental image, conceptually isolated from the next 'perception' or image). To deny the identification between experience and brain event is not to deny that the brain event is a necessary condition of having a perceptual experience.

For one, the point is definitional: that there is a set of neural events necessary for a complex perceiver to have perceptual experience is not identical with saying that having a perceptual experience is to be in one of those neurological states. As the discussion in chapter 5 about a

possible common factor between hallucinations and perception will make clear, perception cannot be defined independently of the environment, and so, brain processes are rather “a kind of complex adjustment that the brain has to undergo, in each context, in order that you can be visually related to the things around you; so that you can see them, in other words” (Campbell 2002, 119, 131). To perceive, then, is not to be in a certain mental but to be perceptually related to the environment, which brain activity partly enables a perceiver to do.

The point is not to deny that there is a causal aspect to perception. What I deny is the characterization of this causal aspect as a sequence that starts with objects emitting impulses and finishes with a mental, inner event identified with the experience of the property associated with the objective impulse, that is, a representation in the classical sense. The causal aspect of perception includes physical configuration on the part of the object as well as physical configuration on the part of the perceiver, but this causal aspect—not perception itself—is a confluence of causal-sensitive aspects rather than a matter of a linear chain ending with a mental event.

A proper understanding of the causal aspect involved in perception does, in fact, contribute to undermining the claim that there is a conceivable ideal of perception in contrast to which perception involving a causal aspect is deficient, indirect, or otherwise distorting. Further, the causal aspect is only necessary but not sufficient, for concrete perceptual experience requires grounding in terms of the unity of consciousness that is necessitated by the idea of experience itself, which we may call perceptual consciousness, and this consciousness is not to be found in the causal sequence we’ve been discussing. These causal events *enable* perception to take place, but what they enable is not a representation but a direct *relation* with object, events, or states of affairs. Such relation or engagement, which we refer to as experience and that as such entails an underlying structure of experiential consciousness, is what perception consists in.

This connection between experience and consciousness is supported when we look at the issue from the point of view of the temporality of experience, that is, to the temporal structure

belonging to our consciousness of our experience. The main contention here, as it pertains to our topic, is that the temporal structure of experience is not the objective temporality of linear, sequential “punctual or instantaneous nows” (Thompson 2009, 318; See also Gallagher and Zahavi 2008). In other words, the idea of a subject able to engage with the world in perceptual experience requires a temporality that is not that of objective time. The issue of perceptual consciousness temporality would be a matter of an entire book, so I will limit myself to outline a couple of relevant considerations.<sup>9</sup>

As I have argued in the previous chapter, perception does not occur in static isolation, but in enactive dynamic sequences of perceptual continua: to perceive an object is not to entertain isolated snapshots (which in itself would not either speak necessarily in favor of inner representations as their end-product) but a continuously perceiving oneself the same object over time, either as one simply observes it (which in this view is still active) or as one more actively interacts with it (Gallagher 2005, 173–205). This continuity is mutually implied with a

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<sup>9</sup> Kant’s Transcendental Deduction is an obliged reference in this issue, namely, the issue of the unity of consciousness that makes possible our cognition of objects—the transcendental unity of apperception—and the question of whether such unity can be presupposed as existing independently from the activity of the understanding in which it is involved, or it only becomes the unity it is when it takes in such activity, or whether its structure features both aspects. Husserl, and specifically his philosophy of perception, makes the relationship between consciousness and experience a central concern of its philosophical project. Particularly, his “Lectures on Thing and Space”, the *Studies on Constitution* (partly of the subject), the analyses on active and passive synthesis and on the consciousness of internal time exhibit a careful treatment of the way in which an account of the idea of a consciousness is correlative with, and necessary to, an account of the idea of experience and its associated notion of meaning. It is worth also mentioning that this type of inquiry into the very possibility of knowledge of the world is for Husserl tried to a *critique* of reason. The issue appears as well in more contemporary literature such as (Hurley 1998, esp. Ch.2,3, and 6; Gallagher 2005, esp. Ch. 8; Gallagher and Zahavi 2008; Thompson 2007, Ch. 9 and 11). I agree with Hurley that working through issues of consciousness in relation to perception and action can actually challenge the traditional distinctions inner/outer or mind/word, perception/action, input/output that leave us estranged from the world, incessantly puzzled by perception. This agreement reappears here and there in my work and partly motivates the social *enactivism* of the theory of perception I am putting forward.

While the topic of the unity of consciousness and perceptual consciousness calls for an extensive treatment, I would like at least to insist that a careful treatment of the problems of perception cannot afford to pay no attention to it, and that, contrary to this, a good deal of contemporary philosophizing on perception is wrongly comfortable in dealing with perception and its conceptual associates (experience, content) somehow oblivious to the deep philosophical significance of the problems surrounding our being perceptually conscious of a world. Without this sensitivity, the ingrained tendencies of thought of Modern and Contemporary philosophy that I have arguing against, find support in popular scientific understandings of physical properties and brains, and unquestioned assumptions about what is conceivable and rational to expect in mind matters, take the place of serious epistemological reflection about the complex relations between perceivers and world. It is high time for a synthetic awareness of the broad philosophical significance of our questions and of the constraints such broad views place on us. The social enactive view of perception I am offering in this work intends to be well anchored in such traditional discussions, albeit with an eye to the intersubjective dimension of our lives—a dimension that has been latent in the tradition and must now be explored in disciplined ways able to grant it a status in discussions where a wrong-headed psychological individualism cum propositional rationality prevails. It is my contention that this shift is philosophically warranted, and much needed for the wider purposes of philosophy as a discipline with a responsibility to humankind.

perceptual experiential temporality that is not explained by recourse to objective temporality. For perception to be continuous, and as such to account for object-continuity and for self-consciousness continuity (as it takes place in our actual, pragmatic involvement with objects and events in which perception consists), the temporal structure of perception requires that initial impressions do not disappear immediately and are ‘active’ in the following ‘snapshot’ impression, or in other words, that there is a lingering impression turned into anticipation towards continuous perception of objects, for otherwise it would not be possible to experience objects as continuous, and that we do and is at the very basis of a perceiver’s capacity to relate to the world. This is what Husserl calls the temporal structure of inner consciousness—*impression-retention-protention*— which is constitutive of our consciousness, not only of ourselves but also of our being conscious of objects perceptually (and otherwise psychologically).<sup>10</sup> In other words, the way in which perception is original consciousness of objects and events is incompatible with the absence of an extended temporality, where objects just-perceived do not base the now-perception of the same object.

Husserl illustrates the retention-protention model with the case of the perception of a melody, where the initial impression ‘stays’ as the basis on which following notes are to take place. This puts the perception of the melody at the level of the constant interaction, and not just as a matter of the initial moment and its *simply* following sounds. The temporality of perception does not lie in primal impression but extends over time, into the sequence itself of ongoing perceptions, and that is why perception is not experienced “as having a subject-object structure, but instead as an immediate coupling or dynamic attunement to our environment” (Thompson 2009, 326).

Chalmers has characterized Edenic perception as *direct* and *immediate*. The presence of a causal chain is a charge against directness, and the temporality intrinsic to the causal chain is a charge against immediacy. Insofar, however, as this extended temporality of perceptual

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<sup>10</sup> This is arguably part of what is at stake when Kant refers to the syntheses of “apprehension in the intuition,” “of reproduction in the imagination,” (these two being from him “inseparably combined”) and of “recognition in the concept” (Kant 1998, 228–231 (A100–103)).

consciousness involves what we can still call a causal element, for it is built upon the continuous existence of the world that is constantly anticipated and fed back, Chalmers's ruling out directness on the basis of causality (even if it was the wrong idea of causality), which involved an element of temporal mediacy, entails the impossibility of perceptual consciousness itself in the Edenic world. But given that what it is to perceive in the first place is impossible without perceptual consciousness, Chalmers's theory entails that the very idea of perception is not true, Edenic perception—the true state we are to understand ourselves over against. Not only is then actual perception deemed illusory, but it is deemed so on the basis of a state of affairs that cannot be recognized as perceptual.

My second argument (ii) addresses the point of the upshot of knowing by revelation, by asking how we would know or be acquainted with perceptual stuff in this ideal of *revelation*. It seems that to know something by revelation is to know it in an intellectual or spiritual manner, where the thing revealed appears in one's mind with no relevant causal reason. For Chalmers, only something like a hypothetical mode of knowledge by *revelation* would be able to present objects and properties without causal mediation and "in their intrinsic glory" (2006, 49; see also p.94). But it seems to me that *every* instance of perceptual experience of the world is unlike revelation: surely I can close my eyes, turn my head, open my eyes again, and a scene is presented there. But to the extent that I know full well that I can see the scene *because* I am directed towards it and that *it would not* be there *if* I close my eyes, etc. it seems that the sense in which it is presented to me is not like that of a revelation. The possibility of entertaining counterfactuals evinces the causal dependence of the experience. What good does revelation do for us when trying to understand perception then?

Chalmers may object that his point is about property qualia: that in perceiving, say, a thing's smell the *thing's smell itself* is revealed to us, and not that what we call the thing's smell is just *our take* on the thing's smell. I must confess I am at a loss about what to do with this idea. It seems to me, though, that this revelation hypothesis is a sleight of hand devised to posit, at the

level of the phenomenal character of perception, the idea that there is a contrast between perceiving the thing's smell itself and just our take on the thing's smell, and that the correct description is one that fixes the referent at the thing's smell itself. To put it in simpler words: hypothetical revelation carries with it an objectivist idea about the existence of perceived properties in the world.

But to the extent that this strategy carries substantial entailments for the presentational character of experience, it is fair to demand a justification for the methodological device. So I ask: what would it be for a phenomenal feeling of a property to be *non-causally linked* to the property? What would it be for a perceiver to have a phenomenal experience that in its phenomenality is directly related to the property perceived? There is no positive notion that could support the complaint, and this makes the complaint and the revelation hypothesis *empty* in the sense of the classical empiricists.

When I examine the presentational character of a thing's smell, I talk about the thing's smell, but I talk about it insofar as it is the thing *I* smell. There is no reason to suppose that the ideal construction of this presentation is to say that in perceiving a thing's smell, there is a thing's smell that I just witness—that is, that I am affected by a smell without me bringing the phenomenal character to it, but only encountering it. The reason why this is not the preferred ideal description is because one can just as well describe the situation as one in which I smell the smell of the thing. Notice that there is a contrast here between a way of looking at the interaction as a matter of a given, fully pre-defined world, which in perception I come only to witness, and a way of looking at the interaction as an interaction in which the subjective side cannot be absent. The undecidability of these ideal scenarios, on the grounds of these “ideal” constructions alone, points, I think, to two ways of radically conceiving the relation with the world, which some may describe as a difference in “intuitions.” Insofar as the relation at stake is a real one—that of beings perceiving things in the world—the right characterization depends on taking a broader view and observing perception as it takes place and not just as a concept,

which on conceptual-only grounds, can be treated no differently than revelation. Such further evidence, I will be arguing, takes us in the direction of conceiving perception as a taking up of physical reality, such taking up defined at the level of experience, not at the level of object property or sensible quality with independent existence, where causality has an essential role in perception and revelation is empty concept.

Further, if revelation actually provided us with a notion useful for understanding perception, one would have no more reason to call an actual perception *perception* than one would have to call it *distortion*. As I said above, visible properties cannot be made sense outside of seeing. This means that the perceived property cannot be made sense of, *in its phenomenal character*, outside of the world of perceptual relations. This seems to block the road for Chalmers's view to maintain that a non-relational property behind the appearances of perception is the true content of phenomenal presentation. Unless Chalmers is able to provide a satisfactory account of such perceivable property *as a perceivable property, and yet arrived at by extra-perceptual means and conveyable in non-perceptual terms*, then there is no reason to assume that we ate of a tree of Science—that our perceptual situation is rather a predicament, to be understood in contradistinction to an ideal that leaves our contact with worldly objects, events, and states of affairs *lacking*. Science speaks in quite the opposite direction than Chalmers hears it speaking. He may be, unbeknownst to him, hearing an echo or looking at a reflection.

### **3.3.1 Directness and The Three Dependencies of Perception**

Chalmers's myth of the knowledge acquired through the fruit of the tree of science is a way of saying that such conception of perception is built upon a contrast with an ideal state of affairs. Mysteriously that ideal state of affairs has normative force in his conception, and, for the present case, it consists in the conception of ideal perception as direct and unmediated, in contrast to actual perception as indirect and mediated. But as I have been arguing, it does not seem that Chalmers's mythologizing as a device to express *conceivability about directness* has enough traction on reality. He has just assumed that the present state of affairs is indirect *because* it is



mediated, entailing that perception does not put us in true contact with the world, and so its deliverances are always doubtful. The idea is that no mediation can be innocent. If there is mediation we must be suspicious of what it has changes has the original reality undergone. If we go back to the tick mentioned above we'll see that even in this very simple case of detecting a substance (butyric acid) and acting upon such input event (release from the branch) there is a processing—a biochemical one in this case. By the argument that a process amounts to non-directness, the tick's relation to the mammal secreting butyric acid is not direct. If this is not direct, then not even the tanning of our skin in the sun is direct, and I am at a loss at to what interaction, if any, can be *direct*. This trouble in finding cases of directness, understood as causally unmediated, points to the real, deeper problem for Chalmers's account, namely, the inability to give the idea of directness-in-perception content. Without such content, to say that perception is indirect is an empty assertion.

There is one more conceptual point that troubles Chalmers's picture of direct perception. One might think that Chalmers's denial of directness must have been about what he calls nonrelational properties, that is, properties supposed to exist independent of the perceptual relation; category where he places color. My objections up to this point have been about such supposedly nonrelational properties. But even if I granted those nonrelational properties existence, my objections would have massive consequence in regards to relational properties (comparative properties as in a sound that is too loud, or in the size of objects relative to each other in a regular visual scene), hence to perception in general.

Suppose we accept Chalmers's characterization of directness. If Edenic content is correct, how could we account for properties whose essence and description only make sense when perceived from a specific point of view of a specific being? (Would there be one Garden of Eden per species?) How would a touching being behave in relation to a coarse or smooth surface—that is, on the tactile nature of this surface as it reveals itself to touch—without that behaving depending on the nature of the touching being, on the sensitivity of its skin? How about

perceiving something as big or small? What would it be (except for synesthetic subjects) to taste drink or food, such that this tasting would not depend on the specific interaction of the mouth cavity with objects? Would relational properties be of a type that never occurs in Eden, since they depend on the relation between perceiver and perceived as a matter of their essential nature and can only be indirectly perceived? And if they do not figure in Edenic content, which explains presentational character, does relational properties' presentational character go unaccounted? If all these gamuts of 'properties' are not Edenic but *plain* worldly, their presentational character cannot be thought of as contrasted with some confused ideal of direct perception, and the content associated with them cannot be Edenic content, for no Eden ever was a possible home for them.<sup>11</sup> And could a theory unable to account for relational properties be properly called a theory of perception?

In this section, I will expand my argument that perception is a matter of normatively structured appearances, by presenting the three constitutive mediations that determine our concrete contact with perceivable realities. I will add that, by appealing to the constitutive ways in which perception is dependent upon different facts and interactions, appearances are explicated and more easily understood in their systematic, normative structure, and the question of a threat to directness does not even arise. It is not that in perceiving a color we do not experience a feature of physical objects relatable to a certain physical description. Rather, in perceiving a thing's color we are interacting with an object placed in determinate environmental

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<sup>11</sup> The physically and chemically defined aspects of the physical world that stimulate our sensory nerve endings are also causal determinants of perception, in relation to both the specific objects we perceive and to the environmental conditions in which we experience those objects. These material aspects determine perceptual objects in the most basic of senses. For example, only that which is able to reflect or interfere with light might be an object of vision, but also only on the condition that there is light. Chapter 4 will offer an account of this relation between perceptual intentionality and the specific materiality of the object. By a similar token, the use of capacities depends on context, so it must be stipulated that I am assuming standard environmental conditions. Take the case of audition. The presence of a certain level of background noise is part of the normal ecology of audition. This is clearly revealed by anechoic chambers, noise-insulated spaces designed to eliminate all echo (which normally contributes to a normal soundscape). (See the anechoic chamber at Binghamton University, 360-degree view: <http://www.youvisit.com/360fullscreen.php?college=79868&pano=8404&&vhost=1&pl=v&inst=59850>). In silent places like these, "auditory neurons in the brain stem increase the amplification of signals from the auditory nerve to compensate for the lack of external sound" (Cox 2014, 209). In very quiet places, a person would start to hear bodily noises such as the sound of circulating blood. Reportedly, it was after a visit to one of these chambers and the experience of sounds of his own body in that context, that John Cage composed his 4'33", which, among other things, is ineluctably accompanied by some noise (Cox 2014, 212–213). By a similar token, continued patterns of low levels of sensory stimulation affect the stability and consistency of otherwise normally perceived objects, as Guenther shows in the case of solitary confinement prisoners (2011, 258–259).

conditions, such as surroundings colors and ambient illumination, and in a certain position relative to a subject that is configured thus and so, and is moving in determinate ways, directions, and speeds, and performing specific movements guided by pragmatic goals (Varela, Thompson, and Rosch 1991, 161–162; Noë 2004, 125–132; O’Regan and Noë 2001, 952). This example is still somewhat inappropriate because, as I have been arguing, there are properties that we perceive that are not relatable to physical properties of objects. These mediations are what I will refer to as *the dependencies of perception*: idiosyncratic, non-socially pragmatic, and socially pragmatic. The specific objects we perceive, the specific ways in which we perceive them, the sensory properties we perceive in them (including the length and intensity of our perception of them, where applicable), and the possibilities of sequences, combinations with other sensory properties—these aspects, among others, are constituted by these dependencies. Counterfactually put, to say that these dependencies are constitutive of our perceptual experiences means that such experiences’ phenomenal character, objects, contents, perceived properties, concrete appearances and the structure of those appearances would not be what they specifically are, weren’t we perceptually related to reality in the form specified by the dependencies. While I have been talking at times about mediations, I will now exclusively refer to them as dependencies in order to keep with the Enactive literature and to underscore that these dependencies are constitutive of perception, i.e. that perception constitutively *depends* on these mediations.<sup>12</sup>

### **a. Idiosyncratic Dependencies**

By *idiosyncratic dependencies* I refer to the person’s concrete configuration, at the moment of the perceptual interaction, of biologically based capabilities and dispositions and psychological characteristics such as deep-seated attentional habits or habitual associations about things

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<sup>12</sup> Notice also that referring to these dependencies as *mediations* carries a sense of intervention, and that contrasts with things *unmediated* as to something without any intervention. It is a short distance between unmediated and pure or original. Perception being mediated sounds negative (as representationalism has always had it) and not positive (as Social Enactivism, realisms, relationalisms have it). In contrast, dependence is the opposite of independence. In the framework of SEP, independence is not desirable, for there is no way to account for interactions to be independent.

perceptual, that are constitutive of our perceptual experiences.<sup>13</sup> These biologically based capacities and dispositions such as the basic structure of our bodies, the structure of our sensory apparatuses and their range of sensitivity develop and otherwise change in different ways, in varying degrees, and through different influences. It is possible that someone's olfactory sensitiveness becomes overly sensitive to certain stimuli, due to psychological associations, but it is not likely that the range of the visual spectrum expands, for reasons due to the cellular structure of rods and cones. Other facts of embodiment are, for instance, the temporality with which our nervous system is able to process continuous stimulation in different sensory modalities, the thresholds for sensory overstimulation or sensory fatigue, personal sensitivities or insensitivities to sensory stimulations, etc. Part of what distinguishes the everyday experience of a florist's smelling a flower from the random experience of a non-florist's smelling a flower, I categorize as an idiosyncratic dependency. The reason for this is that there are habituations and relatively stable levels of sensory tolerance and fatigue that can be counted as part of the workings of the olfactory apparatus. *Idiosyncratic dependencies* are constitutive of what we perceive and the way we perceive it, not only in relation to specific perceived objects but also in the possibilities of contextual relations with the same object over time and with others objects.

Idiosyncratic dependencies are at work both in perceivers with average capacities relative to the group to which they belong—those with, say, “good” hearing—, as well as in perceivers with capacities lower or higher than average, by reasons natural or even artificial.<sup>14</sup> The clarification of “good” hearing conditions is conceptually arbitrary, although statistically significant, and it is only meant as a way of making clear that the average person in the average

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<sup>13</sup> Embodied accounts of cognition (Husserl 1989; Merleau-Ponty 2002; Gallagher 2005; Gallagher and Zahavi 2008) or some enactivist accounts examine in detail the dependence of perceptual experience on “the structure of our biological embodiment” in detail (Varela, Thompson, and Rosch 1991, 147–150). I initially categorize body schema and body image (Gallagher 2005) under idiosyncratic dependencies, but leave open the details of this categorization as well as the possibility of both schema and image to partake in non-socially pragmatic or socially pragmatic dependencies.

<sup>14</sup> It remains undetermined to what extent prosthetic-like devices are still within the parameters of normal perception. It seems that a pair of glasses does not change the nature of perception, and it would seem to follow that neither would a microscope nor a telescope that rely on visual stimulation that the subjects report seeing.

situation also experiences things auditorially (or otherwise perceptually) in a way that is mediated by personal physiological configuration and standard environmental conditions. But for perceptual experience, the average way of perceiving the world has no intrinsic normative value. Every type of perceptual experience has the same existential value, and each set of idiosyncratic dependencies is constitutive of experience. In commenting on how El Greco's astigmatism was part of a lived world expressed in painting, Merleau-Ponty notes: "When irremediable bodily particularities are integrated into the whole of our experience, they stop having the dignity of a cause" (1942, 219; the translation is mine). This integration of perception with experience is integration with our "way of thinking and being" such that it expresses a necessary aspect of our nature, and not "a particularity imposed from the outside" (Merleau-Ponty 1942, 219). This is why the way our physical and psychological idiosyncrasies relate to our perception is in the form of a *dependency of experience* and not of a *cause for sensory stimulation*. Since experience is fundamentally lived-experience, the significance of the perceptual is at the personal, existential level, and should not be understood as a mere conditioning—a path that was already precluded, though, since perception is not sensory input.

When these idiosyncratic dependencies are culturally influenced, what tells these dependencies apart from the socially pragmatic ones is that these can be referred to the person's regular workings of their sensory apparatuses. Further, I do not assume that specific aspects of perceptual experience can only be tied to one dependency. It is often the case, that experience features influences from all three dependencies and that it may be impossible to tell the contributing factors apart from one another.

In relation to the issue of directness, it is clear that the same object does not necessarily appear the same to different perceivers, but this type of differences does not entail indirectness. It would be wrong to say that a cave wall is indirectly perceived by a human and by a bat simply because each perceiver is acquainted with it in a different way.

## **b. Non-Socially Pragmatic Dependencies**

By *non-socially pragmatic dependencies* I refer to patterned links between actions and sensory stimulation, whose mastery is constitutive of our perceptual experiences. These dependencies include part of the traditional Enactive idea of sensorimotor dependencies, which is the idea that we perceive the way we do because of the significance of our movements for sensory stimulation (O'Regan and Noë 2001; Noë 2004). Of all sensorimotor dependencies, I put on the non-socially pragmatic side, those dependencies that are cast essentially on spatial properties, because only in relation to space it makes sense to talk of motor variations. These are non-socially pragmatic, I contend, because the properties they are related to are perspectival properties—P-properties—that could be objectively defined, in the following spirit: “P-properties—the apparent shape and size of objects—are perfectly ‘real’ or ‘objective.’ Indeed, the relation of P-shape and P-size to shape and size can be given by precise mathematical laws (e.g., the laws of linear perspective). Importantly, in order to characterize P-properties, there is no need to refer to sensations or feelings. P-properties are objective in the sense that they are determinate and that they do not depend on sensations or feelings” (Noë 2004, 83).

If we extend this relative objectivity argument to other actions, not just motor related, in the sense that it is the change in location that determines the change in sensory stimulation, we find that there are other sensory relations that hold a similar structure. It is the case, for example, of the fact that the temperature of one's hands influences the experience of temperature of a thing touched. Relations of taste (eating a very sweet solid followed by a sweet beverage) are of a similar kind: they hold a certain objectivity not in virtue of social habituation, but in virtue of actions or manipulations on them or in relation to them, according to the modality. A non-socially pragmatic dependency (that happens to be sensorimotor in kind) is at play in the case of like looking at a pond.<sup>15</sup> One can see through the pond when standing close to it but as

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<sup>15</sup> The sensory and the motor are here not only a matter of causal input and output at the subpersonal level but also feature in dynamic feedback relationships at the personal level (Hurley 1998; see chapters 7 and 8). Even then, it is important to notice that the perceptual is not identified with the causal sensory. Pragmatic dependencies (both socially and non-socially constituted) are built upon structural aspects of the embodiment of perceivers, so partly

one walks away from it, the surface may start reflecting the scene opposite to one, i.e. as one reduces the angle of one's line of vision relative to the surface of the water, allowing oneself to 'encounter' light reflected on the surface.<sup>16</sup>

It is important in SEP's account to see that the split is not between sensorimotor and other dependencies, but between non-socially pragmatic and socially pragmatic dependencies. It is irrelevant for my thesis whether Noë's Enactivism is strongly committed to the thesis that (i) all P-properties are objective and definable regardless of sensations or feelings, as he claims P-shape or P-size are, or whether his Enactivism claims that (ii) not all P-properties are real and objective in the way P-shape and P-size are. It is clear that (i) would make his Enactivism weaker, for reasons I explained in length at the end of chapter 2 and will expand on in chapter 4 (section 4.1.1). On this point, it is still the case that SEP offers a more comprehensive theory than Sensorimotor Enactivisms since SEP identifies both non-socially pragmatic dependencies that go unaccounted for in the Sensorimotor view, and socially pragmatic dependencies that exceed what the Sensorimotor view accounts for. I have exemplified the first kind with the dependency between some interactions between skin (or mouth) temperature and objects of touch. Some socially-constituted attentional variations are of the second kind because they are not sensorimotor. By the same token, sensorimotor dependencies do not cover either lawful variations in smells and tastes, such as those a person brings about by customarily adding salt to food. There is nothing sensorimotor in the common phenomenon that a certain dish tastes better or that flavors are more noticeable if I add salt to it.

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upon the facts figuring in idiosyncratic dependencies. In fact, autopoietic enactivists such as Varela, Thompson and Rosch (1991), and Thompson (2007) straddle the embodiments aspects of idiosyncratic dependencies with sensorimotor dependencies. But these dependencies are also built upon a history of perceptual interactions (Hutto and Myin 2013, 17). It is not only that we become skillful in certain pre-existing sensorimotor potentialities of human bodies and environment, but that we come to have the specific sensorimotor skills based on our own history of interacting, in sensorimotor terms, with the environment.

<sup>16</sup> Similar analyses could be extended to the cases of reflection and refraction (including double vision illusions) that both Price and Ayer consider so telling as to the non-direct character of perception (Price 1950, 28–29; Ayer 1947, 3–4).

### **c. Socially Pragmatic Dependencies**

By *socially pragmatic dependencies* I refer to the social practices and aspects of them that are constitutive of our perceptual experiences, which I have called perceptual practices. As accounted in chapter 1, perceptual practices are the finely attuned, contextual and normative system of commerce of—production of and response to—meaningful perceptible material. These are dependencies of perception because our perceptual experience of specific objects and the properties we get acquainted with, etc. depends on socially constituted ways of taking in or manipulating perceptible materials. For example, heating up or cooling down foods or beverages according to uses (which de facto include preferences, tendencies, and dislikes) makes the specific object of our interaction depend on something we do. As in the case of some foods we heat up in order to eat, these interactions may even affect the perceptual object itself, its specific perceptual properties (shape, texture, consistency, flavor, smell, among others) may change along with temperature changes.

Some socially pragmatic dependencies consist also in very basic ways of ‘using’ the sensory apparatus. For example, sniffing strongly or softly may be very specific ways in which some people simply smell something, or in the way they enjoy a pleasant smell. We can also see socially pragmatic dependencies in the absence of the distinction between blue and green in some languages, such as Tarahumara (under a framework that links this absence of a difference with actual discriminative and otherwise perceptual practices) (Varela, Thompson, and Rosch 1991, 171). Some socially pragmatic dependencies are sensorimotor.

Consider the following case: In looking for a dark grey sweater, which suits the occasion, I may turn on the light, knowing that with poor lighting dark grey and navy blue may look the same to me. In doing so, the interplay of light and color kicks in, as well as the spatial disposition of visual non-transparent objects and my ability to sort those colors out. All aspects are relevant here, and yet, in a governing sense, the intention to find a certain colored-piece guides the process. All dependencies are in place. Chapter 4 will provide the opportunity for



further examination of the interplay of the three dependencies within the structure of content (cf. section 4.1 and the *Ambulance Siren* case). It sufficed for the purposes of this chapter to have explained the way in which these dependencies or mediations are understood not as a cleavage between appearances and reality, but actually as the very way in which physical realities present themselves and are perceived, in a way that cannot be called but direct.

### 3.3.2 Are There Perfect Sensory Properties?

The second point (B) in Chalmers's conception of the presentational aspect of perceptual content is the perspectiveless ideal of perception, such that to directly perceive objects and properties is to perceive perfect properties, which are part of the Edenic content.

In Chalmers's view, perceptual experiences have the phenomenology they do by virtue of having Edenic content, that is, by virtue of having experiences that *seem* to present us with perfect properties. "If we were to take our experience *completely* at face value" (2006, 70) it would not seem that we were presented with perfect properties but we would actually be presented with them. Presentationally, however, the distinction between *being presented with* and *seeming to be presented with* perfect properties is *self-effaced*: 'the phenomenology,' Chalmers would say, presents as with properties as if they were perfect properties, so the content that accounts for 'the phenomenology' is constructed in terms of the ideal garden of Eden where such properties were real and we were really presented with them, directly, immediately, and unmediatedly, that is, where such properties were *revealed* to us.<sup>17</sup>

Let us get some clarity here. Chalmers says "Eden sets the standard, and our imperfect world can only match it" (Chalmers 2006, 111). On his two-stage view of content, while Eden plays the strongest role, Fregean content only represents perfect properties imperfectly—it *matches* them, that is, it picks up imperfectly instantiated properties and objects that normally

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<sup>17</sup> It is not altogether clear that debates in philosophy of perception have decidedly moved forward. Certain discussions seem just to have been repackaged and some distinctions rehashed according to the fancy of the moment. Here it is as if Rorty, in commenting on Ayer's formulation of the argument from illusion (of which Chalmers's tree of Science is a piece), were actually commenting on Chalmers's strategy as the "sketching an Ideal Language whose undefined descriptive predicates would refer to directly apprehended characteristics of postulated entities called 'sense-data'" (1992, 13). This impression brings a positive point, though, a certain unspoken reliance of Chalmers on a sense-data background, which the substantial proximity of Chalmers's and Price's accounts seems to support.

cause the experience that perfect properties and objects would cause in Eden. Our standards are not those belonging to a perfect world, for “after the fall, we have learned to live with the imperfection of perception” (2006, 95). And yet, our standards derive from the perfect phenomenal veridicality of Eden and this is why the presentational content of our perception is Edenic: it resembles imperfectly yet closely the perfection of Eden, which we can’t help to *feel*. However *ad hoc* its role is, Chalmers is committed to perfect properties, even if all we have is *as-if* perfect properties. I shall then take Chalmers at face value and argue against the idea that there is such a thing as Edenic content in perceptual experience and that this content fulfills the presentational desideratum.

So here is a point where Edenic content puts itself to the test of coherence and shows itself to be self-contradictory and self-defeating: there are perceptual experiences in which we are presented with non-perfect properties. All cases of finely grained perceived properties belong to this category (unless Chalmers were to take the even more implausible view that every finely grained property is itself a perfect property). These cases include the lack of definition of the property perceived when an object is clearly perceived as not having a definite, sharply defined property (like a mix of songs, voices, sounds, and conversations at a loud bazaar, or a complex, new flavor for which we have no name yet), in both the situations in which properties presented could be sharply acquired or in which they are not ameliorable; cases of transitions between more defined states (like the sequence of perceived colors as it gets darker), and cases of nonconceptual perceptual content that are not included in the previous categories, such as perceptions of things as harmonious. As a matter of fact I hold that no perceptual experiences present us with perfect properties, for they are all always, as Husserl has defended, fundamentally indeterminate (both as the nature of the properties we perceive and as the continuous, always-changing nature of its objects). My specific argument here, though, only needs that *some* perceptual experiences have no Edenic content. (These problems will soon reappear under the veridicality desideratum, and with a reason: if Fregean content derives from

Edenic content, it only makes sense that the problems of indetermination that we find at the sensory properties level will mutate correspondingly into the representational level.)

The question is: Is Chalmers's account of the presentational desideratum through Edenic content able to handle cases like those described above, featuring indeterminate, finely grained, and transitional perceptions? Naturally, an answer to this question entails an answer to a more fundamental question, namely, whether Edenic content captures appropriately the presentational desideratum. I will argue that the answer to both questions is no; we can safely derive a negative answer to the latter question on the basis of a negative answer to the former question. I want to examine the following specific case: How would Chalmers analyze finely grained or transitional perceptual experiences, such *changes* in the property itself, for example, in a surface due to illumination changes, or in shape due to our location in relation to the object?

