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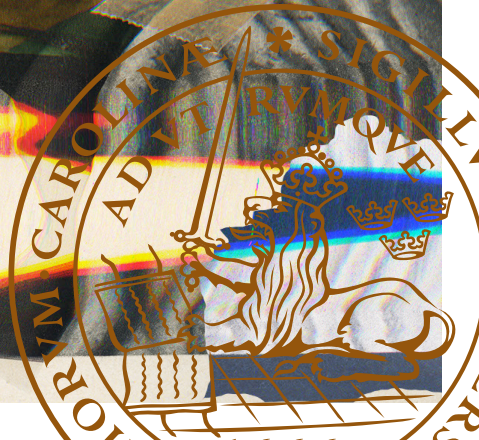
Perceptual Presence

Perceptual Presence

Max Minden Ribeiro

DOCTORAL DISSERTATION

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Abstract:

In this doctoral thesis, I defend an account of perceptual presence. My account has descriptive and explanatory aspects. In the descriptive account, I argue that perceptual presence is a strand of phenomenal character whereby experience manifestly depends on mind-independent objects. I identify two forms of manifest dependence, manifest spatial dependence and manifest temporal dependence. Each form reflects the apparent fulfilment of an enabling condition for successful perception. My explanatory account locates perceptual presence within a metaphysical framework. I argue that perceptual presence can be accommodated within a point of view-act-object framework, and reject appeals to an attitude-content framework. I also reject the view that presence is not perceptual at all.

Both the descriptive and explanatory aspects of the thesis are guided by the aim of placing perceptual experience within a broader account of the mind. This involves attending to the similarities and differences between perceptual experience and other kinds of experience, both in their phenomenal character and functional role. Sensory imagination and experiential memory are especially valuable here, for though their phenomenal characters are in some ways like that of perceptual experience, they don't possess presence. As a companion to my account of perceptual presence, I offer an account of the phenomenal pastness of experiential memory. Pastness is to be explained by experiential memory's characteristic pattern of dependence both on its objects and its subject.

Key words: Perceptual Presence; Perceptual Experience; Phenomenal Character; Manifest Dependence; Sensory Imagination; Experiential Memory

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Perceptual Presence

Max Minden Ribeiro

For Rikke and Sylvia

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Abstract

There are different ways to bring a cypress tree to mind. We might think about a tree, speak about it, or imagine it. The cypress might come to us unbidden in memory, or in dream. But we might also see a cypress tree, or feel its branches in our hands. This way of bringing the tree to mind is distinctive because the tree itself seems to be present in our experience. Our experience has perceptual presence.

In this doctoral thesis, I defend an account of perceptual presence. My account has descriptive and explanatory aspects. In the descriptive account, I argue that perceptual presence is a strand of phenomenal character whereby experience manifestly depends on mind-independent objects. I identify two forms of manifest dependence, manifest spatial dependence and manifest temporal dependence. Each form reflects the apparent fulfilment of an enabling condition for successful perception. My explanatory account locates perceptual presence within a metaphysical framework. I argue that perceptual presence can be accommodated within a point of view-act-object framework, and reject appeals to an attitude-content framework. I also reject the view that presence is not perceptual at all.

Both the descriptive and explanatory aspects of the thesis are guided by the aim of placing perceptual experience within a broader account of the mind. This involves attending to the similarities and differences between perceptual experience and other kinds of experience, both in their phenomenal character and functional role. Sensory imagination and experiential memory are especially valuable here, for though their phenomenal characters are in some ways like that of perceptual experience, they don't possess presence. As a companion to my account of perceptual presence, I offer an account of the phenomenal pastness of experiential memory. Pastness is to be explained by experiential memory's characteristic pattern of dependence both on its objects and its subject.

Kappa:
Finding a Framework
for Perceptual Presence

1 Introduction

The words *present* and *presence* are among the more ambiguous and evocative that the English language has. To be present is to be in the place in question ('I am present'), it is to occupy a certain time ('the present'), and it can be used as an indexical ('in the present case'). Then there is social presence (the presence of friends), psychological presences ('presence of mind'; 'try to be present'), supernatural presences. There are meanings tied to the verb 'to present' and the idea of presentation ('Let me present Claire'; 'its sleek appearance presented itself to me'). And there are meanings tied to gifts and giving ('a birthday present'; 'She presented him with a medal'). I could go on. These terms are commonplace but they are also resonant and curiously difficult to keep apart. For example, when a teacher takes the register and students say in turn that they are present, it is not clear that only a single sense of presence is at play.

When we move from ordinary language into the diction of philosophers, things are no less tangled. Technical notions of presence (παρουσία [parousia]; Anwesenheit; présence) have a long history in metaphysics and the philosophy of mind. In contemporary philosophy, different concepts of presence play central roles in areas as varied as the philosophy of virtual reality, the philosophy of psychiatry and the philosophy of physics. But my focus is the philosophy of perception, and how the picture of perceptual experience it offers fits within a broader account of the mind. In this domain, *perceptual presence* refers to a particular aspect of the phenomenal character of perceptual experience. That is, a particular strand of what it is like to enjoy a perceptual experience. Take a visual perceptual experience of a cypress tree. The phenomenal character of the experience involves what it is like to see the colour of the tree, the shape of the tree, its movement, what it is like to find the tree to be beautiful. But there is also something it is like to experience the tree to be present. And here all of the ambiguities of ordinary language come crowding back in. For intuitive as the proposal is that we do experience the tree to be present, what precisely does this

mean? Is it to experience the tree to be real? To experience its occupying a particular place or space or time? Is it for one's very experience to be presentational? To seem to relate one to, or put one in contact with, the tree? Is it for the cypress to somehow gift itself to you, something that couldn't occur if we were experiencing the tree in a non-perceptual way? For whatever the correct understanding of perceptual presence, there is widespread agreement that it sets perceptual phenomenal character apart from some of the other ways we might bring the cypress to mind, for instance in thought, memory, imagination and perhaps dream.

Why does it matter that we clarify the sense in which perceptual objects are given as present? We can gesture at the phenomenal character at issue. Why should we aspire to a more detailed description or explanation of it? My answer is twofold.

First, perceptual experience plays an extraordinary role in our cognitive and experiential lives. Perceptual experience gives rise to and reason for beliefs, it guides and is guided by intentional action, it facilitates concept deployment and empirical thought. We might wonder what contribution phenomenal character makes to perceptual experience's ability to play these myriad functional roles. Is there a link between the cypress tree's seeming presence and my ability to think about it, adopt beliefs about it or sit beneath it? If so, a careful description of what the phenomenal character of presence amounts to will instruct investigations into how perceptual experience realises these functions.

Second, philosophers of perception often ask questions about the nature of perceptual experience. Is perceptual experience a process, a state or an event? Is it confined to the head or does it extend into the world? Does it *represent* objects, and if so, how should we understand this notion of representation? These are metaphysical questions, but considerations of phenomenal character help to determine how we answer them. For phenomenal character is not neutral on questions of metaphysics. In perceptual experience, we are not only presented with a scene, but in some sense with the kind of relation we seem to stand in to that scene. This isn't to say that we can simply read off the metaphysical nature of perceptual experience from its phenomenal character, but we might at the least demand an explanation when the two depart from one another.

In fact, the link between phenomenal character and metaphysical nature is more complex than this. In addition to guiding our theorising about perceptual

metaphysics, we can think of the strands of perceptual phenomenal character as explananda for an account of the metaphysics of perceptual experience. What does it mean to explain phenomenal character? I am not advocating a reductive explanation, and certainly not a reduction to physical mechanisms. To my mind, to explain phenomenal character is to locate it within a metaphysical framework that can support it. By metaphysical framework, I mean the basic components out of which perceptual experience's intentional structure is composed and their composition. Available options include an act-object framework and an attitude-content framework. (I discuss these frameworks in Section 4.2). These are competing accounts of what kind of an entity a perceptual experience is. These frameworks ought to be able to accommodate the different strands of phenomenal character. We can assess them on their ability to do so.

My aim in this dissertation is to offer and defend an account of perceptual presence. I do so across five papers. My aims in the *Kappa* are to introduce the project, discuss and evaluate my findings, and position them in relation to the current state of research. In Chapter 2, I discuss terminology and bring out some of the background assumptions of the project. In Chapter 3, I present the descriptive and explanatory wings of my research, and examine my methodology in pursuing each. In Chapter 4, I summarise my account of perceptual presence in broad brushstrokes. I also consider the relation between phenomenal character and metaphysical structure, and its relevance for the explanatory project. In Chapter 5, I provide a more detailed discussion of the aims of my dissertation and how they are met by the particular papers. I also reflect on some important omissions and unresolved problems. Finally, in Chapter 6, I discuss the place and importance of my own results in the context of historical and contemporary research.

2 Terminology and Background Assumptions

After a word about the range of terminology used to pick out perceptual presence, I introduce a dilemma about the shape of my research project, in order to bring into view some central unargued assumptions that frame the dissertation.

Before beginning it is important to note that many of the authors I engage with use different terminology to discuss what I am calling *perceptual presence*. Matthen (2005, 2010) and Ferretti (2018) appeal to a 'feeling of presence', Dokic and Martin write of 'the sense of presence' (2017), and Farkas (2013) describes 'a sense of reality'. Husserl terms this feature of perceptual experience *Leibhaftigkeit* [givenness 'in person' or 'in the flesh'] (1998), while Sturgeon calls it 'scene immediacy' (2000) and Millar terms it 'phenomenological directness' or 'object-immediacy' (2014a, 2014b). Very many authors describe perceptual experience as presentations (e.g. Searle 1983; Brinck 1997; Bengson 2015) or ascribe them presentational phenomenal character (Pautz 2007; Chudnoff 2012), presentational force (Smithies 2019) or phenomenal force (Pryor 2000; Siegel and Silins 2015). It is also important to note that for other philosophers of perception, this strand of phenomenal character is never isolated or named, though this is not to say that it does not play a role in guiding theorising about perceptual experience.

