

INTRODUCTION

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Perceptual experiences—for instance conscious episodes of seeing and hearing—are variously structured. To understand the kind of cognitive contact with the world which perceptual experience provides, we must understand these structures.

We perceive structural features of our environment such as spatial, temporal and perhaps causal relations among perceived objects and events. But arguably perceptual experiences themselves are also structured by relations among the things we perceive, in ways which are not fully captured by the idea that we perceive these relations. When you hear a material event like a collision, you hear it *by* hearing the sound it causes. When you see a material object you do so *by* seeing some of its constituent surfaces. On the face of it this reflects an explanatory structure within perceptual experience: you experience one thing because you experience another, exploiting the causal or constitutive connection between them.

Arguably, perceptual experiences also have spatial structures which are not fully captured by the idea that we perceive spatial structure in the environment: in vision, but not in touch, you experience objects as extending into a certain region of space, a region whose boundaries are defined by your own visual limitations, such that this region is experienced as part of a larger space extending beyond what is currently visible.¹ As Louise Richardson notes in this volume, this feature of visual experience is structural in the following sense: it remains in place independently of *which* objects and relations in the environment are perceived, so it is naturally understood as a way in which objects and relations are perceived. Similarly, perceptual experience in general arguably has a temporal structure, not only in that episodes of experience unfold over time but also in the following way: you experience perceived events and temporal relations among them as occurring within a certain period of time; you experience this period as part of a longer stretch of time, stretching beyond what is presently perceptible.²

Philosophical theories of the nature of perceptual experience introduce further structures. According to sense-data theory, we perceive our environment only by experiencing sense data. According to representationalism, perceptual experience has the general structure of a representational or intentional state like a judgement—for instance perceptual experience might be a relation to a proposition. According to naïve realism, perceptual experience is a non-representational relation to the environment, such that features of the environment constitute the character of experience.

To understand the kind of cognitive contact with the world which perceptual experience provides, we must understand these structures. Take the case of hearing a collision by hearing the sound it causes. Are you aware of the collision only insofar as you grasp causal principles connecting it with the sound, or is there a more robust sense in which you perceive the collision itself?

Notoriously, sense-data theory seems to entail that perceptual experience is awareness of our environment at all only in a relatedly derivative way: perceptual experience is fundamentally awareness only of sense data; it is awareness of the environment only insofar as we grasp principles connecting the former with the latter, if such principles are available. By contrast, representationalism and naïve realism allow that perceptual experience is immediate awareness of the environment. But we can ask more specific structural questions about the immediate forms of cognitive contact these

¹ MGF Martin, 'Sight and Touch', in Tim Crane (ed.), *The Contents of Experience*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992.

² Matthew Soteriou, *The Mind's Construction*, Oxford: OUP, 2013.

theories envisage. If perceptual experience is representational, does it have just the same structure as judgement, and how is the phenomenal character of experience connected with this structure? Recent naïve realists understand perceptual experience as a three-place relation among the perceiver, features of the environment, and the perceiver's perspective.³ The third term is introduced to accommodate variations in phenomenal character which come with different perspectives on the same scene. This raises questions about the complex relational structure proposed, including whether it can accommodate all variations in the character of perceptual experience.

Work in a Kantian tradition holds that there is a special connection between, on the one hand, experience's presenting its objects as mind-independent, and on the other hand the unified spatial structure of perceptual experience.⁴ So we can ask whether the spatial structure of perceptual experience, in contrast with its temporal structure, has features which could vindicate this suggestion. And we can ask whether differences between spatial structures in the different perceptual modalities are consistent with the appeal to a *unified* spatial structure.

The kinds of structure just sketched, and the questions raised about them, are very far from comprehensive. Similarly this volume does not aim, implausibly, to be comprehensive with respect to the structure of perceptual experience. Rather, each essay explores a specific region of this general territory on its own merits.