Imagine you are looking at a tree at dusk, when it's getting darker. Suppose sunset is at 6:17 p.m., and it gets darker from 5:53 p.m. to 6:41 p.m. Add a heavily clouded day, new moon. A correct description of color behavior when darkening would be to say something like this. Color X is visible at 100% of its 'intensity' at 5:52 p.m., at 75% at 6:05 p.m., at 50% at 6:17 p.m., at 25% at 6:29 p.m., and at 1% at 6:40 p.m. ( $X_1, X_2, X_3, X_4,$  and  $X_5$ ). At 6:40 p.m., I contend, color  $X_5$  (say the brown of a tree trunk) would not appear to be the same color it was at 5:52 p.m., and would seem to be the same as other colors,  $X_4$  and  $X_6$  (imagine a brown chocolate and a brown mocha as 'contiguous' or close shades of brown). Both phenomena—at some point color  $X_5$  does not look the same (color constancy breaks down), and color  $X_5$  is mistaken for  $X_4$  or  $X_6$ —suggests that there cannot be an instantiation of perfect colors at 6:40 p.m. In other words: to say that the presentational aspect of the content of a perception of color X at 6:40 p.m. is explainable as a perfect instantiation of it, the same that is instantiated, for example, at 6:05 p.m., seem not to speak of the what-it-is-like to have that color. Chalmers would agree that for content capturing the way things look, to be unable to capture this difference is not plausible (See 2006, 84–89 when talking about a shadowed white surface and a gray unshadowed surface).

Chalmers has suggested treating cases like this either as a conjunction of perfect properties or as another sort of intrinsic property. While the case of a shadowed surface allows for the talk of *color+shadow*, it is not clear what conjunction works for the ‘getting darker’ moment: how would we factor the *darkening* aspect? As to the other type of intrinsic property, Chalmers talks of a specific “mode” of brown that is instantiated when ambient light is such and such. The problem with this last proposal is that it posits yet another perfect color property. It would start resembling mere speculation to posit a perfect color for every shade that there is or there could be. Extended to other sensory modalities, my point here is that it is not only implausible but empty to try to capture presentational content as a matter of ideal perfect properties that are just as finely grained as actual properties we perceive in the world. The appeal here is not only to simplicity, but to the fact that the finely grained character of perceived properties derives from the actual dynamic interactions of worldly, environmentally-situated objects, events and states of affairs, with perceivers who are not just revealed the physical aspect of objects, but who perceive them on the basis, partly, of their physical structure.

Let us insist for a moment in the case of color. Standard talk of color is sometimes too fruity, too cartoonish—some apples are red, some apples are green, limes are green, and lemons are yellow. Philosophers have rightly wondered about things such as the sky’s color. How about the color of a water pond? One wonders, naturally, whether a water pond (or its surface) has a color in Chalmers’s sense (although it, of course, does for all intersubjective perceptual intents), that is, as a sensory quality that could perfectly be instantiated in Eden without being experienced. The case is interesting because it paradigmatically shows how its color is very much dependent on surrounding conditions (in this case, illumination and surrounding scene) and on its position relative to the observer.<sup>18</sup> The perceived color of a water pond depends on the water itself, what is underwater, what is around the water, specific illumination (whether cloudy or sunny), and one’s own position relative to the water (subtending angles, etc.), that is,

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<sup>18</sup> For a more detailed exploration of the metaphysics of colors in classic studies in the enactive literature see (Varela, Thompson, and Rosch 1991, 157–171; O’Regan and Noë 2001, 951–952; Noë 2004, 123–161).

to different ‘sections’ of water in the water pond: so that some sections reflect the surroundings, some sections allow for seeing through, and some sections seem simply look to be of a certain color, on which one could get a relative, satisfying-enough, interpersonal agreement with other viewers. The difficulty for Edenic content to account for the color of a water pond depends on the impossibility to single out one color that would belong to the pond, for in virtue of the nature of the object at stake, any color would depend on a series of relations of which the position of the observer is one, which entails that the color could not be perfectly instantiated, in Chalmers’s sense.

Back to the case of getting darker, Chalmers is unable to provide an analysis of colors *as it gets darker*. “Objects do not seem to change their colors, exactly, although the representation of their colors may become much less specific, and it eventually becomes absent altogether (as does the representation of objects, in pitch blackness)” (2006, 89). This is self-contradictory, for this talk of “becoming less specific” is incompatible with perfect colors. They could become less specific as to their imperfect veridical content—Fregean content, answering to the veridicality desideratum—but not as to their perfect veridical content: the one that Edenic content is supposed to capture. To say that in Eden things are presented in their perfection means to say that presentation is an all-or-nothing affair. This is why the closest Chalmers gets to the issue of darkness is with *substitution*: “in Eden, when things become dark, perfect darkness is present throughout the relevant volume: of space, intrinsically altering that volume, although it need not alter objects’ colors. In Eden, when darkness falls, perfect darkness pervades” (2006, 89). But perceptual transitions are not substitutions. In Chalmers’s Eden, there is darkness, but it doesn’t get dark.

It should be clear by now that Eden is a non-starter. Either in Eden it doesn’t get darker, moment by moment, although it is dark at times (at some point lights are just turned off), or colors do not have the same lawful behavior they do on earth. The former option has no room for perceptual transitions that abound in the perceptual world, perhaps more than perceptual

fixities do, and which are essential to perception; the latter option takes colors for what they are not, making it impossible, once again, to account for perceptual transitions.

The consequence for Chalmers's account is fatal: Edenic content is a poor account of the presentational content of perceptual experience. Would not there be something wrong if colored objects did not look differently (and yet the same) as it gets darker—particularly when it's about to get pitch-dark? Or if colored objects didn't look differently depending on illumination conditions? To make the point more basic: Consider an object whose size and shape does not perceptually change while we move away from it, or about a sound that does not fade away as we move away from it. What is wrong with these cases is that the continuous variations of perceptual continua and the consistency of such variations are *essential* to what it means to perceive objects, events, and states of affairs. If the perceptual world were like Eden, I contend, we would not know *how to act upon* perceived objects that do not behave as worldly objects do. Even more basically: in Eden we would not *have the feeling of perceiving things*, as things would not change as we relate perceptually to them, and such changes are at the very heart of perception. The perceptual Garden of Eden is just a wayward, wrong, fruitless view.

While talk of perfect properties offers Chalmers a way to theoretically accommodate changes in the objects, the subject, or the medium that make for a change in what is perceived, this happens only under quite artificial and implausible circumstances. Not only is the adaptation to the specific case problematic, but there is an arbitrary reference to a supposed ideal *presentation* of such property. However, insofar as perceived properties are essentially perspectival, it is simply nonsense to say that there is such a thing as a perfect instance of the property such that it is revealed in "all its glory" and that is independent of the experience of it. A perfect presentation is an oxymoron, for perfect means perspectiveless and presentation is essentially experiential and essentially perspectival.

For Chalmers, the ideal perfect perceivable property is one that exists independently of perceivers experiencing it. In contrast, I have argued that the very idea of a perceived property

is such that its existence, as perceived, is indescribable and not-thoroughly-conceivable outside of the perceiving relation. Just to make clear my position vis-à-vis the traditionally called primary properties, my claim is that while things have a shape independent of the perceiver, the perceived shape as perceived is not independent of the perceiver. That which is perceived, in the case of shape, is not the shape as objectively defined by, say, a measurement, but the way such shape looks from different points of view. To look at a square tower from afar and see it round is to say that I am seeing a square tower from afar and it looks round because square objects like towers look round when looked from afar.

Chalmers would object that there is no reason to think that properties are essentially perspectival. As a matter of fact, the idea of perfect property he has in mind is a property that in its perfect instantiation is independent of an experience of it: “we have no trouble conceiving of an object being perfectly colored even though no one ever experiences its color” (Chalmers 2006, 114). The view I have been proposing is able to accommodate *part* of this state of affairs: the idea of a colored object that no one sees. I am not saying that objects are only colored when I look at them, but that to speak of their colors depends on our being able to look at them—at least in the sense that we experientially know the domain of visibilia. What I am unable to accommodate is the talk of the object being “perfectly colored.”

The notion of an ideal perfect perceivable property, let us recall, is one that exists independently of perceivers experiencing it. When discussing in some more detail the possibility of perceiving perfect colors, ‘representing’ perfect colors, as he’d have it, Chalmers resorts to cases in which we actually represent uninstantiated properties (like perfect redness, or perfect bitterness) in order to dispel our worries. He says that we can represent “the property of being phlogistonated” or of “being a round square” (Chalmers 2006, 83). These examples are of no avail at all in a discussion about the possibility of ‘representing’ or perceiving things with the presentational character of *perception*. These cases are not real, they may be impossible, and it is doubtful they are truly conceivable.

Chalmers says that he has no good theory of “how our mental states represent any properties at all” (2006, 84). And yet, he concedes that the way we represent “requires a theory of the roots of intentionality,” an understanding of which “will be closely tied to understanding the metaphysics of phenomenology” (2006, 84). He further says: “I am inclined to think that Edenic content may also give us an entry point for understanding the metaphysics of experience. [...] It may be that perceptual experience is fundamentally equivalent to the presentation of an Edenic world. If so, then if we can understand how the presentation of an Edenic world is possible, then we will understand perceptual phenomenology” (Chalmers 2006, 117). So here we have that we go from understanding the Edenic content to “the phenomenology.” But if the Edenic world were about properties that may go uninstantiated, such as “being phlogistonated,” our prospects for understanding perceptual experience and the phenomenal character of perception would be dim if they depended on Chalmers’s theory.

And now things go in the reverse direction: from understanding “the phenomenology” to Edenic content (75), for in a somewhat similar confused line of thought he says: “A world with respect to which our visual experience is perfectly veridical is an Edenic world. [...] It is natural to ask: what is the character of an Edenic world? A full answer to this question depends on a full analysis of the phenomenology of visual experience, which cannot be given here” (2006, 75). Here we are told that understanding a non-existent world depends on an analysis of the way things appear, but even Chalmers’s ‘phenomenology,’ we have seen, is quite distorted, for it relies on a view of presentation that doesn’t allow for transitions and finely grained perceptions: “Edenic content [...] directly reflects the experience’s phenomenology” (2006, 73). It does not seem that we can rely on a ‘phenomenology’ about the way things actually appear and yet structured in terms of perfect properties revealed in perfection. So what is the direction of inquiry and of explanation? What is original, basic level of analysis?

And yet, Chalmers comes a bit closer to the idea of a perceptual property, when he considers the case of pain. Pain cannot be perfectly instantiated because it cannot occur without



a subject experiencing it, and the notion of a perfect property is a radical mind-independent existence. Yet he holds that pain exists as a property, even if cannot be instantiated in Eden, like a round square, because “one has a grip on the property of perfect pain, based on one’s experience” (2006, 114). My conception of a perceived property seems to be akin to what Chalmers imagines pain to be. As with Chalmers’s pain, I hold that there cannot be a perfect instantiation of a perceived property, if perfection entails the exclusion of experience. Whatever notion we have of a like-perfect property, which I think we can talk meaningfully about, is derived from one’s own experience.

Chalmers says his two-stage view of content is supposed to be strong in the account of phenomenal character through Edenic content, and in the idea that even the Fregean, representational content is grounded also in “the phenomenology of experience” (2006, 73). If I am right in pointing to the fundamental confusion in the notion of a perfect property, seemingly the basis of the ‘phenomenology’, then Chalmers’s Edenic content is, in fact, wrong and his Fregean content does not have the good grounding it supposedly does. Chalmers’s attempt to find phenomenological adequacy in a hypothetical world shows two things: that he is mistaken about what it is for spatiotemporal objects to be perceived by beings capable of perception and that he is hence not accounting for this-worldly perception, but for other-worldly perception. Chalmers retains the *feeling* of presentation and explains perceptual changes as deficiencies in relation to an ideal. It is mistaken to say that such hypothetical world can stand for what is phenomenologically adequate, for precisely such deficiencies are the positive sources of the actual characteristic ways of perception. In this connection one sees that an intellectualistic conception of real objects, that is, of real objects modeled after an ideal world, tokened in perfect properties that can never be instantiated, and which are thought to be analogous to being phlogistonated or being a round square, are evidence of a profound *disorientation* in standard philosophy of perception.

To actually perceive objects, events, and states of affairs directly and immediately means to be engaged in coherent, systematic yet always-varying spatial, temporal, and pragmatic interactions with objects, states of affairs, and properties, according to the materiality of objects and the triple dependency of perception. The theory I have been accounting for does exactly this. It goes to the roots of intentionality in general, and to the roots of perception as a specific type of intentionality in particular. In the face of the foregoing objections and having in sight a positive rich theory of appearances which offers a much thicker and richer phenomenology of perceptual experience, backed up by and built upon the metaphysics of perceptual experience, Chalmers account of the presentational aspect of perception should be rejected, along with the associated structure of content it proposes.

**Sensory Properties in SEP.** I would like to finish this section by stating my take on sensory properties, making emphasis on the interactionist aspect of SEP. The position I have been articulating is that the properties we perceive are appearances or aspects *of* things, such that there is no *distance*—yet a perspective—between perceived thing and perceivable thing, because for objects, events, and states of affairs there is no other way to appear perceptually than to present themselves in appearances to perceivers. There is, however, a one-many correlation, structured along the lines of the three dependencies explained above.

The interactionism of SEP is also predicated of phenomenal character. Even though I hold that perceptual experience of perceived properties is indeed partly characterized by phenomenal character, this character is not a *mental event* but a characteristic of the interaction, in which an aspect of the world is presented in such-and-such ways to a perceiver. This presentation in the form of an appearance is not just a feeling, a ‘seeming.’ I here echo Wittgenstein’s idea that the feeling in perception is not an inner experience or a private event but rather a bodily engagement with the world, in which the we respond bodily “both physically and verbally to [...] perceptions” (Krebs 2010, 131). The phenomenal character of a perception

is woven into lived-experience in a responsive manner, and not merely in a receptive way, as if it were “the last stop” on the input side of things, as Hurley would have put it (1998, 249).

I have argued that sensory and perceived properties are not intrinsic properties of objects, which is what it is supposed under the idea that an object has a certain color and to perceive that color means to perceive exactly the way such color is ideally thought to exist in the object itself. On that view, perceived properties are merely contingent, supervenient aspects of real properties existing in objects. This position can take the shape that perceived properties are qualia alone. But this is to be rejected on the basis of the metaphysics of experience I endorsed, for it entails an untenable projectivism in that the felt quality of the world becomes dissociated from it.

So as to the intrinsic properties view I grant that it makes sense to talk of nonrelational perceivable properties, that is, that it, of course, makes sense to say that there is such a thing as a color in the things out there, and a certain texture. But the property that we could linguistically fix as *the* color or *the* texture of an object, for communicative purposes, is not to be expected to figure in our perceptions of it, strictly speaking. The color and the texture *that we perceive* is always interactional: it is always a look or an appearance of the one reality that is out there, but which cannot be described in its perceptual, sensible lingo outside of the perceptual interaction with it.<sup>19</sup> The linguistically fixed property does not really pick a finely grained phenomenal appearance, that is, as it is lived in experience.

Shoemaker’s (2006) position on sensory properties allows me to underscore a key aspect of SEP. For Shoemaker, perceived properties are not sensible qualities (physical properties of objects). Perceived properties are qualitative characters *of* qualities, but are themselves no properties of external objects or objects’ properties. Neither are they the ways of presentation of objects and those objects’ properties, that is, they are not only different in the how of the presentation but in the what of it (2006, 472). Qualitative characters, in Shoemaker’s

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<sup>19</sup> Even Ayer’s argument for the definition of the “real qualities of a material thing” is unable to escape this intra-perceptual dependence, as he tries to fix perceptual reality in terms of “privileged appearances” (1947, 31). I will explore this in some more detail in the next section.

terminology, are *aspects* of external properties; as such, they are ways subjects *represent* objects as having. To perceive a certain qualitative character an object to have is to have an experience whose phenomenal character is based on the *representation* a subject has of the object.

The fundamental disagreement in our positions is that Shoemaker is a representationalist, unlike SEP, which is best characterized as interactionalist. Interactionalism can countenance key tenets of the relationalism proposed by Campbell but it goes further. Let me illustrate it in the following way.

It is unclear whether Shoemaker gets the relationalist wrong when he takes her to be saying that on the relationalist view of experience that holds objects themselves to be constitutive of experience, “the experience inherits the qualitative character by including an instantiation of the color that has it” *and* that each color has only one qualitative character (2006, 472–473). It would follow from here that for the relationalist there is no way to account for differences in perceptual experience of the same object, and such differences are—not only under inverted spectrum scenarios—central to the way perceptual objects present themselves to subjects. Shoemaker reasons that the idea of phenomenal character being *inherited* from the object that is constitutive of the experience commits the relationalist to there being only one “qualitative character.” The problem here seems to be with Shoemaker pressing too hard (and mistakenly) on the idea of *inheritance*: one speaks of inheritance when a thing is transferred to another, so there is a strong notion of continuity in the thing inherited.

To counter this view we would need a notion of perceptual relation that has objects as constitutive of experiences, and where the nature of the relation itself is other than the passing down of an object. Some relations, however, stand in a one-one structure between subject and object. This is the case, for instance, of the relation between a viewer and a mirror, such that given the angle at which the viewer’s eyes are in relation to the mirror, there is only one set of objects reflected in the mirror that is accessible to the viewer.

On SEP's view, we rather talk about a perceptual interaction. The reason for this is that the relationship is conceived as one in which things and their sensory properties appear differently to subjects (same or different subjects) depending on considerations pragmatic and environmental factors as well as considerations about the constitution of the perceivers. While inheritance is a somewhat apt analogy for a source-product relation, it is limited. Not every such relationship is one of inheritance. In our case, the guiding sense in *perceptual relation* cannot be pinned down by the inheritance model. In contrast, I hold that the phenomenal character of objects and their properties is grounded on the "qualitative character of things" such that they are shown in *one-many or undefined-many* relation between objects, events, states of affairs and appearances or properties. These relations are best specified through the triple dependency of perception, the two-fold structure of content, and the pragmatic account of perceptual normativity.

### **3.4 Eating from the Tree of Illusion and the Veridicality Desideratum**

Chalmers mythologizes that we ate of the tree of Illusion and that thereafter things did not appear exactly as they were but rather with "different colors and shapes at different times." Our trust was broken. At pain of irresponsibility, we were then motivated to doubt whether things are as they appear. Philosophers helped us began to realize and fulfill our duty to ever demand from our perceptions whether they are true. Ever since, our relation with the perceptual world is a rational contestation of perceptual evidence, at times yielding positive verdicts.

But things are sadder, now we know, for true veridicality is to us but a chimera. We would never be actually presented with things in their pure glory. Our representations of things can only imperfectly, *and only sometimes*, match what must ideally be the case in Eden: "Eden sets the standard, and our imperfect world can only match it" (Chalmers 2006, 111). Whether or not an experience is (imperfectly) veridical is determined by content that needs only to *match* perfect properties, that is, "to play the role that perfect redness [properties] plays in Eden" (2006, 72).

Fregean content is an (imperfect) condition of satisfaction of our experience: the experience is (imperfectly) veridical iff the world turns out to be the way perceptual experience (re)presents it to be. The world turns out to be the way experience represents it if we have experience of properties that *normally* cause the experience that perfect properties and objects would cause in Eden. And ‘normally’ is enough for us because our standards are not those belonging to a perfect world, for “after the fall, we have learned to live with the imperfection of perception” (2006, 95).

In other words, the argument is that we can only get an imperfect idea of the world by means of perception, and that even this imperfect idea is never secured, and that in order for it to be secured, perceptual resources alone won’t do and extra-perceptual means must be put to work. In this section I take up issue with this argument, as it is deployed around the tree of Illusion (only one aspect of the more famous argument from illusion), and deal with it by exposing the unspoken argument on which it is built and that such unspoken argument, dressed of a strong ‘intuition,’ is faulty, and must then be rejected.

A concern for *veridicality* is the rule rather than the exception in the philosophical work on perceptual experience or on the epistemology of perception. Theories of perceptual content normally take for granted that the guiding issue about content is that perception has the epistemological role of justifying beliefs arising from those experiences’ content (Byrne 2005; Peacocke 1992; Siegel 2011a, 3–4; Siegel 2010, chap. 2; Toribio 2007). Experiences represent the world to be a certain way—they have a *content* that shows the world to be a certain way—, and because appearances are, by definition, taken to be only contingently corresponding with the world, a “strong intuition” holds experiences “assessable for accuracy”—the *veridicality* desideratum (Chalmers 2006, 50).<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> One quick note: my taking the issue of content as a matter of the aboutness of perceptual experience implies that I do not take content to be ex hypothesi a piece of a representational framework on which the content of perception are “things conveyed by sources of information (as when we speak of the contents of a newspaper story)” (Siegel 2010, 28) that are truth-functional via correspondence (i.e. veridicality). On this view, ‘content’ lives in the veridicality neighborhood, and this is more patent when we touch upon the idea that perception is representational. Given that I dispute this notion, some might think I should just give up on using ‘content’ as a way of conceptualizing perceptual aboutness. It seems perfectly fine to me to offer an interpretation of content that is not definitionally linked to

The views that theorize from veridicality assume that the truth-functional behavior of the concept 'content' in relation to the related ideas 'perception,' 'belief,' 'object,' 'property,' etc. reveals something central about the philosophical interesting aspects of perception, guided by some (never-all-too-clear) 'intuitions' and constrained by the extra-linguistic 'phenomenology' of things, i.e. a list of flat, isolated ways things look. Partly what is at work here is a commitment to perception having an intrinsic inferential character. Such inferential or pseudo-inferential character of perception is at work in beings like us, able to compare perceptual experiences with idealized perfect objects and properties possibly instantiated in experience (2006, 102). It goes without saying that in such views perception in non-human animals remains a mystery.

The concern for veridicality is the flip side of a worry about deception. One can look at someone's theory of perception by looking at their conception and use of perceptual error, deception, perceptual illusions, and hallucinations. The early deployment of the argument from illusion in Price (1950) and Ayer (1947) is telling in this respect; and Austin thought in fact that the faulty cases actually take the lead and are the levelers of the field (1962, 44). That this is the modern attitude towards perception should by now be clear—down the line, philosophers think, the task of philosophy is to see how everything stands in relation to, or on our way to, truth. The nature of perception ends up being the distilled product of a reduction-to-truth, regardless of whether perception is the type of thing that aims at truth. Chalmers's is a clear case of this view that takes, directly and indirectly, a certain conception of what counts as an illusion as definitional of perception. An idea that certain perceptions count as an error is assumed *before* the investigation about perception. As a matter of fact, there is not much argumentation for the consequences of our eating the tree of illusion. This explains why my arguments are oftentimes directed against other philosophers who actually argued for it, such as Price and Ayer.

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veridicality, thereby allowing the position I am arguing to contribute in the important debates about perception on which content is invoked. This move entails saying that the ground level is that of aboutness. The content-veridicality defender should not have problems explaining why she takes content to be the correct take on aboutness, or why content is, regardless of the metaphysics of experience or aboutness, the right level of analysis in the problems of perception.

In this same vein, we find Chalmers just *assuming* that hallucinations can have the same “phenomenology” as perceptions—the root of the Tree of Illusion.<sup>21</sup> Chalmers “discusses” this aspect in a footnote, as if it were inconsequential, or at least greatly downplaying its importance; yet the discussion is simply a declaration of allegiances. For to be sure, what is contained in such an assumption is that perceptual resources aren’t able to say much, with certainty, beyond a report of a collection of rather isolated appearances that are only contingently linked to reality.

What makes the issue more problematic, it seems to me, is not that we hold different positions. What is problematic is the way the issue itself is sidelined, not realizing the fundamental aspect of some of the assumptions at play—such attitude simply renders the view’s problematic aspects invisible to its defenders. Or better, in not realizing the definitional character of the foundations to their approach, the standard view cannot treat but as off-topic several well-based criticisms that do not share its language.

In this context, I hold, in contrast to the standard theory of perception, that there are perhaps no heftier issues in the metaphysics of perception than the relationship between objects in the world and our perception of them, between objects and their appearances. To claim that the connection between perception and world is to be established beyond appearances and with the aid of extra-perceptual contributions because appearances can be deceitful is a *petitio principii*. It is to say that the connection between perception and world is contingent, i.e. that we can’t be sure we’re not being deceived *because we can be sometimes deceived by perception*.

It may sound heavily counterintuitive that I call the possibility of perception to be deceitful into question. Who has not believed a surface to be of a different color it turned out to be? Who has not seen an object of a certain size to change its apparent size as one moves away from it? Who has not seen circle look elliptical? When we come to see the reasons underlying this

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<sup>21</sup> Chalmers rejects the disjunctivist insight according to which a veridical perception and a perfect hallucination do not have a common ‘phenomenology’ (i.e. he denies disjunctivism about phenomenology). In other words, he affirms that there is a common factor between (paradigmatic cases of) a hallucination and a perception. He claims to be neutral on what he calls disjunctivism about metaphysics (whether experiencing and hallucinating are metaphysically different), a point on which we radically disagree, and on disjunctivism about content (whether the experience case and the hallucination case share content, partly or not at all), a point on which we partly agree but for quite different reasons.



'intuitional' understanding of perception, we will see why such 'intuition' not only need not be, but must not be, and should instead be replaced by an understanding that rejects any idea to the effect that the senses deceive and theorizes these cases as a function of appearances, in an entirely positive way.

The idea that perceptions can be deceitful is evident to most philosophers of perception, in a way they qualify as a strong 'intuition.' This seemingly naïve view brings along an entire conceptual world with it. But should it be held as self-evident intuition, and not as an argument that can be attacked? Let us revisit the initial framework and see if I can offer an interpretation of the issue of deception that speaks in favor of my 'looking at perception in its own terms' and against their framework.

Consider a *bona fide* or *minimal good case* of visual perception. It need not even be a 'perfect' perception (whatever that could exactly mean). You can even consider a case of what is normally referred to as perceptual error or illusion. Just your regular perception of something you look at. Consider that you look at a table, just like Hume did (1977, 104–105). Let's call each specific perception P1, P2, P3, and so on. There is a perfectly meaningful claim to the effect that there are *differences* in the way the table looks as you move in relation to it, not only in size but also in shape, or in the way its colors looks (which Russell keenly noted). This much is true. The question is how far can one go with this cursory description of the phenomenon, and how much one can derive from it.

Philosophers of different sensibilities might cash out this phenomenon in the following way: that these differences mean that our perception of objects *may* or *may not correspond* to the way things *are*. The inference-based claim (normally sold as an intuition) is that perception is not necessarily faithful to the way the world is. I now want to make clear some of the assumptions that are operative in the *articulation* of the intuition and call them into question. I want to dispel the idea that the 'intuition' at stake here is theoretically noncommittal, but rather a conclusion with loaded and doubtful premises, and should thus be rejected.

A central reason why one could cash out the phenomena in these terms relies on operating on binary and atomistic terms. Either we perceive the thing as it is, or as having a quality it has—unchanged—or we don't. If we do, our perception is veridical; if not, our perception is non-veridical. Second, on the standard view, the right interpretation when we say we perceive something over time is to say that we rather see a sequence of individual perceptions. Or at least, that on the right analysis we should find no contradiction with a scenario described as a sequence. Hume's position is certainly extreme in this sense, but its spirit remains on the standard view (or even necessitated by such view): “[Our senses] convey to us nothing but a single perception, and never gives us the least intimation of any thing beyond” (2000, 126).

Now, the object looked to us in more than one way when we compared P1, P2, and P3. Only provided, as Ayer would insist, the identity and permanence of the object, states P1, P2, and P3 claiming to be based on the object, i.e. deriving its intrinsic character on the object, would not be warranted in claiming being so grounded, for if that were the case, P1, P2, and P3 would be the same. From this one concludes that perception is *not* a necessarily getting in touch with *the* way things are. We cannot rule out that an exclusive disjunct of P1, P2, and P3 could be true, so that one of them would be veridical, but we must rule out that an inclusive disjunction of the three, or a conjunction of at least two differing (in the same respect) single perception could come out true.

What we get is that in our perceptions of the world, veridical perception is only contingently veridical. The reasons for its veridicality cannot be only perceptually warranted, but need inferential backing-up—a thesis Hume explicitly states and Kant criticizes in the paralogisms. Perceptually alone we can't assess the exclusive disjunction P1, P2, P3 to be true or false. Lack of sameness in a sequence of perceptions is interpreted negatively, for in this frame of mind what I have called a sequence of perceptions is a sequence happening in us, but not a sequence grounded on the thing perceived. From here on the standard framework for perception may take different shapes, but it keeps the desideratum of veridicality understood in

binary terms and operating upon discrete perceptions, and puts perception and perceptual powers on the negative side of the veridicality desideratum's ledger book.

But let's step back and see the basic phenomenon and the purported implication. *Is the implication warranted in the phenomenon as described?* The answer is no.

Being warranted or not in saying that the differences between moments of the perception of a thing entail that perception does not necessarily tell the veridical story about reality hinges, conceptually, on the truth of the conjunction of two premises, (1) and (2):

A distinction appearances/reality:

- (1) Same-aspect perceptual variations in the perception of a thing are incompatible with the reality of that aspect of the thing, such that they can't be predicated without mistake of the same real object (only as-if of the same object).

A thesis about the persistence of real objects of a mind-independent world and their properties:

- (2) Objects and their properties (objects, events, and states of affairs) are mind-independent realities.

Thesis (2) is underdetermined, though. Let us consider two big-stroke variants, as they pertain to the issue of perception.

(2<sub>1</sub>) Objects and their properties (objects, events, and states of affairs) are mind-independent realities and their properties and they are defined from an objective point of view, intellectual or scientific.<sup>22</sup>

(2<sub>2</sub>) Objects and their properties (objects, events, and states of affairs) are mind-independent realities and yet it is not the case that they can be entirely defined from an objective point of view; the actual perceptual engagement of perceivers and communities of perceivers with worldly objects (perceptions that involve a vantage point of view, not only spatial but also temporal and pragmatic, plus situational features) are necessary for a full definition of worldly objects and their properties in their being perceived.

It is important to note that the viability of (1) may set constraints on (2) (a version of which I accept), for if differences in appearance are intrinsically, non-inferentially compatible with true

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<sup>22</sup> Although Chalmers's framework is basically the same as (2<sub>1</sub>), he may need to add to it either that such objects and properties *are thought of as perfect objects and properties instantiated in them*, or even that they *are* perfect objects and properties of a metaphysically possible world with normative import.

being, then the reality of a mind-independent reality, as to its perceivable nature, cannot be known in independence from the way it appears, which is my claim. If (1) were true, only (2<sub>1</sub>) would be compatible with it. The conjunction of (1) and (2<sub>2</sub>) would be false by means of mutual contradiction. If (1) were false, (2<sub>2</sub>) can still be the case. I will be claiming that (1) is false, (2<sub>1</sub>) is false, and (2<sub>2</sub>) is true.

Let's look at (1). Substantively, the issue of the compatibility between appearances and reality is, I claim, a thesis about the nature of perceivable things and the nature of the perceiving of those things.<sup>23</sup>

As to the nature of perceivable things it is important to note that (1) entails that the qualifications of objects can be defined in a fixed way, such that an object or property can only be characterized in one way in a given respect, which it is referred to as the reality of the object or property. In this framework, for appearances of object or properties to be actually revealing of the nature of the real object, they must be able to be predicated in the same way objects and properties themselves are. This naturally entails that multiplicity in a given respect is thought of as not revealing of the real nature of an object or property.

Being able to meaningfully refer to a definition of the nature of the real objects and properties is a necessary condition to pronounce appearances incompatible with it. But when we analyze the nature of that definition of real being we run into a series of problems.

The true description of the real objects and its properties must be perceptually meaningful in order to be relevant as a standard for comparison of perceptual appearances. This means that the aspects that figure in the definition must be cashed out perceptually: this beverage is bitter, this smell is sweet, the object is this big, and this coin is round. At the same time, the definition

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<sup>23</sup> Let's restrict our domain to the domain of actual experiences. First, I am interested in objects perceivable by perceivers, for I define perception by what the type of actual sensory-mediated interaction with a world of objects, events and states of affairs that occur for animal perceivers on Earth, and, by extension, in a universe with the laws we know, as they apply to perceivers our relative size—and not, say, to microscopic beings. I am interested in the way objects, events, and states of affairs are actually perceivable, and not in the way in another metaphysically possible world things of who-knows-what nature would be 'perceivable' for subjects constituted who-knows-how, for that's *as if in studying the nature of empathy considering telepathy is considered helpful*. I see no way of guaranteeing truths about perception that are not based on actual perceptions. Instead, I offer a rich theory of (this-world) perception and a theory of (this-world) appearances and of the experience of the objects that present themselves in appearances.

purports to be mainly non-perspectival, non-perceptually based. In other words, that the nature of its reality is such that it is of such a shape, taste, smell, or size regardless of the position or circumstances it is looked at from or in. Sure it is possible to give an objective description of some perceptually related states of affairs, such that, for example, a table is square iff it is a four-sided equilateral polygon. But this description, being perceptually relevant—that is, reflective of *at least* a veridical perception, according to the standard framework—, is one that coincides or is instantiated in one (or several), but not all, of the possible ways perspectives from which an object appears. But then there is a claim that the right perspective is *no perspective*, that is, that is *not just one among many* perspectives but *the* right one. The problem is: Where does the right perspective derive its right character so it can claim to be more than a perspective? And the problem again is that for it to be perceptually meaningful it must be something cashed out in terms one can understand perceptually, and not, for example, in geometrical analysis or scientific terms.