My use of the term *perceptual presence* should be distinguished from a prominent use in Noë's work (2004; 2012). On this alternative terminology, perceptual presence is a feature of perceptual phenomenal character whereby whole objects are experienced when only parts of those objects are open to view (Noë 2004, 60-63). This said, Noë's 2012 book is titled *Varieties of Presence*, and some of the notions of presence he examines draw very close to my use of the term (cf. 2012, 19; 2005, 250). See Section 6.8 for discussion of my own proposal in relation to Noë's work.

It is said that often in philosophy, the key moves are made before the first page. The *Kappa* then provides a helpful opportunity to probe some of the background assumptions that have framed and guided the discussions of perceptual presence in the articles. In particular, I am interested in sketching the kind of phenomenon I take myself to be investigating, how it is related to perceptual experience, and how if at all it might be related to other kinds of experience. This matters because my approach in the papers is often contrastive, bringing out similarities and differences between perceptual experience and other sensory experiences such as experiential memory and sensory imagination, in order to guide my theorising about perceptual phenomenology, intentionality and metaphysics. In the papers, I simply assume that the experience of memory or imagination could not have perceptual presence, and it is worth taking the opportunity to interrogate that assumption. I'd like to set things up as an apparent dilemma. Here are two very general approaches to perceptual presence. Neither is quite my own.

On the first, we assume an antecedent taxonomy of experiences (perceptual, imaginative, memory). Perceptual presence, it is then claimed, is a striking feature of paradigm perceptual experience. The central project is simply to offer an account of what presence is. On this picture, it is an empirical question whether *all* perceptual experiences have presence, and whether some imaginative and memory experiences have presence as well. It is no objection to the account of presence if this turns out to be so.

On the second approach, rather than an antecedent taxonomy, we have a range of experiences which are alike and differ in various ways. Our task is to categorise them into perceptual experiences, imaginings and memories. We can call *presence* that which is definitive of perceptual experience. Our question is what this is. As it is not implausible that some of the fundamental defining features of each of these kinds of experience will turn out not to be phenomenal, or introspectively accessible, it is an empirical question whether every aspect of perceptual presence will turn out to be phenomenal, or introspectively accessible. So, in so far as presence is definitive of perceptual experience, it is not obviously a purely phenomenal notion, and should not be assumed to be so.

My own approach is closer to the second than the first. Indeed, I reject the first approach more or less wholesale. Once one allows that perceptual presence is merely paradigmatic, it is difficult to find a principled ground to rule out experiential memory or imagination having perceptual presence, which is

axiomatic for the research programme I pursue. On the second approach, there is a transition I want to resist, from perceptual presence being definitive of perceptual experience to its being a catch-all for the defining features of perceptual experience, whether they are phenomenal features or not. I think this approach is right to note that there may be defining features of perceptual experiences that are not introspectively accessible, and perhaps not phenomenal at all. One might expect that there are neurological features of perceptual experience that distinguish it from imaginative or memory experience. But rather than a catch-all for everything that is definitive of perceptual experience, perceptual presence is restricted to what is definitive of perceptual phenomenal character. Perhaps it is just one element of what is definitive of perceptual phenomenal character. So, the unargued assumption here is that *we can distinguish and categorise kinds of experience based on their introspectively accessible phenomenal character.* While this is an unargued assumption, I think it a reasonable one with historical precedents i.e. Husserlian essentialism. (Husserl 1983; Zahavi 2003, 37-39). I need make no commitment as to whether the same category of perceptual experience can also be identified using non-phenomenal criteria.

Perceptual presence is definitive of perceptual experience. If an experience has the phenomenal character in question, it is a perceptual experience. If it doesn't, it is not. A couple of notes of qualification are needed.

First, while perceptual presence is a phenomenal property, it needn't follow that it is always introspectively accessible. For all that I have said, it may take training or cognitive effort or favourable circumstances for us to be able to attend to perceptual presence[1]. I also allow for the possibility that certain kinds of state can have phenomenal character that is indistinguishable from that of perceptual presence without necessarily being phenomenally identical.

Second, this way of setting up the project invites pressure from empirical examples. For if an empirical case could be identified that clearly demonstrated perceptual experience without perceptual presence, or perceptual presence without perceptual experience, this would pose a foundational challenge to the research project. One purported empirical case that I discuss in Paper 1 is derealisation experiences. These are a range of experiences associated with mental

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[1] For arguments that perceptual consciousness overflows introspective access, see Block 2007; 2011.

disorders, in which patients sometimes describe the perceptual world as seeming unreal, flat or distant. In Paper 1, I raise doubts as to whether perceptual presence is what is lacking in derealisation experiences.[2] But for the sake of argument I assume that it is. I then suggest that rather than lacking entirely, in derealisation experiences, perceptual presence is depleted or distorted. These still strike me as the right defensive moves. Later in the paper, I suggest that the claim that Dokic and Martin take to be their target – that perceptual presence is 'essential to, or constitutive of, perceptual experience' (2017, 300) – is a strong claim and that 'derealisation experiences provide some reason to reject it' (Minden Ribeiro 2022, 163). In light of the approach I have set out above, I now think this was too concessive. In that paper I also consider empirical counterexamples in the other direction – purported instances of perceptual presence without perceptual experiences. Though I find Dokic and Martin's examples and arguments unpersuasive, I consider whether hallucinations and dreams pose problems for my account or the research project more generally in Section 5.4.

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[2] I now wonder whether we should describe derealised experiences in terms of a lack at all, as opposed to simply a change.

3 The Project and Methodologies

In this dissertation, the overarching project is to offer and defend an account of perceptual presence. I propose that we can divide this undertaking into two broad projects, one descriptive and one explanatory.

i.   Descriptive Project: To provide a careful phenomenological description of perceptual presence.

ii.   Explanatory Project: To identify the metaphysical framework for perceptual experience that best explains perceptual presence, so described.

The explanatory project involves both advocating a particular metaphysical framework, criticising alternative frameworks, and considering the metaphysical frameworks of the other kinds of experience that sit alongside perceptual experience in a broader mental ontology. These other kinds of intentional experience bear important phenomenological, intentional and metaphysical similarities and differences with perceptual experience, they interact with perceptual experience in various ways, and some, I argue, take perceptual experience as their intentional objects.

In this chapter, I discuss the philosophical methodologies I utilise in pursuing the descriptive and explanatory projects.

3.1 Methodology in the Descriptive Project

A hostile trope assumes that offering a description of phenomenal character involves a wholly introspective methodology. The trope is hostile because labelling a philosophical methodology introspective suggests that it is unreliable, unverifiable and idiosyncratic. While attending to phenomenal character is an

important part – though only a part – of my philosophical methodology, it is important to distinguish between this activity and certain caricatures of introspection. For attending to and describing perceptual presence is not like attending to and describing a colour, or taste, or mood. The latter are particulars experienced in token conscious events. We may not experience that colour again, and if we do we may feel inclined to describe it differently due to changes in the lighting, or our vocabulary, or our temperament. By contrast, perceptual presence is not a particular item we happen to consciously experience, it is a *structural feature* of a kind of experience. By structural feature I mean a feature of 'the conscious character of experience that [is] not a matter of what the apparent objects of such experience are' (Richardson 2010, 238). Structural features are constant, phenomenally conscious attributes of experiences of a certain kind, and so ought to be consistently and intersubjectively available. This is not to say that attending to phenomenal character is without risk. It is certainly not infallible. But the risks are mitigated somewhat once we note the place introspection within a broader philosophical methodology.

Another procedure I appeal to in developing phenomenological descriptions is straightforward philosophical argument. Some of these arguments are inferences to the best explanation. For instance, in Paper 3, I motivate my descriptive account of the temporal aspect of perceptual presence by finding it superior to the only substantive alternative that has a prominent temporal dimension. In the same paper, I argue that my descriptive account is better able to handle a range of puzzling features of phenomenal character than its competitors. Some of the arguments have more of a transcendental feel. For instance, in Paper 4 I argue that when perceptual presence is instantiated, it seems that the experience's enabling conditions have been satisfied. Here I begin with a statement that I take to be true: there is a sense in which perceptual experience always seems to be veridical. I then ask what the conditions of the possibility of perceptual experience seeming to be veridical are. I propose that in order to seem to be veridical, it must be part of the phenomenal character of experience that it seems that its enabling conditions are satisfied. Other arguments, in particular negative arguments against alternative phenomenological descriptions proceed by pointing out inconsistencies, ambiguities, unintended consequences, or further considerations that suggest the description is less attractive.

I will mention a third methodological procedure that is sometimes implicit in developing philosophical arguments towards or against particular phenomenological descriptions. In the phenomenological tradition, this is termed eidetic variation (Husserl 1983). Eidetic variation is a form of analysis in which one imagines a phenomenon undergoing certain changes in its properties. At some point, one imagines the phenomenon changing such that it is no longer the kind of entity it was. From this one can distinguish which properties are essential to that kind, and which are merely contingently associated with it. For example, the fact that the perceptual experience I am imagining has visual phenomenology is inessential. A perceptual experience could just as well have tactile phenomenology. But that the experience seems to be about mind-independent features of the world is, I venture, an essential feature of its being a perceptual experience. Once I vary the imagined experience so that its intentional objects are the entities that comprise my own mental life (i.e. sensations, thoughts), the experience ceases to be perceptual. An appeal to intuition is involved in this procedure, but I see this as in keeping with conceptual analysis more generally, of which I consider eidetic variation a species (cf. Zahavi 2003, 39). This methodology involves a commitment to essentialism about mental kinds; the view that kinds of experience have essential properties. This fits well with my discussion of the background assumption that perceptual presence is definitive of (or essential to) perceptual experience.