Fiona Macpherson asks whether sense-data theory is a form of representationalism, where representationalism is, minimally, the view that perceptual experience's phenomenal character is sometimes representational. She argues that the answer depends on how, exactly, sense-data theory and representationalism are understood. For instance, it depends on whether representationalism holds that phenomenal character *has* representational content—that phenomenal features of experience represent things—or instead holds that phenomenal character *is* representational content. Thus Macpherson explores not only the connection between two influential theories of perceptual experience, but also the more specific explanatory structures implicit in these theories.

Craig French considers a challenge which blurry vision poses to naïve realism. The distinctive phenomenal character of blurry vision does not seem to be an experienced feature of the environment. Can this be accommodated by a theory which takes features of the environment to constitute the character of visual experience? French argues that blurry vision cannot be accommodated by introducing a third term of the perceptual relation, corresponding to the viewer's perspective. But, he argues, it is consistent with a robust form of naïve realism that perceptual experience includes subjective, nonrelational aspects where those aspects—like blurriness—do not seem to one to consist in the presentation of features of the environment.

Sebastian Watzl argues that perceptual experiences have an action-guiding force, in roughly the way desires do, and in contrast with the force of judgement. He argues that this phenomenon is distinct from others discussed in the literature, such as the representation of affordances and the influence of nonconscious perception on action. On this basis, Watzl raises a structural challenge for theories of perceptual experience: given that perceptual experiences do also have a roughly assertoric force, how can these two aspects of experience be understood in a way which respects the unity of perceptual experience?

³ John Campbell, 'Consciousness and Reference', in *The Oxford Handbook of Philosophy of Mind*, ed. Brian P. McLaughlin, Ansgar Beckermann and Sven Walter, Oxford: OUP, 2009; Bill Brewer, *Perception and its Objects*, Oxford: OUP, 2011.

⁴ PF Strawson, *Individuals*, London: Methuen, 1959; Gareth Evans, 'Things Without the Mind', in his *Collected Papers* (ed. John McDowell), Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985.

Thomas Crowther draws an analogy between perceiving events and perceiving material objects. You can see an object by seeing only some of its surfaces, rather than seeing every part of the object. But the idea that you directly perceive the object itself, rather than just some of its surfaces, can seem to be threatened by the fact that how things look to you is fixed just by the character of those surfaces. Similarly, you can perceive an event like a walk—a complete, spatiotemporally located particular—during a stretch of time during which you do not perceive every temporal part of the walk. Crowther identifies a *prima facie* problem here for the idea that you directly perceive the walk itself. He suggests that the solution lies in a temporal ontology which includes not only particular events, but also temporal ‘stuff’ which fills out time and constitutes particular events, and which consists in an agent’s engaging in activity.

Matthew Nudds takes up the issue about the kind of cognitive contact which auditory experience provides. He identifies two problems. First, one might think that recognising material events by hearing the sounds they cause always depends on non-auditory knowledge of connections between the two; in that sense there is no purely auditory knowledge of the material world. Nudds suggests that this is not the case. Secondly, he claims that we can take visual experience to constitute knowledge of the material world, only because things’ visual appearances consist in material properties such as shape and motion. By contrast, one might think that things’ auditory appearances consist in acoustic properties, and never in material properties, so that auditory experience never constitutes knowledge of the material world. Again Nudds argues that this is not the case, by appeal to the temporal structure of auditory appearances. For example when you hear something roll, the temporal structure of its auditory appearance *is* the temporal structure of the material rolling.

Louise Richardson identifies a contrast between Molyneux’s question and a temporal variant on the question. The original question asks whether someone born blind, and taught to discriminate a cube from a sphere by touch, could, on becoming able to see, now discriminate them visually.⁵ The variant question asks the same, but about a pulsing process and a continuous process, rather than a cube and a sphere. Our immediate reactions are typically that the original question is difficult, but that the answer to the variant is clearly ‘Yes’. Richardson’s explanation of this contrast lies in the idea that experiences in the different perceptual modalities differ in spatial structure but share a temporal structure. Richardson also argues that, once we properly appreciate the nature of structure in perceptual experience, we can resist the traditional thought that modality-specific spatial structure is at odds with our experiencing things as mind-independent.

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⁵ John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (Second edition), Oxford: Clarendon Press, II, IX.