Ayer bites the bullet and says that the reality of the object is actually one appearance yet a 'privileged appearance'. The case of color or shape seems to lend itself more easily to the solution Ayer proposes. Some appearances (sense-data, in Ayers' and Price's framework), say appearance K, are related to the rest of the appearances of a thing in a way that has more predictive power, in the sense, that having sense-appearance K is more telling of the rest of appearance possibilities of the object than other appearances (Ayer 1947, 263–274). It is not difficult to think this is right considering certain shapes or colors, for it seems natural to talk about a red-colored surface that is perceived more clearly red in one position and in broad daylight, or a round figure that would look from certain points of view really round and not elliptical, as when one looks at a coin in a way that the plane of one's line of vision is perpendicular to the plane of the surface of the coin.

I am not convinced that these two cases settle the matter, for the variety of appearances provide only relative support to each other, as that one that attains the privileged appearance

status would not do so in the absence of the range of possibilities, and in that sense it is difficult to see how this privileged appearance would count as the ‘reality’ of the object or property in comparison to which other appearances derive their ‘mere appearance’ status.<sup>24</sup> In other words, it’s not clear to me that relative predictive power of one appearance in relation to a gamut of other appearances can furnish that appearance the epistemological status it supposedly does. The perspectival status of the privileged appearance, though privileged, prevents the definition of the reality of objects or properties derived from it to acquire the strong status it is supposed to possess, for it is based on this definition that differing appearances of the same object or property are treated as not revealing of such true reality. In this sense the privileged appearance strategy is self-effacing.

This is in fact connected to my agreement with a version of disjunctivism. The baseline for SEP is *only* a minimal ‘good case’: that a perceiver actually interacts with an external object. Cases of hallucination plus coincidence (the subject hallucinates “correctly” what is coincidentally perceptually available to them) are ruled out because they are not perceptual. In order to understand the significance of this *minimal good case* as a requirement it is appropriate to compare it to what looks like a more stringent requirement but which falls prey to the preconceptions derived from veridicality. This is what Siegel calls the superstrongly veridical case: a certain property is perceived accurately in this case: “seeing *o* when *o* looks *F*, *o* is *F*, and *o*’s looking *F* is due to *o*’s *F*-ness” (Siegel 2010, 37). I dispute this seemingly clear statement. First, *F* is not necessarily predicable of *o* in the absence of the perceptual interaction (think of the color of a pond as one walks around it), even if it is meaningful to talk in such terms. We need a conception of (2) the *F* that belongs to the object is not the *F* that appears in the specific profiles or perspectives that are presented in perception. Actually, in perception there are *F*s—*F*’, *F*’’, *F*’’, etc.—, so the relation between *F* and *F*’, *F*’’, *F*’’, is a one-many relation. These are the properties I referred to earlier as perspectival properties or P-properties (Noë 2004, 82–83).

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<sup>24</sup> I endorse a positive sense of something like ‘privileged appearances,’ provided its status is correlative to the totality of appearances and the normativity that belongs to them, as I will touch upon in chapter 5 but elaborate in more detail in chapter 5.

The difference between P-properties and properties *of* the objects, events, and states of affairs can further be specified thus: objects, events, states of affairs and their properties are presented perspectively in perception and can only do so. We are acquainted with *F* but only via *F'*, *F''*, *F'''*, etc.<sup>25</sup> If a perceptual presentation is only perspectival, a perfect presentation (*F* as *F*) is an impossibility. Physical occurrences—e.g. material objects in their visual aspect but also in their olfactory aspect—cannot be experienced by perceivers but in perspectival sequences. To put in a somewhat counterfactual way: unless gods enjoyed an embodied existence they would not *perceive* at all (Pietersma 2000, 62).

Further, there is a stronger objection to the idea of a privileged appearance standing for reality. The objection is that it can't stand a careful perceptual analysis in the cases of size or complex shapes. It is also an objection to another argument against the direct perception of objects and their properties, namely, the argument of the continuous series in which delusional and veridical appearances take place (Ayer 1947, 8–9; Price 1950, 32). Consider a cow. “If I gradually approach an object from a distance I may begin by having a series of perceptions which are delusive in the sense that the object appears to be smaller than it really is” (Ayer 1947, 8). Suppose I am situated at 100 meters, 50 meters... 3 meters, 1 meter away from the cow. *At which one of those distances does the cow look as big as 'it really is'?* To ask that is foolish, and extreme cases—looking at the cow at 1-millimeter distance from it or at a million kilometers from it—cut no conceptual ice. And it is mistaken to assert then that there is such a thing as the cow appearing or smaller or bigger *than it is*, for the cow appears always as big as it is relative to my distance from it. Naturally the cow has certain dimensions (although for exact dimensions a living being of this kind is not the best choice), but those dimensions, say height, cannot play out perceptually in the manner needed for it to be a standard for reality. The cow having the

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<sup>25</sup> This is another way to make sense of the rejection of the traditional commitment to veridicality understood along binary lines (objects are presented as they are or they are not) and in discrete terms (at each moment it is possible to assess whether appearances match reality or not. Thus, 1) Both *F'* and *F''* are *F*s, in the sense that perceptual profiles actually reveal how things are, and 2) an *F'*, *F''*, *F'''*, etc. could not be assessed in isolation, but only as a part of a sequence, where *F\** is deviant, but only in relation to *F'*, *F''*, *F'''*, etc. A discussion of P-properties and their normative relation to the social and the pragmatic is undertaken in chapter 5.

dimensions it has is not incompatible with its looking of varying dimensions depending on the location of the subject from it, so the appearances cannot be called incompatible according to a standard of reality, as it is needed for the tree of illusion to have any purchase in this respect. But insofar as the tree of Illusion was intended as a general objection to all varying appearances, this counterexample works as an objection against the broader case.

An even stronger objection is this: What is the *shape* or *figure* of the cow, in terms of privileged appearances? While the dimensions of the cow, say its height, were something we could make sense as a potential standard (one that fails to be such for it cannot play out perceptually but without perspective), I don't think it possible to define the privileged appearance or appearances of the shape of the cow. The issue seems to me intractable were we discussing the shape of the cow in tactile terms: what would even count as a differing appearance of the shape of the cow if I were to perceive its shape by touch, that is, by movements of my arms and hands over the body of the cow?

It starts looking as if that the philosophical articulation of the distinction appearance-reality is based on something analogous to a snapshot visual comparator, in which perspective is built-into but managed to seem absent, thus making it 'intuitive' to say what corresponds to a standard and what doesn't. But even in a visual mode, it is impossible to make clear what a privileged appearance capable of becoming a standard of reality—able to ban differing appearances from intrinsically counting as actual perceptions of the thing—in the case of the shape of a cow. Clearly one shot won't do—neither two would. So a set of privileged appearances would stand for the real shape qualities of the cow: are we to suppose that a set of images of the cow, taken from different perspectives, won't overlap in the way a part of the animal's body appears, thereby allowing in the ideal set conflicting appearances? It may be argued at this point that the general point is rather theoretical and that no one is claiming that 'privileged appearances' are supposed to be potential real appearances of objects: real visual perceptions, real touch perceptions, real smell perceptions. But if this is not the case, if the



standard for reality is not one that can be rendered in perceptually meaningful terms, on what material basis can actual perceptions be deemed as non-veridical? They can't, and the issue is then that there are no reasons to think the required standard exempt from a careful phenomenological, perceptually based analysis.

The shape of the cow, then, is such that it is perceived in varying appearances which the concern for veridicality insists on considering merely contingent, for it counts with the possibility of having a standard of reality that is fundamentally non-perspectival. But the non-perspectival cow's shape is impossible to conceive. Some might think that the idea is not of a view from nowhere, but a view from everywhere: this is the sense in which Merleau-Ponty says that the full object may be thought of as seen from everywhere: "the house itself is not the house seen from nowhere, but the house seen from everywhere" (2002, 69). One may think that he grants the house itself the status of an ideal object, composed of all perspectives, existing at once. However, he insists on the spatial and temporal nature of the different perspectives, from which we can conclude that a unity of spatial perspectives at one moment is impossible to actually be the case. The idea of a house seen from everywhere brings to light the fact that to conceive of the reality of an object in perceptually meaningful terms, e.g. as a perceptible material object, is epistemologically dependent on perceptual categories. Merleau-Ponty has also spoken of the perceptual field as a multiplicity of perspectives where things show themselves to others (2002, 68–70). Only metaphorically inert things show themselves to others; what the point brings to light is the dependence on the idea of an observer, for only an observer has a point of view from where things are perceived. To speak again of our cow, the idea is that truly to conceive of the cow as a totality would be to think of all the possible perspectives from where all parts, sides, and aspects of the cow would appear.

Let me try to take this line of thinking one step further. If it is the case that all perceptions are essentially incomplete, or in other words, that all perceptual relating to objects is never fully achieved because there are always perspectives we have not taken, in which objects and their

properties would appear in ever so slightly differing ways (colors, forms, etc.), then we are always fundamentally related perceptually to things as to things that are never given completely and in which their potentialities are on the *horizon*, even if they are never fulfilled or explored. This line of thinking is at the basis of the account of normativity I will be offering in chapter 5.

Going back to the need for a standard of reality as necessary to the argument from illusion, the point I want to highlight from Merleau-Ponty's argument is the impossibility of conceiving of a standard of reality that is perceptually meaningful (and to which individual appearances can be compared to in order to be deemed veridical or delusional) and that does not have the limitations and indeterminations proper of the appearances it is to be compared with, namely, the "problem" of having, in Chalmers terms, "different colors and shapes at different times." This being the case, it does not seem that Ayer, Price, and Chalmers can really offer the type of standard of reality needed to make the concern for veridicality take off. This point just reached, by *reduction*, is paralleled, and more succinctly expressed, in Husserl's idea that even a God would see things in perspectives—where the absence of varying perspective amounts to the absence of perceptions.

What looks seemingly neat in the case of a coin starts looking foolish when compared with more real cases. The real world is more like cows than it is like coins in a two-dimensional space. This argument aims at saying that the idea that the reality of an object or property can be defined in terms of privileged appearances is inconsistent with a metaphysics of the material world involving the spatiotemporal determination of occurrences. I can't imagine what peculiar metaphysics may render such a view not inconsistent.

A less conspicuous point relates to the status *of our perceiving* the different appearance variations of one thing, to wit: the issue of compatibility between appearances (in the plural) and reality (in the singular) only arises because a gulf is supposed between them as if they were two different domains. This is why in such a view the direct objects of perception must be an inner

occurrence call them sense-data, sense-impressions, mental images, Fregean *Sinne*, or any other name for traditionally conceived representations, detached from the world they arise from. This implies that the mental representations stand in need of further confirmation, so that our perception of the world is understood as a double process: a sensory input followed by a judgment or inference.

For example, when one has a phenomenally red experience as of an object in one's environment, this can be used as grounds for accepting a belief that there is a red object in front of one. One would not normally call this relation between experience and belief an "inference," but it can be seen as a sort of quasi-inferential relation. Just as with belief, the inferential role of a perceptual experience can be analyzed in part by asking: when given information about how things are in the world, will a subject accept or reject the perceptual experience? (Chalmers 2006, 98–99)

This is a good illustration of the way of looking at perception based on veridicality. It is natural in this framework to require an inferential step that brings together different, intrinsically incompatible, appearances. Also important is the conception of the perceiver behind this theory, namely, the idea of a thinker. I have no space to expand it here, but what is worth noting here is the erroneous idea that in relating perceptually to things one is always rationally active and in control, always comparing, inferring, deducing. It is Ayer's idea that while in perception there is no deduction for no specific instances can count as a universal, we must be engaged in induction, still reaching conclusions but not of the kind that provides certainty (1947, 39–40). In contrast, I have in mind a perceiver that is engaged with the world, not in the mode of judging, but in the manner that pertains specifically to perception: an engagement with the world that is immersed in the world, takes implicitly its structure for granted, and actively relates to it in a very immediate and involved way. While I do not intend this last line of thought as an argument against (1), it seems to me rather clear that such a notion is at work in our conceptualization of perception, and that this image of us is erroneous.

This way of looking at our perceptual involvement with the world has some problems. One of them is that it over-intellectualizes the perceptual process, making it more mysterious the

cognitive continuity between non-human animals and humans, distinctions between fully-abled and disabled human beings (extending to issues such as the relation between perceivers and the world, and, ultimately, deep issues about our nature as perceivers, thinkers and emotional beings). On the other hand, it removes the sense of immediacy that we find in perception and which is central to sequential, instantaneous activities, such as the acrobat in the circus.

### **3.4.1 In Virtue of Appearances, Not In Spite of Them**

I have been arguing that (1) is false, namely, that it is not the case that differing same-aspect appearances are incompatible with the reality of real objects and their properties. I have been also taking a position regarding (2) the mind-independent status of objects, events, and states of affairs and their properties in relation to perception. I have rejected the interpretation of it according to which such realities, if perceptually meaningful, can be objectively defined (2<sub>1</sub>). I defend interpretation (2<sub>2</sub>). Thus, I hold that the mind-independent objects and their properties, as perceived, cannot be fully defined in an objective manner alone, but that the actual perceptual engagement of perceivers with them furnishes part of their full definition.

There is a world independent of us and we perceive it. I do not claim that there is no fixed reality that we perceive. There is such a thing as ‘the way things are.’ There is more to what there is than the way things are. Even more, all that there is about things is not limited to the way things are by themselves. From the get-go, for an object, event or state of affairs to be perceivable means to stand in one-many relation to the appearances in which it appears to subjects specifically configured and situated. There is no leaving out “reference to properties” for a view like mine in order to oppose the veridicality-structure notion of content, as Siegel implies (Siegel 2010, 29).

I do not question then the possibility of being *mistaken* about something, like when it’s dark and one sees a dark brown object that turns out to be a dark blue navy object. Or like when a voice sounds like our friend’s but turns out to be a stranger’s. It makes sense to say ‘it turns out to be X, not Y.’ By the same token, I hold that it is often the case that one is *unsure* about the

exact characteristics of the perceptual object in a given aspect, for the aspect appears *unclear* to one, like when Descartes refers to a square tower that sort of looks round in the distance. But these cases are properly interpreted not as incompatible between appearances and reality, hence not as being veridical or nonveridical. I instead interpret these as occurrences in the complex warp of *normativity* that constitutes perception.

What others call fallibility, or what they express as perception being deceitful, I interpret and articulate in terms of degrees of fulfillment of perceptual expectations and of pragmatic significance that is a function of the actual relation or interaction between perceivers and a rich theory of appearances—not as a separation between perception and world. This notion of normativity is not about bridging a gulf, for such a gulf does not exist, but about making explicit many ways in which appearances can vary consistently and along several dimensions, such as indeterminations on the part of the object, situational/environmental features, the relative object-perceiver location (spatially, temporally, and pragmatically) the constitution of the perceiver at the moment, and the specific nature of the perceptual engagement. The product will be a theory in the spirit of a *radically positive, affirmative* theory of perception and appearances.

The idea of an appearance or profile is the idea of a partial manner in which worldly perceivable objects, events, and states of affairs can only present themselves directly, in their being physically constituted, for spatiotemporally and pragmatically situated perceivers. To perceive an object or being directly acquainted with it means to perceive or be directly acquainted with ‘one’ appearance or profile, or with a ‘sequence’ or ‘system’ of the appearances or profiles that are possible for that object, in manners that are *holistically coherent* in regards to the intrinsic configuration of the object (from micro to macrophysical structure), the specific disposition of the object in its environment, and to the modes of perceptual acquaintance (i.e. roughly sensory modalities plus modes of interaction) that pertain to the object and to the interaction object-perceiver, as reflected in specific configurations of *contents*, structure in the

manner that the present chapter suggests. In this framework there is absolute no conflict in saying that seeing in this moment a by-now-disappeared star is the only way for that star to be seen, in its existence at moment  $t_1$ , by a perceiver situated so far away that she sees at  $t_1+n$  years.

We perceive objects, events, and states of affairs in the world not *despite* the differences in specific appearances but *thanks* to them. The absence of factual variations, which the standard theory would require for a series of perception to be necessarily of the same object, would, in fact, be a counterfactual confirmation of the view I am endorsing. If the habitual variations in the perception of a physical occurrence would not take place, according to the modality in which it occurs, would be evidence that we do not actually perceive the object we perceive. This view somehow begins with the idea that “the same unchanged Objects appear, according to the changing circumstances, now in this way, now in another way” (Husserl 1989, 64, <58>), and the whole gamut of ways in which the same object can appear carries normative force.

On this view, hallucination is cut out from the beginning. Illusion, as I will explain later, will be treated not truth-functionally but re-described as a type of perceptual contingency that carries no threat, and that is subsumable under the epistemic purview of experience itself, as it follows from the theory of appearances that I started developing in the previous chapter.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> I said that Chalmers denies disjunctivism about phenomenology, and claims to be neutral on what he calls disjunctivism about metaphysics, and on disjunctivism about content. I hold that disjunctivism about metaphysics is true by definition, and is also confirmed by both hallucinatory and perceptual experiences, insofar as these aren't experiences isolated from the totality of our experiential life. I hold that to deny “disjunctivism about phenomenology” is underdetermined because the standard conception of “the phenomenology of x” is too thin to capture the way things look. A proper definition of the way things look—as I started accounting for in the previous chapter—implies that while hallucinations and illusions may have the same character as to an aspect of an object or its properties *in a momentary abstraction*, the temporally extended, contextually-dependent, internally-coherent structure of appearances in which ‘phenomenology’ consists cannot be common to a hallucination and a perception. In other words, it is only trivially true there is something in common in the color of trees when I see them than when I dream of them—namely, that I can answer ‘green’ to question ‘What color are the trees?’ and also pick an object of the same color in the environment (engage in discriminatory behavior)—, but this ‘commonality’ does not translate in any serious sense in the nature of perception. I take disjunctivism about content to be true in the relevant sense, for the objects and its aspects are constitutional of the experience, therefore of content. I add that disjunctivism about content is false in the same rather trivial sense that dreamt of and perceived trees ‘are’ green.

One reason that makes disjunctivism both about content and about phenomenology true in my view is that I deny that there is a real distinction between them. In my theory both (‘content’ and ‘phenomenology’) are grouped under the same heading: perceptual content, which is a specification of the nature of objects perceived as they are perceived and of the ways in which such objects are presented to a perceiver.

In mainstream views, talk of content simply supervenes on experience (Chalmers 2006, 65). In my view, experience is constitutive of content. To hold philosophically the ontological priority of experience is to say not only that perceptual experience *explains* our thinking about the world; rather, that it is that that it partly *constitutes* our thinking about the world. Further, it is not only that perceptual experience constitutes perception itself and is, when suitable, constitutive of our *thinking* about the world, but that it also partly constitutes our *acting upon* the world. In these cases, I mean constitutive in the sense that what is explained is not only *how* something came to be, but *what* it is or came to be.

Let us go back to Eden and look at it as one looks at a mirage that one knows it is so.

Chalmers's strategy was to contrast the actual world with a hypothetical perfect world, in which the actual world appears deficient, in order to render this world deficient in virtue precisely of not being like the hypothetical perfect world.

My own strategy takes the perceptual world as it appears in perceptual experience and investigates the conditions and structure of precisely our perceiving the world. Insofar as I need no hypothetical world to make sense of the actual, neither the actual world is not a deficiency nor am I itching for a fix that would take my perceptions and turn them into some alien standard of perfection.<sup>27</sup>

The desideratum for *veridicality* understood as a demand for ideality is dropped and replaced by a broader notion of *normativity*. In SEP's view, perceivers are able to situate perceptual interactions in relation to *expectations* and *possibilities*. Perceptual normativity is about situating perceptual occurrences in terms of their *pragmatic significance* and of *degrees of fulfillment of expectations*, as I started to elaborate in chapter 1 (section 1.2.4). This move is in keeping with my examination, in the last chapter, of Augustine's strategy, where I showed in a slightly different way how an ideal notion—truth, in that case—is an idealization of what perception actually presents us with. I have intended to build a strong case for an account that

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<sup>27</sup> The narrative I've offered is quite analogous to Nietzsche's *How the Real World at last Became a Myth* in his *Twilight of the Idols*; a piece of his antiplatonian reaction to the idea that this world is not the real world.

takes perception for what it is, and not for what it supposedly lacks. The desideratum concerning the presentational character of appearances is re-interpreted, not as a desideratum anymore, but as the actuality of perception and in terms of a thoroughly positive, this-worldly theory of appearances. In this context the presentational character of perception is properly explained by a social enactive theory of perception, that shares some elements with relational, directly realist views.<sup>28</sup>

Lastly, it may be objected that I am taking the idea of Eden too far: that clearly Chalmers does not think that there was an Eden and we fell from it. That much is clear, though. Critics might say that in refuting Chalmers I have, at best, only made implausible the use of the myth, but not the deep philosophical reasons to hold perception accountable to a non-perceptual standard of veridicality. But my critique has been about the *rationale* that moves his little myth. If Chalmers has provided an *ad hoc* way of understanding perceptual content—if it is just an ideal language to talk about perception (very much in the way Ayer saw his own sense-data project) in order to account for the features that need accounting—my critique stands. In objecting to the motivations underlying the desiderata about content, and in showing the tensions in this account regarding the real world, I have provided reasons to reject his full account of content.

The set of objections I have offered in this chapter shows the characterization of Eden to be mistaken and concludes that the upshot of the Fall is not a rational one. In the crafting of Eden,

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<sup>28</sup> Schellenberg (Forthcoming; 2011) has recently argued that the perception is both relationalist and representationalist. I do not rule out the possibility of granting perceptual representations an *ad hoc* sense, as a way in which we could refer to what we perceive for instrumental purposes. Strictly speaking, representations must ultimately be entirely deflated. I say deflated and not eliminated, for the project of modeling the mind and modeling perceptual systems for instance for AI purposes may require such language. Recent developments in AI show that relationalist concepts are much needed for a robot that is able to dynamically perceive. Simaan and others have been working on ‘complementary situational awareness’: “the robot’s ability to gather sensory information as it works and to use this information to guide its actions” (Simaan, quoted by Salisbury 2013). In my framework, however, the instrumental, not constitutive, character of this situational awareness is tied to its representational basis (understandably so) and is linked to the fact that only original perceivers—living beings—are capable of having the original intentionality present in perceptual consciousness.

Further, as I will be arguing in this and the next two chapters, the casting of content constitutively (and not just instrumentally) in pragmatic terms is at odds with representational tenets. My rejection of the fundamental character of representations, which the entire project supports, allows me further to distinguish my view from Schellenberg’s (with whom I agree on several interesting points, albeit for different reasons), as well as from other relationalists, like Campbell, and other enactivists, like Noë (or even Schellenberg’s enactive ‘capacities’ approach).



a notion of perfection is embedded in the actual workings of perception and deemed deficient. In accepting Eden as it is presented, one is already accepting the diagnosis of the Fall, for they are correlative notions. Having showed that we have every reason to reject the idea of the Eden, I have in the same way showed that we have every reason to reject any view that shares the axis ideality-illusion-veridicality as the underlying understanding of the perceptual world.

Chalmers's account of perception is of no use in trying to advance our understanding of perception, except, and this becomes its virtue, as a way of looking at what perception is not and at the way philosophy of perception should not proceed.

## Chapter IV

### Dynamic Content in The Social Enactive View

In the Social Enactive view, perceptual content is the notion subordinate to perceptual experience that specifies that which perceptual experiences are about. I use *experience* and *content* to refer to *perceptual experience* and *perceptual content*, unless noted. In this chapter, I build what I call a dynamic account of content on top of the work of the previous two chapters, where I dealt with the notion of experience (chapter 2) and with the relation between experience and content (chapter 3). I departed from representational views on content and argued that content refers to that which experience is about: it is an issue of the aboutness of experience. I proposed that content derives from, or is ‘molded’ by experience. Putting *experience-content* in a *model-mold* relation is meant as a way of signaling that to understand *what an experience is about* amounts to a great extent to understand what *to experience perceptually is* in the first place, and as a methodological device in the sense that content allows us to see things about experience that aren’t observable from the point of view of experience alone. Because of this relationship, the scaffolding for the conception of content I am to articulate more precisely in this chapter consists in the argumentation about experience offered in the previous two chapters. In particular, it should be noted that my full-fledged argument about veridicality in relation to experience and content—an argument *against* the concern for veridicality—appears in chapters 2 and 3. The task I take up in this chapter is to distil the lessons from chapters 2 and 3 to make the central constraints on the idea of content explicit and offer a parsing of content that honors the account of experience already offered. The next chapter will be devoted to an account of the normativity of perceptual experience and content.

In the view I am presenting, experience defines what *aboutness* is: aboutness is the relation between an experiencing subject and the experienced object, such that the subject’s experience is

about the object, and *in the concrete way* in which it is experienced. *Perceptual* content is a specification of *what is experienced, in the way* it is experienced.<sup>1</sup>

Within the social enactive theory of perception I am proposing—a relational, or rather interactive social externalism—the notion of content should satisfy some desiderata. The first one is a desideratum about phenomenology—understood in the thick sense I use. Since in my view perceptual experiences are about temporally extended continua, this specification of contents, which I term *dynamic*, explains the transitions and other relations among moments of such perceptual continua, as well as the relations of those sequences with the objects, events, and states of affairs that we experience perceptually, including the high-level, pragmatic-based properties that we find in them.<sup>2</sup>

Second, perceptual experience constitutes the ground of our being conscious of things phenomenally, both terms of action and, sometimes, predicatively (propositionally) and emotionally. Perceptual content, then, must provide partial explanations and justifications of what in each case is the object of our perceptions and actions, of our thoughts and emotions. Thus, content as specification of aboutness also has an explanatory and justificatory role, which in general follows this formula: we are perceptually aware of things (we act on things, we think of things, we feel in relation to things) partly because we perceive things in specific manners; so the way we perceive them explains and justifies the ways we are aware of them, act upon them, think of them, and feel about them.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> In not using the intentionality idiom, I am purposefully setting aside traditional understandings of what intentions and intentional objects are and what theoretical roles they are expected to perform. Particularly, I am not buying into the idea that all intentional objects play the same role, for that disregards specific types of intentionality and their objects.

<sup>2</sup> See chapter 2 for an argument for high-level properties. In relation to properties in general, there can be a further metaphysical question about whether events are basic or only a construction on properties of objects, hence whether perception of events is of the event or of properties of objects: “the noisy police car coming towards me now” or “there is something about the noisy police car and that is that it’s coming towards me now.” My suggestion, following my argument on the pragmatic dependence of objectivities and properties at the end of chapter 2, is for the interests of theorizing about perception, there is no fact of the matter, and the specification of objects or events and their properties highly depends on the way in which the subject takes position about a worldly reality. In the next section, I touch upon this issue when I talk about perceptual intentionality and its particular variations and the way they partly determine the object-as-perceived.

<sup>3</sup> I do not include a constraint of reasonability in this desideratum: the idea that perception grounds what it is ‘reasonable’ to believe, to do, or to feel, as Siegel does (as well as several standard takes on perception) (2010, 9). This and related issue are pursued in greater detail in chapter 5.

In section 1, I sift the account of experience and the account of the relation between experience and contents of chapters 2 and 3 in order to draw general constraints on content. This taking of stock allows me, first, to make the case for taking a perceptual continuum or perceptual sequence, and not a static object, as the paradigm of the perceptual object; and second, to account for the distinction between perceptual object and perceptual content in terms of the *perceptual object* and the *object-as-perceived*. Note that in the expressions *perceptual object* and *object-as-perceived* I use 'object' as a placeholder for objects (proper), events, and states of affairs to which we are perceptually related. I then provide an argument for the perceptual intentionality at work in object-as-perceived and finish the section by highlighting the non-detachable, world-involving character of perceptual content in the Social Enactive View.

Section 2 is the core of this chapter, where I proceed to offer a parsing of perceptual content. Perceptual content must reflect, on the one hand, the stability (and at times unity) of perceived objects, events, and states of affairs; on the other, it must reflect the dynamism of perception, in which unities are embedded. This makes up for an account of dynamic content that is multilayered and pragmatically dependent, and structurally four-fold. As to its *nature* (1), content is constituted by the real, worldly objects and the object-as-perceived, the latter being the main specification of content; as to its *structure*, content is parsed into (2) core-content and (3) environing-content; and (4) environing-content extends all the way down to the very moment of acquaintance or contact of a perceiver with properties of the physical world.

In section 3 I discuss an objection raised by Drummond to the effect that a view of content that takes perceptual continua as perceptual objects is committed to phenomenalism. I reply to this objection arguing that the parsing of content proposed (*full=core+environing*) is not committed to a part-whole structure and can hence guarantee the reality and stability of the world.

#### 4.1 Object and Content: The Relation Between *Perceptual Object* and *Object-As-Perceived*

In this section I would like to take stock from the accounts of perceptual experience and its relation to chapters 2 and 3, hence also offering an argument for the distinction between perceptual object and object-as-perceived.

To perceptually experience temporally extended continua featuring external objects, events, and states of affairs is to engage in a sensory-based active manner with worldly objects, as they come, are available for interaction, and go; in their coming, being available for interaction, and going away.<sup>4</sup> This spatially and temporally extended interaction with objects is pragmatically constituted in ways that are more often than not *socially constituted*. Perception takes place in practices, as chapter 1 accounted for, so perception appears in the richly defined description of situations like tasting a meal or visually following a soccer ball as it comes towards me and I prepare to kick it, and not properly about ‘detecting’ the shape of the spherical volume. SEP follows Hurley (1998) in rejecting the input-output picture, that is, the view that perception equals causal sensory input, upstream of motor output. I will explore these aspects in chapter 5 where this argument will be linked to the broader idea that perceptual interaction *grounds* other types of engagement with the world, such as action (not motor output), thought, and emotion.

In this conception perception is direct and is also mediated by three main different types of dependencies that I introduced in chapter 3: idiosyncratic (facts of personal and species embodiment, and otherwise idiosyncratic), socially pragmatic, and non-socially pragmatic.<sup>5</sup> Hence, the social enactive view is entirely at odds with the notion that there can be an unmediated contact between subject and objects. More specifically, the Social Enactive view is committed to a distinction between object properties and perceived properties: objects, events,

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<sup>4</sup> Unless explicitly stated, ‘object’ is used as a placeholder for objects, events, and states of affairs. When talking about actual objects (the ambulance siren, the car), I will talk of ‘physical object.’

<sup>5</sup> Cf. chapter 3, section 3.3.1.

states of affairs and their properties are presented perspectively in perception and can only do so. The mediation of these dependencies plays a role in the appearing of objects.

External objects, events, and states of affairs cannot be experienced by perceivers but in perspectival sequences, according to the perception-relative dependencies. Thus, in perception, we are acquainted with pragmatically governed temporally extended continua.

Take the *Bicycle Ride* example. When I ride my bicycle to work, there is a sense in which the perceptual object is the whole continuum made up by the changing road, the many cars parked and moving, the building, signs, and people I pass by, the different thermic sensations in my skin, my touching the wind, and the smells around me. Granted, if the ride lasts for 25 minutes, we are less inclined to talk about the whole ride as one continuum, but at least when I am going down a two-block long slope, the whole perception of things through the two-block distance can be confidently pronounced one continuum. So as I ride, I perceive people and objects around me. I can, for instance, move so as to avoid another cyclist.<sup>6</sup> I truly perceive them, but there is also a sense in which the object of, say, my visual perception is not just one object and then another and then another. Rather, the object of my perception can be the sequence itself in which objects present themselves, as they succeed one another, and as I feel the crisp cold air and the smell of a rainy early morning. I often remember rides precisely in terms of the moving sequence. It would be contrary to my experience to say that I never experienced the sequence for all there was was a sequence of static moments.

In chapters 2 and 3 I approvingly quoted Husserl saying that perceptual continua could be thought of as chains of “resting perceptions, unified by transitional phenomena, in which various sides and parts of the thing present themselves in a stable way” (1997, 83, 76, <98,89>). I must make that assertion more precise: while we can think of perceptual continua as made of resting parts and sides, these parts and sides are not accurately characterized as static either. On the one hand, they are embedded in pragmatically governed continua and contexts, so their status

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<sup>6</sup> Chapter 5 will revisit the Bicycle Ride example, but with an emphasis on the “systematic dynamic interdependence of perception and action, with multiple channels of motor-to-sensory feedback” (Hurley 1998, 302) at play, for example, in avoiding another cyclist or taking a curve by a turn of the handle bars.

as independent entities is contingent upon the perceptual relation. It was in this sense that in I elaborated, in chapter 2, upon Husserl's insight that perceptual unities are not simply detected, but rather 'posited,' that is, objectivated or individualized as they are grasped.<sup>7</sup> The thought that must be warded off is the following: that the objects of perception can be individualized and defined before the perceptual relation takes place, and that it is proper to define them (including their parts, sides, and aspects) in the terms we normally refer to them, as when we talk of a building's façade and its sides and roof. Whether those objects of the world are the objects of our perception, and whether their architecturally or otherwise defined sides or parts feature in our perception, it is all a matter of the perceptual activity itself that may or may not focus on them, defined this way, in their 'worldly' independence. On the other hand, it is sometimes the case that there are no parts or sides that we can categorically pinpoint (or at least not in a way that can categorically refer to a pre-existing static configuration of things), as is the case of the *inattentive onlooker*, the person that inattentively watches the country passing by while riding a car or a train.