Set alongside traditional philosophical argument and eidetic variation, what is the role of introspection in my methodology? I think of it as bookending the philosophical procedure. At the beginning of developing or assessing a description, reflection on apparent structural features of phenomenal character might help to sharpen one's sense of the phenomenon in need of description. And at the end of the procedure, reflection on phenomenal character might provide a corrective. It is plausible that in responding to critical arguments, one finds oneself operating with a description that no longer captures what perceptual presence is like. In this case, returning to the phenomenal character is a way to pose afresh the question of whether a description succeeds or not.

3.2 Methodology in the Explanatory Project

All of the methodological procedures mentioned in the previous section are also deployed in the explanatory wing of the project. I will here add to them consideration of empirical results. There is a growing literature of empirical work that is relevant to developing an account of perceptual presence. Some empirical research offers cognitive and neuroscientific accounts of presence (Dijkstra et al. 2022; Seth 2014). Other empirical research investigates other kinds of experience or phenomena that might be appealed to in support of particular claims about perceptual presence. In Paper 1 in particular, engagement with the empirical literature on derealisation disorders, Parkinson's disease, hallucination and virtual reality informs my assessment of Dokic and Martin's (2017) arguments. Thinking about psychopathology, and the kind of pressure that psychopathological experiences place on prospective accounts of presence has been a great stimulus to my research.

Though it is important that philosophical accounts of perceptual experience engage with the findings of the sciences, there is also a sense in which I see the work of this dissertation as pre-empirical. For one of the services that philosophy provides to the sciences is a clarity and rigour of conceptual apparatus that is vital to empirical investigation. I will offer a simplified example. Imagine a neuroscientist experimenting on a living brain. They observe a pattern of neuronal activity and hypothesise the occurrence of a perceptual experience. Perhaps they simultaneously interview the subject, who responds 'yes, that was a perceptual experience'. I suggest that in order to produce robust results – in order to identify the neural correlates of perceptual experience – scientist and subject must have a clear conception of what a perceptual experience is; a conception agreed in advance and independently of empirical results. Here I think philosophical work of the kind I have developed in this dissertation can be valuable to the mind sciences. For it offers robust criteria by which scientists can conceptualise the phenomena under examination. Imagine a second case, in which the neuronal activity in some ways resembles the first case and in some ways does not. And imagine that the test subject responds that they are not sure whether they were having a perceptual experience or not. It is surely important to have pre-empirical criteria one can use to establish if their experience was perceptual – perhaps by assessing whether the subject's experience met the descriptive conditions for perceptual presence.

4 The Account

In this chapter, I present the central position I defend in the dissertation. This is the view that perceptual presence is an experience's manifest dependence on mind-independent objects, and that this is best explained on an act-object metaphysical framework that accommodates the subject's point of view. I begin by summarising the results of the descriptive project, before turning to the explanatory project. I then raise a question about the connection between phenomenal character and metaphysical nature that has important bearing on the relation between the two wings of the project. A more detailed discussion of the individual articles and how they together accomplish the aims of the dissertation is postponed until Chapter 5.

4.1 The Descriptive Account

In the descriptive wing of my project, I propose that perceptual presence is an experience's manifest dependence on mind-independent objects. The phenomenal character of perceptual presence is the phenomenal character of our experience's seeming to depend on its object in two ways.

First, the spatial location that the experience is had from seems to depend on the spatial location of the object. I call this Manifest Spatial Dependence. To see why this description is apt, let's first take a step back. In perceptual experience (but not in sensory memory or imagination) we are conscious of the spatial location that our experience is had from. Memory and imagination present to a point of view but it is not the case, and does not seem to be the case, that the location of this point of view is the location that the subject having the memory or imagining actually occupies. When I imagine looking out over London from Primrose Hill, it does not seem that the location that I am imagining from (a reading room in Copenhagen) is identical with the location of the imagined point of view. But in

perceptual experience, I do seem to be aware of where my current perceptual experience is being had from. It is being had from wherever the origin of my point of view on the perceptual scene is located. And how can I figure out where that is? There are different, mutually supportive procedures available here, but one of them is to depend on the spatial location of the objects of perceptual experience. Looking out over London, I can identify the spatial location that my experience is being had from relative to that of my experience's objects. My point of view seems *this* far from the dogwalker on the path in front of me, and *this* far from the BT Tower. My handle on the location that my experience is being had from depends, and seems to depend, on the location of its mind-independent object. Note that this is a relatively weak, epistemic sense of dependence.

Second, the temporal location of my experience (or the temporal part of it that is occurrent) seems to depend on and seems to be indistinguishable from the temporal location of my perceptual object (or the temporal part of it my occurrent experience is of).[3] There are two claims here. An indistinguishability claim and a dependence claim. Taking the indistinguishability claim first, we can ask whether the phenomenal character of perceptual experience can guide me in answering the question of *when* my current visual perceptual experience is located. Following Soteriou (2013, 89-90) I suggest that in perceptual experience, the temporal location of experience seems to be indistinguishable from the temporal location of its object. There is nothing in the phenomenal character of perceptual experience that indicates that the temporal location of this perceptual experience is at any temporal location other than that which the dogwalker, for example, occupies. To this reasonably weak, negative claim, we can add a stronger dependence claim. It seems that the temporal location of the perceptual experience is determined by, and so depends on, the temporal location of the object of experience. It seems that my having a perceptual experience of the dogwalker at the time that I am depends on the dogwalker having shown up at the time that they did. The implicit assumption here is that we individuate particular perceptual experiences at least in part in terms of their objects. And note that this is a relatively strong, metaphysical sense of dependence.

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[3] Soteriou (2013, 89-90) endorses this position and terms it temporal transparency.

These spatial and temporal strands of phenomenal character seem to depend on properties of the mind-independent object being experienced. P.F. Strawson makes a related point when he writes that:

> The idea of the presence of the thing as accounting for, or being responsible for, our perceptual awareness of it is implicit in the pre-theoretical scheme from the very start. (2011 [1979], 136)

Strawson's focus here is our concept of perception, rather than perceptual phenomenal character. A less elegant reformulation of Strawson's sentence in my terms might read:

> The spatial and temporal presence of the thing as accounting for, or being responsible for, our perceptual awareness of it is implicit in perceptual phenomenal character.

For Strawson, this dependence is causal. I suggest in Paper 3 that it is rather constitutive. But this is to move beyond the descriptive to the explanatory wing of my project.

On my view, there are three necessary conditions for perceptual presence:

i. The experience seems to be of mind-independent objects.

ii. The spatial location that the experience is had from seems to be positioned relative to the spatial location of the object.

iii. The temporal location of the experience seems to depend on, and seems to be indistinguishable from, the temporal location of the object.

If the phenomenal character of an experience meets these three descriptions, it has perceptual presence.

We can think of the first condition as the *mind-independence* condition and the final two as *presence* conditions. Interestingly, the division into *mind-independence* and *presence* conditions opens the possibility of non-perceptual presences. This is the experience of *mind-dependent* objects or events, the phenomenal character of which seems to depend on the spatial and/or temporal properties of its object. In some cases, this may involve spatial *and* temporal properties. The phenomenal character of located bodily sensations (an itch or pain, say) might be thought to

be identical to (and so dependent on) those sensations' sensible properties at their spatial and temporal locations. In other cases, where the mind-dependent object or event has a temporal but no spatial profile (as in our awareness of our own thoughts), the spatial requirement for presence might be invalidated. I am flagging the possibility that there is a more sweeping view of presence available than the account of perceptual presence I defend in this dissertation. There are many pressing challenges to such a view and this is not the place to address them. But considering the possibility that perceptual presence is one form of presence among others fits nicely with my aim of positioning perceptual experience within a broader ontology of mind. There is a tendency to think of perceptual presence as wholly unique. I am suggesting another view is available, on which what is distinctive about perceptual presence is that mind-independent objects seem to stand to us in the kind of relation of immediacy and intimacy usually mind-dependent objects processes and events.

4.2 The Explanatory Account

The explanatory wing of my project concerns identifying a metaphysical framework to accommodate perceptual presence, as described in the descriptive wing of the project. I consider a number of different perceptual frameworks over the course of Papers 2, 3 and 4, and offer a framework for experiential memory in Paper 5. In what follows, I summarise three perceptual frameworks before presenting the one I think is best able to accommodate manifest dependence.[4]

Act-Mediating Object (Sense data theory)

- On this metaphysical framework, perceptual experience involves a relation between a subject and a mediating object. The relation (act) is an awareness or acquaintance relation. The relation is existence-implicating: it could not obtain without its relata. The mediating object is distinct from the public object that the experience is an experience of (the cypress tree, say). It is only by standing in an awareness relation to

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[4] See Textor (2021, chap. 9) for discussion of act-content-object, act-object and object frameworks across Austro-German, British and American philosophy at the start of the twentieth century.

the mediating object, that the subject comes to have a perceptual experience of the public object. The mediating object is termed a sense datum. These are now standardly thought to be private mind-dependent entities (though see Russell 1997 [1912] chap. 2; Moore 1953, chap. 2 for discussion).