When I listen to a song in order to enjoy it, or to someone speaking so as to understand what she is saying, the object of my perception is the song or the conversation, coupled with whatever background noise there is, but both song and conversation are continua of sounds—and it would be a confusion to say that the actual perceptual objects are isolated sounds—even if there is a level of subpersonal processing that takes up sounds in chunks (as in vision, as we know because of motion pictures). Even when we contemplate an object, say, for aesthetic enjoyment, the object is present to us in an extended manner. First, eyes explore objects in fast movements known as saccades, placed inside a head that moves, and atop a body that moves too. But also, the specific shifts in attention that make up for the contemplation of the objects are not random but guided by the (in this case) contemplative intention and the object itself. In the case of taste, liquids or solids move inside the mouth, and these movements may matter or not, and it is standard practice to take the time to enjoy a piece of chocolate by letting it slowly melt in

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<sup>7</sup> Cf. chapter, 2, section 2.3.3.

one's mouth, for the experience is different than that of a fast biting the chocolate. In olfaction, we sniff and take in waves of air, and it is a learned practice to sniff something intently yet softly to be delighted by it: one does not typically explore the faulty trash can in that way. These observations are available to any perceiver, reflecting on her perceptual experience as it occurs in everyday life. They illustrate that the natural objects of perception are continua, embedded in pragmatic interactions, which guide perceptual attention and perceptual awareness (and, as chapter 5 will show, also the connections between perception and action, thought, and emotion).

These two commitments, (1) perspectival appearing and (2) the temporal extendedness of perceptual objects, further buttress the claim that to perceive something is to perceive it *as* something. It is a *take* on reality since reality is perceived in a particular manner or aspect. If the perspectival appearing of things allows for the same object to appear to the same or different perceivers in various manners, the difference in each perceptual take would not be due to the intrinsic materiality of the object (or event or state of affairs), but would belong to the perspectival appearing. Noë is right in remarking that we generally don't put much attention to perspectival properties and variations in them, but that once we turn our attention to them, it is plain to every perceiver that there are differences in different perceptions of the same object, and that other perceivers may have slightly (or significantly) different takes on same objects (2004, 83). If we focus on the temporally extended aspect of the way things appear it is even clearer that our contact with things is not just an impression of an object itself, but a *take* on it.

On the one hand, then, we agree that there exist differences in the particular ways in which things are presented to us, as a function of perceptual dependencies and expressed in perspectival properties and perceptual continua. On the other, it is part of the perception of things that in each case we are acquainted with the external object, event, or state of affairs. As different philosophers in the phenomenological tradition have insisted on, it would be a mistake to say we are only acquainted with the individual perspectives in which objects are presented.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> See also (Noë 2004, 76).



In both cases, we are dealing with the direct perception of an object. The difference I would like to introduce now, following these distinctions, is that *what we perceive*, that is, *the content of perception* is two-fold: on the one hand, the external object that we perceive is an aspect of *perceptual content*, which I will call the *perceptual object*; on the other, the specific way in which the object is presented to us—which I will call the *object-as-perceived*—is also an aspect of *perceptual content*. Perceptual content then is composed of both the *perceptual object* and by the *object-as-perceived*. This point is about the *nature* of perceptual content, which only partly maps onto the discussion on the *structure* of perceptual content that I address in section 4.2 below.

*The Ambulance Siren.* I work near a hospital, and it is quite common to see ambulances going by with their sirens on. When I hear an ambulance siren getting closer to where I am and then going away, it is the ambulance siren itself that I hear, and as such it is part of the content of my perception. The *perceptual object* can be thought of as an answer to a *what* question. But it is also true that I hear the siren in specific ways and that those ways are also part of the content of my perception. For instance, the sound gets louder (and seemingly higher in pitch, due to the Doppler effect) if the ambulance is coming towards me, but becomes lower (and seemingly lower in pitch) and fades away if it's going away. Those are two different ways of hearing the same ambulance siren. The *object-as-perceived* can be thought of as an answer to a *how* question, because, once again, I do not only hear the siren: I hear the siren of an ambulance, as it goes away, and in that going away there are specific characteristics that I am aware of (or can be if I turn my attention to them), and also characteristics that are linked with other aspects (actional, propositional, emotional) of my perceptual interaction with my surroundings.

In fact, I am not a passive receiver vis-a-vis the ambulance siren. My perceptual relation to it is best described as an interaction. There is much more about my perceptual experience of the siren than my location relative to it. In order to understand the siren as an object-as-perceived we need to account more fully for my interaction with it. I now bring to the fore the three constitutive dependencies of perception presented in chapter 3 (cf. section 3.3.1).

I am interacting with the ambulance siren even though I do not act in a very hands-on way, as I acted towards the cyclist I was avoiding in the *Bicycle Ride* case. But this also makes it a good example: it will give me a chance to signal that perceptual interaction is not only a direct manipulation, but it is the form of every sensory-based experience of the world. Because sirens are loud and unpleasant to hear, it is common for a person to avoid somehow or try to minimize the exposure to the sound, for example, by covering their ears or even slightly turning the head. But a case of a more evident perceptual interaction with the siren is not difficult to find. Suppose I am walking down the street with a friend of mine, and we are talking about something important; perhaps I was confiding something to him. Although I don't see people I know around us, I lower my voice a bit—it's not just caution, fearing someone would hear the confidence, and we both understand that a piece of sensitive information is coming. That is the moment when the ambulance siren comes towards us. Surprised at first, we see where the ambulance is coming from and then hear it getting increasingly louder, and apparently higher in pitch. I stop telling my story, waiting for the ambulance to pass. I stop in the middle of the sentence, prompted by a subtle gesture in his face that I interpreted as "I can't hear you very well" and wait until the noise has gone considerably low before I resume. My friend understood my pausing and waiting; there is no surprise in him. I also noticed that when the siren started to get closer I could no longer hear the noise of the other cars and the voices of few people around us, but now that the siren goes away, I can hear that background noise again. Let's finish the case by adding three more characters, a runner coming from behind us, and an arguing couple, across the street but 50 meters behind my friend and me, which we noticed as we were walking. They were arguing very loudly. When the siren came towards them, they didn't stop but kept yelling at each other, now at the top of their lungs, evidently upset and careless about what other people could have thought. Of course, they did notice the ambulance because they had to yell louder and louder, and their yelling seemed even louder after the ambulance had gone away.

What the Ambulance Siren case illustrates is, first, as I have already said, that the siren itself is a perceptual object for my friend and me, the runner, and the arguing couple. The *perceptual object* can be the same for people situated very differently, as in this case. Let us now look at the differences in the object-as-perceived. The configuration of the object-as-perceived varies according to the three constitutive dependencies of perception: the *idiosyncratic dependencies*, the *non-socially pragmatic dependencies*, and the *socially pragmatic dependencies*.

For instance, the tone and loudness of the siren are mediated by the *idiosyncratic dependencies*, that is, facts of the embodiment of each of the listeners and deep-seated personal sensory-specific attentional habits or associations. Suppose that my friend experiences mild hearing loss. For him, the siren is not as loud as it is for the others—and this he “knows” and is part of his way of navigating the world (in taking clues from running cars, in setting music at a higher volume). But by the same token, the moment at which he is unable to hear my soft-voiced confidence comes sooner than it would for another person. That explains that although I was cognizant of the ambulance siren and knew that I had to stop at some point, I didn’t think it was so soon and it was a gesture of his that clued me to pause. In this sense, the perceptual experience of the ambulance siren is mediated by an idiosyncratic dependency for my friend. For the runner, listening to music through regular earphones (not the noise-cancelling type), would also experience the noise of the ambulance siren—its unpleasantness, getting louder, and going away—mediated by what would count as an idiosyncratic dependency because it affects her initial sensory acquaintance with physical properties of the world. In this case, the idiosyncratic dependency (additional to facts about her hearing system) is also partly formed by the way the earphones and the music affect her listening to the siren. The idiosyncratic dependency, it must be said, is also at work in the case of a person with average audition capacities and “good” hearing conditions.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> As I noted in section 3.1, the average way of perceiving the world, as in “good” hearing, has no intrinsic normative value. It is conceptually arbitrary, although statistically significant.

*The non-socially pragmatic dependencies* refer to patterned links between actions and sensory stimulation that do not belong to the socially constituted aspects of pragmatic interactions. In the case of the ambulance siren, this type of dependency refers to variations in the way the object is perceived due to environmental conditions product of the sensorimotor relations between subject and object. In the ambulance siren case, the Doppler effect (that pitch seems to get higher when the siren approaches one, and lower when the siren is going away) is a non-socially pragmatic dependence, because it depends on the pragmatic relation between subject and object.

Lastly, the perceptual experience of the ambulance siren is *social-pragmatically* mediated or dependent in several ways. First of all, it is mediated in the fact that this perceptible object is, in some social contexts, a siren. Societies have developed this loud object and positioned it on top of certain vehicles so it emits noises configured thus-and-so, in intensity and frequency, to ensure awareness of such vehicles in a relatively broad radius, on account of a socially accepted urgency. A siren is a siren because it is loud and (for most) unpleasant—it is impossible not to notice it in this negative way. In this sense, some gestures that can be seen as non-socially pragmatic dependencies such as the so to speak instinctive reaction in relation to this sound becomes a social mediation when my conversation with my friend is interrupted by it and a gesture of his lets me know that the noise is now too loud for him to hear me.

It is appropriate to recall a central aspect a theory of perception must explain. A theory of perception should not only explain the way things look in terms of some basic sensory properties such as loudness or pitch—which are often reduced, but wrongly so, to the perceptible side of a physical property of objects. As Krebs analysis of Wittgenstein's take on perception, a theory of perception must explain the connection between the sensory and the significance of things for human existence: the fact that perceptible things are meaningful aspects of "the world in its sensuous richness", that is, in the way they appear to us, within systems of references, of personal and communal histories that become rooted in the body

(Krebs 2010, 134). It is this domain of meaning that more often than not remains out of the radar of ‘epistemizing’ or ‘scientist’ views, as Krebs puts it, reflecting on Wittgenstein’s lessons on the perceptual.<sup>10</sup> Such was also the view of Husserl and Merleau-Ponty, and it is one to which the social enactive view fully subscribes.

Back to objects, notice however that the perceptual object is part of perceptual content in a very general sense: when I hear the ambulance siren coming towards me, I hear the ambulance siren. Period. By contrast, if we are to *specify* how the siren sounds to me I need to recur to the *siren-as-heard*. For specifying the perceptual object, the *object-as-perceived* is the appropriate notion and not the *perceptual object*. The notion of *perceptual object* simply points to that which I perceive, without much ado. And yet, it is central to the Social Enactive view I am putting forward (as well as to other enactivist, relationalist, and realist views), that the *perceptual object* features squarely in a description of the perceptual content of an experience.<sup>11</sup> I hear the ambulance siren and I see another cyclist on the road—even though I cannot give any details about the siren or the cyclist unless I talk about the way I hear the siren and see the cyclist.

#### 4.1.1 Perceptual Intentional Relation and Object-As-Perceived

The reader may have noticed that the question “*How* do you perceive what you perceive?” is an ambiguous one. Rather, it admits of two types of complementary answers. One refers to the particular qualities with which the thing is presented: I perceive the ambulance siren as going away, sound getting lower and fading in intensity. This I have captured under the heading *content*, specifically under the rubric *object-as-perceived*.

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<sup>10</sup> Such is also a pragmatist view of James, Dewey, and Austin (and connected to the views of Wittgenstein) that Putnam echoes in saying that “if there was one great insight in pragmatism, it was the insistence that what has weight in our lives should also have weight in philosophy” (1999, 70).

<sup>11</sup> Counterfactually put: to perceive a table does not mean to be acquainted with every aspect of the table. Not being perceptually acquainted with every aspect of the table does not mean not directly to perceive a table. Being perceptually acquainted with changing aspects of the table (due to environmental conditions, changes in the object, or in the relative perspective of the perceiver), even somewhat conflicting between them, does not mean not directly and truly to perceive the table. Perceptual object and object-as-perceived are distinct yet correlated notions, and both coexist in perception. Also, the somewhat simplicity of this commitment is thus expressed: “I perceive the physical thing, the Object belonging to nature, the tree there in the garden; that and nothing else is the actual object of the perceptual intention. A second immanent tree, or even an ‘internal image’ of the actual tree standing out there before me, is in no way given, and to suppose that hypothetically leads to an absurdity” (Husserl 1983, 219, <186>). One possible absurdity, relevant for the present purposes, is that several of the perceptually specific possible predicates of the actual perceptual object do not apply to an internal representation.

But logically prior to this answer, there is a more immediate one: I perceive the ambulance siren auditorily, or visually. More abstractly, we can say that there is an adverbial or intentional qualification at stake, one that is first of all sensory-modal (even multi-modal, like when I am talking to someone, hence hearing and seeing), but one that can secondarily include emotional and pragmatic aspects. For example, I thermally perceive how hot a hot beverage is, as I am about to drink of it, in order to not burn myself; or I olfactorily perceive the old house, as I long for the times I spent there several years back—in longing, I pause over specific smells, and perhaps connect them with others or with memories, and may even try to find past sensations.

The Husserlian-inspired insight I am underscoring here—and the ground I want to secure for the discussion to come in this chapter and the next—is that the specificity of content is also partly arrived at through an analysis of the type of perceptually based intentional relation in which it takes place. This account of perceptual content would in fact not be complete without placing it within this broader perceptual intentional framework—which, to be sure, belongs to the theory of experience I have endorsed. *Descriptions* of objects-as-perceived are ‘soaked’ with specific perceptually based intentionalities: to speak of a seen object is *grounded* on what it is to see: to relate to things using one’s own eyes, which pick things on the basis of light, reflectance, that is, to be acquainted with *visibilia*. The linguistic point carries with it a deeper element: the specificity of object-as-perceived derives *substantively* from the type of relation in which it is *perceived*.

The object is singled out by the perceptual intention, but it is not just singled out: it is held in a particular *way*, it is engaged under certain determinations, and it is taken up in specific manners. In a broad intentional sense, Husserl refers to the object-as-intended as the *noema* of an intentional relation; and to the type of relationship with the *noema*, he refers to as the *noesis*.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Intentional analysis takes many shapes. I think that the best intentional analysis so far originates from the work of Husserl, and is suitable for modifications and improvements. The reader may want to take a look at other intentional analyses, of which (Crane 2001) is a good introductory example. For the purposes of this paper, however, I wish to indicate that where other intentional analyses speak of aspectual shape as a way of accounting for the fact that things are for us in a certain way, Husserl’s phenomenology treats this aspectual shape as a very extended feature that allows and requires of much more analysis. The distinction between noesis and noema (as well as the further

Each ‘object’ of consciousness is made conscious in a specific way, of which perception, memory, object-to-be-avoided, regret, and expectation are examples. Hearing the orchestra playing a song is not the same as remembering the song played by the orchestra—and this not only because the recollection cannot match the richness of the actual listening situation, but, for our present purposes, because *hearing* something is different than *remembering* sounds in that in hearing we are related to an occurrence of the world whereas in remembering we are related to a memory. We know that to stop a sound from being heard we can plug our ears, but that is not what we do when we want to stop remembering a sound.<sup>13</sup>

Let us now focus on *perceptual intentionality*. The analysis of concrete perceptual experiences gains in depth from the idea that *perceptual intentionality* and *object-as-perceived* are not only moments of the relation, but are structured in connection with each other in strict parallelism, so that the nature of each co-determines the other, and second, that variations in one are *causally* concomitant with variations in the other. This parallelism means that they mutually influence or co-vary with each other. In other words, that there is an interpenetration or interweaving between the intentionality and object-as-perceived—between *noema* and *noesis*. What does this *constitutive* mutual interpenetration consist of?

First, the perceptual object insofar as it is perceived *has*, even *is* a ‘sense’ or a ‘meaning’ for us (Husserl 1983, 214, <182>). There is here a twofold relation: the perceptual intentionality—to smell—and the phenomenal character, the sense the perceptual object has for me—a smell.

Second, and in clearer interactional way, I related auditorily only to audibilia, to sonic occurrences, and in a way audibilia determines that I relate auditorily to it.<sup>14</sup> Multimodally, for

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distinctions I am to examine in this paper in connection with the issue of content) purports to investigate ways in which aspectuality can be accurately specified in the case of perceptual experience.

<sup>13</sup> Unlike other intentional relations, perceptual intentionality requires that the perceptual object exists. I won’t pursue here the differences with other types of intentionality. I am aware that my commitment to the actual existence of the perceptual object is at odds with strands of phenomenological philosophy, and I hold that my position is both correct and defensible as a position Husserl himself held. I have visited this issue in different fashions in chapters 2 and 3.

<sup>14</sup> I do not deal here with synesthesia. Noetic and noematic adjustments would be needed to accommodate to subjects that relate modally to objects or events that are usually thought to be perceived in other modalities. I do not foresee that these adjustments jeopardize any of the central tenets of the social enactive view of perception. The same applies to other perceivers, e.g. non-human, and their abilities to engage perceptually with otherworldly reality, as bats do with echolocation or some fish by a type of magnetic/electric type of perception.

example, I relate to someone speaking to me in a concrete way that includes both audition and vision (evinced in phenomena such as the McGurk effect). At the same time, the fact that someone addresses me verbally calls for my engaging with this occurrence in precisely the appropriate multimodal interaction.

A virtue of the social enactive account is that it corrects the far-too-common *habit* in the philosophy of perception of treating all perceptual intentionality the same, and this means mostly to treat it as a type of vision, or secondarily as a kind of touch—in any case dealing primarily with spatially related properties such as size and shape.<sup>15</sup> The relation between *perceptual intentionality and object-as-perceived* is an antidote to the idea that perception, as to the object and as to the subject, is a one-currency thing for the objects of perception.<sup>16</sup>

Different versions of Enactivism have committed this mistake as well.<sup>17</sup> Varela, Thompson, and Rosch's influential Enactivism (Autopoietic Enactivism, as Hutto calls it) defines perception as “perceptually guided action” and defines action in motor terms (Varela, Thompson, and Rosch 1991, 173). Perhaps even clearer is the case of Noë's Sensorimotor Enactivism, a refinement of some aspects of Varela *et al.*'s. Noë also defines perception in sensorimotor terms, but he goes one step further. It is not, he says, that perception is for action (as one could perhaps interpret from the Varela *et al.*'s), but that perceiving is constituted “by the exercise of a range of sensorimotor skills” (Noë 2004, 90). From another point of view, our capacity to perceive is constituted by sensorimotor knowledge. This exercise is not only the possibility of executing certain movements on the basis of what is sensed but rather in being able “to draw on one's appreciation of the sensorimotor patterns mediating [...] your relation to it” (2004, 90). This appreciation grounds movement made on the basis of things perceived, even in terms of

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<sup>15</sup> Furthermore, the framework of veridicality, as I have been discussing it, seems to be built upon and depending on visibilia and sight: stable objects, clear boundaries, occlusion, geometrizable perspectival relations, and a relatively clear physics lingo. How different are things when we start thinking in the sense of smell: no stability, not much of a boundary there, no clear occlusions, no mathematizable relation, not easy and still not clear physics lingo. This should raise all sorts of concerns for philosophers of perception.

<sup>16</sup> Somehow relatedly, although from a non-perceptual field, Husserl explains that in the case of an object we value, the noema is the valued object, already valued, and not the valuable object, to which a valuing (the noesis) would be added (1983, 232, <198>).

<sup>17</sup> Others enactivists like Hurley and Hutto have not made this mistake.



affordances, but it also grounds the understanding, we might say the phenomenal character, of what is perceived. That is for sure an important precision, for it deals with the oft forgotten issue of the original consciousness of perception.

The point that concerns me now, though, is Noë's claim that the exercise of sensorimotor knowledge or skills allows "my perceptual experience to acquire full-blown perceptual content" (2004, 90).<sup>18</sup> While Noë at times qualifies content as visual or spatial, his position does seem to be that all perceptual content is mediated in a sensorimotor way. For instance, when discussing the possibility of individuating sensory modalities by reference to their objects, he says: "at the ground of our encounter with these different objects—appearances in one modality or another—is sensorimotor skill" (2004, 107). He attributes to sensorimotor dependency the "suitable generality to play a basic role in an account of the nature of sensory modalities" (2004, 109). Inter-modal differences belong, in Noë's view, not to a different kind of dependency but to different *patterns* of the sensorimotor type (2004, 109).<sup>19</sup>

I contend that sensorimotor skills do not exhaust the ways in which perceptual content is mediated. Modalities other than vision provide evidence that (i) some perceptual content is not mediated by sensorimotor dependencies, and that (ii) intra-modal content, even if partly sensorimotor, cannot be all acquired in such way. Take the case of the bitter flavor of a

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<sup>18</sup> Sensorimotor skills and sensorimotor knowledge are for Noë the same. This is problematic despite his insistence that this type of knowledge is implicit, practical, and non-propositional. Daniel Hutto has charged Noë of proposing a conservative enactivism, and his criticism is based mostly off of this point: "Ultimately, the problem is that SMC [sensorimotor contingency] theorists fail to be radical enough. For, if we give up on the idea of experience as a static inner representation and truly think of perception as a kind of exploratory activity, extended over time, then there is no need to introduce 'knowledge' as a kind of bond that holds together various percepts in order to explain phenomena such as perceptual presence" (2006, 399–400). While Noë takes precautions in order to fend off precisely this type of objection, Hutto's criticism succeeds, I think, in that knowledge is too rigid to capture the plasticity and the tacitness of the type of ability involved in sensorimotor dependencies. Enactivist views are better off not using the talk of knowledge in explaining what is grounded in action or practice, as I have shown in chapter 1. While I can't discuss it here for reasons of thematic focus, I'd like to note that this mistake of Noë is linked to his position on (non-)conceptualism, namely, that all perceptual content is conceptual. If, as he says, "concepts are practical skills, and some practical skills—some sensorimotor skills—are simple concepts" (2004, 199), first, we would be missing a concept for propositionally structured concepts, and second, we'd be running into familiar problems about dealing with experiential novelty.

<sup>19</sup> Although Thompson's own work on mind and cognition is thorough in a number of ways, rich in nuances, and philosophically and phenomenology rigorous, his account of perception, mainly drawing from Noë's Enactivism (and some of Noë's collaborations with O'Regan and Hurley), suffers, for that reason, from the same drawback I have been addressing (2007). Intersubjectivity figures in his account of the mental as a mode of embodied activity, but not in perceptual terms. I do not have a position on Thompson's take on cognition overall, but only on his position on perception.

sweetened beverage, coffee or tea, after you've eaten something very sweet. Or take, for instance, the perception of ambient temperature on a hot day. In these cases, there is nothing properly sensorimotor in perceptual content intrinsically, or in terms of the perspectival or motor potentialities of objects to be seen in different perspectives. Meaningful possible actions in these cases are not motor, yet they are actional, as the socially pragmatic dependencies illustrate. For the second variation, take the case of a deafening space. There are aspects of the auditory content that are spatial, such that I know that turning my head to one side seems to decrease the intensity of some sounds, or that in walking in a particular direction I may be getting out of the noisy area. Yet, concrete audible properties such as pitch or timbre, while can be affected by distance, are not perceived in terms of knowledge or a mastery of sensorimotor skills such that they are perceived insofar as I am able to perform movements that affect the perception or that make the perception meaningful.<sup>20</sup>

I, however, would not dispute that *spatial* content is mediated, in its spatiality, by sensorimotor contingencies, as Noë defends. The mistake, once again, is in supposing that *all* perceptual content is spatial, or even that all content is not exclusively but at least fundamentally spatial, as for example Peacocke (though not an enactivist) has argued, by saying that spatiality is presupposed by "representational properties of all other types" and constitutes part of the "objective content of an experience" (Peacocke 1992, 61, 67).

One case that disproves this claim is retronasal olfaction, which is, roughly speaking, smelling things in the mouth via the throat. Orthonasal olfaction happens through the nose, making even possible to find spatial information according to the smells coming in from the left and right nostrils (similar to interaural cues in the case of audition, or binocular comparisons, in the case of vision) (Gottfried 2005; Porter et al. 2005). Retronasal olfaction, in contrast, happens via the nasopharynx and is normally associated with the experience of flavor, when smell works

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<sup>20</sup> Further, a correct account of the nature of auditory content is based on time, rather than on space. Sounds do not have spatial boundaries: they are not experienced as starting here and finishing there. They are however experienced as having temporal boundaries, and it is precisely the succession of 'boundaries' what allows in many occasions to distinguish some sounds from others, in a manner structurally similar to a distinction figure-ground.

"in tandem" with the sense of taste (Porter et al. 2005; Stevenson 2009, 11; Gottfried 2005). In the case of retronasal olfaction of food or beverages in the mouth, subjects assign the position of the object of smell to the mouth (Small et al. 2005). An olfactory stimulus may be mistakenly be experienced as flavor when is in the mouth, and in other cases the relatively simultaneity of taste and smell makes it also difficult but not always impossible to parse out between tasting or smelling. Since the olfactory epithelium is located in the nose, there is no distinguishing of the part of the oral cavity where the molecules that reached the epithelium through the retronasal passage were released. Thus, the establishment of a point of origin located somewhere in the mouth and of a system of axes operating from that index (as when eyes are the point zero of observation of a cube in front of me) is an idle exercise for retronasal olfaction. There is no gain in such description: a system that would yield exact positions of odors in the mouth would yield information that is altogether irrelevant for the characterization of olfactory content acquired retronasally. While, lastly, intensity of smells may change with location, and dependent on the type of food or beverage at stake, it seems that such changes inside the oral cavity are negligible, if not altogether irrelevant, for a characterization of olfactory content, since differences of location inside the mouth do not contribute to differentiating smells from one another. Be it a feature common to all representationalisms or not, to affirm that perceptual content is always spatial (whether only, mostly, or fundamentally spatial) is incorrect, for it leaves out, for example, most experiences of flavor and some cases in the experience of smell.

Back to the mutual constitutive interweaving of *perceptual intentionality* and *object-as-perceived*, Husserl refers to the very concrete nature of the perceptual experience as one in which the perceptual object, as it is perceived (or in general *meant*) must be seen in a double specificity: in the *how of its determinations*, and in the *how of its manner of givenness*. The object in the *how of its determinations* (1983, 314, <272>) corresponds to determinations pertaining to the object, in its noematic aspect; the object in the *how of its manner of givenness* (1983, 228, 316, <194, 273>)

corresponds precisely to the way in which it is perceived, its noetic aspect. It is, in sum, “the sense of the object itself in its [double] how” (Micali 2012, 154; the translation is mine).

To bring this series of reflections up a notch, let us consider a case involving emotional, socially rich interaction that includes a qualification of a sensory modal intentionality. For example, I can look at a tree somehow disinterestedly, but also look at it melancholically. In both cases, I am *looking* at the *tree*, but there is a difference, which in this case is a compositionality on the side of the intentional act, for my two ‘seeings’ of the tree are more complex than a simple seeing the tree ‘neutrally.’ They can be so different that unattended features of the physical tree can be made conscious in virtue of the attitude: perhaps soft colors or shapes capture our attention when we look at the tree melancholically, in contrast to those details being absent when we look at the tree customarily. Think of epochs, cultures, and artistic movements that developed and increased sensitivity or disinterest for certain sensual aspects of reality, due to artistic sensibilities or to vital needs, as it can be the case of a culture in which people rarely stop to see the soft tones of things, or as in the case of Eskimos, reportedly being able to make very subtle distinctions in ‘shades’ of white.

We can think of a similar case in a different sensory modality by contrasting the customary perceptual exploration of an object and a careful exploration set in motion by a change in attention. Think for example of a known rock song, and in the contrast between the generic listening of it, where no change in pace and no virtuosity display call my attention at all, and when, for example, a guitar solo catches one’s attention.<sup>21</sup> This attention shift may lead to increased attention to other features of the song. The fact that details raise to the surface in the careful exploration mode entails a variation on the side of the *object-as-perceived* (Husserl 1983, 222–26, <189–92>). These attentional modifications of the *object-as-perceived* constitute further evidence of the dependence of perceptual content (specifiable in terms of the object-as-perceived) on the pragmatic component (Husserl 1983, 225, <192>).

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<sup>21</sup> Notice that I use ‘object’ in a generic sense, but that is inadequate when applied to audible things. Following O’Callaghan, the case of auditory experience shows that the objects of sound are not objects but events, chiefly because they do not have spatial but temporal boundaries (O’Callaghan 2007; O’Callaghan 2009).

#### 4.1.2 Perceptual Intentionality, Detachability, High-Level Properties, and Perceptual Practices

One of the central characteristics of the conception of perceptual content in the social enactive view is that it is a peculiar type of content externalism: content is dependent on the intentional relation and is non-detachable from experience because it is *world-engaging*. Simply put: the social enactive view never treats the contents of perception in detachment from experience, that is, from the relation in which they come to be and persist as contents, and this relation is an interaction with the world.

A legitimate question is whether the distinction between *perceptual object* and *object-as-perceived* is metaphysical or epistemological. The distinction is better conceived of as epistemological, for the following reason: no new entity is created when I perceive something. Certainly, the intentional act or relation is metaphysically different from the object it is about. But the object-as-perceived is the very same object but as it is *in* the relation, *from* a perspective. In other words: the object as a part of physical nature, described in a scientific-like manner, cannot capture the way in which it is taken up. The object as taken up can only be described within the relation or interaction that is established between perceiver and object. It seems plausible to offer an argument to make this very distinction between perceptual object and object-as-perceived into a metaphysical one. But accepting the distinction does not require that step; as a matter of theoretical parsimony, there is no need to encumber the theory with a metaphysical distinction, when an epistemological one suffices.

At the core of the theory I am proposing, there is a rejection of the concern for veridicality that is at the heart of standard theories of perception (most of which are representationalists). As chapter 3 showed, the concern for veridicality is a piece of a conception of experience that entails detachability for contents. Criticisms of representational views on content are often directed, and not without reason, to a propositional construct of contents, that is, where contents are propositional attitudes. Standard views deal with this issue assuming that

perceptual experience and its contents are structured propositionally, mostly as beliefs, which makes individuation of content a truth-functional semantic matter. Siegel terms this view the Strong Content View, and argues that the representational view of content (that contents are truth-functional aspects of experiences that render them veridical or not) is not committed to the Strong Content View, that is, to the propositional construct (Siegel 2010, 73–74).

But since both views treat content as detachable from experience (so an accuracy or veridicality verification can be performed), showing that content must be treated as non-detachable works as an argument against both views, whether contents are cashed out in terms of propositions or not. As I have argued, the theoretical commitment to the perspectival appearing of things, as a function of the system of dependencies previously accounted for (idiosyncratic, socially and non-socially pragmatic) bars us from conceiving of content in independence from the perceptual interaction. And since it is in the nature of the conception of perceptual experience as interaction that perception is of the world, then it follows that there is no conceiving of perceptual content as non-world-involving. Since both the “[Representational] Content View” and the Strong Content View conceive of content as detachable they are on the wrong track.

But there is something more substantive at stake here. The conception of content of the social enactive view, insofar as it is non-detachable from experience (meaning that it is non-detachable from perceptual intentionality and from the world that is engaged in precisely the type of experience issuing from such intentionality), guarantees that if it is the case that in perception we are acquainted with high-level properties, there must be a perceptual intentional counterpart to those properties. This entails, for one, that perceptual intentionality—or intentionality in general—is not simply a type of mental state, narrowly (internally) individuated. To be in an intentional relation with something is then not simply a matter of a mental regard upon something, but a being related to things that is grounded in practice, and is hence embedded in an environment and a context, and embodied. Further, this argument makes

it all the more feasible that perceptual intentionality is also extended. Moreover, this reasoning furnishes another argument for the suitability of the perceptual practices accounted for in chapter 1 that constitute the ground level for our perceptual engagement with the world.

#### 4.2 Full Content Is Core Content plus Environing Content

The central (albeit general) distinction between *perceptual object* and *object-as-perceived* touched upon the *nature* of content, but not upon its *structure*. This section takes up such task and offers a parsing of content as an account of its *structure*.<sup>22</sup> I take heed of the fact that the worldly object is part of content, but put that aspect to rest. If raised again, the question about the real object can always be answered along the lines already presented. I now change gears.

The structure of perceptual content must reflect three key elements. First, it is the *holistic* character of perceptual contents, in the sense that no isolated sensations or objects are ever present in perception, but always in a figure–context configuration.<sup>23</sup> Each moment of a perception is concrete and unique in the very specificity of its determinations in its extended temporality. In each moment, a specific configuration of objects and surroundings takes place. Second, it must reflect a difference in the phenomenological structure of perceptual experience, namely, the coexistence of change and identity. This is the idea that perceptually, “a ‘continuous ‘multiplicity’ is related to a ‘unity’” (Husserl 1983, 87, 237–238, <75–76, 203>). The case of a melody is immediately telling: the melody is itself perceived as a unity despite its continuous changes and yet the continuous changes can be perceived.<sup>24</sup> Perceptions ‘keep’ their object in the

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<sup>22</sup> This account began following broad distinctions Husserl used in the *Logical Investigations*, descriptive content and intentional content, intentional aspects and *real* aspects, quality and matter of the act, etc. and the analysis later done by him in his *Ideas I*. It is not possible now to draw a clear line separating Husserl’s specific influences from this final account. I can say that a lot has remained, in terms of the spirit and mode of analysis—notwithstanding that spirit and mode come not only from the *Investigations* but also particularly from the *Lectures on Thing and Space* and the *Ideas I*, esp. §§128–135. I can only declare the Husserlian inspiration of this account.

<sup>23</sup> Agreeing with the key tenets of Gestalt theory, Merleau-Ponty says that the perceptual object is always in the midst of a field (2002). Merleau-Ponty’s attitude (and Husserl’s to an extent) was both sympathetic and critical towards Gestalt theory, which they refined and embraced. I do not offer an exegesis of their takes on Gestalt theory, nor on the way my account of the structure of perceptual content differs from them or the original Gestalt theorists. My intent here is only to recognize the affinity.

<sup>24</sup> I grant that the case of a melody goes one step further than the mere stability within change, in the sense that the stability at stake can be said to be an emergent property. My argument here does not depend on the case of a melody,

face of changes in the subject, in the object, or in relational aspects (Husserl 1983, 313, <271> §§130-131).<sup>25</sup> Furthermore, it is central that perception is able to withstand the fluid reality of perceptual sequences, for that enables us to establish relations with objects or events in the world, despite their being extended in time. Third, since content is a specification of aboutness, an account of content must provide us with conceptual and lexical resources to refer to the object of our perceptions, no matter how dynamic and ephemeral it might be.

If we reflect for a moment on observing a tree as its branches move with the wind, or in the flavor experience of eating a piece of sushi, or in hearing an ambulance siren coming towards us, we will notice the following structural features: (1) the perceived totality is (2)-plus-(3) (*full*); (2) that an object or situation (and its properties as well) remains as a referent (*core*); (3) that there is more than the intended object or situation *as intended*, such as the context environing the intended object or aspects of the object that were not intended (*environing*). While (2) is a holding of an object that carries a certain intentional permanence, the object is stable *in the variations* featured in the perceptual sequences (3). *The variations are not threats to the permanence of the object but the concrete manifestation of what permanence means for real objects.* Further, my use of *permanence* should not be overstated, because objects may not be stable and can radically change or disappear, but for as long as a perceiver is able to identify actionally, predicatively, or

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and holds well for the case of my perception of a squirrel running up a tree. However, the case of the melody highlights a central commitment of the Social Enactive View, very much derived from the work of Merleau-Ponty, presented in chapter 2 when I introduced high-level properties in perception, and rehearsed above when perception was qualified as always perception of something as something, to wit: if I were to encounter a 'melody' as a mere sequence of notes without an internal configuration holding them together, giving it its sense of melody, then that would not be a melody. I would not be encountering a melody but a sequence of notes. It is, once more, the coming across something as a totality, that is, as a unity that overrides a hypothetical perception of just the parts (Merleau-Ponty 1942, 93-94).

<sup>25</sup> A cursory taxonomy of possible changes in the perceptual relation may include: kinetic changes in object, subject, or both (the latter entails perspectival changes); changes in the object; bodily based changes in the subject, which, excluding those merely kinetic, can be interactional beyond movement (pressure put upon something, or more carefully exploring something—that is, a more narrowly defined physical interaction, and a more pragmatic component); psychological changes in the subject (such as attentional shifts); or changes in the environment, such as illumination, background noise, and other modal-specific environment-like variations, e.g. antecedent flavors or smells) (Husserl 1997, 75-76, <87-88>; §26; Drummond 1990, 146).



even imaginatively the object as the same in a sense, then there is a sense in which permanence applies to that which has remained throughout the changes.<sup>26</sup>

(1) *Core content + Environing content = Full content*. Correlatively, we hereby have another equation: *full – core = environing*. This last one is particularly useful to reflect on aspects of our perception of things that often go unnoticed. Relatedly, this tool can help examine other sensory modalities and, if I am correct in identifying environing content as nonconceptual, also as a tool for analyzing nonconceptual content.

(2) *Core content*. It is central to most perceptual experiences to focus on an object or event that remains a continuous referent throughout the perception (Husserl 1983, 224, <191>; §90–99). *Core content* refers to the concrete objects (events or states of affairs) that guide or receive our attention, that is, the object on which we act and about which we predicate. In looking at a tree, even if I am walking past it while having it in my line of vision, it is undeniable that specific moments of the tree are different from each other in several respects, only one of which is the difference in the perspective from which I see the tree. And yet, it is undeniable that I perceive the tree at all time and can refer to it as the same tree. The analog analysis for the *Ambulance Siren* case should be clear.

Core content is an abstractum that, so to speak, hovers over objects and environing changes—in the way a center of gravity of an object is abstract yet very real. What SEP accounts through the notion of *core content* is a desideratum of a theory of perceptual experience. Representationalism and other theories may have notions that attempt to respond to a similarly construed desideratum, e.g. perceptual object representation. SEP's account is superior on account of the nature of content of which it is a specification and of the relation with environing content.

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<sup>26</sup> The connection between nature and structure is explored at length in the following chapter, where the chief claim is that perceptual content is pragmatically individuated. Both if we take the perceptual sequence as the model of perception, and the core content as an admissible pole in the description of content, we find that it is exactly the placement of events and aspects in a coherent sequence what characterizes perceptual experience. What type of coherence is this perceptual coherence? How does that apply to both the extended sequence and the singularized moments? These aspects are explored in the next chapter.

*The Case of the Parked Car.* What counts as a core content, as explained before, depends on the specific pragmatically guided perceptual intention at stake in each case. Say I am walking down the street and there is a car parked near me. I may notice the car or not. I may only notice the presence of a big object without thematizing it as a car. If I notice it, I may notice it in many ways: noticing its color or not, noticing where it is exactly parked, etc. My way of noticing it or not somehow depends on what I am doing: perhaps I am rushing to get somewhere and my surroundings are not something I have an interest in, except for efficiency. My level of awareness of the car is also related to my pragmatic engagement with it: if I barely notice the bulk I may be able to avoid it (and vice versa too), and my noticing it without awareness of model or color may be enough for a more involved pragmatic relation, such as intently standing behind it while another car goes by. In all these cases, I take a position about the car, which affects what perceptual properties I notice. Thus, when I am in the vicinity of a car, it is not the case that I always encounter *a car as such*, with its many characteristics, and that my perceptions, actions and reactions about it can be defined objectively.

Perceptual intentionality relates to 'core contents' depending on our pragmatic relation to things. This intentionality can take the shape of a clear intently intending the object, but it can also lack this heightened purposeful awareness of an object. The first situation is the case of an intently listening to a mosquito flying around me to avoid it or catch it, where other objects or events surrounding me may move, as it were, to the background. The second situation is one in which my attention may be wandering and only transitorily focusing on things. This can be illustrated by a person suffering a poor weather's day. She may not be intently looking at the cloudy sky, or consciously feeling a very cold temperature, or intently listening to a noisy street where she is waiting for the bus. And yet, as she waits for the bus, her attention may fall upon the low light that makes objects look unattractive. Her attention may be momentarily taken by a cold wind reminding her, as it were, of how cold it is. It seems still that a minimal awareness, not necessarily an intently focusing on things, is necessary for there being a

perceptual experience with its corresponding perceptual content. In all these cases, however, core content is not specified in advance on the side of the world, because the same world full of objects and situations, may be taken differently at different moments. In the case of the car parked on the street, the core content, the referent of my perception could be the bulky object that I avoid or the brand-XYZ yellow car of beautiful lines and bold color I am admiring. In the case of the street where a woman waits for the bus, a specific building across the street can feature as core content, but core content could also be the collection of building and objects looking unattractive under the dark cloudy sky.

Further, there is the explicit singling out of the object as it occurs in verbalization: we refer to objects of the world as stable objects. This element underlies a deeper, stronger point: we experience objects of the world as stable and unitary, or conversely, we experience the world as comprised of objects that we see or hear, of which we speak, upon which we act. This is core content of, and, as this type of isolated entity, it constitutes a layer of perceptual content.

(3) *Environing content.* The perceptual sequence in which the object or situation is presented as the same does not only consists of the object at stake. It also comprises (i) objectual, unintended aspects, and (ii) extra-objectual (hence unintended) aspects and properties, extended temporally, (at times) spatially, and modally, reaching all the way down to the moment of initial contact with physical aspects of the world. Environing content is a specification of the perceptually relevant ‘environings’ of more keen perceptions.

Just as the perceptual object is the one that exists in space and time and the one that we relate to (act upon, refer to, think about) in its perspectival determinations, it is of the essence of perception that, as a whole, we find a continuous “braid of partial synthesis of increase and decrease [of the relative givenness of sides and parts of things], in which, to be sure, the individual strands of the braid have and can have no autonomy” (Husserl 1997, 95, <113>). Each same object is presented in a series of changing aspects or perspectives (Husserl 1983, 87, <75>), some of which belong to the focal object and some others to context. But whether they

belong to the same object (the swirling colors of a colorful kite), or to the extra-intentional aspects of the object (the changing illumination of an object in a case in which I am not concerned with lighting) or to context, they do not affect the sameness of core content. Hence, these variations are thought of as belonging to environing content, and environing content can be said to be an ever-flowing multiplicity of moments.

The unintended aspects of the intended object ((i) above) are, for example, the colors in colored things when my intending has nothing to do with color. For instance, in tasting a piece of sushi I do not normally intend its color (or its shape), and it yet makes part of the experience. To use an example of Husserl's, this is the way the whiteness of a piece of white paper is part a visually based interaction with the paper (e.g. I want to grab it). It is the same for feelings accompanying the objects that are felt in a given way, as with the melancholy that may accompany my smelling an old house full of memories for me. These aspects are extra-intentional because I do not intend *those* aspects and they still accompany the whole and are part of content (Husserl 1983, 75, <65>).

There is another fashion that this still objectual yet unintended environing content can take. This is the case of heavily amalgamated habitual associations and entrenched 'known connections' related to an object—possibilities or properties—that may present themselves when the object is intended in certain manners (Husserl 2001b, 113). A piece of china porcelain may, for instance, be intended as a piece of decoration on a mantel, and yet, its fragile character is perceptually presented with it, although perhaps only explicitly in the face of impending danger (for the china piece's integrity).

Besides the aspects still belonging to the object but that are unintended in core content (i), environing content refers to the surroundings of the core (ii). These surroundings are, first, *temporal*, as a function of the dynamic nature of perceptual experience in the Social Enactive View. For instance, in my tasting a food item over the course of a meal, what I ate right before such item is part of the full content of the tasting of that food item, for it can be the case that the

previous flavor influences the new one. A sip of wine immediately before a bite of brie cheese will somehow affect the flavor of the cheese, and the flavor of the wine plus cheese lingering in my mouth has the potential of influencing the flavor of yet another piece of cheese, this time perhaps a camembert cheese. Or following an example of William James's, hearing thunder must be specified at times as thunder-after-silence (or thunder-after-thunder), for the phenomenal character of the experience changes in one case or the other. Another useful example is that of dipping both hands into lukewarm water after dipping one hand into warm water and the other into cold water. The lukewarm water feels as if with two different temperatures. The hand that was initially in the warm water container will feel the lukewarm water colder than the other hand would, and vice versa, because the second hand was dipped first in cold water. When hands are in the last (lukewarm) container, that water there is the core content, and the two previous buckets, one warm, one cold, are the environing content.

Relevant environings can also be, in several but not all modalities, *spatial*. In my perception of a colorful house, for example, the colors of the surroundings matter, for colors are context-sensitive. As the artist and educator Josef Albers put it in his famous *Interaction of Color*, “a color has many faces” (Albers 2006, 77).

Also on the normative side, we have that all the concrete aspects of perceptual sequences—of those braids just mentioned—refer to “possibilities of fulfillment” (Husserl 1997, 105, <125–26>) and the pragmatic possibilities of perceptual acts, which I will explore in chapter 5.

As to its normative and explanatory work, environing content accounts for the *relations* between the sides, parts, elements, and transitions that form perceptual continua. To specify the color of the surroundings of a yellow house entails that surrounding colors are part of an explanation of the color of the core content, and would also be part of the explanation of another color interaction occurring there, as it could be the perceived color of the clothing and umbrella of another person passing by. In the context of a meal, to say that part of the content of a specific perception includes the flavor of item eaten or drunk right before means that within the

proper zoom level, those previous flavors partly explain the current flavor, as well as other aspects of the whole perceptual interaction.

#### **4.2.1 Lowest-Level Interpretive Take on Physical Reality: The Roots of Normativity**

A theory of perception should have something robust to say about the sense in which there is in perception a contact with a physically defined reality. The Social Enactive view has a position about this, and it is spelled in terms of perceptual content: perception starts to be contentful at the very moment of acquaintance of a perceiver with sensible physical and chemical properties of the external world. Since perception is a pragmatically guided normative field, to say that there is content at such basic level means that the explanatory desideratum of content—that content as an explanation of the internal transitions and transformation of the way the world is presented in perceptual interaction—finds there a partial answer. In other words, understanding how and in what sense aspects of the physical world come to be perceptual is necessary to understand what it is for perceptual content to be content. Also, this discussion bears weight in accounting for the modal (also inter- and multi-modal) component of our taking up aspects of the world in perception.

This topic requires a much longer account than what I can offer here but my purpose at this stage is simply to *situate* the content of this basic contact with the world within the taxonomy of content provided and to articulate the fundamental rationale under which it is considered as content. This rationale is also as able to give normativity some anchoring in the physical reality and its interaction with perceivers. The details of the psychological mechanisms by which this takes place or the specific constraints, derived for instance from scientific accounts of neural networks of multisensory integration or about the physiology of sensory receptors are not addressed here, but they do not affect the conceptual point I am making.

To start off, within the parsing of content proposed, the content of perception at the moment of contact with the world belongs to environing content. It is useful to notice that this

moment embodies the nature of the fundamental distinction between the perceptual objects and the object-as-perceived.

On the one hand, there is a physical world whose physical characteristics (reflecting light, having a particular kinetic molecular energy, having a precise material composition, the vibrations of airwaves at certain frequencies, etc.) make it possible for a being like me to perceive it, that is, for me to take heed of it in the manner in which I do (as being visible, as having a temperature, as telling of shape, as opposing resistance, as being audible, etc.). On the other hand, it is the fact that I can engage in perceptual relation with those aspects of the physical world, that is, that I am able to be *about* them in the way that the different sensory modalities and inter and multimodal interactions are about things. Through the sense of smell, for instance, we are acquainted with things in their smelling. But in things' smelling we are also *about* smells' connections with flavors, with past experiences, with hedonics, and with the ability to think and talk about the things we smell. It is not only that there is a what-it-is-like about them at a given moment, but more generally that they come to be for us in a sense that exceeds our phenomenal consciousness of them.

This general perspective according to which we can entertain in specific perceptual ways characteristics, aspects, or events of the world translate, at the present level, in the following insight: there are aspects of the world that *are seen from a subjective standpoint* when both parts, perceiver and worldly aspect, enter in a relationship. It is not possible for those physical aspects of the world to remain merely objective when they enter into a relation with a subjectivity. Once they are made conscious, they are not anymore perspective-less, neutral. Thus, physically defined things of the world are always taken up by consciousness in a particular way: they are animated—minded—, they come to be as a sense.

But, what does it mean for physical aspects of the world to be animated, to become minded, or to be taken up perceptually?

In this analysis I somewhat follow Husserl' referred to this moment as the apprehension of hyletic stuff—also translated as hyletic stock or hyletic data.<sup>27</sup> This is in no way sense data. The term *hyletic* points to the idea that there is a sense, acknowledged above, in which we become acquainted with stuff. Although we must acknowledge the existence of this vaguely qualified stuff, it is not quite 'something' yet, and we can't speak of them in precise terms. This stuff is perceptual, yet barely so. It's a limit notion than can't yet be jettisoned, for it is part of the causal determinants of perception.<sup>28</sup>

So we have, on the side of the world physical properties. We don't talk about these properties from the point of view of experience, but sideways, from the point of view of a physical description of the world. In turn, such physical description is itself part of an experience and cannot claim to reach things themselves. For someone concerned with the description of that matter as physics or chemistry does, another phenomenological analysis of such scientific acquaintance with stuff is appropriate—and would indeed be necessary in a project that wanted to account for our contact with the world in all domains and not just perceptually. That is not my task here.<sup>29</sup>

The taking up (or 'apprehending') of sensory material in perception is an *interpretive* act. The taking up of physical stuff in experience refers, at a basic level, to the very experiencing of

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<sup>27</sup> Husserl began this discussion in the *Investigations* and continued and nuanced it later in his *Ideas I* (Husserl 2001b, §§20, 22–31; Husserl 1983, §§85–86, 97). Welton and others hold that this framework was abandoned by Husserl in the years leading up to *Ideas I*, and replaced by the noetic-noematic correlation, and later on by a construction in terms of perceptual sense (*Wahrnehmungssinn* or *Auffassungssinn*) (Welton 2000, 183; See also Crowell 2013, 130–131). The reason for that appraisal seems to be that Husserl must have abandoned a simplistic matter/form or content/schema view in which we could separate data from the interpretation of data. Reasons of space prevent me from exploring this issue in detail, but for the present purposes it will suffice to say that, while I agree that a simplistic division is untenable, in my view a data element and an interpretive element are still necessary in order to understand the constitution of objects for perception—and so Husserl thought as the passages from *Ideas I* attest to. The difference is the way I think the hyletic data should be treated. The view I propose can reconcile the *Auffassung*/hyletic data, with noetic-noema, and with perceptual sense (*Wahrnehmungssinn*).

<sup>28</sup> The causal aspect of perception is here understood as a confluence of causal-sensitive aspects rather than a matter of a linear chain ending with a mental event. The causal relation is not a sequence that starts with *objects* emitting impulses and finishes with a mental, inner event identified with the experience of the property associated with the objective impulse, that is, a representation in the classical sense. Actually, the causal antecedent of perception is a physical occurrence of the world not intrinsically understood as an object. Perception begins once this hyletic stuff is taken up as a perceptual-meaningful something. That something may or may not be an already defined object.

<sup>29</sup> Yet in order to block the objection that this position leads to an endless regress, I hold that since we can never get out of every relationship we have with stuff—so we never achieve a position from where ultimate foundations can be laid or assessed—, in dealing with basic questions we are in many-legged situation, where one or more legs must stay in the ground in order to move the others, and all can't be up at the same time. The foundational dream of a complete revision—or a complete foundation—is wishful thinking.



physical realities in a phenomenal way, such that, for example, a particular range of the electromagnetic spectrum is taken up as colored stuff by seeing beings. This colored stuff—an initial perceptual determination—would be what Husserl called hyletic stuff (Drummond 1990, 144). Notice that the former is part of the *perceptual*, while the latter is part of the *as-perceived* aspects of things, as understood in 4.1 above.<sup>30</sup> This type of interpretation depends indeed on the type of beings we are, and it also evinces pragmatic dependencies (both socially and non-socially constituted) for it situates sensory-based occurrences in a system of perceptual references that forms a horizon that is open for action in certain ways and not in others.<sup>31</sup>

Not only do I relate auditorily to sonic stuff, but also sonic stuff constraints my relating to it: it picks, as it were, my auditory relating to it. In somewhat a related fashion Husserl says: “I cannot rejoice in anything unless what I rejoice in stands before me in the hues of existence ” (2001b, 137). By extension, I can’t hear what does not present itself sonically, and I can’t feel as slimmy what I can’t touch one way or another. I can’t say it’s acrid what only presents itself auditorily, and I can’t say it’s glossy or mate what is not in the first place visible.<sup>32</sup>

By the same token, this interpretive taking up of physical realities bears a connection with other senses in which things appear, for example, whether something appears as familiar or exceptional, as melodic or harmonic *with* other parts, and others similar categories. We have

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<sup>30</sup> I offered an initial discussion of the temporality of perception in connection to experience and consciousness in chapter 3, section 3. I was there concerned for the first time with a proper understanding of the causal element in perception. It is important to acknowledge that there is at this level a question about temporality, particularly as to how the temporal aspect of this initial contact with stuff connects with the temporal sequence of experience. The temporal structure of perception requires that initial ‘impressions’ do not disappear immediately and are ‘active’ in the following ‘impression,’ or in other words, that there is a lingering impression turned into anticipation towards continuous perception of objects, for otherwise it would not be possible to experience objects as continuous, and that we do and is at the very basis of a perceiver’s capacity to relate to the world. This is what Husserl calls the temporal structure of inner consciousness—*impression-retention-protention*. Now, this structure must have a counterpart at the level of the taking up of hyletic stuff. I cannot undertake that analysis at any length here.

<sup>31</sup> We find here the idiosyncratic, socially pragmatic and non-socially constituted pragmatic dependencies I have proposed above. Following the argument about the intentional structure of position-taking of section 2.3.3 above, the perceiver is a pragmatic position-taker, so there are reasons to think that connection between the pragmatic and the interpretive taking-up of stuff reaches all the way down to the basic level of contact with reality. Further, internal and external horizons of possible fulfillments are already at work in the objects we perceive and determine the possibilities and impossibilities for perceptual nexuses (Husserl 1973, 103–106, 122; Husserl 1970, 165; Husserl 1983, 322–23, <279>; Drummond 1990, 150–151).

<sup>32</sup> An analysis of sensory modal predicates—acrid, tart, bitter, rough, brilliant, etc.—, and the connections between sensory related uses and their metaphorical uses can shed interesting light on the philosophy of perception, traditionally limited to shape, size, and color.

here the case of a sensation being taken up, which means that it stands in definite relations to others and to perceptual fields.

While I do not do the fine-grained work here, a further development would contribute to an account of sensory modalization (in one modality, intermodally, or multimodally), that is, what counts as a modality, as combinations of modalities in one, or even regarding modal compatibility. This may have a bearing on cases like the case (presented in section 2.3.3) of research in social cognition showing differences between the way some Americans visually perceive scenes and the way some East Asians do. The fact that the same “patch of light” is taken up by some as independent or as standing in relation to neighboring patches is not a feature of the physical occurrence, but a function of the pragmatic intentionality at stake.

Because the Social Enactive View sees the perceptual relation as an interactive coupling, this basic acquaintance level is in no need of a decision as to what comes first, whether it is the interacting subject or a radiating world. Since perception is subject to pragmatic dependencies, there is no question of physical aspects in a sort of void and (in place of a real perceiver) a sensor. This means, among other things, that no useful or interesting definition of the physical occurrence of perception belongs to the physical occurrence itself. The physical event is nothing without the interpretive taking up of it. Unlike Berkeleian idealism, for which that which is perceived is that which is, in this account there is a distinction between “qualities of objects and hyletic data” (Lévinas 1995, 40). The distinction, though, is not ontological but epistemological, in keeping with the analysis of the perceptual object and the object-as-perceived (Drummond 1990, 142).

By way of conclusion, a few clear points. I do not mean that airwaves of such and such frequency and wavelength, or chemical compounds in the air of such and such molecular weight, or rays of light of such and such frequency are part of the contents of perception. The reason is not, as one may think, a supposed lack of certainty about physico-chemical configurations being the correlates of perceived properties. The reason is that, as physical properties, they are no

content of perception yet—no matter how close the correlation between physical properties and perceived properties, there is an irreducible (yet somewhat bridgeable) between them. What is part of environing content are the perceptually meaningful aspects *once* the physical stuff is taken up, as I have been illustrating.

The moment physico-chemical aspects of the world become perceptual matter they are specified in perceptual ways: they are sonorous, smell-like, colored, etc. Often, those aspects feature in distinct objectualities: in the loud ambulance siren, in the smelly trash can I walk by, in the sweet hot chocolate I drink. It is plain that the sonorous nature of what I perceive as a loud ambulance siren is closely related to the core content. What makes it environing content still is that when I focus on the ambulance siren, I do not focus on the sonority of the ambulance siren. Likewise, when I walk by a smelly trash can my attention is directed to the disgusting smell as disgusting and not to its olfactive nature, as a philosopher of perception in investigative mode would.

The question gets tougher in the case where I focus on the sensory nature itself of something. As I write these words, I decide to play music and to focus on the music. But I attempt to focus on it as it is something I can hear, as sonorous or audible, and not as it being the sound of a guitar, or it being a voice, loud or not, high-pitched or low-pitched. Merely as something I can hear. I think I can do this, but it takes a very particular turn of attention—I easily slip into the form sound takes, or in general into musical categories. So the question is: when I focus on the sonorous nature of the occurrence, following the characterizations I have offered, is the sonorous nature of the sonorous occurrence core content or environing content? My take is that what in this case figures as core content is a sophisticated abstraction but not the sonorous nature in which airwaves come to be sound for me. Once I can focus on the sonority of sounds, sounds are *already* sonorous. Hence, the sonorous nature of sonorous occurrences, in the sense that they initially are taken us by the embodied perceiver I am, is environing content.

There is another case. Basic perceptually meaningful aspects are often not part of objectualities: they can be vague, foggy or hazy.<sup>33</sup> Let me say a word about cases like the latter.

The totality of enviroing content also includes marginal aspects that may or may never saturate or become features of core content (or even of featuring in more central (less marginal) aspects of enviroing content). We can characterize this aspect of enviroing content as potentiality, indication, symptom, hint, clue, trace, or inkling---all of them related somehow to clear perceptual formations, which they may never come to be.<sup>34</sup> Part of the difficulty in pointing to these unsaturated, low-intensity aspects of perception is precisely that they are not a concrete thing yet but they are not nothing.<sup>35</sup> In a fuller account of the transition from the unsaturated to the saturated talk of intensities and magnitudes will be needed. While I don't offer here a full-fledged account of these aspects, the initial indications provided left the domain almost readied for further development. The framework of pragmatic individuation of content and the discussion of normativity, both coming up in chapter 5, will make it clearer how a full account of the *perceptual unsaturated—indicios perceptuales*—plays an irreducible role in perception.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Upon further examination, which I cannot offer here, nonconceptual content considerations would play a central role in favor of individuation of perceived properties at the experiential level itself, as it is the case with rather capricious perceptual continua such as the interplay of colors due to the play of light and tree leaves or as random reflections of things in water.

<sup>34</sup> A very precise term for what I am aiming at is the Spanish word *indicio*. In English, I settle with *inkling*.

<sup>35</sup> A similar, and connected, difficulty is faced by theorization of nonconceptual content, for it requires putting in words in somewhat clear terms what is hazy and non-concrete.

<sup>36</sup> A basic puzzle on the theory of the unsaturated has to do with the status of enviroing content as unconscious perceptions (in the sense of lack of awareness) or implicit aspects of perception. Thompson (2007, 262–266) offers the following diagnosis: Block, for instance, would accept these implicit aspects as a case of access-consciousness without phenomenal-consciousness. The problem there is that not every aspect that figures implicitly in perception, in the Social Enactive view, is characterized by its availability for rational decision and control of action. On the other hand, Thompson says, Noë and O'Regan object to Block, and hold the position that perceptions without awareness are no perceptions. Thompson's outlining of a solution to this puzzle is compatible with the Social Enactive View. Three aspects are to be retained from Thompson's (and used in further developments of the issue of the *perceptual inklings*). (1) Within the framework of "temporal extended dynamics" there is room for both implicit and explicit aspects (I think that the formulation according to which "there is no differentiation" between them is wrong (2007, 263)). He is right, though, in pointing to "moments of comparatively weak and strong affective force" in what he calls intrinsic aspects. I cast these differences in terms of intensities and magnitudes, correlated with marginality or centrality within enviroing content. (2) Activity and passivity play a definitive role here, which in my taxonomy of content are somewhat mirrored by core-content and enviroing-content. Pragmatic individuation of full content is central here. (3) Affectivity and receptivity are at play in perception in the sense that one is receptive to what has already affected oneself, and affectivity refers to what has "a kind of affective force or allure, or affective 'grabbiness,' in relation to one's attention" (2007, 263). Spelling out the interplay between affectivity and receptivity, Thompson says: "something becomes noticeable, at whatever level, owing to the strength of its allure or grabbiness, emerging into affective prominence or salience, or relief, while other things become less noticeable owing to the comparative

### 4.3 The Charge of Phenomenalism

The account of content of the Social Enactive view is so closely linked to its conception of perceptual experience that several of the objections against the parsing of content just offered are actually objections against the conception of experience at stake: questions about the autonomous nature of content and the directness of perception, about the centrality of veridicality, and about the issue of high-level perceptual properties. Those have been addressed in previous chapters, and answering again to them in content-specific terms would require a rehearsal of the same arguments. That, I won't do here.

There is another important objection against this view on content that pertains, not to the structure of content, which this chapter focuses on, but to the normativity internal to the dynamic account of content. A strong version of that objection has been put forth by Siegel, and it consists in the claim that to the extent the Social Enactive View allows for perceptual comparisons, then it is committed to a representationalist, autonomous view of content, entailing a concern for veridicality. It will be taken up in chapter 5. I will answer to this objection once the social enactive take on normativity has been established.

There is, however, an objection that applies directly to the nature and structure of content I have offered. This objection has been raised by John Drummond, initially in response to Gurwitsch's reading of Husserl's concept of noema, or object-as-perceived.<sup>37</sup> Succinctly, the charge is that a view that takes the perceptual object (and in consequence, the object-as-perceived) as *perceptual continuum* is committed to phenomenalism, because a whole like a continuum cannot be but understood as a whole composed of parts, and whole-parts conceptual framework betrays the extended temporality it was aiming at, rendering us unable to account for the real world.

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weakness of their allure" (2007, 263–264). There is a significant agreement between the Social Enactive View and Thompson's Autopoietic Enactivism.

<sup>37</sup> In personal communication, Drummond has also raised this criticism against my view that the perceptual object is a perceptual continuum.

At a deeper level, the problem with phenomenalism is that it has the impossibility to affirm categorically that in perception we perceive the real world, that is, real object, events, and states of affairs. At most, the objection goes, perception gets acquainted with parts of the world, but the holding together of those parts and its product, the whole of perceptual experiences of objects, has the status of a mental construction. For phenomenalism, the world is only made of contingent appearances—mind-made reifications of a world that is separate from us. To be sure, phenomenalism has been around for centuries, has been espoused by several philosophical schools, and been challenged by philosophers of different persuasions (Cf. Noë 2004, 79ff.). Austin, for instance, engaged with Ayer and Price—I examined others facets of that debate in chapter 3. I focus on the Gurwitsch-Drummond debate because I take the decisive issue to be one that is at the very center of the Social Enactive View; an issue that comes from the phenomenological tradition. The issue is that in perception we deal with a temporally extended world, and perceptual object and perceptual content are constrained to this dynamism.

I contend, contra Drummond that the perceptual *object*—in the broad sense I have been using, i.e. as a placeholder for objects, states, and states of affairs—and its correlative *content* is normally a perceptual sequence or continua, and that this is possible without falling into phenomenalism. It follows from the Social Enactive account of content structure that specific objects are, even in cases of continua, fully accounted for in their being objects of phenomenal awareness, thought, predication, and action.

In the perceptual discussion on phenomenalism, the key is the status of the relation between real object and object-as-perceived. It is, in other words, the problem of *content*, or what is the same, *of the perceptual object as it presents itself in perception*. Is the object-as-it-is-presented-in-perception/as-it-features-in-perceptual-interaction (perceptual content) a composition of parts in a mind-projected unity, hence necessarily separated from the world and only contingently matching it at times? Or is the unity and reality of the object-as-it-appears-in-perception such that the familiar problems associated with a gulf separating mind and world do

not appear? And in relation to the Social Enactive View: Do the nature and structure of content presented (*perceptual object/object-as-perceived* and *full=core+enviroming*), which *responds to the constraint that the objects of perception are temporally extended continua*, entail either phenomenalism or the type of realism that the Social Enactive View espouses?

Let's look more closely to the problematic alternative Gurwitsch proposed. Drummond diagnoses the problem with Gurwitsch in the whole-part model, to wit: "On Gurwitsch's view, that an identical thing appears in each of its appearances is a consequence of [a] whole-part structure, for in grasping the appearance (the part), we grasp a part which has a functional and systematic significance for the whole and, hence, we grasp, albeit imperfectly, the whole itself" (Drummond 1990, 96). On such view, the real object is a "system of appearances," or a system of a totality of adumbrations or presentations (Mohanty 2008, 382; Drummond 1990, 150).<sup>38</sup>

But what is the nature of this system? Is the system given, or is it idealized? On Gurwitsch's view, the system is ideal: "[such] Gestalt-whole is an ideal object" (Drummond 1990, 97). Drummond says, is that since Gurwitsch only allows for the grasping of parts, the whole is never given—rather it is posited as an ideal, and it does not matter that it is qualified as a system of adumbrations with functional and systematic significance. Functional qualifications notwithstanding, the whole is an ideal.

This type of analysis reduces each appearance to a moment of a whole that is never given and only theorized as a Kantian regulative idea (Mohanty 2008, 394). This path invites idealistic interpretations that counter the realist spirit that I am articulating, for it declares the impossibility of real contact with objects in the world. The object is *thought* of as a transcendent unachievable infinity, yet rationally present and regulative. While I do not think that Mohanty thinks of the system of appearances, of the perceptual content, in a way that makes of it an

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<sup>38</sup> By way of illustration, let us recall what Merleau-Ponty says of a visually perceived house: "the house itself is not the house seen from nowhere, but the house seen from everywhere" (2002, 69). Notice though that the house is never seen from every angle. From the point of view of the actual perspective we have each time, based on sensory stimuli, the system of appearances Mohanty and Gurwitsch talks about is never actually given. Further, Merleau-Ponty's dictum entails that the house itself is never experienced. I do not think that Merleau-Ponty falls into phenomenalism, but this affirmation—aided with a bit of decontextualization—allows us to see how attempting to escape one type of intellectualizing illusion—the house itself as an unanalyzed house seen from nowhere—may lead to another illusion—that the feeling of presence of the whole house in perception means that the house is seen from everywhere.

entity separate from the real object, which Gurwitsch does, I regard his interpretations as providing at least too weak of a bridge between appearances and object. It must be noted, however, that with this rejection not every teleological account of the perceptual object is ruled out.