- The resources available to explain perceptual presence are the intrinsic properties of the sense datum and features of the kind of relation that obtains between the subject and the sense datum.

- On this framework perceptual experience can take place without the presence of the public object (e.g. in hallucinatory experience). As such, the public object and the properties it instantiates offer no resource in a constitutive explanation of perceptual phenomenal character. This is not to say that the public object will not be implicated in causal explanations of perceptual experiences.

Attitude-Content (Intentionalism/Representationalism/The Content View)

- On this framework, perceptual experience is fundamentally a subject's adopting a particular attitude to a particular item or items of content. The content is usually considered to be a structured abstract entity such as a proposition or a set of possible worlds. The proposition expresses a way the world could be. The content will be *satisfied* if the world happens to be the way it is represented as being. The attitude is a relation to this abstract entity. It has been termed 'sensorily entertaining' (Pautz 2007, 437) or the 'ex-ing relation' (Byrne 2009, 437). The adoption of this attitude towards perceptual content constitutes *the subject's representing* that the world is a certain way.

- As with the Act-Mediating Object framework, on the Attitude-Content framework a perceptual experience might take place without the physical presence or existence of the public object. That is, the conditions stated in the content of perceptual experience might not be satisfied. Again, hallucinatory experience provides the obvious example. The public object and its properties are not fundamental components of the framework and they do not offer a resource in explaining perceptual phenomenal character.

- The resources available to the Attitude-Content theorist are different kinds of content (conceptual/non-conceptual; propositional/non-propositional; singular etc) as well as variations in how the perceptual attitude is conceived.

- There are a number of variations on the content-attitude framework that I term *attitude-content-plus* views. These accounts supplement the framework with an extra element, whether sense data (Price 1932), sensational properties (Peacocke 1983), qualia (Shoemaker 1990) or indeed an object-involving relation, where this relation is extrinsic to representational content (possibly Masrour 2020 fn9). These additional elements provide further resources one might appeal to in accommodating perceptual presence.

Act-Object[5] and Point of View-Act-Object (Naïve Realism)

- On this framework, perceptual experience essentially involves an existence-implicating relation between a subject and public, mind-independent objects (i.e. a cypress tree). The relation is often termed an *awareness relation* or *acquaintance relation*. This relation cannot obtain without its relata, so naïve realism is solely a theory of veridical perceptual experience.

- There is something it is like for the subject for this relation to obtain, such that the experience's phenomenal character is at least partly constituted by the mind-independent object and its sensible properties.

- One way to develop this framework is to hold that perceptual experience is constituted by the arrangement of its constituents. These include the subject, the relation of awareness and the mind-independent object. I propose that the subject's occupation of a point of view, and the experience's background conditions should also be considered constituents of perceptual experience. Call this the Point of View-Act-

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[5] Sense data theories are usually considered act-object theories. I have chosen to distinguish the act-object framework from the act-mediating object framework, to highlight the different explanatory resources a framework has depending on whether it involves an awareness relation to public or private entities.

Object framework. To occupy a point of view is to occupy a position in space and time with one's body. The subject's body then is a constituent of perceptual experience.

The three frameworks just listed are by no means the only frameworks available for analysing perceptual experience. Other options include adverbialism (Chisholm 1957) and what has come to be known as the 'internal physical state view' (Pautz 2021, chap. 2; Papineau 2021). Another view that I regret not developing in my papers resists both the act-object assumption that relations to objects are existence-implicating, and the content-attitude assumption that representation is a matter of adopting an attitude towards an abstract item of content. Instead, the view insists that we can represent objects directly (i.e. without identifying them through conditions of satisfaction) whether we are hallucinating or veridically perceiving. I think there are views that draw close to this in the phenomenological tradition, and they remind us that the attitude-content framework has no monopoly on the notion of representation. I haven't developed this framework in this project, though such a framework is consistent with the account of experiential memory I offer in Paper 5.

I advocate a Point of View-Act-Object framework, on which manifest dependence is explained in terms of the actual constitutive dependence of perceptual experience on mind-independent objects. I will briefly run through how the framework accommodates the three necessary conditions for perceptual presence I set out in the descriptive wing of the project.

    i.   The experience seems to be of mind-independent objects.

            According to the Point of View-Act-Object framework, perceptual experience involves a relation to public, mind-independent objects. The framework will accommodate this descriptive condition if it can be shown that the obtaining of a perceptual relation to mind-independent objects can offer an explanation of an experience's seeming to be of mind-independent objects.

    ii.   The spatial location that the experience is had from seems to be positioned relative to the spatial location of the object.

            On the Point of View-Act-Object framework, the spatial location that a perceptual experience is had from is the location of the point of view that the subject occupies upon the perceptual scene. The

location that the experience is had from and that of the object are positioned in a continuous region of space so that they can be located relative to one another. In so far as perceptual phenomenal character conveys the spatial locations of both the object and the point of view upon it, it conveys that the two are positioned relative to one another.

iii.   The temporal location of the experience seems to depend on, and seems to be indistinguishable from, the temporal location of the object.

A relation of awareness only obtains when the object exists (or more accurately, existed at the right temporal distance) and the event it participates in occurs. For this reason, the relation of awareness does depend on the temporal location of its object. The temporal location of the constituted experience in turn depends on the temporal location of the object, and this, the naïve realist can claim, is reflected in the phenomenal character of that experience.

As this metaphysical framework is object-involving, I will need to say something about whether I take hallucinatory experiences to instantiate perceptual presence, and if so, how their presence is to be explained. I discuss this in Section 5.4.

4.3 The Relation between Phenomenal Character and Metaphysical Nature

What does it mean to explain phenomenal character? And to do so by appeal to a metaphysical framework like those I list above? What would a successful explanation look like, and by what standards could we claim that an explanation was unsuccessful? Answering these questions has obvious implications for how we should think about the relationship between the descriptive and explanatory projects.

I am quite sceptical of explanations of phenomenal character. To see why, it helps to set up a dilemma about the relation between phenomenal character and metaphysical nature. The horns of the dilemma are (1) to conceive of the metaphysical nature in non-phenomenal terms, and (2) to conceive of metaphysical nature in phenomenal terms.

Let's begin with the first horn and assume we conceive of metaphysical nature in non-phenomenal terms. The components of the frameworks mentioned (relations, mind-independent objects and properties, propositional content etc) should be considered non-phenomenal. In this case, with Sturgeon (2000, 13-14) I worry that simply appealing to a relation to an object that is present does not explain why the object seems to be present. There are always going to explanatory gaps between the phenomenal character and the metaphysical structures that explain them. There is nothing about a relation or a representation *per se* that ensures its phenomenal character should be a certain way. Just as we can always ask (but not answer) why the taste of basil should be just like this, we can ask why whatever the correct metaphysics of perceptual experience is should have presence phenomenology just like this.

On the other horn however, where metaphysical nature is conceived of in phenomenal terms, any purported explanation looks circular and trivial. You appeal to a relation to explain phenomenal character, and the relation itself is identified exactly because it has the phenomenal character that we are setting out to explain. Or alternatively, you appeal to an item of content, but that item of content is only suitable to the explanatory task because it is conceived as bearing the phenomenal character in need of explanation.

One might hope that the contrastive approach adopted in this dissertation would help here, but if anything, it makes things worse. For the introduction of sensory imagination and episodic memory only duplicates the problem, introducing more examples of phenomenal character in need of explanation.

A response to this dilemma that is sometimes advanced by naïve realists is to contest what is meant by 'the phenomenal'. If the phenomenal refers exclusively to subjectively accessible features of our cognition, there is potential for a gap between those features and the metaphysical structures purporting to explain them (horn 1). And the proposal then that the metaphysical structures are conceived in phenomenal terms looks *ad hoc*, and the explanation offered trivial (horn 2). But, the naïve realist poses, what if 'the phenomenal' is already a feature of external reality – properties that are instantiated in the external world like colours and shapes (Campbell 1993). If the phenomenal is not primarily a feature of experience but a feature of the world, and a metaphysical structure is appealed to that includes a relation to those features of the world, conceiving of that structure in phenomenal terms no longer looks *ad hoc*. But reflection on

perceptual presence shows that this strategy will not work. For the phenomenon under discussion is the seeming dependence of experience on its objects, and so the dichotomy between phenomenal character and world that the above strategy attempts to collapse is fundamental to the explanandum. With perceptual presence, unlike the phenomenology of colour and shape, there is no space to claim that this strand of the phenomenal is not intrinsically a property of experience, because the phenomenon under discussion is exactly experience seeming to depend on the world.

My own resolution is to adopt the second horn, but with some qualifications. I accept that there is a degree of (to my mind non-vicious) circularity to the kinds of explanations that metaphysical frameworks can offer of phenomenal character. For a metaphysical framework to offer any explanation of phenomenal character at all, we need to conceive of the framework in phenomenal terms. I think the charge of triviality is lessened somewhat because these frameworks are composite, and the phenomenal characters they explain are complex. Compare an ostensibly simple strand of phenomenal character like the sensation of redness. Let's say I were offering an explanation of the phenomenal character of looking at a red patch, and I appealed to a simple act-object framework. And let's say I claim that the sensation of redness is to be explained entirely by the physical presence of the red patch, where the relation does not contribute to phenomenal character except instrumentally, in bringing the sensible properties of the patch to phenomenal consciousness. This explanation is trivial. I have one thing to explain, the sensation of redness, and I explain it by claiming that one element of my framework has the property in need of explanation. We learn little new about phenomenal character in this way. But if I am right in my descriptive project, perceptual presence is not simple in the way that the sensation of redness might be thought to be simple. Perceptual presence is not a sheer 'sense' or 'feeling', despite the prevalence of these terms in the literature. This strand of phenomenal character is run through with sensory, spatial and temporal intentionality, and these complex descriptions provide a series of desiderata for a framework to accommodate. To do so, one must appeal to numerous components of a metaphysical framework: subject, point of view, relation of awareness, mind-independent object and background conditions. Unlike the redness case, it is a non-trivial question how these various components combine to explain the complex phenomenal character of perceptual presence.