This conception regarding parts and whole “raises problems concerning how to understand the categorial differences between senses (or perceptual appearances) and the object itself and how to understand the possibility of perceiving things themselves” (1990, 98). In other words: by using the categories of part and whole in analyzing the conjunction of identity and change that characterizes perceptual experience, and which has animated the parsing of content I have offered, we are unable to properly understand the relations between change and identity, or between, as Husserl put it, a “continuous multiplicity” and a “unity,” which I set out to account for in the first place (Husserl 1983, 87, 237–238, <75–76, 203>).

The reason of this categorial incongruence, in Drummond’s view, is that when only individual appearances are given real status, they are treated statically, and the whole is posited as ideal. This type of analysis “abstracts from the temporal process of the perception as a whole. Whole/part analysis [...] is essentially *static* analysis and cannot be employed in the analysis of the perceptual process *as a process*” (Drummond 1990, 151; Emphases in the original).

On the Social Enactive View, as well as for Husserl, these three constraints are honored: the perceptual object is a perceptual continuum, not necessarily but possibly identified with a physical, unitary object; whatever is presented in perception is presented with a sense of wholeness that belongs to perceptual experience (despite the fact that the object as a whole can never be present to sensory receptors).

Let me now elaborate the point where I think the Social Enactive View and Drummond’s view differ. This will show why, first, the Social Enactive View is not subject to the phenomenalism objection, and why the Social Enactive View, while incorporating several features of Drummond’s analysis, is an improvement upon it.



For Drummond, the way to think of the perceptual object is not in a whole-part model, but rather in terms of identity and manifolds. The idea is that the identity of the object is taken as a given, which is presented in a temporally extended manner in “a manifold of appearances.” He adds: “The identical is that which is given in and through a manifold; hence one of its sides or aspects is present whereas others are absent, although they can in time be brought to presence” (1990, 151).

In Drummond’s view, the object is a unitary object and it is the focus of perception. The object is certainly given in a temporally extended manner but it is always a unitary object. This is what I think distinguishes our positions: I do not think it is necessarily an issue of *identity-in-manifolds*, but *identities-and-manifolds*.

Drummond focuses on unitary objects and theorizes content as the object as it is presented. Manifolds are for him the appearances in which and through which an object itself is presented. But there is no clear room for what surrounds “the” object.

Drummond is moved in these considerations by a concern for the stability of the object. The way he proposes to ensure such stability is to analyze the perceptual relation as always having a definite object that is unitary and stable. Not having a defined object as the perceptual object jeopardizes the stability of the object, hence, the certainty that perception is of real objects, and not the mind-projected unity that we fear in phenomenalism.

Contrariwise, I have insisted that I used “perceptual object” to mean objects, events, and states of affairs. I have also said that I understand the perceptual object to be a perceptual continuum or sequence. Notice, furthermore, that I take content to be the addition of both core and environing content and not just core content. Further, I have clarified that core is not always highly defined and that whatever count as a core is not predefined by worldly objects, but is defined by perceptual intentionality. In perceptually interacting with the world, I do not only interact with (physical) ‘objects’ with precise spatio-temporal boundaries. I used examples in the experience of flavor and audition to illustrate this point.

The *Bicycle Ride* case features a good example of a perceptual continuum. Drummond has responded saying that we should distinguish between the phases in “seeing the road as the bicycle moves along it” and the concrete object-as-perceived, namely, “the road as perceived over the entire, temporally extended perception. The road perceived is a stable object, even though it is disclosed only in its salient features and even though it is disclosed in a multiplicity of noematic phases. The dynamism is at the level of the multiplicity of experiences and the noematic phases, the stability is found in the temporally extended unified experience and its object” (Drummond 2014).

My qualification of the road lends itself to the criticism, but I contend that Drummond would be at a loss if the perceptual object (in my broad sense) were more complex, dynamic and plastic. For instance, I hold that a perceptual object can be defined this way: while riding my bike, the perceptual object is the whole continuum made up by the changing road, the number of cars, building, signs, and people I pass by, the different thermic sensations in my skin, my touching the wind, the smells around me. Perception often occurs in this way, and not directed to specific physical objects.

At that point, the route that defines the stable object at the “world pole” in terms of worldly objects is at a loss, unless it wants to define the object as the *overall disposition of the world*, locally defined spatio-temporally. But that is clearly no definition in the sense of stability desired.

So when I say that it is more appropriate to define the framework as one of identities-and-manifolds, I mean that the plasticity of the contents of perception, featuring core and environings (which accepts of gradations or levels of marginality or centrality), is better understood as a plurality. This plurality occurs not only on the side of the perspectives or appearances (manifolds) but also on the side of the identities since they can vary in their configuration (objects, events, states of affairs). Core content can pick a wide perceptual continuum. There is nothing in the notion of core content that limits it to ‘stable’ objects.

In the framework proposed, what guarantees the reality of the perceptual object (in my broad sense) is the fact that it definitionally belongs to the world. And the world, as the home of endless possibilities for perceptual interaction, does not seem to hold stability in the manner that physical objects do. As a matter of fact, the world may be a very unstable place in that sense. I think it is more appropriate to perceptual interactions to think of the world as plastic.

There is one last element that also serves as a door into the next chapter: the pragmatic normativity of perception does not *make* our perception of the world be of the world, but it *reflects* that they are so. This issue, the pragmatic horizons in which perception is embedded buttresses the claim that the perceptual continuum view does not fall into phenomenalism.

We know already that the perceptual object—the world that presents itself in temporally extended sequences—is present in appearances, in perspectives, i.e. in “successive and adjoining” perspectives of the object. The perceptual presenting of an object is the type of thing by which an object presents itself in successive appearances or perspectives that are interrelated in the feature of perceptual consciousness of presenting the objects perceived in their wholeness, and in pragmatic *horizons or pragmatic systems of reference* (Drummond 1990, 150–51).

The peculiarity of perception lies partly in this dual character: it allows perceivers to engage with objects in a way that such objects are fully given to perceivers—they do not feel they are acquainted with sides or parts—, and at the same time, in such a way that a horizon of possibilities of givenness is open. As elaborated above, the temporally extended perspectival appearing *of things in perception* is the enveloping characteristic of the perceptual phenomenon: perception happens from point of view—a temporal, spatial and pragmatic positionality of a subject over against an ever-shifting and changing world.

This takes us to state once more that moments of perception do not exist in isolation, in the manner that touching the side of a book *as a side* is a holistic performance, for realizing it as a side is bound with the whole of which it is a side. (Husserl 1997, 66–69, <80–84>). And yet, those never-isolated moments of perception point to the radical open-endedness of perception,

to the fact, that the ideal of perception of an object in its entirety, so it is *adequate* to the way the world, both at rest and in gradual development, is but a myth (Husserl 1997, 96, <114>).

The fact that the Social Enactive View escapes the charge of phenomenalism does not mean that teleological thinking is entirely debunked from a consideration of the perceptual object. The idea of a total perception of the object can be perfectly entertained in imagination/phantasy as what would be the result of all possible experiences of the object: my, or our, experiencing the object from every possible point of view. This is the proper understanding of Merleau-Ponty's dictum seen above. For example, I have really seen my desk, and perceived my pillow by touch, and yet I understand that there may be perspectives or perspectival configurations that I have not occupied yet, and that may give me a different, however slight, perception of the object. There is even no conflict in saying that the perspectives are infinite and I may never see or touch familiar object in every way that it is possible to see them—yet, I have truly seen them. Imagination or phantasy exercises may, among other things, underscore the radical perspectival character of actual perception.

Further, the real object is related to the possible perspective that other members of the same, common world would have of that object (Zahavi 2003; Micali 2012, 156). The object, the real one, which presents itself in different perspectives, not only presents itself to me, but to others as well. In the development of this idea lies part of the genius of Husserl's approach to intersubjectivity: the 'object' is always fully achieved in the phenomenal sense and yet, given in a limited, open-ended way. It is a totality that is not exhausted in what is given at each moment, but not because it is not exhausted it stops being a fully achieved totality. The object's open-endedness serves as a horizon of the perceptual interaction in an intersubjective context, as an "index of a subjective [perceptual, in this case] system of correlations" (Husserl 1970, 165; Husserl 1983, 322–23, <279>).

## Chapter V

### The Normativity of Perceptual Experience and of Dynamic Content

Perception is normatively structured. The how, when, where, why, and what of perception are subject to normative relations. In its pragmatic aspect, perception is *normative* because it features a dimension of *successfulness* and *pragmatic significance* that is exhibited in social practices and the individual interactions that based on those practices. To inquire about the normativity of perception means, on the one hand, to inquire about *how* perceptual practices and individual interactions hold together, that is, about the origins of our being able to situate perceptual interactions in relation to *expectations* and *possibilities*. This sense belongs to the normativity of perceptual practices and it is cast in terms of the mastery of a technique by which we are familiar with perceptual properties and their aspects and interactions, we respond appropriately to them, we explore them, and we manipulate them skillfully. This subset of perceptual normativity was addressed in section 1.2.4.

On the other hand, there is also a normative dimension to *perceptual intentionality* and to *perceptual content*. There is normativity in *how* the different aspects of perception hold together with other aspects of our (so-called) mental life such as thought, awareness, action and emotion, and in *how* the *contents* of perceptual experience hold together. This chapter focuses on the normativity of perceptual intentionality and perceptual content.

The normativity of perceptual intentionality deals with the role of perception in the economy of our mental life. The general perspective of the social enactive view in this respect is that our mental life is part of our pragmatic engagement with the world, and our pragmatic engagement gives perception a central place in that engagement. In this chapter, I will offer arguments for the perceptual application of this general thesis.

Specifically, in the first section of this chapter, I will take up the issue of the relation, justificatory and otherwise, between perception and the other central aspects of our mental life.

In this regard, I argue that perception as perceptual experience is a form of *original intentionality* that grounds awareness (or phenomenal consciousness), thought (including belief, desire, and predication in general), action (beyond the scope of perceptual practices), and emotion. As a type of original intentionality, perception can be said to be a type of consciousness, in the sense of being an original way of making things available for consciousness. The extended argument is that since our pragmatic engagement with the world encompasses not only what we do, but also what we are aware of, the things we think about and what we think about them (predication and belief), and what we feel, it is important to spell out the way in which the perceptual aspect of that pragmatic engagement stands in relation to these aspects. I will have something to say about the way these dimensions are interrelated.

This grounding connection issues, first, from the nature of perceptual experience (chapters 2 and 3). Second, since I intend to maintain a continuity with the literature, and the relationship between perception and other aspects of our mental life—whether they are mental states or a different kind—is addressed in the literature as part and parcel of the normativity of perception, I will address that desideratum in terms that are somewhat close to that discussion.

The second part of this chapter is about the normativity of perceptual content, namely, *how* the *contents* of perceptual experience hold together. *What* these aspects are is normatively implicated in this *how*. In this sense, to ask for the normativity of perception means to ask, at the level of content, how simultaneous and consecutive experiences hold together, what governs intra, inter and multi-modal perceptions, what are the relations between parts (properties, perspectives, etc.) and wholes in perception, what are the transitions between liminal experiences and fully saturated ones, and so on. As a matter of fact, one of the *raison d'être* of an account of content is the instrumental role it plays in helping us spell perceptual normativity.

Lastly in section 3, I take up two important objections to SEP's view on perceptual content and its normativity. The first one is Stephen Crowell's view entailing that there is no place for the sensory and the undetermined in perception since normativity arises only from the

conceptual or from quite determinate norms, as in the case of bodily action aiming at clear successful, optimal grasp of something. The second objection will be Susanna Siegel's argument about the two-fold entailment from properties to content: (1) that accepting that properties are presented in experience entails the (representationalist) Content View (2010, 29), and (2) that using properties in perceptual comparisons, which SEP does, commits one to a content view, for those properties would be, as it were, isolated in order to then be compared to others, and this isolation would entail detachability, a sufficient condition for the representationalist view of content.

### **5.1 Perceptual Experience as Original Intentionality**

The issue of perceptual intentionality falls under the general problem of the possibility of being conscious of things at all. To be conscious of something is a relation of conscious being (in this case a human being) to things other than herself in which things are something for herself. This relationship is specified according to some essential modes in which things are given, that is, are to be something for consciousness, e.g. perceptual, predicative, actional, emotional, cognitive, etc. (2001b, 126). Perception is one of the original ways in which this happens. On the issue of consciousness, I follow in general Husserl's phenomenological orientation.

So what does it mean to say that we are conscious of objects we perceive? What does it mean to say that when we interact with a thing in a sensory-based way, which we've called perceptual experience, that thing *is* something for us, and on that very basis, we are able to construct memories of it, say things about it, think possibilities for it, make judgement about it, or act upon it? The answer to this question is partly to be found in the accounts of practices, experience, and contents. Let me offer a recap of those aspects.

To talk about perception is to talk about interacting with worldly things in a sensory-based manner. As I have been arguing in the previous chapters, perceptual experience is interaction with the real world, in which a spatial, temporal, and pragmatic situated perceiver relates in a

sensory-based manner to physically-based objects, events, and states of affairs in the world, which are not—are *never*—given in absolute ways to perceivers, but always presented in the appearances in which they can only occur in their being perceivable. Real objects are experienced *as* they are referred to and acted upon by people in their everyday lives (and by scientists in their theoretical endeavors) (Husserl 1997, 3, <6>).<sup>1</sup>

Further, perceptually experiencing (or just *perceiving*) worldly objects is an original way of being intentionally related to these objects. This means that perceiving objects is one of the original ways in which we, as conscious beings, are able to relate to an object, or to be *about* an object—in contrast, for example, to the way in which we, as living beings, relate to nutrients found in food. More precisely, to be acquainted with the world perceptually, that is, to *experience* it perceptually, is to be in interaction with things that are presented to a subject in-the-flesh, that is, with a sense of bodily immediacy and evidence that is incompatible with the actual doubting of their being so presented. To perceive an object, event, or state of affairs of the world is to be in such a relation to the world that “one is in touch with a spatiotemporal entity that is real in the sense of not being either an inference drawn from earlier beliefs or in some other way a product of a belief” (Pietersma 2000, 61). In perceptual intentionality, the subject who is sensory acquainted with objects—the one who interacts with objects—is thereby also able to entertain further thoughts, to act upon them, and to have emotions about them (Husserl 1997, 123,<147>; 2001, 40, <4>).<sup>2</sup>

In one sense, the accounts of practices, experience, and contents of previous chapters are themselves an explication of the idea that perceptual interaction with the world is one of the original modes of being conscious of things. Several arguments in those chapters located perception in an explanatory relation to predication, thought, action, and emotion.

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<sup>1</sup> While I take my theory to be compatible with much less complex forms of life, I limit myself to the case of the human being. I do not think that perception requires awareness in every case, although it sometimes does in the case of the human being. I won't pursue this topic here.

<sup>2</sup> This description offers a robust answer to the two questions Price poses in *Perception*, about the status of that which gives rise to our perceptions (for him, sense-data), which he referred to, following Moore, as a 'belonging to', and to the question of the nature of 'perceiving' or 'perceptual consciousness' (See Price 1950 esp. Ch.2).



A few examples may illustrate this triple entailment. From the account of practices we gathered, for instance, that the precise fineness of grain that matters to us when we experience things is often defined by the socially constituted practices of which they are part (e.g. that a food item like a potato chip is supposed to be crispy). Our experience of aspects of reality featuring perceptual properties is often an experience of high-level properties. We become acquainted with those aspects of reality through perception and not through inferential processes. Regarding experience, I also argued that the type of interaction we see in perception is properly understood as direct, and is characterized by the mediations of perception (idiosyncratic, non-socially pragmatical, and socially pragmatic). Concerning content, I argued that there is not even a sensory basic aspect of reality that does not come to be what it is for us if not in a concrete perceptual relation, characterized by specific perceptual modalities. These examples, among others, have already shown how SEP accounts for the fundamental role of perception in our conscious acquaintance with things.

Someone might say that these are only indirect accounts that do not demonstrate that perception is a type of original intentionality. It is difficult to make sense of this objection since it seems to call for a direct account. It's hard to see what an account would be since chapter 3 rejected the usual candidates. As a matter of fact, one position or the other seem to operate at the level of fundamental assumptions about the workings of the mind, not susceptible of judged directly. It appears that an indirect strategy is necessary. I have offered several indirect routes, and will in a moment add one indirect route, proposed by Campbell.

Someone might also say that the problem is that this view does not solve the problem of the consciousness of perceptual objects any more than representations do. On this objection, it is not any less clear why acquaintance with real objects would be originally situated, so to speak, in the economy of consciousness. Why would direct acquaintance be more in the clear than the acquaintance with ideas? SEP opposes Fregean and Russellian ways of going about experience and content that take inner experiences and their contents (abstract mental entities) as what

constitutes our basic being conscious of objects. It is in fact characteristic of the standard view that it takes its assumptions as if they are natural, and the only conceivable way of looking at issues. In this case, the problem with mental representations is that they are taken *eo ipso* to stand in just such conscious relations to a subject (Campbell 2002, 121).

To be sure, I agree with Husserl when he says that theories that posit internal representations as the ground-level entity on which consciousness takes place leave the phenomenon unaccounted for, because the mere having of a representation does not explain that the object is *meant* or *taken* by a subject and in a certain way (Husserl 2001b, 125–127). The explanandum remains unexplained, and we see intellectualist tendencies turned philosophical intuitions find solace in retreating to the inner.

Two further arguments in this respect. First, an indirect argument. It is plain that “being conscious of objects” must be established somewhere. This is, once again, an issue lying at the very basic level of the ontology of mind and consciousness. The question is whether we are going to take real objects as the objects of perceptual consciousness or will jump, in a potential endless regression, to mental entities, which, in any case, at some point would need to be declared *conscious*. If this is the case, I see no principled reason to reject taking external objects themselves as that which we are conscious of. Notice two parallels. First, to take representations as the object of perceptual consciousness is like the perceptual object analog of the homunculus fallacy: We are perceptually aware of objects because we are perceptually aware of objects in our heads. It is not difficult to see that the issue of perceptual awareness is not really explicated by that reasoning. Couple it with the homunculus fallacy itself, and we have a clearer picture of how we are in the presence of a regress: I don’t see objects in the world; a little man in my head sees little things in my head. How does the little man see things he sees? Inside his head?

The second line of argumentation is about the internal ‘coherence’ of perceptual objects and their continuous existence. In this respect, there are several reasons why external objects are the very objects of perceptual consciousness, and why not doing so—and instead relying on

abstract entities as the objects of our perception—leads us to all kinds of problems, particularly the epistemological bias that treats perception as intellection, and the objects of perception not in their own terms but under the alien concept of truth. These reasons are that in matters of perception only a realist, relationalist position can account for the dynamic, perspectival, high-level content workings of perception, and for the continuity and “coherence” of objects in consciousness. The temporally extended, multiple, finely grained perspectives that feature in our perception of objects are best explained by assuming that we are in contact with those objects in temporally-extended sequences, in which different perspectives are explored, in finely grained ways, in sensory based interactions. The best way of talking about the external world is to be directly realists about it.

This issue has been importantly argued by Campbell, one of the chief proponents of relationalism, with which SEP is in partial agreement.

The problems with the representational view are well treated by Campbell in a critique of the “common factor” view (also “highest common factor”), exploited by both disjunctivists and relationalists. The common factor view states that what makes a person conscious of something is its being related to a representation of the thing, which would be common between the actual experience of the thing in the world and a perfect hallucination of the thing (See also Snowdon 2008; Martin 2008; Haddock and Macpherson 2008a). The representationalist endorsing the common factor view is committed to the view that both experiences are the same, despite one being caused by a real object and the other not, for in both cases a mental representation obtains, and it is mental representations, not real relations to objects that individuates the awareness of objects.

Relatedly, as McDowell has elaborated, this is all we must concede to a massive skepticism. All we could aspire to, regarding perception, is the type of content that could belong either to a real perception of objects or to hallucinations of them. Epistemically we can in principle never be confident that we perceive the world (McDowell 2008).

There are several problems with this view, but I can only review a few of them. Let me highlight Campbell's strategy to derive some conclusions precisely from the indistinguishability on which the common factor view preys. If, as the representationalist says, there is a common factor between hallucinations and real perceptions, because they seem indistinguishable to the philosopher upon cursory examination, then it would appear that the representationalist has no resources to posit the continuity of objects as they exist in time and space. As Campbell notes, experience is what makes it transparent to the subject that objects are the same "across time, or across sensory modality," or as a basis for inferences (e.g. predicate attribution) based on the identity of perceived objects (Campbell 2002, 130). But if experience is only defined by mental representations bearing no necessary connection to a mind-independent world, an experience thus conceived cannot provide the needed warrant.

Instead, a conception of experience that makes it a direct contact with objects in the world is able to warrant the identity in question. To be sure, this conception of experience takes reliable syntheses (cognitive processing) to enable the subject to have precisely that type of interaction with the objects that constitute it. Brain, cognitive processing is taken to be a necessary condition for a perceiver to have experiences, but it does not entail that the real outcome of such processing is a mental representation: "It is not that the brain is constructing a conscious inner representation whose intrinsic character is independent of the environment. It is, rather, that there is a kind of complex adjustment that the brain has to undergo, in each context, so that you can be visually related to the things around you; so that you can see them, in other words" (Campbell 2002, 119, 131).<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> A further problem is that hallucination talk is simply overrated. It is not the case that we are actually deceived by hallucinations, although it is quite true that perception is 'fallible.' Specifically, when snapshot hallucinations are pressed to fit into the flow of continuous perceptions and their continuous coherent relation to action, they lose their grip because no people are tricked this way. Some may argue that illusions would further the common factor view, as in the case of phantom limb phenomenon. Upon close examination, though, it is clear that this type of illusion does not have the consistence and coherence that would make it indistinguishable from a real limb. Not only the phenomenon is not coherent across cognitive capacities—the phantom limb patient recognizes there is no limb—, but it also does not behave in strict concomitant variation with changes in the environment. Sensations in the phantom limb do not feature the proprioceptive and kinaesthetic continuous feedback that real limbs have.

Further, if the identity of objects over time is a puzzling issue for the representationalist, it follows that she doesn't have the resources to justify the perceptual sequences in which identical objects feature along with other objects, for the problem just multiplies. What this objection amounts to is that when the representationalist is pressed about real time, spatially extended perceptual sequences, there is simply no warrant for our actual engagement with the world.

We find in Campbell an argument for the identity of perceptual objects. As I have had occasion to argue in chapter 4, specifically in regards to the variations of perceptual objects that *core plus environing* content can explain, SEP goes beyond relationalism: it is *interactionalist*. In this sense, there is no commitment to perceptual objects being identical with themselves, although they can be. Not every perceptual object remains identical during a dynamic interaction. Perceptual objects are in a certain way continuous while we perceive them, but they frequently change. What I want to retain for the time being is this continuous existence of objects, to which different properties apply over time. SEP is well suited to account for this *vague sameness* of the dynamic object. Since this dynamic object is an object of the world, in our interaction with them, we are acquainted with finely grained objects, even as they change. This fineness of grain is also better account for by SEP than representationalism.

This dynamism is, once again, best explained by a theory that takes the external objects themselves as the site of aboutness, since mental copies would lack the detail that only reality can offer.

Let us now move on to exploring perceptual intentionality and its connections with three central aspects of our mental life: phenomenal consciousness or awareness, action, and emotion. My goal here is not to present conclusive arguments barring representationalism but rather to articulate a coherent framework in which perceptual experience plays a grounding role in relation to a vast reaching range of our world interactions. This grounding role, which I will specify in terms of awareness, judgment, action, and emotion, is one which representationalist views assign to detachable contents and understand as justifications.

### **5.1.1 Perceptual Experience Grounds Awareness**

The term consciousness also has a narrower meaning than the one just presented. In this narrower sense, consciousness as awareness or phenomenal consciousness is characterized by a reckoning of a what-it-is-likeness, that is, the fact there is something is experienced as happening to one, or felt as belonging to one. Perceptual intentionality grounds this sense of consciousness as awareness. However, awareness is not thought to be definitional of every step and aspect of perceptual intentionality and perceptual content. This is because there are aspects of what we perceive that we are not conscious of directly, but only, for example, as possibilities for future engagement. Still, most perceptual experiences exhibit this aspect.

It is a central tenet of SEP that experience is not solely the feeling or awareness of having a sensory-based acquaintance with an object. That view, which SEP opposes, is the modern idea that experience is an inner issue, a mental issue, something we feel. This position has become in many ways the natural way of thinking about mental phenomena. In the case of perception, this view is coupled with the input thesis, that is, the idea that perception is the subjective end point of sensory input: seemings. In that version, to perceive something is to have a subjective impression that things both have the perceptible properties they are perceived as having and are that way. Since, in that view, things might turn out to be, or not be, the way they seem to us, they are just seemings.<sup>4</sup> SEP disputes this view. SEP holds that perception is the actual contact with actual objects—qualified in dynamic, perspectival terms and so on—, and that seemings accompany parts of these interactions, but are not what defines them.<sup>5</sup> However, I would like to be careful in the following: I do not take awareness to be the same as belief.

### **5.1.2 Perceptual Experience Grounds Thought, Judgment, and Inference**

In addition to phenomenal awareness, perceptual experience directly grounds judgment, and by judgment I mean to refer to thought, judgment, and inference.

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<sup>4</sup> This applies to both low-level-only and high-level theories. The representational view is independent of a commitment to low-level or high-level perceptual properties theories.

<sup>5</sup> That only some aspects of our perceptions or perceptual experiences are accompanied by the feeling of awareness is best understood through the account of content as full=core+envirning, of which the pragmatic background that individuates them is a central part.

As to belief formation, in particular, since I do not take content to be detachable from experience nor consisting of conditions of satisfaction of experience (accuracy conditions), for reasons explained at length in chapter 3, contents do not form beliefs. Rather, because perception is an original way of being conscious of things, perceptual experience and its contents (here understood as a specification of aboutness) carry with them an intrinsic certainty of things being as they are presented—in their dynamism and perspectival context—, incompatible with disbelief and doubt. It is an intellectualization of perception to argue, upstream experience, that perception forms belief because when I want to know whether X is the case, I go see X. Rather, it is because when I see X and have the immediate certainty that X is as it is presented in experience, that I can reflect on the fact or verbalize it. It would be more appropriate to say not that perceptual content justifies belief, but, rather, that the belief *consists* of having a perceptual experience with a particular perceptual content.

Naturally, this does not mean that I can't ask whether the object I perceive *is* as I perceive it. And still, it is because I immediately "believe" it to be so, that I go on and ask: "Is it so?" This question operates on an already existing belief. There is no initial impression that doesn't come with a sense of reality, which amounts to the "belief" element. We must not forget that the perceptual interaction, and the awareness, and the eventual wondering are all contextually and pragmatically dependent.

Further, I wish to make clear that being able to ask a clarifying question about the relationship between the independent structure of a physical object and the way it appears to me in a concrete perspectival and pragmatic situation, does not entail that the question itself somewhat represents or carries a standard of accuracy applicable to perception itself. Nor does the questioning mean that perception does not as a matter of fact come with the sense of immediate certainty I've been claiming it does. The difference lies mainly in the fact that the double-checking question is derivative upon an initial acceptance. But the language-game of asking whether things are as they appear is only one fueled by thought experiments—a game

that is not part of everyday experience, since even when an initial doubt appears it is only further perceptual experience that confirms, as it were, that initial doubt. But this doubt needs to be taken as doubt in the sense the skeptic wants. The same situation occurs when one is exploring an object or a situation that requires further exploration due to its spatial or temporal extension or configuration. In such a case, one may wonder whether the object will be, in its totality, as one foresees it to be, and so the exploration goes on. Although this partial result could be construed as a doubt on whether the object is as it seems to be at a certain moment in time, it would be wrong to apply to model of reality as a standard against which to judge experience's contents, as it were, where further contents are conditions of satisfaction of an experience.

We know is that different perspectives or appearances of a thing can be compared meaningfully—and with good reason: they belong to the same environment and interactive perceptual context. And we also know that being aware, as we are, about the perspectival character of perception, it is normal that we wonder about the status of our perceptions in the midst of dynamic, extended perceptual interactions. This is why sometimes, for instance, in double checking something like a reflection on a piece of glass, reflection which 'covers' the objects behind the glass, we move so as to alter the reflection and prove to ourselves that the reflection we saw is such, and is not the object, or vice versa. But, once again, individual perspectives can't be compared to an extra-perceptual, extra-perspectival reality able to deliver a final verdict. Rather, experiences' contents stand in more or less coherent and stable relations with their own milieu. The radically incoherent, wild case is the one that makes us pause. Even in those cases, we try to find an irregularity in nature that explains the irregularity in experience, which still comes to us with a sense incompatible with belief.

In a line of thought that goes as far back as Aristotle, perceptual experience constitutively entails a basic coming-to-be-present-for-the-experiencer of a thing present to the senses, such that it is the basis for *being conscious of the way things feel*, for my being able *to think of or*



*imaginatively play with them* in the manners pertaining to the specific perceptual modality, and for being able *to relate consciously to them as possibilities for action*, as in a decision-making process, and even as a basis *to entertain imaginary possibilities for action*.<sup>6</sup> Campbell is right in echoing this line of thought: “Experience of objects has to be something more primitive than the ability to think about objects” (Campbell 2002, 122).

Allow me to illustrate this array of possibilities. To perceive auditorily an automobile coming towards me is not only to be conscious of it sonically, so to speak, but also as something that is not a smell, as something that is amenable to carrying certain perceptual-related predicates (such as ‘getting closer’ and even perhaps ‘bigger’), as something that I can classify (e.g. “this must be a high-cylinder car”) and, further, as something that I can act upon. Further, auditorily to perceive a car also encompasses the possibility of hearing a rhythm in the rumbling of the car, such that a memory of an old similar-rumbling car may come to mind—or even to discover rhythms of songs in the rumbling of the car, like we can play finding shapes of animals in the clouds. Let us not lose sight of the fact that in all these cases, as in the Parked Car examples, there is normally a pragmatic setting that defines expectations and possibilities. Even surprising events are located in relations to expectations and possibilities.

There are, in the domain of possibilities that come with a perceptual experience, experiences that can be rightfully called judgments and inferences, or are bases for judgments and inferences. Such is the case of perceiving a given color as *familiar*, which is a type of judgment and yet is entirely perceptual. Similarly, and somehow between judgment and inference, is the case of a man that having chosen a suit in the morning, goes to a drawer and picks *matching* socks pair. There is in seeing the right pair a certain judgment of match about the socks, and an inference of socks-and-suit match. As to inferences, it is like the case of someone that probes with her foot the bottom of a river in order to walk without falling, and adjusts, so to speak, tactile expectations to the way things feel in the water. Or like the person driving in heavy, thick fog, that awaits for objects closer to him. In this case, this person adjusts the

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<sup>6</sup> See Aristotle’s *On The Soul*, especially books II and III (Aristotle 2001).

inferences made to a perceptual situation, or, in other words, the inferences made are heavily based on the perceptual experience, which in this case is affected by visual conditions. Lastly, it is the same case, in the modality of touch, of the person that just went to the dentist, and still with a numb lip, is able to use a straw, putting to use the “knowledge” that the edges of a straw would be easier to feel than the surface of the glass.

### **5.1.3 Perceptual Experience Grounds Perceptual-Related Action**

Perceptual experience’s grounding of action is part of the engagement with the world that implicitly takes the world’s structure for granted, and not in a judgment-mediated way. As I have explained in the previous chapter, the implicit acceptance of the world and of perceptual experience is better explained by a theory that denies that a perceiver is sensory-awareness-guided-by-rational-patterns-of-judgment about what they *seem* to perceive.

One obvious sense in which perception grounds action is as part of perceptual practices, as I have defined them before, as intersubjectively constituted and sensory-based practices of interaction with worldly objects, and defined socially in a way that picks out objects such as food, dance, and dress and activities related to them. It is of the nature of practices to be intrinsically normative in a way that chapter 1 explored. I won’t spend any time on those arguments.

The sense that I explore here is different from the sense in which perceptual is found woven into perceptual practices. Rather, it is more basic than perceptual practices, and, in a sense, it encompasses them. The idea here is that perceptual experience is at the basis of our acting in the world in terms of movement and explicit interactions with and upon objects and persons. Since perceptual practices include interactions with people and objects—yet specified in particular ways—the type of grounding of action on perception I will explore here grounds perceptual practices as well.

Snowdon has argued that to be perceptually related to an object entails that one can entertain demonstrative thoughts about the object (2008, 67; see also Snowdon 1992). It is

possible to extend this rationale to intentional agency. If perceptually experiencing an object entails that one can think about that object and to think about it in the ways in which it presents itself, it must also be the case that perceptually experiencing an object entails that one is able to interact with the object in sensory and sensorimotor ways, accounting of course for the possibilities of action holding between subject and object (distance between one another, type of object perceived, physical and cognitive capabilities of subject, etc.).

In SEP, the fact that perception is an original way of being related to worldly objects themselves means that perceptual experience partly constitutes our being related to the world, not only phenomenally but also in terms of action.<sup>7</sup> We perceive the world in action-related terms, and not in mere appearing manners to which possible actions are added by judgment.

Of the ways in which perception is constitutively grounding of action, we can divide into personal and subpersonal levels. At the personal level, we have perceptual practices, treated extensively in chapter 1, as well as the action-meaningfulness of perception and the perceptible character of action-possibilities.<sup>8</sup> At the sub-personal level, we have what systematic interdependencies between sensory impulses and motor significance, part of which I have captured before, in chapters 3 and 4, under the heading “non-social pragmatic dependencies.”

Straddling both personal and sub personal we find that perception grounds action on the basis of the temporal dynamism of perception, on which a sense of the timeliness of actions clearly rests. Temporal relations between “moments” of perceptual continua ground our reasons for action, since action is temporally-bounded and, for the most part, has a timeliness requirement.

At the personal level, say that perception grounds action partly means that we act in a certain way upon an object partly because we perceive it as we do: as having a certain location

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<sup>7</sup> Certainly it is in this line that we should understand Kant’s idea of “the primitive character of perception relative to thought and judgment” (Ginsborg 2013, 210).

<sup>8</sup> To the objection that action-meaningfulness is a type of instrumental dependence, Social Enactive Perception answers by noting that instantiations of this case are indeed instrumental, but the fact that perception is structured in this way, that is, that perception has this significance in the intentional interaction with a world is an ontological fact that emphasizes the interdependency between the two domains—of which, once again, specific cases are instantiations that can be interpreted as instrumental.

within reach or without reach, as being of a liftable weight, and so on. I kick the football in a given way because I perceive it is in such and such location and moving in such and such direction and I want it to move in direction X at speed Y, etc. I think of objects in the way I do partly because I perceive them in certain ways.

A good deal of what is involved in this case is instrumental dependence, and this one is uncontroversial. Philosophers of perception of all persuasions accept this is the case. But to say that we perceive the world in action-related terms has a deeper, constitutive sense. Our perceiving the world is inseparable from our acting in the world, and our acting in the world is inseparable from our perceiving it. In what sense? In my everyday perception of the world, objects are continuously experienced as affording action possibilities. This means that that it is constitutive of perception to be action-meaningful, and for action-possibilities to be *perceptible*. This does not mean that some action-possibilities are not perceptible or require an active judgment or inference, but it means a) that some are not in need of judgment, and b) that it is possible that in the inference-requiring cases, perception affords a series of horizons on which specific action-oriented inferences could be made, but in a way that is dependent upon the horizon of concrete perceptual interactions.<sup>9</sup>

There is a second constitutive sense that tracks the personal to the idea of intentional agency, that is, of what it means for a subject to be an agent. Hurley has argued that the interdependency, and for my purposes the constitutive dependency of, action and perception is part of what makes the notion of an agent capable of motor action. For one, the notion of being able to act (but not simply in the manner of automatic response) allows for a “normative space” between stimulus-response and action. But this acting is only possible because an agent capable of motor action is able to “understand” the motor significance of the perceptual, and vice versa. Thus, Hurley says that the agent’s point of view is that from “which what you perceive depends systematically on what you do and vice versa, and such that you keep track of this

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<sup>9</sup> This means, for example, that an olfactory experience may afford a spatial judgment, but not an auditory one.

interdependence of perception and action. Such perspectival self-consciousness involves ordinary motor agency” (Hurley 2001, 427–428).

It is in this context that Hurley understands “reasons for action” as constraints on making sense of the relation between action and perception in general, where making sense is not the capacity of verbalizing those reasons, but the capacity of acting so that it is evinced that the agent is able to cast motor significance in sensory terms, and sensory significance in motor terms. This, she says, characterizes the first person point of view.

Hurley is right in saying that reasons for action or not reasons for belief for action (See Chalmers 2006, 100; Toribio 2007).<sup>10</sup> In fact, in the expression “reasons for action” *reasons* is a bit of a misnomer. The main reason is that practical reasons “don’t require the language, or the kind of theoretical inferential/conceptual abilities that language makes possible” (Hurley 2001, 430), which explains the attunement of animals to their environments. Reasons for actions are rather basic and common to all perceptive and motor beings. Practical reasons may be better understood under the model of what characterizes motor tacit, appropriate responses to situations, as judged by the apparent goal of the action, which is normally more than the mere motor display. Having a language or being able to make language-based inferences are not needed to make sense of practical rationality as I understand it.

#### **5.1.4 Perceptual Experience Grounds Perceptual-Related Emotion**

The purpose of this section is not so much to offer a conclusive argument for the idea that perceptual experiences ground emotion, but to offer a couple of remarks that make this thesis compatible with the social enactive theory of perception as a whole. This should increase the attractiveness of the view.

An argument coming from SEP’s commitment to the perception of high-level properties says that part of the high-level properties perceived are the hedonics of the chemical senses. The

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<sup>10</sup> These are certainly not reasons of the kind that one is supposed to be able to give in the face of doubts about one’s rationality. Second, and most importantly, reasons for action are normally amenable to be the only ground that there is: I throw X with a certain force because I see the target in such a position and I experience X to be of a certain weight. It does make sense to ask for further evidence of the connection between the sensory and the motor than appeal to the other person’s understanding of that inter-significance.

hedonics of smell, flavor, and taste are the part of the smell, flavor, or taste experience that expresses a liking or disliking of the thing experienced, to the point of being inseparable. As I showed in section 2.3.2, hedonics are explained by a dynamic interaction between the object and the perceiver. They cannot be explained by reference alone to the object. The common phenomenon in which smells or flavor conjure up emotionally loaded memories supports the idea that perceptual consciousness grounds emotions. Evidently, SEP does not hold that all emotions are perceptually grounded, but that some emotions are. In those cases, part of the answer for the emotions is found in the way we perceive something.

The perception of others and the phenomenon of *empathy* also suggest that perceptual consciousness grounds emotion, that is, that some of the ways I feel about X are justified in my perceiving X in a certain way. In empathy, we experience others and understand some of their psycho-physical experiences as theirs and as similar to ours (Stein 1964). In the case of empathy, the character of immediacy of the experience of the other and of parts of her 'mental' life is coupled with a particular reaction to it. A quick example that comes to mind is our perception of someone's anger in her speech, which Zahavi credits Husserl with and which is also a well-known point made by Wittgenstein (2010, 294). In fact, to be empathetic with someone's situation partly means to respond to that situation not in judgment-based way, but in an immediate way in which the feeling (say, compassion) is not 'judged' appropriate and then generated, but rather immediately felt and at times acted upon. Expressions of moral rage upon the experience of someone's pain or humiliation, or expressions of compassion upon the experience of someone's pain or plight fit well in the framework of SEP. If we accept that there is such a thing as the emphatic experiences, and we have every reason to do so, SEP provides a useful framework to understand part of the experience as perceptual. The understanding of this type of experience as partly perceptual has the advantage of explaining its immediate character and its bodily dimension. Since SEP provides a pragmatic understanding of the perceptual, the phenomenon of empathy can also now be understood in its intersubjective and practical

dimensions, and would be compatible with interaction-theory (IT) and other phenomenological proposals (PP) about the nature of empathy that can fall under the label direct-social perception (some of the alternatives to the orthodox ways of looking at empathy, namely, theory-theory (TT) and simulation-theory (ST)) (Gallagher 2005; Gallagher and Zahavi 2008; Zahavi 2010; Zahavi 2011). SEP would then be the general theory of perception able to accommodate a central desideratum of IT and PP views, to wit: "to take the embodied and environmentally embedded nature of psychological life seriously and acknowledge a more immediate experiential access to the minds of others which is prior to and more fundamental than any imaginative projection or theoretical inference" (Zahavi 2011, 546). This feature makes SEP an attractive view based on its comprehensive character.

## 5.2 The Normativity of Perceptual Content

Perceptual experience is partly constituted both by phenomenal character and by full content<sup>11</sup> (*core plus enviroing*). This means that two experiences would be if they had the same phenomenal character and the same content, but they would not be identical since each experience depends on the pragmatically defined interaction with the object. In SEP's view, phenomenal content is only part of experience, for experience is the actual interaction with

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<sup>11</sup> As I have stated before, I hold disjunctivism about metaphysics to be true, and disjunctivism about phenomenology to be underdetermined in trivial cases (hence a deflationism about the comparing of properties in trivial cases: "Is the blue of my dream the same as the blue of my real perception?" where the answer is yes, but only in this trivial sense), but true in the final analysis (cf. chapter 3, section 3.4). In the present case, the significance is that, by saying that I see or touch something to be of a certain size or shape, I refer to the case in which I engage in a visual or tactile relation with a thing and its subjective impression, and not only to a putative subjective impression without referent. My use of "I see X" or "I touch X" includes cases where I deviate from what is generally agreed upon. My use of "I see X" or "I touch X" does not include cases where I am merely imagining or remembering the thing, for in those cases I am not actually seeing or touching anything, that is, I am not engaged in a sensory visual/tactile-based way with a thing in the world.

The claim that narrowly conceived phenomenal character (momentary sensation of X) and content can come apart, despite the claim that content is constitutive of phenomenal character, points to a version of disjunctivism. In other words, it is the idea that the content and the phenomenal character can be exclusive disjuncts, that they are not necessarily linked. I do not think that it really happens—in the context of spatially and temporally extended perceptual continua—that two perceptions with the same phenomenal character can have different contents, but for the sake of argument I accept this can be ruled out entirely. For the cases in which it happens, namely, hallucinations (extended hallucinations, if you will), I hold that the experiences are different in virtue of having different content (a real one vs. a hallucinatory one). This is compatible with my acceptance of disjunctivism about metaphysics and my claim that disjunctivism about phenomenology is underdetermined. As I have expressed, once 'phenomenology' is understood in the context of a temporally extended, contextually dependent, internally coherent structure of things' appearances, phenomenology about content is also true (see chapter 3, n.21).

objects. This section of the chapter deals with the normativity of perceptual content, namely, *how* the *contents* of perceptual experience hold together.

This section accounts for how, at the level of *content*, simultaneous and consecutive experiences hold together, what governs intra-, inter-, and multi-modal perceptions, what are the relations between parts (properties, perspectives, etc.) and wholes in perception, what are the transitions between liminal experiences and fully saturated ones, and so on. Content has been explained already to be a composite of core plus environing content. The present account of content operates within that composition.

To be clear, if the perceptual interaction is formed by a practice component that relates in specific ways to objects, and those objects, perceptual normativity occurs at both ends. In this section, I don't deal with the practice aspect—neither as to perceptual practices (chapter 1) nor as to perceptual dependencies (chapter 3)—but with the content side of those interactions. Perceptual interactions are like the axle of two wheels, one being the acting, the other being the content. I address here the content wheel.

In keeping with the ontological and epistemological priority of practices in relation to perception, SEP's take on *content normativity* is pragmatic, as opposed to syntactic or semantic. The master argument of this section will show that what makes perceptual moments stand with each other in systematic relations, is a pragmatically governed field of *perceptual fulfillment*, consisting of possibilities, expectations, and actualization of perceptual content. In other words, to say, for example, that a series of perceptual contents (according to its specific composition in the *full=core+environing* model) are part of a certain perceptual experience means that they are glued together by being part of actual or possible interactions with objects, events, or states of affairs. In other words, perceptual content is pragmatically individuated. I will argue in this respect that content is partly individuated by (1) local pragmatic considerations (specific links of content to other close contents), and (2) holistic pragmatic considerations (placement within high-level, holistic pragmatic motivations: embeddedness in pragmatic sequences). These actual



and possible interactions are partly specified by what objects, events or states of affairs afford. It is evident that our interaction with objects depends on what we can do with those objects, so in this sense the what of perception has imposed a normative horizon on pragmatics: a horizon spelled out in terms of both constraints and possibilities.

This account of normativity of content will allow me to offer a view about content-individuation at the lowest level of contact with the world—a relation that was left open in chapter 4. To be sure, the domain of possible perceptual interactions that constitutes the pragmatic level on which the normativity of content depends is the domain of intersubjectively constituted, sensory-based practices of interaction with worldly objects, such as food, dance, and dress. These are, not surprisingly, the perceptual practices defined in chapter 1.

### **5.2.1 Core Content Is Not Individuated Conceptually**

My first argument for the pragmatic dependency of perceptual content concerns *core content*.

This is a negative argument: it argues that content is not individuated conceptually, and rejects the conceptual thesis on pragmatic grounds. This argument does not prove that content is individuated pragmatically, but its conclusion is necessary for the further pragmatic thesis.

The core aspect of content has the peculiarity that it can be understood, under a certain description, as a type content that is such in virtue of being a function of concepts. It is true that a description of the content of my auditorily perceiving a car as an instantiation of the concept ‘car’ picks up something correct about my perception of it. This description is, however, secondary. This content can be characterized, and so primarily, in terms of its placement in a pragmatic context, and not as the instantiation of a concept.<sup>12</sup> Not every time I perceive a car I am aware that I perceive a car, or verbally report that I hear a car, such report being explicit and standing in the first line of my cognitive relation to the car. In other words, my car-involving perception is not necessarily the perception of a car, and the actual perception is pragmatically determined in complex ways, where objects are rarely all that is perceived, and

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<sup>12</sup> Some alternatives for a pragmatic casting of the noema in general and the core of the noema in particular include, among others, its casting it in terms of my perceptual geographies, Gibson’s affordances (1979), Cussins’ cognitive trails (1992), or Noe’s access (2012).

the whole perception normally just involves objects. Since it involves objects, but not necessarily *qua* the objects they are, everyday perception is rarely, if ever, individuated conceptually. The individuation issues from the whole pragmatic framework in which the object is presented, as the *Bicycle Ride* and *Ambulance Siren* examples of chapter 4 illustrate.

Hopp drives the point home in an interesting way when pointing to the for-the-sake-of-action character of perception: It is very easy to persuade oneself that perception has the same sort of intentional content as judgments when one's paradigmatic instance of perception is visually attending to an already familiar sort of object and reporting, either to others or internally, what you see, and do so for the sake of doing just that. But this is not a paradigmatic case of perception. Most perceptual experiences do not have perception, or even knowledge, as their goal. Perception is more typically done in the service of action" (Hopp 2011, 48).

### **5.2.2 Full Content's P-Properties And The Case of Attention**

This section addresses perceptual content as *full=core+enviroming* and constantly refers to the parallel between perceptual content and object-as-perceived, provided in chapter 4 (esp. Section 4.1.1). This being the case, the specific determination of the perceptual object, hence of perceptual content (that insofar as object-as-perceived is content) can, and often does, acquire a certain life of itself that rules on its perceptual horizon and can affect other perceptual objects. This content's life of itself own is brought about by attentional dispositions, both consciously aware ones or deeply seated attentional habitualities. To the latter case belong, for instance, the perception of written language or speech, which SEP holds exist in a world as it appears to a suitably situated perceiver.<sup>13</sup>

In accounting for the three types of dependencies of perception in section 3.3.1, I presented the concept of perspectival properties, P-properties. Noë defines them as follows: "P-properties--the apparent shape and size of objects—are perfectly 'real' or 'objective.' Indeed, the relation of P-shape and P-size to shape and size can be given by precise mathematical laws (e.g., the laws of linear perspective)" (Noë 2004, 83). All that is necessary for my argument is to say that P-

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<sup>13</sup> Cf. chapter 2, section 2.3.2.

properties thus defined do not exhaust the whole range of perspectival properties. While in chapter 3 the emphasis was on the perceptual dependencies that made them possible, I want now to focus on those properties themselves as part of the content of perception, and I want to articulate the claim that part of the content of perception is given in the form of P-properties that are not defined in Noë's way. This difference is another aspect that distinguishes SEP from other enactivisms (see also 4.1.1).

In Noë's view, "P-properties are real in the sense that they do not depend, for their nature, either on what goes on in us (e.g. sensations), or on what we do" (2004, 84). I hold, in contrast, that it is not the case that P-properties do not depend on what we do, or on what goes on in us. More often than not, P-properties depend on what we do, and derivatively on what goes on in us, both regarding sensations (what stimulates our sensory endings) and in terms of both core content and the phenomenal character associated with that type of content. Take, first, the case of attentional dispositions that fix content, as happens in the case of series of dots forming a cube that can be seen in two different ways.<sup>14</sup> The perceptual content qua content is entirely dependent on a certain attentional disposition, and it can become fixed in a way that even rules out other possibilities. It is the case of learning to see something as something specific, in a way that makes it really difficult, or perhaps impossible, to change that specific take on the thing. The Müller-Lyer lines, which westerners "learn" to see as of different lengths but the San foragers of the Kalahari do not, are a perfect example here. Back to Noë, P-properties are properties of the environment only under the assumption that there is nothing else to the way things appear than relations between their objective properties, relations between objects, locations, and, at least in the visual case, illumination, as Noë describes them. But there is often more than relations between objective properties in cases where attentional direction fixes the content, that is, where attentional regard decides the issue. In other words, it is often the case that there is *no fact of the matter* in the environment as to the perceptual specification of a state of

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<sup>14</sup> It is conceivable that there are internal divisions in these attentional dispositions. For instance, it may seem premature to say that *seeing-as* or *seeing aspects* phenomena, as illustrated by Wittgenstein, are due to changes in attention alone. It may be a matter of further investigation to determine what divisions are possible here.

affairs—what core content, what environing content—, and in those cases the definition of the perceptual object is attention-dependent.

Take, for instance, cases like those of change blindness or the case of holistic or atomistic perception of visual scenes in research on social cognition. These are cases where the object of perception cannot be established independently of the pragmatic interaction. Take also the case of perceptual attention based on relations of familiarity or harmoniousness, of eating with a view on food-enjoyment: in those cases perceived properties are not ‘objective’ properties, but perspectival properties, in the sense that they are possibilities of things to appear, based on the pragmatic intention with which it is seen. Along the same lines, when I am at a furniture showroom, looking for items of colors that could potentially be harmonious with other colored items I own, objects and their colors would start showing up perspectively, but not only in terms of objective relations between objects, subject, and environmental conditions, but also in terms of the pragmatic intention that guides my looking at them. The harmoniousness of a shade of green with a beige lamp would not show up in many other perceptual interactions. Although I don’t provide the full proof here for high-level properties as normatively governed, the case of relations of familiarity or harmoniousness provides a clue about how a case of this kind would stand in a content-normative sense.<sup>15</sup>

### **5.2.3 Master Argument for Pragmatic Normativity of Perceptual Content: A Pragmatic System of Possibilities**

Content has a normative element constitutively in it since the parsing of *full content=core+environing* entails a series of relations of containment and sequentiality in the light of the dynamism of perception that accounts for the way contents hold up together. This section spells out those relations and other aspects constitutive of the normativity of content. SEP’s take on content accounts for (i) the holistic character of perception and for (ii) the coexistence of change and identity in perceptual continua, both these aspects being of normative significance.

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<sup>15</sup> Other types of high-level properties include perceiving particulars as natural kinds, perceiving agents performing actions, perceiving processes, relations like harmoniousness or familiarity, the hedonics of chemical senses, visual and haptic object recognition, and written word and speech recognition, among others. See 2.3.2.

The present arguments for the pragmatic location of content cash out the potential of the parsing of content in  $full=core+environing$ . First, *Environing content* will be understood as a pragmatically governed system of possibilities. This entails that *core* content is determined by the perceptually relevant system of possibilities in which it is embedded.<sup>16</sup> Two further aspects are discussed in this section. The first one is that *core content* is partly defined in virtue of its relation to a pragmatically related *environing content*, hence in virtue of its role in *full content*. The second element is that *environing content* is defined in virtue of its nature as a system of possibilities. This system of possibilities is *horizonal* in nature. This is what makes it possible for *environing content* to be a geography in which *core content* can take place. As to its normative and explanatory work, *environing content* does a good deal of work accounting for the *relations* between the sides, parts, elements, and transitions that form perceptual continua.

The distinction between *core content* and *environing content* is one of structure and not a hard distinction about two natures of content. All content is in a sense at the same level—the level of possibilities. This is what allows *core content* to be dynamic and continuously change within *environing content*. An apt analogy is a center of gravity. The center of gravity of a volume is real but it is not one specific atom or molecule, and it moves around as the object moves. The *nature* of content was resolved as a specific combination of perceptual object and object-as-perceived, with the emphasis on the latter (section 4.1). A further but separate step is the *structural* distinction between *core* and *environing content* (section 4.2). This distinction is a desideratum of a theory of content, as argued at length in chapter 4, on account of the pragmatic differential treatment of the specific object of our perception, however dynamic it might be, and of the relation between change and identity, and multiplicity and unity in the perceptual object.

The structure of content presented in the equation  $full=core+environing$  is roughly described as a combination where *core content* is the concrete object of our attention, action, or

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<sup>16</sup> In SEP, the domain of the perceptually relevant is broad. For instance, someone's body smell may affect the possibilities of social interaction, including aspects of social distinction and class issues, giving rise to treatment of the other as the same, as indifferent, as superior, or as inferior, among others, wherever those distinctions are in place in human communities.

predication, among others, and enviroing content comprises perceptually relevant (i) objectual, unintended aspects, and (ii) extra-objectual aspects and properties, extended temporally, (at times) spatially, and modally, reaching all the way down to the moment of initial contact with physical aspects of the world. The question that paves the way to understand the normativity of content is: *What makes all those aspects of content be contentful?* The answer in the case of core content seems evident: core content is contentful because it is that which I most attentively or explicitly experience perceptually. If core content is the object of my perceptual experience, it is precisely its being the object side of my interactive perceptual experience what makes it be the content that it is. After all, content is but a specification of aboutness, just as experience is. (Notice, however, that this does not specify everything that there is to know about core content: it gives the most straightforward sufficient condition for something to be content, not a set of the determinants that make a piece of core content to have the specific nature it has. For that, we also need, on the side of content, the connection with enviroing content. Another aspect of that definition comes from perceptual practices.).

Things are not this straightforward in the case of enviroing content: What makes the objectual-unintended and the extra-objectual (hence also unintended) aspects *contentful*? What makes them relevant for perception? The answer to this question is the mark of perceptual normativity, and that answer, in turn, is the source for understanding the scope, depth, and fineness of grain of perceptual normativity.

Let me put it in a different way: If content's nature was already established following the notion of object-as-perceived, of which the perceptual object is a part (the object that appears in perspectives), why do core and enviroing content need an additional justification? Core content can in any case ratify its membership easily. Some can object, however, that enviroing content (objectual but unintended aspects, or extra-objectual aspects and properties of perceptual wholes) is not clearly an object-as-perceived, hence not content in the first place. When singled out, doesn't enviroing content fall through the cracks? And to the extent that I said that both

environing and core are part of the same fabric of content, doesn't all content lose its character too? The answer is *no* and the argument I now present takes us to the whole system of possibilities of which both enviring and content transient and real specifications.

Environing content comprises aspects or properties of perceptual objects or situations that are not explicitly intended, such as the color of a soccer ball as I kick it or the texture of the surface of a table where I simply rest my hand, or the olfactory background on which further smells can acquire significance as they come to be experienced. I am not paying attention to those aspects but they somehow partake in my perceptual engagement with the world. How? In what sense and way?

One might at first consider that what makes this type of content contentful is simply its being sensorially present, that is, that all things that reach our sensory endings are part of content, whether or not they make it to awareness. The problem with this merely sensational description of such contents is, first, that it would force us to declare *every* element of sensory impingement part of the content of a perceptual situation.<sup>17</sup> This alternative partly is based on the wrong assumption that our nerve endings are like doors always open through which everything that fits gets through: that sensory impingement is the same meaning all the way to experience. Further, this is not a good alternative because although what becomes content does so first in virtue of being available sensorially, through our perceptual apparatus, it is so easy to mistake the perceptually meaningful sensory with sense data, and sense data is a bad hypothesis for reasons that have been profusely discussed in the literature and that I have addressed in previous chapters. Thus, contentfulness of enviring content is not availability of sensory information per se, without an understanding of what a perceptually meaningful sensory

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<sup>17</sup> An argument that I don't explore here is the argument based on the physiological fact that even at the nerve ending level, there are selective forces that determine what is felt, e.g. the simple case of sensory fatigue. Neurologically downstream things get even more complicated, for sub-personal processes already operated with filters upon impulses. Backward judging has the enormous problem of assuming that things of which we are phenomenally aware always had that specific interpretation, hence the idea that initial impulses were simply "captured."

contribution means.<sup>18</sup> That understanding is not to be found in the sensory information in some sort of brute, basic level. Further, to insist on the merely sensory would make too big of a gap between content and experience, and both content and experience are specifications of aboutness, that is, there has got to be a common ground for both content and experience.

However, it is true that whatever comes to be content and experience must be able to be felt. In section 4.2.1 where I talked about an interpretive taking up of things of the world at a very basic, sensory-like level. What is this interpretive taking up grounded on? Whatever this interpretive taking up is grounded on, I argue, is the same ground on which content stands, both core and environing. That ground is what makes content contentful, and on SPE's view that is the placement of content in a pragmatic system or field of references and expectations, of possibilities and fulfillments.

Let's start with what Husserl calls the present and the absent parts of the perceptual object, and let's proceed to analyze their relations. To start with, think of a relatively simple perceptual experience, such as touching a book. Imagine that it is nice old volume and someone is admiring it tactilely. We notice at once that the whole book is not perceptually present to the person at each moment, and yet, regions yet-untouched of the book are present—the feeling of the book right there includes aspects unseen. The whole book is present: it is not that the story ends simply by noting that I don't feel the parts I don't see. There's more than that.

Part of the book being present consists in the availability and likelihood of a normal, deft exploration of the book, so that you would explore tactilely (also visually, perhaps olfactorily) those regions you have not explored. One may also be examining a book (perhaps a thinner and longer one) and find it suitable for scratching one's own back—a desire that appeared suddenly, connected in quite a simple way with quite a simple action, touching a book. But if it is an old volume (perhaps someone's treasure), it may not as easily become a back-scratching tool. I am

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<sup>18</sup> Even in information-process and functionalist frameworks, a syntactic requirement that a definition of the computational task and its logic are needed points to a deficiency in a notion of impulse that would be self-sufficient. Furthermore, the very idea of input needs to be specified in semantic terms, that is, in terms of how it will be turned into a specific representation (See Marr 1982).



certain that the reader gets my point: the domain of what is possible on the basis of the perceptual is, in everyday life, multimodal and rather creative.

The object is always incomplete from the point of view of perception although it comes with a sense of full presence. When we perceive an object there are certain aspects of the object that are evident to me in a factual way: these are the sides of the book which I actually touch at a moment. There are other aspects of the object that are experienced as perceptually present but not directly. Strictly speaking I am not touching several sides of the book and yet, my entire experience of the book is not only of one side of the book but of the whole book. In his *Lectures on Thing and Space*, Husserl refers to this duality in terms of proper and improper appearances. Proper appearances are supported by presentational content, that is to say, by sensorily perceived aspects of objects in the world that give rise to a certain experience. Improper appearances are supported by a system of intentional references that yield expectations to be 'fulfilled.' Proper appearances are full intentions, in Husserl's terminology, because they are intended perceptually and realized or fulfilled. Improper appearances are empty intentions, for they intend an aspect of the object but that intention is not at the very moment fulfilled (Husserl 1997, 35–50, <42–60>).

In improper appearances, the intention may be said to be "synchronically" empty, but not entirely empty. It in fact seems misleading to call it empty, since it is not empty in two different senses. First, the object is given in what Husserl calls *horizontal* intentionality: as a part of the consciousness of the object, the 'hidden' profiles are also given in experience (Gallagher and Zahavi 2008, 96–97). In the case of a physical object perceived visually or tactilely, like the book of the example above, its back side is given to me in experience. This means, on the one hand, that I don't experience the book as lacking the aspect I am not currently "sensing," and, on the other, that I am for the most part able successfully to interact with the book: I can grab it with an appropriate grip, and at least begin lifting it with an idea (somewhat vague, for sure), of its weight. Part of the background at work here is naturally our habituation with the world: we find

ourselves at home in the world. We find the world stable, dependable, and regular; we know materials that have properties we are acquainted with (e.g. weight or resistance), and at the basis of this are also physical laws. This stability of the world is part of the conditions on which perception takes place in everyday life.

Second, the not-yet-present profiles are often pro-tended, that is, they are expected. In this second sense, the situation is two-fold: the perceptual object is extended in time and since object consciousness operates within a time-consciousness that pro-tends, any specific ‘chunk’ of object-consciousness is part of a continuum formed by an impression that lingers on in consciousness—retention—and protends, that is, paves the ground for the following ‘chunk’ to appear, based on the type of object at stake. In a sense, this chunk of intention is forward-oriented, or as Husserl would put it, anticipatory. In the broader, governing sense, perceptual intention is dynamic and continuous. Perceptual consciousness would otherwise be impossible (Gallagher and Zahavi 2008, 97).

Proper and improper appearances (to use Husserl’s 1907 terminology) are structured as systems of perceptual expectations: if I am touching a book, say the back of it, and get to the edge of the spine, my movement would likely proceed as if the next surface will be shorter, and my intending to touch the spine of book will be a fulfilled expectation if such surface is in fact shorter than the back of the book. Notice, however, that even if there is no “*actual confirmation*” of the hidden side, in terms of actual sensation-based interaction, a certain fulfillment takes place when the object behaves in accordance with those expectations.

These expectations are not cashed out as propositions; they are implicit in perceptual action. It is now to be noticed that the system of expectations and fulfillments—a “system of referential implications” or “pointings” (*Hinweisen*)—is a system of pragmatic possibilities on which the core content may or may not take on determinations it did not have before. Husserl describes this situation as follows, making the perceptual object “call out on us” and saying: “There is still more to see here, turn me so you can see all my sides, let your gaze run through

me, draw closer to me, open me up, divide me up; keep on looking me over again and again, turning me to all sides. You will get to know me like this, all that I am, all my surface qualities, all my inner sensible qualities” (Husserl 2001a, 41, <5>). It is plain that the sensory dimension does not stand by itself: perceived aspects of the world are not simply aspects passively received. In the view that I am arguing, there is no clear cut between action and perception in several ways, as I have argued in several places in this and previous chapters. One of the connections occurs here, because the system of expectations is one of expectations as affordances, for what I expect (implicitly, to be sure) is something I can or can’t do. The expectations are to be fulfilled as I interact with the object, or rather, in virtue of my interacting in this or that way with the object. A practically unsurprising object, then, is an object that fulfills expectations and in that sense does not ‘disprove’ the original sense of reality that comes with our perceptual experiences. Notice how the base line here is a normal world that at times may be “challenged” and not a putative world that is “confirmed” at each step.

These expectations, or better, these referential implications have feelers in every direction: towards more or less determination of the perceived object, or, also, for instance, towards more determination in regards to one sensory property and the detriment of another. Their fulfillment can both increase or decrease in saturation of the presence of the object, e.g. in the form of smelling a dessert more fully as I approach the kitchen, or losing it as I walk away. These evidence-giving sequences strengthen or weaken initial takes on things (Mohanty 2008, 392–394). In my view, it is crucial to see that this fulfillment of a system of references or indications, of expectations, does not point towards a *better* perception of the object—for there is no standard of “best” perception for every pragmatic situation in which a perceptual object is present, and sometimes ‘best’ would be indefinable or very context-specific (think in a background that is to remain precisely in that way)—, but in every possible direction of coherent existence of perceived objects, including its disappearance from the perceptual field.

As we saw earlier, it cannot be a merely sensational criterion that characterizes contentfulness in the case of envioning content. The criterion (which is also common ground to the interpretive taking up that takes place at the most basic level of content with physical reality, as I'll show below) is pragmatic in nature: only those objectual-unintended and extra-objectual (hence also unintended) aspects that *at least* play a functional role in the transitions between moments of perception are aspects of envioning content, including transitions in terms of affordances. These transitions, to make sure, operate in every direction: it is just as perceptually meaningful a smell that fades away in its fading away, as it is a smell that will always remain vague, as yet another one that increases in determination. In terms of affordances, it is perceptually meaningful that an object appears as graspable, as one whose 'graspableness' fades away as the distance between subject and object gets longer.

There is an interesting yet puzzling consequence of my account, which I shall call the *thesis of unspecifiability of total content*. The totality of contents of a perceptual interaction is unspecifiable, for the horizon of possibilities that is opened up by a state of affairs (a specific perceptual interaction) is always changing, becoming fulfilled or actualized at each moment in a specific direction, thereby opening new horizons. At the moment in which one course of action or perception is pursued, others start to change, to morph, and some to disappear. Now, at the moment in which only one state of affairs is pursued, the horizon of possibilities is in a sense present as a repertoire of *possible implications* or *pointings-towards* of the actual state of affairs. Those possibilities figure in content, exactly in that measure, as possibilities.

This *unspecifiability of content* is not the same as the *radical incompleteness of perception*, though both belong to the open-ended nature of perception, its perspectival nature in a changing world. The incompleteness of perceptions means that perception is never fully achieved because it is about dynamic continua, constantly in change. The unspecifiability of content means that the whole set of contents at a given moment cannot be pinned down, because some of them are

indeterminate, some are vague—they are possibilities that have not achieved their specific determination. Some of these contents should rather be understood as *fields of possibilities*.

The pragmatic nature of content applies then *full content*. It applies to environing content as field of possibilities in which more specific perceptions can happen, and as the concrete background that gives its specific grain to pieces of core content. This pragmatic nature applies to core content in two ways: first, core content is the object of our pragmatic endeavors, and second, it is partly *individuated* by its connection to the field of possibilities surrounding it, such that it acquires a specific grain or flavor, and such that it is part of a dynamic sequence in which there is a continuous determination issuing from precisely the continuous dynamic nature of the perceptual object. It follows from this partial determination, that core content would not have its specific nature were it not placed in precisely such environing content.