I asked above what a successful explanation of phenomenal character in terms of a metaphysical framework would look like, and by what standards we should judge that an explanation is unsuccessful. The first part of my answer is negative. We should not judge an explanation successful or unsuccessful based on whether it is circular. For all explanations of phenomenal character will have a formal circularity built into them. Far from a pernicious feature, I have suggested that such circularity is required for the proposed explanation to close the explanatory gap between phenomenal and metaphysical, and so qualify as explanatory at all.

Can we add to this any positive standards? Over the course of the five articles, I appeal to a range of criteria. Whether the metaphysical framework is coherent, whether it is compelling, whether it supports the complex functional role of the kind of experience. I place special emphasis on examining how the metaphysical framework compares to those of other kinds of experience that have comparable or contrasting phenomenal characters or functional roles. The working assumption is that we should expect these similarities and differences to be reflected in the appropriate metaphysical frameworks. Likewise, comparison with non-standard and pathological perceptual experiences provides a useful challenge for a framework, and I consider the relevance of pictorial experience, empirical hallucinations and illusions, experiences of holograms, derealisation disorders, the false senses of presence associated with Parkinson's disease and the experience of virtual reality to adjudicate the right framework for perceptual presence over the course of the five papers.

5 Meeting the Aims of the Dissertation

I wrote above that my aim in this dissertation is to offer and defend an account of perceptual presence. I identified two projects with different objectives: one descriptive and one explanatory. In the descriptive project I provide a careful phenomenological description of perceptual presence. In the explanatory project, I identify the perceptual framework that best explains perceptual presence, so described. To satisfy the descriptive and explanatory objectives is, I submit, to satisfy the main aim of the project. In this chapter, I set out how the five articles together meet my descriptive and explanatory aims. I then explain why I no longer hold the positive, descriptive account of perceptual presence that I advocate in Paper 1. I will also reflect on some important omissions and unresolved problems, in particular the challenges to my positive account posed by hallucination and dream.

5.1 Meeting the Descriptive Objective

To meet the descriptive aim of the project is to offer a careful phenomenological description of presence. It is also to show that it is superior to alternative descriptions. Over the course of the five articles, I offer two descriptive accounts. The first in Paper 1, and the second in Papers 3 and 4. Across the papers, I also offer reasons to reject alternative descriptive accounts of perceptual presence. In Paper 2, I argue that Matthen's proposal that perceptual presence is 'assertive' misdescribes the sense in which perceptual experience purports to present the world as it is. In Paper 3, I consider several descriptions of perceptual presence including that objects are experienced as real ((Dokic and Martin 2017; Seth 2014), 'really there' (Matthen 2010, 107), located in the 'here, now' (Ratcliffe

2015), mind-independent (Farkas 2013), or alternatively, the sense that the perceptual experience itself is revelatory (Millar 2014a), immediate (Sturgeon 2000), or direct (Millar 2014a). I argue that although they gesture at important features of perceptual presence, these descriptions are each too ambiguous to offer the kind of robust account that the descriptive project requires. In particular, some instances of sensory memory or episodic memory can be reasonably be said to meet these descriptions, but neither kind of experience instantiates perceptual presence. The positive descriptive account I offer lends itself to a specific sense of each of the descriptions, a sense that does not apply to episodic memory or sensory imagination.

I operate with much the same descriptive account in Paper 4, though I elaborate it by noting that experience's manifest dependence on the spatial and temporal properties of mind-independent objects conveys the apparent fulfilment of the spatial and temporal enabling conditions of that experience. This in turn offers an explanation of the common observation that perceptual experience presents itself as veridical. It seems to be veridical because it presents its own enabling conditions as being fulfilled.

In Paper 5, I complement the descriptive account of perceptual presence with a descriptive account of the pastness of experiential memory. I operate with a substantive conception of pastness. The phenomenal character of pastness is not limited to having a conscious, past-directed temporal orientation. Tensed thoughts and imaginings of historical events would have pastness were this the case. Rather, I propose that the pastness of experiential memory involves a number of elements I term *Presence in Absence, Personal Past, Actuality, Fixity, Personal Significance* and *Fragmentariness*. I observe a sense in which the dead were once able to resist our impressions of them but can no longer, and suggest that a central feature of pastness is that objects seem analogously to have once resisted our experience of them, though they can no more. The descriptive account that I develop in Paper 5 holds that experiential memory represents, though does not instantiate, perceptual presence.

5.2 Meeting the Explanatory Objective

To meet the explanatory objective is to identify the metaphysical framework for perceptual experience that best explains perceptual presence. This in turn has a positive and a negative element. One must motivate one's own positive proposal as well as offering arguments against the alternatives. In Papers 1, 2 and 4, my explanatory programme is largely negative.

In Paper 1, I argue that a view on which perceptual presence is explained outside of the metaphysical framework that constitutes perceptual experience is undermotivated in Dokic and Martin's 2017 paper. Their view is that perceptual presence is not an intrinsic feature of perceptual experience at all, but a separate entity – a metacognitive feeling. But their appeals to various empirical examples do not provide grounds to support that position. As I write: there is no reason to think that the sense of reality [Dokic and Martin's explication of presence] is not instantiated by perceptual experiences themselves (Minden Ribeiro 2022, 165).

In Paper 2, I examine the metaphysical framework underpinning Matthen's account of the feeling of presence (2005; 2010; 2014; 2021). Matthen has a distinctive take on the attitude-content framework. He proposes that conscious perceptual experience involves both descriptive content (an image), and a referential element (a propositional operator he terms the feeling of presence). The feeling of presence both provides demonstrative reference and operates as an assertion operator. For Matthen, it is important that the feeling of presence is attitudinal because he is committed to the Shared Content Principle, the claim that the descriptive content of perceptual experience, sensory imagination and episodic memory can be identical (Matthen 2014, 280). I provide a number of arguments to show that this elaborate metaphysical framework is inherently unstable. First I argue that on no plausible interpretation can the referential element play the two roles Matthen assigns to it – assertion operator and provider of demonstrative reference. Then I argue that Matthen is committed to a framework on which descriptive (or image) content is a mental entity, a reified image. This is the common element across perceptual experience, episodic memory and visual imagination. But a mental depiction proves a defective ingredient in assembling the metaphysical framework of a state that purports to present reality. There are problems integrating the depicted viewpoint with the subject's actual viewpoint, and problems maintaining a coherent notion of assertion.

In Paper 4, I widen the scope of my criticism of the attitude-content framework. With my descriptive account in hand, I argue that the attitude-content framework in general cannot explain presentational phenomenal character. My line of argument is as follows. The attitude-content theorist must explain phenomenal character in terms of attitude, content or their combination. Explanations that place the explanatory burden on attitude commit to an error theory of perceptual presence. Explanations that place the explanatory burden on content face counterexamples from non-presentational representations partly composed of the same content. On examining the systematic way that individual elements of content and attitude contribute to explanations of functional role and phenomenal character, I conclude that no combination of attitude and content will be jointly sufficient to explain perceptual experience's presentational phenomenal character.

Although I do not examine every metaphysical account of perceptual experience on the market, Papers 1, 2 and 4 consider and reject a substantive tranche of the literature. Paper 1 is important because if presence were to be explained by something external to the metaphysical structure of perceptual experience, the explanatory project would be undermined. Paper 2 and 4 have different scopes. Paper 2 focuses on a single, prominent account of perceptual presence, and tries to articulate the problems with the framework it is implicitly committed to. Paper 4 takes a more sweeping perspective, focussing on the attitude-content framework more generally. This is the most orthodox and influential perceptual framework, both in philosophy and the mind sciences.

My positive defence of a framework that supports perceptual presence is developed in Paper 3. As noted above, this is a Point of View-Act-Object framework.

In Paper 5, I develop a companion account of the metaphysical framework of experiential memory. This is a non-relational account of experiential memory that endorses the Dependency Thesis. When applied to experiential memory, the Dependency Thesis holds that 'when one experientially remembers an f, one does so through remembering consciously experiencing an f' (cf. Martin 2001, 273). Past experiences are among the intentional objects of experiential memory. Though experiential memory doesn't instantiate presence, it represents presence; it represents past experiences as having depended on their objects. At the same time, the current memory experience does not depend on those objects, at least

not for its initiation. Rather, it depends on the subject. I claim that experiential memory involves a characteristic, nested pattern of apparent dependence on both subject and object. I make no commitment to experiential memory constituting a distinctive attitude towards representational content. The account offers a useful counterpoint to my account of perceptual presence, respecting the similarities and difference in phenomenal character and functional role that I observe across the five papers.

5.3 The Descriptive Account of Paper 1

The descriptive account of perceptual presence I defend in Paper 1 is as follows.

> Presence is instantiated when:
>
> (1) The object is presented as a constituent of mind-independent reality such that
>
> (2) the experience seems, by the very kind of experience it is, to reveal how things are. (Minden Ribeiro 2022, 160).

Call (1) and (2) the object and experience conditions respectively. In the paper, I propose that visual imagination and pictorial experience (a video call) can meet the object condition but not the experience condition. Conversely, intuitions or insight experiences seem by the very kind of experience they are to reveal how things are, but without meeting the object condition.