The pragmatic normativity of content provides an intrinsic way of understanding the relation between core and environing content, that is, between the explicit object of our actions and predications and to the unintended and extra-aspectual aspects of the systems of perceptual possibilities in which whole perception takes place. The pragmatic normativity of content also provides a way to provide a normative justification for the different aspects of perceptual consciousness. The claim, in this sense, is that the determinate configuration of *full=core+environing* is operative in an understanding of our awareness of things, of the way we relate to perceptual objects in thought, judgment and inference, of perceptual-related action and perceptual-related emotion (see 5.1.1-5.1.4 above).

The *Ambulance Siren* case of chapter 4, for example, helps to exemplify how the specific determination of the siren at each moment has to do with the whole sequence in which it appears to me. When the siren is away from me, I do not perceive it as entailing perhaps a certain action on my part, such as making sure I am out of the way, but I may perceive it as entailing a warning that it will come closer to me. I won't pursue a detailed elaboration of the different ways in which I am related to the siren as I perceive it, but the general idea is that the

specific mode in which I am aware of it, or the particular actions or non-actions that I am called upon at each time, can be partly explained by recourse to the structure of content. The fact, for instance, that when the siren gets closer to me it starts to cover over the voice of a person I am talking to explains my anticipations of what is to come (complete covering over of the voice), my actions in that respect (pausing for a moment) and my awareness of it as a powerful presence in my perceptual field, interfering broadly with many other immediate activities, including, perhaps, a quiet, reflexive introspection moment another bystander may have had at that moment. Yet, for the caught-by-surprise introspective bystander, the ambulance may mostly be absent from her field of awareness, save for the moment of inescapable presence (when the sound is very loud, and everybody around the person moves in function of the siren). This last case highlights, once again, that the pragmatic orientation of a person in the world, her taking of position, governs the perceptual interaction, for it even gives the inescapable a specific tone or grain.

#### **5.2.4 Environing Content at the Lowest Level**

The explanatory desideratum of content (namely, that perceptual content functions as an explanation of the transitions and transformation of the way the world is presented in perceptual interaction) finds part of an answer in the lowest level of contact with a physically defined reality. The pragmatic nature of environing content as a field of possibilities extends to the lowest level of environing content. In this section, I wish to sketch SEP's take on perceptual content at this level. While this aspect needs a fuller treatment, the overview provided in section 4.2.1 and here should suffice for the account of normativity in general.

Let us first recall that the idea of the lowest level of contact with the world is to be understood as part of environing content. This lowest level (for which I initially took an inkling from Husserl's hyletic stuff) is the idea that there something to be said about the relation between a physical world whose physical characteristics (reflecting light, having a certain kinetic molecular energy, having a certain material composition, the vibrations of airwaves at

certain frequencies, etc.) make it possible for a being like me to perceive it, that is, for me to take heed of it in the manner in which I do (as being visible, as having a temperature, as telling of shape, as opposing resistance, as being audible, etc.). In one sense, then, this is an issue of sensory modalities: it is about my engaging in perceptual relation with aspects of the world, such that I am able to be *about* them in the way that the different sensory modalities (as well as inter and multimodal interactions) are about things. In another sense, while all of our perceptions involve an interaction that can be defined in this basic sense—the sound of the french horn or the bassoon is still a piece of audibilia in the sense that a physical property of the world is available for auditory interaction—, parts of environing content remain at an undetermined low level which I have characterized as marginal, and as the level of the perceptually unsaturated—*perceptual inklings*. To borrow Thompson’s way of talking about this (see chapter 4, n.36), some things remain weak as to the force of their affective allure, while other emerge into “affective prominence or salience” (2007, 263–264). Affective, to be sure, is appropriately perceptual since affectivity refers to what has “a kind of affective force or allure, or affective ‘grabbiness,’ in relation to one’s attention” (2007, 263).

Let me then clarify the claim that the pragmatic rationale for environing content extends to this most basic level of contact with the world. How to understand the pragmatic at play at the lowest level? And the question is puzzling because in the previous section I built the pragmatic account upon the denial that the merely sensory can individuate content. And yet, to the extent that perception relates a sensory being to its *Umwelt*, in a way that couples senses and sensibilia—to that extent there is, at least, a limiting character in what the sensory allows. Sets of sensations are tied to specific sensory horizons, and not to others: for instance, what is audible is closer to what is loud than to what is freezing cold, and it stands in continua of audible material rather than in continua of felt temperatures. By the same token, what is tasteful (taste-bilia) is closer to what is sweet than to what is dark, and it stands in continua of smells

and flavor rather than in continua of illuminations.<sup>19</sup> Part of what gives a hypothetical sensory chunk its character is precisely its standing in the midst of some modal sequences and not in the midst of others, and those sequences are a determining factor in the pragmatic possibilities of perceptual interactions.

While the dynamic account of content I am proposing involves causal determinants in the workings of perception, it is not a causal domain: perception is not simply determined by the physically defined realities to which a perceiver is exposed. Rather, it is pragmatic in the rich sense that a person's being in the world is determined by her pragmatic relations to things and people.<sup>20</sup> While SEP's take on content does not exclude causal conditions, they are for the most part built into higher, more socially-informed and personally-enriched levels.<sup>21</sup> The riches of the world of food, its combinations and ways of enjoyment in terms of where sequences, temperatures, amounts, and mixtures (intra- and inter-modal) are partly built upon the physical and chemical properties of material items that can be combined in some ways and not others (e.g. drinks that must be drunk fast before they sediment), food items that cool down relatively fast and are to be eaten warm, proportions in intensity of flavor of, say, hot sauces, etc. One does not find the meaningfulness of food at the mere sensory level, but sensory-material conditions feature in the meaningfulness of food, for they have implications in the manners of consumption and enjoyment.

The information-theoretic approach of Dretske is seemingly compatible with my proposal. It may be helpful briefly to consider that view in order to spin the idea of the pragmatic nature of perceptual content that I have been. The idea of seeing as *simple seeing*, consisting in rich information delivery (channeled modally, or rather, getting informationally rich in virtue of modality) with no epistemic upshot seems to capture all my enviroing content (Dretske 2000).

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<sup>19</sup> A related claim, belonging to the specification of the *idiosyncratic dependencies*, is that the materiality of the world, and the materiality-attunement of perceptive capacities (according to each type of being), conditions the modes and horizons of perceptual experiences: it sets their limits and possibilities, according to the specific sense-sensibilia matches, without precluding further non-sensational configurations deriving from personal history, intersubjective influences, or in general, circumstantial configurations that give (or impede) further shape to material interactions.

<sup>20</sup> See my (Arango 2014) for an account of the pragmatic in relation to our being in the world around the Husserlian notion of *Stellungnahme*.

<sup>21</sup> See (Rorty 2009, 165–212) for an even broader discussion of these topics in a general epistemological terms.



Dretske crafts these contents epistemically inane; all things epistemic depend on the conceptual powers of perceivers, hence not on the information, however rich it is. But can this be so? Can there be mere information with no epistemic value in itself? This is part of my rejection of the sensational criterion for environing content. Information's specific richness depends on a *system* for which it is information, but the perceptual system, with so much fineness of grain even in terms of sensory modalities, puts part of that richness in the information itself, even if it is not fully defined at that level. This means, in turn, that 'information' —environing content—cannot be epistemically inane. Modal channeling has, in SEP's view, a meaningful, epistemic component. It seems then that rich information is not epistemically empty and that it is its placement on a system of possibly related processes or outcomes that makes such information what it is.

I have said that what makes content what it is, even in the case of environing content, is that it, *at least*, plays a functional role in the transitioning between moments of perception or that it marks possibilities for affordances. I must confess that I am not entirely convinced that my 'at least' carries the weight I think it carries. Part of the problem is that it is difficult to conceptualize and determine the role of what is not explicitly perceived. An approach like Dretske's has the advantage of starting light. Yet, when analyzed in detail it seems as if he's just unloaded information from the role it plays, turning an *at least* into a *nothing*, and wrongly sending that unloaded aspect into 'higher' levels. If the idea is that the role of information/environing content is undefined and could therefore not be specified or adjudicated to concrete perceptions, I object to thinking that the only way to deal with it is making its relevance a matter of a higher, non-conceptual processing. That vagueness or undefined character is already built into lower levels of perception. Here is an argument: a low-level sensory acquaintance with the world is not good for everything—i.e. it cannot combine with any thing whatever (sounds aren't good for tasting). Rather, it is only good for some transitions (from sweet to bitter, as opposed to from sweet to loud), and is only a possible antecedent for the

appearing of certain affordances and not others. That field of implicit and explicit possibilities is part of the sensory modal aspect of the perception. Hence, it seems that even in a minimal sense it can be argued that no perceptual content is epistemically empty, even when, as said before, epistemic content that is merely a potential for possible transitions is never accomplished or actualized.<sup>22</sup>

### 5.3. Objections

#### 5.3.1 Crowell, Environing Content, and the Lowest Basic Level of Contact With Physical Reality

At this point I have the resources to object to Crowell's take on the sensory in his account of normativity (2013), according to which there is no place for the sensory in the perceptual because the normative, he says, must respond to norms that are either fully conceptual or at least very determinate, as is the case of bodily action aiming at the successful, optimal grasp of something. The general conception of environing content in SEP (the unintended), and especially the most basic level of contact with the world (the unsaturated, perceptual inklings), do not belong in Crowell's conception of determinate objects guiding bodily action. The normative then does not reach to the undetermined in perception, such as the sensory contribution to perception found in the lowest level of contact with reality, or in the radical incompleteness of perception.<sup>23</sup>

Crowell seems to agree that the normative dimension in perception entails a system of references or implications obeying the *law of motivation* and not the *law of association* or causation (2013, 24-26). Here we see a parallel between these two Husserlian notions and

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<sup>22</sup> As a normative framework, the pragmatic system of possibilities and expectations that explains the long braids in which perceptual aspects occur offers intelligible connections between events. The normative connection is found preeminently in the pragmatic position-taking of the perceiver. There is, however, an aspect in which the answer is yet to be investigated: how to understand the traffic and transitions between lack of stimulus, unsaturation, and saturation. This issue must be postponed for further inquiry.

<sup>23</sup> Crowell's position is that Husserl did not have the resources to provide a truly normative account for the perceptual, whereas Heidegger did. I object to this reading. As my references to Husserl all along this work show, Husserl does have the apparatus to offer true normativity.

McDowell's and Davidson's *space of reasons* and *space of causes*. The difference between the two domains is that in associations or causes there are only sequences of things that simply follow one another, whereas in motivations and reasons there are relations that can be *justified* by a subject, such that the non-necessary connections can be made *intelligible* to self or to another. What is at stake is, in a sense, a space that is between natural necessity and randomness. Perception, Crowell and I agree, is fundamentally located in that middle space.

Crowell identifies the system of references or implications as guided by a model of intention fulfillment in which fulfillment is governed by a concept-like determination that allows for a veridicality judgment, in which one succeeds or fails, and one of whose tasks is "to provide warrant for our judgments" (2013, 125, 129). In Crowell's own words: "My perception, and not just my judgment, has a meaning, and this meaning has a structure identical to that of the corresponding judgment, namely, a *conceptual* structure" (2013, 126). I perceive something and if I perceive it correctly if the thing is what I thought (judged) it was. Notice, first, that this is the same model I criticized profusely in chapter 3: a philosophy of perception built around a veridicality concern.

Crowell adds a type of bodily intention-fulfillment somewhat different from the merely conceptual to veridicality according to concepts. In his view, the difference between conceptual fulfillment and perceptual-bodily fulfillment is that perception admits to a type of counterfactual. This counterfactual is based on mastery of sensorimotor knowledge that allows us to infer variations in the perception of objects according to movement (Crowell 2013, 129, 143–144). I will not rehearse once again my arguments against a sensorimotor-only understanding of perceptual interaction in chapter 3, which led me to postulate the three dependencies of perception. My point here is to show the closeness of conceptuality with optimality-directed bodily skill at work in Crowell. The key here is to look at the commitment to a notion of *veridicality* having a central role in normativity. For Crowell, talking of normativity is to locate oneself in a space in which we can ask how an experience "might go

wrong.” In other words, to experience something perceptually for Crowell involves setting oneself in “reference to normative satisfaction conditions that determine what the thing is supposed to be, a certain meaning that establishes how the current experience must necessarily be related to (former and) subsequent experiences *if* the thing perceived is in fact what it gives itself to be” (2013, 16–17; 129)(2013, 16–17; 129).

What Crowell rejects is the Husserlian view, which SEP spouses, according to which there can be epistemologically rich, intentionally-laden, nonconceptual content at the level of what I have been referring to as the most basic level of contact with the world, in which physical realities are taken up by us as something perceptually meaningful (Crowell 2013, 138).<sup>24</sup>

It is not difficult to see in this context why for Crowell the undetermined character of what is taken up at the interpretive level and is at times unsaturated does not have a role in the normative: there are not satisfaction conditions for them; there is nothing that determines “what the thing is supposed to be.” What motivates his take on perceptual content to be occurring at the level of optimality-directed bodily skill is that his view is “norm-governed” in a strong sense: “getting a better look at something depends on knowing how to look — that is, being skilled at bringing oneself into the circumstances that will allow the *optimal* look to emerge” (2013, 142, emphasis mine). Perception, for Crowell, is skill based, entails success conditions, and constantly aims at improvement of one’s body’s stance in relation to a phenomenon. My central critique at this point is that, although in SEP’s view these are possibilities for perceptual interaction, this is not all there is about perceptual interaction. Just as I have argued that the sensorimotor does not exhaust the possibilities for embodiment and enaction in perception, the normative is not exhausted (i) by what can be subsumed under goal-oriented perception, and (ii) certainly not in a way in which actual perception confirms seeming-perception. The latter point (ii), a version of the veridicality concern, constitutes a fundamental difference between SEP and Crowell’s view. The former point (i), about goal-oriented bodily activity, is possible in the context of SEP. In

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<sup>24</sup> In Husserlian terminology, the issue at stake has to do with the status of hyletic stuff (see 4.2.1 for details) and the role of the lived body as an orthoesthetic system, that is, as a system of “concordant perceptions,” as Ricoeur puts it (1967, 50).

SEP, the perceptual and perceptual normativity extend to aspects of content that are not yet defined or determined. Thus, a view like SEP's differs from Crowell's, among other things, in allowing for vague and unsaturated aspects of perception, namely, the connections between physical realities and the perceptual interpretive take on them. Further, the role of pragmatic orientation even at this most basic level of contact with the world is broader than the bodily skill directness of Dreyfus' view, which Crowell adopts. The crux of the problem might be condensed thus:

Even if there is a pre-conceptual level of consciousness where concatenations of sensory fields emerge through the associative syntheses of similarity, contrast, and contiguity — and even if all higher-order conceptual syntheses (such as judgment) presuppose such an organized "pre-given" sensory field — we still do not know how such an association can admit of normative assessment, without which talk of intentionality is empty (Crowell 2013, 139–140).

In contrast to Crowell, SEP holds that the intentionality of perception operates within pragmatically governed fields of possibilities in which the dynamic continua of perception are structured in such a way that everything that is within their field of possibilities and expectations is a legitimate fulfillment of perceptual intentions. These continua are always directed to core contents, and those take a leading role in guiding perceptual continua. In SEP, possibilities and expectations operates within an idea of gradual fulfillment, not with a hard notion of confirmation, as Crowell does (2013, 23). (Perceptual surprises are exactly surprises, but we all know that the surprising takes a moment to be understood as part of a world in which new things occur.<sup>25</sup>) These fields of possibilities and expectations are based on the regularity of the physical world, our habituation to our life on earth, to the internal constrain of sensory modalities and, above all, to our skilled knowledge of perceptual practices, such that we stand,

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<sup>25</sup> SEP's dynamic account of content is holistic in that it takes every bit of content to be located within full=core+enviroming in specific ways. But the sequences are not supposed to be always existing and always related to specific goals. One of the features of SEP's normativity that Crowell's theory, following Drefyus, cannot account for is that of the immediate perception of perceptual surprises where no optimality or specific direction of bodily stance improvement is in sight. A fitting example comes from William James: "Into the awareness of the thunder itself the awareness of the previous silence creeps and continues; for what we hear when the thunder crashes is not thunder pure, but thunder-breaking-upon-silence-and-contrasting-with-it" (James 1981, 240). SEP is perfectly equipped to deal with this case.

forward-looking, in the midst of perceptual continua knowing how to deal with, how to manipulate, and what to expect of the perceptual realities we interact with.

To be clear, then, I agree with Crowell in the desiderata of a theory of normativity regarding *motivation or reasons*. I have extensively accounted for a rejection of the causal as capturing the nature of perception. I have, however, made some room for the causal in the normative. SEP's view understands causal impingements from the world as entailing constraints on what is possible, and what is possible is a necessary basis for the pragmatic. However, when these causal impingements can actually be called perceptual they have already been subject to the interpretive taking up that is located at the most basic level. In Husserl's view, these are the 'functional connections' featuring in psycho-physical correlations, that is, between the causal impingement and the location of its subjective or presenting aspect (Drummond 1990, 146–149). But precisely the presenting aspect is not *just* caused by a physical aspect of the world. Although it is conditioned by the physical configuration of the world, its sense is located in the domain of the personal, which is governed by motivations. Still, the domain of motivation is a relation at the personal level, and this means that the pragmatic depends on the goals of the person who lives a life of projects and complex activities. One does not have a limb that is elevated, with an appendix at the end that is moved to the sides: one raises one's own hand and waves the hand to say hello to a friend.

In the specific domain of the most basic level of contact with reality, in which some modally taken up aspects of the world are still 'sensory' in a way, SEP holds that the pragmatic nature of perception still governs the occurrence and the movements between unsaturation and saturation of perceptual happenings. Crowell is wrong about ruling out normativity from this area of perception, arguing that it is empty to place intentionality and content there because there is a relevant sensory element. His mistake is to assume that every reference to sensation is a matter of causal sequences and that only what can be *experienced as guided by norms* (and not just *in accordance with them*) generates *meaning* (Crowell 2013, 28). For SEP, the normative system

belonging to perception includes the embodied, practical, and social levels, as Crowell grants, but it also extends to (contra Crowell) to the basic level on which physical events in the world are just taken up sensorially. This basic level does not constitute meaning is contentful independently or in isolation, but only by belonging to a pragmatic system of references in which it plays a functional role.

Linking this discussion back to the diachronic account of perceptual practices, it is important to remember that conceiving of practices as the ground of normative relations means that we are within the normative space when we act in accordance with shared ways of doing things, but this does not require knowing why things are done thus or so, or being conscious of doing things thus or so. In the pragmatic spirit of SEP, the normative does not come from a distinction between acting “in accord with norms” and not “in light of them,” as Crowell holds—between being *guided by a rule*, or simply *acting according to a rule*, in the Wittgensteinian discussion. The pragmatic take I have been articulating rejects a semantic requirement ('how to proceed' is fixed semantically), and consciousness of a semantic requirement ('knowing how to proceed') as essential to perceptual normativity.

It is in this sense that there is normativity at the level of basic contact with reality. As accounted in chapter 1, the partaking in perceptual practices means to relate to perceptual things in the manner of unreflective engagements with *seemingly given* aspects of perceptual reality.<sup>26</sup> Skilled practitioners display the normativity of perception in their relation to sensory properties and ranges of them, to harmony or disharmony relations, to possible combinations, to available moves, and to connections to objects and events. Practitioners experience the familiarity of these elements and are disposed to act in specific ways about them. The sharing of meaning that takes place in the perceptual interaction with the world starts at the level of familiarity with different sensory configurations, which is acquired by training and acculturation.

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<sup>26</sup> See chapter 1 for a detailed discussion of the *seemingly given*, which is SEP's extension of the Wittgensteinian take on Quine-analytic sentences. The *seemingly given* is at the basis of the structure of perceptual appropriatenesses and entitlements that belongs to shared ways of doing things, to practices.

### 5.3.2 Siegel's Comparisons and Properties

I dispute Siegel's reasoning according to which accepting that properties are presented in experience entails the (detachable) content view (d-content view, from now on). The d-content view holds that properties are presented in perception and that accuracy assessment is necessary for perception. Whether it is taken in a strong or a weak form (either understanding properties propositionally or in a more 'neutral' framework, as Siegel puts it), the content view entails that contents are detachable and comparisons can be made, and these comparisons are first of all meaningful in order to check for accuracy. Checking for accuracy (what I have referred to as the veridicality concern) is at the basis of Siegel d-content view. I call her view the *detachable content view* because the rationale based on accuracy-checking and the possibility of comparisons essentially assumes that contents are a type of things that are detachable or able to be abstracted from experiences themselves. It seems, however, that the argument that takes her from someone's admitting that perceptual experience is also about properties (as SEP does) to the seemingly consequential claim that perception involves detachable contents and that accuracy checking is essential to perception trades on two equivocations: the meaning of comparisons and the meaning of properties, and with properties piggybacking on comparisons.

Siegel claims that to hold that real objects or situations are constituents of experience does not preclude the possibility of comparing the experience of a situation against the situation, even when the situation is not separable from the experience (Siegel 2010, 69). She says: "When we focus on the subjective character of the experience, comparing it with the situation in which it is had seems *to make sense*, no matter what metaphysical structure it may have [...] We can ask whether things are as they appear. In making this comparison, we don't have to make any assumptions about the underlying metaphysical structure of the experience. So the idea of comparing a Good experience with the situation in which it is had is *not illicit*," even if those experiences have objects, situations, and properties as non-detachable constituents (Siegel 2010, 69, emphasis mine).



The equivocation about comparisons rests on a confusion between a comparison *making sense* and a comparison being *licit* or *illicit*. In saying that for Naive Realism comparisons of the accuracy-check kind are *illicit* is to say that they are not real comparisons because they do not compare things of the same kind (or of the 'metaphysical structure,' as she puts it). To say, on the other hand, that it makes sense to make a comparison is to say that there can be some common aspect between the compared items. Does this mean that they are of the same kind? Does this mean that a comparison is always of things of the same kind? More specifically, the question is whether they are of the same kind in relevant perceptual terms. The answer of SEP is negative. See Wittgenstein's picture-object, a simple drawing of a face with a sort of neutral smile. It makes sense to ask a boy whether the guy in the picture-object is like or unlike a crying baby. The comparison is more evidently perceptual when the game accentuates the shape of the smiling mouth or the frown. A father, for instance, can help the boy compare by exaggerating the frown. What does not make sense is to say that the meaningfulness of this comparison is based upon the perception of a smiling property in the Picture-object, detachable from it, and a perception of a smiling property in a real face, detachable from it. For, in this case, the comparison is not a mental putting side by side of elements already existing in the mind. Rather, it is the 'mastery of a technique' consisting in singling out an element of a picture, or rather, an aspect of it. It is an aspect that does not exist in isolation from the interaction with a perceiver, suitably situated to see it as such. Being able to find an aspect in an object perceived and compare it with others is, in this case, perceptually based, but it does not rest on some basic structure of the direct objects of perception. The same goes for a comparison between the colors of flowers in the nightmare I had last night, and the color of the flowers of the tree I am going by. While it makes sense for me to tell someone about my nightmare and compare with the color of real flowers, that does not mean that in my real perception of the flowers there is a property that is represented, that is of the same kind as another property represented in my dream, such that the two are color properties, one instantiated in a nightmare, one instantiated

in a tree's flower. This last move, to turn what *makes sense* into something *licit*, is itself illicit. Comparisons like this one show that a comparison can make sense and be illicit by the more stringent requirement of whether the things compared are of the same metaphysical structure.

A related issue has to do with the situation of asking whether things are as they seem, which features a baseline comparison. I will not rehearse the arguments of chapter 3, where I took good care of the veridicality concern, thereby setting SEP apart from that view. Right now, I would like to add a couple of elements to it. First, I would like to point to how confusing things get by the language used in the d-content view. In this case, the "*intuition*" that perception is essentially in need of confirmation as to its accuracy reflects more of the intellectual and verbal behavior of some perceivers, some of them are practitioners of philosophy, that on the nature of perceptual experience. I accept that we can meaningfully ask the question of whether things are as they appear. It seems that the English language in which I write these words allows for such an utterance and its meaning to be intelligible. Take this as a piece of verbal behavior. I propose that the explanation for this verbal behavior is that such a question is meaningful vis-a-vis hallucinations (not illusions), and then imported to perceptual situations. This route is blocked by SEP and its disjunctivist commitment.

Alternatively, such a statement is meaningful because it makes sense in the framework of intra-perceptual comparisons. In that case, the question is rather about in what way a given perspective stands *in relations with a range of other perspectival aspects*. This question is a heuristic device in perceptual exploration. For instance, one may initially perceive a certain smell in a friend's kitchen that one takes to be the smell of X, although with a certain hesitation. One then proceeds to smell more carefully to supplement the initial impression. SEP treats this case (and like cases in other sensory modalities) as evidence that perception does not occur in snapshots, but in sequences, and that everything that is given in perception is given perspectivally in spatial, modal, temporal, and pragmatic ways, and that the more perspectives one has, the richer the experience can be. One does not check the perception for accuracy. Rather, one explores and

supplements to be better acquainted with an object. And yet, we live constantly with partial perceptions, that is, with a world that we take to be what it is as it presents itself to us, 'knowing' that most perceptual things would admit of further exploration to more fully determine what things are from every point of view. The point of better exploring some things is not to check upon initial but rather to get a richer perception of something, according to pragmatic orientations. That is why the type of question of whether something is as it seems to be makes some sense, and yet, why it should be understood along the direct realist, interactionalist view of SEP, that is, understanding that the comparison aims not to confirm whether X is X but rather to situate aspect X in a continuum of perspectival appearances that are normatively structured in the manner elaborated in this chapter.

In sum, I bite the bullet that at times—when one is delirious or had a nightmare, one may ask whether what one is seeing is true. The question makes sense but is rapidly suppressed when confronted with the full perceptual sequences that immediately provide an internal coherence of its own. I acknowledge, then, that there could be bad cases. (Let's recall that the baseline for SEP is only the (minimal) 'good case,' where a perceiver actually interacts with an external object). But in the good case (understood in sequential, continuous, dynamic terms), where the question of whether things are as they appear makes sense but more in an open-ended way, all comparison is intra-perceptual, and since perception is necessarily perspectival, there is no room for a sense of accuracy in which contents could be true or false (Siegel 2010, 28).

Let us now look at the issue of properties. According to Siegel, accepting that properties are presented in experience follows from something more basic, to wit: that some bits of experience that can be compared with some other bits of experience. Whatever the ontological status of properties is, Siegel's view seems committed at least to properties being detachable, so that they can be compared with one another, thereby allowing a link to veridicality assessment (2010, 48). Even with all the relatively neutral framework that Siegel uses to define properties

(2010, 71, n.45), I hold that she is committed to a version of properties characterized by some abstract detachability. I will call hers *strong perceptual properties* or *strong properties*.

Strong properties are definitional of her description of perception: "Suppose you see a cube, and it looks red and cubical" (2010, 48). This means, she says, that the experience presents the properties of being red and being cubical. I suggest that one can look at Siegel's view in this other way:

*A Strong Perceptual Property:* A strong perceptual property is what is needed to make sense of comparing things. A property is the type of theoretical entity that grounds a comparison between two things in one respect, assuming that the making-senseness of comparisons means that they are grounded on the real existence of the aspects compared.

This is because for an aspect to be compared with others, the argument goes, I should be able to abstract that aspect and compare it with another. Because this comparison is possible (including the baseline case of asking whether things are as they seem), it seems that properties are detached from their worldly entanglement with things, that is, detached from the things they are instantiated in.

But, as I have just argued in relation to comparisons, there is no reason to assume the existence of properties prior to the comparison, because they are brought about by the practice of comparing and guided by the type of comparison sought. In other words, if in a transcendental fashion one concludes that the fact that comparisons are possible make it necessary that there are strong perceptual properties, then what is needed is a different conception of the explanandum generating other conditions of possibility. SEP has such an alternative conception, which does not fall on the confused version of comparisons that Siegel spouses.

*A Strong Perceptual Property is an exaggeration:* A strong perceptual property is an exaggeration of what is needed to make sense of comparing things. A property is the type of theoretical entity that grounds a comparison between two things in one respect, when one

misunderstands that the making-senseness of comparisons does not mean that they are grounded on the real existence of the aspects compared.

Think in a comparison between a billboard and a certain building, more wide than tall. Can I ask someone to compare whether both objects have something like a rectangular shape? The question is perfectly meaningful, and in both cases I refer to a way of looking at the object by relating width and length, but this absolutely does not mean that in my perceptions of the billboard and the building (more wide than tall)—that is, in my immediate acquaintance with the object as I walk down the street—I perceive a property, rectangularity, which I am then able to compare to other geometric-like properties. By the same token, Siegel's position seems to be committed to saying that there will be a perceived property for every aspect that we could reasonably articulate in questions or statements based on comparisons. This is evidently absurd. The same holds for the use of the Picture-Object in the comparison with a frown.

In the case of the baseline comparison “Are things as they appear?” I argued that they are intra-perceptual comparisons between different perspectives of possible continua, which are normatively structure. So what properties are compared when I ask for intra-perceptual comparisons? I must bring back the difference between perceptual properties and properties *of* the objects, events, and states of affairs can further be specified thus: objects, events, states of affairs and their properties are presented perspectively in perception and can only do so. We are acquainted with  $F$  but only via  $F'$ ,  $F''$ ,  $F'''$ , etc. If a perceptual presentation is only perspectival, a perfect presentation ( $F$  as  $F$ ) is an impossibility. Physical occurrences—e.g. material objects in their modal aspects—cannot be experienced by perceivers but in perspectival sequences.

We are now in the position to revisit a rejection of the veridicality concern I presented in chapter three. I identified the traditional commitment to veridicality by two points: binary nature, in which objects are presented as they are, or as they are not ( $F$  or no- $F$ ) and discrete nature, in which at each moment it is possible to assess whether appearances match reality or not ( $F$  or no- $F$  at  $T_1$ ). But SEP sees things differently.  $F=F'$ ,  $F''$ ,  $F'''$ , etc., and (1) All  $F'$ ,  $F''$ , and

F''' are Fs, in the sense that perceptual profiles actually reveal how things are F-wise, and (2) a single F', F'' or F''', etc. could not be assessed in isolation, but only as a part of a sequence, where F\* could be deviant, but only in relation to F', F'', F''', etc. Siegel confuses P-properties with properties *of* the object (strong perceptual properties). In SEP's model of comparison, it makes no sense to say: "F and no-F are the only and exclusive alternatives." Rather, there are F-wise properties. As a matter of fact, there is no perceptually meaningful standard that is not one perspective among others, so there is no extra-perceptual instance that can ground judgments of accuracy in any robust sense (see my elaboration of Ayer's 'privileged appearance' in chapter 3). The possibility of intra-perceptual comparisons is taken as grounding the internal-coherence and horizontal nature of perceptual normativity that I have elaborated in this chapter.

This line of thought explains why SEP's position is compatible with some versions of Naive Realism and Radical Naive Realism. According to Siegel, Naive Realism depends on whether experiences are individuated "by the particular things that the subject of the experience perceives" (Siegel 2010, 76). And: "As standard versions of Naïve Realism construe Good experiences, those experiences contain the relevant situations as constituents" (Siegel 2010, 69). Thus, while under Siegel's classification, SEP's position would be that of the Naïve Realist, that would be a mischaracterization. I accept that we can meaningfully talk about perceiving properties of the things we perceive, like the Naïve Realist and unlike the Radical Naïve Realist, who says that we are only presented with objects and not with properties.

The Radical Naive Realist, in Siegel's taxonomy, denies that a good experience requires superstrong veridicality: "seeing *o* when *o* looks F, *o* is F, and *o*'s looking F is *due to o's F-ness*" (Siegel 2010, 37, emphasis mine). SEP understand "o looks F" as "o looks F-wise," where F-wise refers to all the possible presentations of F', F'', and F''' etc. The relation  $F - F', F'', F'''$  is a one-many relation. SEP holds that "o is F" is underdetermined because F is not necessarily predicible of *o* in the absence of the perceptual interaction (think of the color of a pond as one walks around it), even if it is meaningful to talk in such terms. As it follows from my discussion

of Ayer in chapter 3, I dispute that “o’s F-ness” (hence “o is F”) has a determined meaning outside of a perceptual interaction. This is because the *F* that belongs to the object is not the *F* that appears in the specific profiles or perspectives that are presented in perception. In perception there are *F*s or ‘F-wise *F*s’, not just *F*. Lastly, SEP also finds underdetermined that o looks *F* “due to o’s F-ness” since it discards interaction as a source of perceptual determination, and SEP’s interactionist nature holds just the opposite. I hold that perceptual mediations of the kind I call idiosyncratic dependencies—e.g. eyeglasses that systematically correct what a person would see, a person having a cold, so it systematically alters for the time involved what the person smells or tastes, or Siegel’s case of stimulation in brain area V1—are not only no threat to a legitimate perceptual interaction, but they are part of the constituting factors of perceptual interactions. Pragmatic dependencies, social and non-social, render “*due to o’s F-ness*” underdetermined. In SEP’s view, the good case is constituted only by an actual interaction with a proper object of perception. SEP denies the need for superstrong veridicality. Furthermore, SEP takes superstrong veridicality to be wrongheaded about the nature of perceptual properties.

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