Each condition has a central term that is underspecified. What is meant by 'presented' and what is meant by 'reveal'? In the paper, I propose the two conditions 'helpfully delimit' one another:

> For it is exactly by giving an object as a part of mind-independent reality, that the experience seems to reveal how things are. Conversely, what it means to 'seem to reveal' is exactly that the experience appears to grant access to mind-independent reality. (ibid. 160).

I no longer think this is satisfactory. For one, I don't think that two conditions placed reversibly around a 'such that' offer a clear or exact analysis. Moreover, much more must be said as to why the videocall experience, for example, doesn't

seem to reveal. And conversely, why the intuition that I left the hob on at home shouldn't count as a presentation of mind-independent reality. On my current proposal, the manifest spatial and temporal dependence of experience on object offer an answer to these questions. But the great stumbling block of the view is that it cannot handle experiential memory. For surely episodic memory meets both conditions without instantiating presence. Thinking about why the objects of memory cannot be presented or revealed – in particular given that perceptual objects are also necessarily located in the past – has guided my thinking about receptivity and manifest temporal dependence (see Section 6.5).

5.4 Omissions and Directions for Future Research: Dream and Hallucination

Naïve realism offers an account of veridical (or at least non-hallucinatory) perceptual experience. Critical discussion of naïve realism however has largely focussed on what the naïve realist ought to say about other kinds of experience – hallucinations, chief among them. In Paper 3, I provide a positive account of perceptual presence that appeals to the metaphysical structure of perceptual experience defended by naïve realists. While I address dreams and hallucinations briefly in Paper 3 (fn 12 and 16), they are not the central focus of the paper. But if dreams and hallucinations do have perceptual presence, they pose a challenge to the act-object account I advocate. Hallucinated or dreamed object needn't exist, and so cannot figure in the kind of explanation that I provide of veridical perceptual experience. It follows that if dreams or hallucinations have perceptual presence, the account I offer only explains some instances of perceptual presence. The point of view-act-object framework would be sufficient but not necessary for perceptual presence.

If the foregoing is right, I have two options. Either I can offer an additional account of perceptual presence in hallucinations and dreams. Or I can deny that hallucinations and dreams instantiate perceptual presence. I will focus first on dreams. Recall my background assumption that perceptual presence is definitive of perceptual experience. If dreams meet the descriptive conditions for perceptual presence, I will be committed to the unintuitive claim that dreams are perceptual

experiences. The problem is that on the face of it some dreams do satisfy the conditions:

i. The experience seems to be of mind-independent objects.

ii. The spatial location that the experience is had from seems to be positioned relative to the spatial location of the object.

iii. The temporal location of the experience seems to depend on, and seems to be indistinguishable from, the temporal location of the object.

Descriptive condition ii. states that 'the spatial location that the experience is had from seems be positioned relative to the spatial location of the object'. In some dreams, isn't this condition met? I dream I am on Primrose Hill at dusk, looking out at the city's lights. In the dream, it seems that I am having a perceptual experience. And it seems that the location that my perceptual experience is being had from is continuous with, and so relative to, the spatial location of its objects, the city's lights. But this is not equivalent to condition ii. The condition does not require that it *seem* that the spatial location that the experience is had from is positioned relative to the spatial location of the object. Rather it asks of the spatial location that the experience is had from that it *seems* to be positioned relative to the spatial location of the object. But concerning my dream of London, the spatial location that the experience is had from is not atop Primrose Hill, if it is anywhere it is in my bedroom in Copenhagen. Being asleep I am unaware of this. The dreamed perceptual experience is not had from anywhere, it's point of view is not occupied – it is merely represented (Soteriou 2024). In dreams, there is seeming presence.[6] But it is not actual presence because the spatial location that the experience is had from does not feature in phenomenal character at all.

Given that dreams and veridical perceptual experiences satisfy different descriptions of phenomenal character, why is it so natural to state that when we are dreaming, we experience objects as though they are present to us? Sartre points to an epistemic disanalogy between perceiving and dreaming that may guide us here. He writes: 'it is possible that, in the dream, I imagine that I perceive; but what is certain is that when I am awake I cannot doubt that I perceive' (Sartre 2004, 160). We have two experiential states that seem to be perceptual

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[6] Compare McGinn's claim that dreams have illusory presence (2004, 92).

experiences. But just because the first is indistinguishable from the second, it doesn't mean that the two are identical, nor that the second is indistinguishable from the first. The dream cannot be distinguished from perception, for Sartre, because in dream we lack reflective consciousness. One understanding of Sartre's claim is that even though the phenomenal character of dream is phenomenally quite different to that of a genuine perceptual experience, we are not in a position to appreciate that difference. Without reflective consciousness we cannot judge that this is not a genuine perceptual experience. As Sartre puts it: 'for dreamers to reason and make comparisons requires them to be in full possession of their discursive faculties, and therefore already awake' (2004, 161). In the case of perceptual experience, my capacity for reflective consciousness is returned and it is evident that I am experiencing reality in a way that is not available to the dreamer. The key point for our purposes is that however absorbing the dreamer's seeming presence may be, it should not be considered identical to genuine perceptual presence.

I am less decided as to what one should say about hallucination. It is certainly intuitive that some kinds of hallucination, including both philosophers' identical-proximal cause hallucinations and some real-life hallucinations like the phantom cries of one's baby, instantiate perceptual presence. Two initial options are available. Either one accepts that these kinds of experiences meet the descriptive conditions for perceptual presence, or one rejects that move.

If one accepts that the descriptive account applies, one owes a metaphysical explanation of that phenomenal character. One cannot offer the same kind of explanation that one offers in the veridical case, as the mind-independent object and its spatial and temporal properties are absent. So perceptual presence will have at least two possible explanations. Perhaps this is unproblematic. The descriptive conditions are quite general and can be met in different ways, and so it should not surprise us that there are different explanations available. Whatever the right explanation is, it is important that it is not equally applicable to the veridical case, as this would threaten to screen-off the explanatory power of the point of view-act-object explanation.

If one rejects the claim that hallucinations instantiate perceptual presence, one must offer an explanation of why it is intuitive to say that they do. Here, one might appeal again to the notion of seeming presence. Compare a veridical perceptual experience to an analogous hallucination. In the former case, one is in

a position to introspect the phenomenal character of one's experience. In the latter case, an explanation might go, one is not in a position to introspect the phenomenal character of one's experience, so one is not in a position to know what that experience's phenomenal character is. One is only in a position to know how the hallucination's phenomenal character seems. There is a model of introspection implicit here on which our awareness of the phenomenal character of perceptual experiences is not distinct from our awareness of perceptual objects (Martin 2006; Soteriou 2013, 206). How does the phenomenal character of hallucination seem? It seems indistinguishable to how it would seem if one were having a veridical perceptual experience in which the descriptive conditions were met. So the best descriptive account available to the hallucinator is derivative of the veridical case, and this is why it is so intuitive to ascribe hallucinations perceptual presence.

Each of these options is a research programme unto itself and I won't adjudicate between them here. Instead, I flag the development of an account of hallucinatory presence as a direction for future research.

6 The Place of the Dissertation in the Field of Research

It is no straightforward task to provide an overview of philosophical work on perceptual presence. As well as a range of different views of perceptual presence, there are a range of explanatory ends to which those views are put. While in recent literature, some have offered explicit and fully fledged accounts of perceptual presence, others provide insightful but more cursory descriptions of this strand of phenomenal character in order to pursue other explanatory goals. There is also an important difference between those who appeal to metaphysical structure to explain perceptual presence, and those who appeal to scientific models of cognition. To bring order to this landscape, I have organised the literature around eight themes: Item-Awareness, *Leibhaftigkeit*, Vivacity, Transparency, The Real, Space, Time, and The Body and Action. I will briefly introduce each theme and demonstrate how it has been developed by influential accounts of perceptual presence, before locating my own research in relation to that theme.

6.1 Item-Awareness

On the basis of perceptual phenomenal character, some have argued that perceptual experience must involve an awareness relation to an existing entity. Price offers a classic example of this argumentative move:

> When I see a tomato there is much that I can doubt. I can doubt whether it is a tomato I am seeing, and not a cleverly painted piece of wax. I can doubt whether there is a material thing there at all… One thing however I cannot doubt: that there exists a red patch of a round and somewhat bulgy shape, standing out from a background of other colour-patches, and having a certain visual depth, and that this whole field of colour is presented to my consciousness. (1932, 3)

Price's intuition is that there is something, some item, that the perceiver is aware of in visual perceptual experience. He takes the phenomenal character of perceptual experience to guarantee it. Why? Because the properties of redness, roundness, bulginess are evidently instantiated, he thinks, ('I sense… a red something, an instance of redness' (ibid. 103), and to be instantiated there must be some item that instantiates them. Let's call Price's intuition Item-Awareness (cf. Pautz 2007; Sethi 2021).

Price notes that hallucinatory experiences also have this distinctive phenomenal character and given that *ex hypothesi* no mind-independent object exists, he commits to hallucination involving awareness relations to existing mind-dependent objects. But this move undermines the appeal to mind-independent objects in the veridical case and Price endorses a unified framework on which all perceptual experiences involve relations to mind-dependent items. Broad's (1952) discussion of the 'prehensive' character of perceptual experience leads him similarly to endorse Item-Awareness and so a sense-data account. Indeed, Item-Awareness has had significant influence on phenomenological arguments as to the nature of perceptual experience, not least because Price's intuition lends support to what Robinson calls the Phenomenal Principle:

> If there sensibly appears to a subject to be something which possesses a particular sensible quality then there is something of which the subject is aware which does possess that sensible quality. (1994: 32)

The Phenomenal Principle is in turn a premise in the Argument from Illusion, against the view that we are directly presented with mind-independent objects in perceptual experience.

My own view of perceptual presence shares with Price the conviction that careful attention to phenomenal character should guide our theorising about perceptual metaphysics. But we transition from descriptive claims about phenomenal character to metaphysical claims in different ways. There is a sense in which Price and Broad ascribe apparent relationality an evidential force that they don't ascribe apparent mind-independence. For when faced with hallucinatory experience, which has both strands of phenomenal character, but for which both strands cannot possibly be reflections of metaphysical structure, they insist that apparent relationality tracks genuine relationality. For reasons discussed above (4.3), I am sceptical of the claim that perceptual presence has an evidential force that favours

one metaphysical framework among others. Apparent relationality does not guarantee a relational metaphysics. I don't prioritise my apparent relationality descriptive claims (ii. and iii.) above my apparent mind-independence descriptive claim (i.). My appeal to the point of view-act-object framework is an inference to the best explanation, rather than a conclusion guaranteed by the descriptive characterisation. And rather than appealing to sensory properties, I flesh out apparent relationality in terms of the apparent spatial and temporal relations that hold between object and experiencing subject. If sensory properties seem to be instantiated, this is explanatorily downstream of the apparent obtaining of these dependences.

6.2 *Leibhaftigkeit*

Here is Husserl describing what he terms the *peculiar character* of perceptual experience.

> the object stands in perception as there in the flesh, it stands, to speak still more precisely, as actually present, as self-given there in the current now. In phantasy, the object does not stand there as in the flesh, actual, currently present. It indeed does stand before our eyes, but not as something currently given now; it may possibly be thought of as now, or as simultaneous with the current now, but this now is a thought one and is not that now which pertains to presence in the flesh, perceptual presence. The phantasized is merely "represented" [vorgestellt], it merely places before us [stellt vor] or presents [stellt dar], but it "does not give itself" as itself, actual and now. (1998, 12)

Husserl's term for this 'givenness in the flesh' is *Leibhaftigkeit.* Riccardi (2019, 2907) describes this a 'remarkably tortured attempt' to characterise perceptual presence, which it is, but I am happy to admit how fond I am of this passage. Husserl's gestures at the receptivity of the spatial and temporal dimensions of perceptual character align with my own view of presence (see Section 6.5 for discussion of receptivity). Still, it is noteworthy how infrequently Husserl attempts to analyse *Leibhaftigkeit* across his writings. For the most part, it is simply taken as a primitive datum that marks the perceptual from other modes of

givenness.[7] In this, his approach draws close to that of the phenomenological psychopathologist Karl Jaspers, who writes:

> In contrast with our imaginings, perception has a quality not determined by the particular sense-organ ... which is something absolutely primary and constitutes sensory reality. ... We can talk about this primary event, name it and rename it, but cannot reduce it any further. (1997 [1957], 94)

One reading of this passage is that there is little more to say about the phenomenal character of perceptual presence than that it exists. We are all familiar with it. It constitutes sensory reality. But it does so primitively, perhaps inexplicably. By contrast, a central thrust of my approach is that perceptual presence does admit of substantive description. In particular, the introduction of manifest spatial and temporal dependence relations provides expansive and straightforward descriptions of what it might mean to experience something 'as self-given there in the current now', as Husserl puts it.

6.3 Vivacity

Jaspers' sentiment echoes an aspect of Hume's criteria for telling impressions and ideas apart. Impressions (for our purposes, perceptual experiences) can only be distinguished from ideas (for our purposes, experiences of memory and imagination) in their 'force and vivacity' (2003 [1739-40], 2). What is vivacity? Compare the difference between perceiving and imagining a particular shade of blue. In both cases, the colour is just the same. The colour itself does not become paler or more diffuse. But the very same shade is *represented* more 'faintly', or in a less 'lively' manner, for Hume. At this point, asking what liveliness amounts to would be to pose a question that admits of no answer. The difference is intuitive and phenomenologically manifest, but it is primitive and can't be explained in terms of anything else. Terms like faintness, vivacity and liveliness are really just labels posing as descriptions. As Jaspers says, we can name it and rename it, but cannot reduce it any further.

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[7] An exception is perhaps his *Analyses Concerning Passive and Active Synthesis.* (2001).

I think it is a mistake to conflate Humean vivacity with perceptual presence. As mentioned, my view is that perceptual presence does admit of description in a way that Hume was never satisfied that vivacity does. Furthermore, Hume also characterises *belief* in terms of vivacity, and beliefs certainly don't possess perceptual presence.[8] Unfortunately, I think that something like the brute distinction between impressions and ideas has influenced much theorising about perceptual presence. Many seems to assume that the phenomenal character of presence admits of only the most cursory description. This is evident in the tendency to refer to presence as a 'feeling' (Ferretti 2018; Matthen 2005; 2010) or 'sense' (Farkas 2013; Dokic and Martin 2017), as though perceptual presence were sheer sensation over and above perceptual intentionality, supplementing it with a kick of vivacity.

One class of views asks that we take this way of speaking literally. This is the metacognitive feeling model of perceptual presence, which holds that perceptual presence is the phenomenological upshot of reality-monitoring processes. These are cognitive processes that allow the subject to distinguish between internally and externally generated cognitive events (i.e. between perceptions and imaginings or memories).[9] Dokic and Martin (2017) hold that the 'the sense of presence' is a metacognitive feeling wholly external to the perceptual representation, which tags the representation as originating outside of the subject. They identify the sense of presence with a 'sense of reality' (2017, 300) but in what I suggest is a sign of their Humean inheritance, they don't offer any substantive description of what experiencing something as real is like. Their descriptive reticence is tied to their explanatory aims. In claiming that the feeling of presence is not to be explained in terms of the metaphysical framework of perceptual experience, they cannot describe perceptual presence in terms of the intentional structure they take perceptual experience to have.

Many of those interested in the epistemic role of perceptual experience ascribe it presentational or phenomenal force (cf. Pryor 2000; Huemer 2001; Chudnoff

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[8] '… belief is nothing but a more vivid, lively, forcible, firm, steady conception of an object, than what the imagination alone is ever able to attain' (Hume 1997 [1748], Enquiry 5.12). Many thanks to Galen Strawson for bringing this passage to my attention.

9 See Dijkstra et al, 2022, for a review of research on the neural mechanisms underpinning reality-monitoring.

2013; Siegel and Silins 2015; Smithies 2019; Berghofer 2020). In this context, again, this strand of phenomenal character is typically labelled rather than described. To illustrate, here is a passage from Smithies (2019):

> I suggest that what sets perceptual experience apart from the cognitive experience of judgment is that it represents its contents with presentational force. To a first approximation, we can say that presentational force is the kind of phenomenal character you have when it seems to you that you're presented with the very things that make your experience true. (2019, 93)

Presentational force is the phenomenal character of your seeming to be presented with things. But what does it mean to be presented with things? If we don't have a grasp of that, the description will have brought us no further. Smithies' addition that we are presented with the things that make our experience true is also inadequate. When I imagine my turquoise sofa, it is the very turquoise sofa that I am imagining that makes my imagining of the turquoise sofa true (or accurate). The imagination doesn't have presentational force, because it doesn't present the sofa. But Smithies has offered no explanation of why imagination is not a presentation. It is hard to avoid the implication that there is no more to say about presentational phenomenology than that it is a distinctive and familiar strand of phenomenal character that imagination simply does not possess.

6.4 Transparency

In *The Transparency of Experience* (2002), Martin introduces twin claims about the introspective character of perceptual experience. The negative claim is that when we reflect on the phenomenal character of our experiences, we don't discover sense data or subjective qualities. The positive claim is that:

> when one's attention is directed inward mind-independent objects seem to be aspects of our experience (2002, 386)

For my purposes, I will term this positive claim the Transparency Thesis.

> The Transparency Thesis: In attending to the phenomenal character of one's experience, one attends to the mind-independent objects, properties and relations that the experience is an experience of.

Martin proposes that the Transparency Thesis offers an important explanandum for accounts of the metaphysics of perceptual experience, one that intentionalist and naïve realists will accommodate in different ways.

As Martin acknowledges, the Transparency Thesis applies equally to sensory imagination. When I attend to the phenomenal character of an episode of visual imagining, I find myself attending to the objects, properties and relations I am imagining. 'In this respect, visualising is as transparent as visual experience' (Martin 2002, 413). But one might wonder whether we can identify a strand of the phenomenal character of perceptual experience that like Transparency offers an explanandum by which we can adjudicate competing accounts of perceptual experience, but that unlike Transparency pertains exclusively to *perceptual* phenomenal character.

In fact, Martin introduces just such a phenomenological datum, which he terms 'immediacy' (2002, 388-391). Experiences that instantiate immediacy have a distinctive phenomenal character and a distinctive functional role. Phenomenologically, immediacy conveys the 'apparent presence' of the objects of experience (ibid. 388). Martin describes this phenomenal character as committal or non-neutral. In contrast to sensory imagination, when I perceptually experience a pig, say, the actual world seems to be a certain way (i.e. contain a pig at location L). In contrast to belief, when I perceptually experience a pig, the fact of the world's being that way seems to be presented to me. Martin suggests that the character of immediacy comprises 'the phenomenological echoes of the fact that one is in a state with the functional role that experience has' (ibid. 391). What is this functional role? That absent any countervailing reasons, experiences that instantiate immediacy will fix belief (that *that* pig is *there*) and guide action.

I take my use of the term perceptual presence to pick out the same phenomenon that Martin terms immediacy. What Martin's account is missing, I suggest, is a substantive description of what immediacy is like. Indeed, talk of immediacy or directness doesn't carry us any closer to a robust conception of the phenomenon than vivacity or presentational force. Developing such a conception is the task of the descriptive wing of my project.

What is the connection between transparency and immediacy? Martin describes immediacy as 'an aspect of the transparency of visual experience' (ibid. 413). This is a substantive claim, first because sensory imagination instantiates transparency

but not immediacy. And second because transparency is a claim about introspection, about what we find when we attend to our experiences. Immediacy is rather a claim about what we find when we attend to the world (we find that it contains a pig), as well as a claim about what attending to the world is like.[10] One might wonder if there is a principle linking these two kinds of claim. Indeed, my account of perceptual presence as manifest dependence is committed to such a principle:

> Linking Principle: When manifest dependence obtains (i.e. when experience seems to depend on its objects), the world seems to be a certain way (i.e. contains a pig).

One way to challenge my account is to question whether this is the correct explanatory order. I maintain that the world seems to be a certain way because experience seems to be certain way (dependent), but some may find it more intuitive to claim that experience seems to be a certain way (dependent) because the world seems to be a certain way.

My account of manifest dependence is consistent with Martin's Transparency Thesis. There are stronger transparency theses (cf. Tye 1995, 30; 2014, 41), to the effect that introspection *exclusively* reveals mind-independent objects and their properties.[11] These theses are inconsistent with my dependence claims. For it follows from my view that when we attend to perceptual experience, we ought to find not only *mind-independent* objects, properties and relations, but also a dependence relation involving the occurrent experience as a relatum. That is, a

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[10] I noted in Section 5.4 that some naïve realists adopt a model of introspection on which attending to a perceptual experience is inseparable from attending to the objects and properties it is a perceptual experience of. This model is clearly consonant with Martin's Transparency Thesis.

[11] Harman (1990) is often taken to provide another strong version of the Transparency Thesis (Bordini 2023, 271). But in fact, his opponent in that paper is the view that we can attend to 'intrinsic features' of our visual experiences. In rejecting this, he leaves space for the possibility that 'perhaps, Eloise's visual experience even presents a tree as seen by her, that is, as an object of her visual experience' (Harman 1990, 38). This example of a manifest mind-dependent and so relational property of a mind-independent object is interestingly analogous to the apparent obtaining of the dependence relations I defend.

mind-dependent relation. But Martin's claim is simply that mind-independent objects, properties and relations show up in introspection, not that they are its sole targets.[12] This is consistent with dependence relations seeming to show up as well. In fact, one might think that we can only attend to such a dependence relation by attending to its relata, so it would miss the point to suggest that Manifest Dependence compels us to recognise further entities when we introspect.

6.5 The Real

Many accounts of perceptual presence describe it as the sense that objects or the perceptual scene is real (Farkas 2013; Seth 2014; Dokic and Martin 2017; cf. Dijkstra and Fleming 2021). Care must be taken here, as we can also judge, recollect and imagine objects and scenes that we take to be real. So it is important to distinguish how 'the real' features in perceptual phenomenology in contrast to those other kinds of experience. One popular, though perhaps no more precise proposal is that perceptual phenomenology is revelatory (Millar 2014a). It seems to *reveal* reality, whereas the other states are merely about real states of affairs (when they are). But what does it mean to seem to reveal? In what sense does memory in particular fall short of seeming to reveal how things are? And what of intuition experiences? Realising that you have left the hob on at home, or intuiting the answer to a mathematical equation? (cf. Chudnoff 2013) Either these experiences also have perceptual presence, or we are owed an explanation of some specific sense of revelation that applies to perceptual experience but not experiences of these other kinds.

Farkas (2013) takes seriously the task of unpacking what the sense of reality amounts to. But by her own account her efforts are unsuccessful. She identifies an object's being real with its existing mind-independently, and so an object's seeming to be real with its being 'taken' to exist mind-independently (2013, 402).

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[12] One exception is in his introduction, where Martin writes: 'At heart, the concern is that introspection of one's perceptual experience reveals *only* the mind-independent objects, qualities and relations that one learns about through perception' (2002, 378. My emphasis). But for the most part, and where unfolding transparency in detail, Martin avoids this formulation.

But as she notes, this is not yet to say anything about what it is for objects to be taken to exist mind-independently. Farkas identifies two necessary conditions: that the experience is sensory and that the experience is not under voluntary control. Neither condition is sufficient and a range of other plausible candidates turn out to not even be necessary in her view, namely the experience's being 'vivid, complete, rich in detail, stable, amenable to perceptual exploration (possibly in several sensory modalities), and, in the case of the visual and auditory mode, located in external space' (2013, 411). Farkas turns from considering formal features of experience to wondering whether features of the content of experiences might mark the sense of reality, and offers some defence of the proposal that 'the general likelihood of the event, given our background beliefs about the world' contribute to the sense of reality (2013, 413).

While Farkas is right that experiences that instantiate perceptual presence are necessarily sensory, I take this to follow from the fact that only sensory experiences meet my descriptive conditions. Sensorily impoverished experiences – objects seen in silhouette, or through a fog – do not have impoverished perceptual presence, so long as they meet the descriptive conditions.

Much more needs to be said about Farkas' involuntariness condition, for there are important senses in which perceptual experiences, including some hallucinatory experiences, are under voluntary control. For instance, one can choose to look away, or to adjust one's perspective on perceptual objects. That said, I think Farkas is tracking something important when she links involuntariness with intentional objects' seeming to be real.

My own view is that receptivity should be assigned an important role here. Recall that on a Kantian framework, receptive occurrences are to be contrasted with exercises of spontaneity. Receptivity is our 'capacity… to acquire representations through the way in which we are affected by objects' (Kant 1998, A19/B33). By contrast, spontaneity is the mind's 'faculty for bringing forth representations itself' (ibid., A51/B75). I don't write extensively about receptivity in Papers 3 or 4, but I take the notion to be exerting significant background influence on my positive account. The idea is this. *When* an experience unfolds, and the course that it takes, depend in important ways on the objects and events one is having an experience of. I suggest that this fact demands causal and constitutive explanation. The beginnings of a causal story will acknowledge that veridical perceptual experience takes place at strictly the temporal distance required for the temporal location of

the object to cause the experience. If a traffic light turns red at t1, and it takes duration d1 for light to travel through the red casing of the bulb to the subject's retina, and d2 for the signal to be registered and visually processed before producing an experience, the experience will occur at t2, where t2 = t1 + d1 + d2. There is no delaying a perceptual experience. You could close your eyes of course, disrupting the causal chain, but on re-opening them, you wouldn't enjoy the same experience you would have had at a later time, rather you will enjoy a new experience (of the object and event at a later time). This is a distinctive sense in which perceptual experience is involuntary. I argue in Paper 4 that consciousness that perceptual experience fulfils this temporal awareness condition contributes to perceptual presence, or in Farkas' terminology, the sense of reality.

The causal dependence reflects a constitutive dependence. My account of manifest dependence articulates ways in which certain spatial and temporal properties of the object are constitutively implicated in the experience having the phenomenal character that it does. On my framework, a veridical perceptual experience includes the perceptual object and its spatiotemporal location as a constitutive part. The experience and its phenomenal character are constituted by and so constitutively dependent upon those constituents. Had the object not been there, this experience could not have taken place, and this is reflected in perceptual phenomenal character. This in turn affords a better grip on the notions of 'the real' and revelation. As I state in Paper 3, rather than being represented as real, perceptual objects show themselves to be real by sustaining the dependence relation of which the perceptual experience depends. Experience is revelatory in as much as its phenomenal character is constitutively dependent on real-time changes in the properties of the object.

6.6 Space

The proposal that perceptual presence characterises our sense that things are real is often developed by appeal to spatiality. Matthen for instance describes presence as a 'felt spatial connection to seen objects' (2010, 115). Some authors appeal to particular capacities for spatial cognition to offer mechanistic explanations of perceptual presence. Again, Matthen (2005; 2010) links perceptual presence to the functioning of the motion-guiding vision system, which is processed in the dorsal stream. Motion-guiding vision identifies objects and their orientations in space, in order to facilitate bodily action. By contrast, Ferretti (2018) ties perceptual presence to stereoscopic vision, the cognitive capacity to represent absolute egocentric depth. In my own positive account, I am neutral as to the correct account of the cognitive and neural mechanisms that realise perceptual presence.[13] Both Matthen, Ferretti and others (e.g. Dokic 2012, 392) deploy their spatial characterisations of presence to accommodate the widespread assumption that pictorial experience does not instantiate presence, for depicted objects (unlike the surface of the picture) do not seem to occupy the same spatial region as the viewer.

While I am in total agreement that we cannot begin to describe or explain perceptual presence without attending to the way that that perceptual objects are spatially given, great care must be taken here too. For sensory imagination and memory are also essentially spatial modes of givenness. My episodic recollection of a cypress tree locates the tree in egocentric space relative to a viewpoint, such that I can deploy demonstrative concepts such as 'here', 'there' or 'to the left' to think about its location. Building on the writings of Soteriou (2018; 2024) I have tried to articulate a spatial difference between perceptual experience and memory or imagination by examining the spatial properties of the point of view that they afford of their objects. The idea is that while the point of view of memory or imagination is merely represented, the perceptual point of view is occupied, where occupation places significant constraints on the spatial location of the subject's

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[13] Other neural or cognitive explanations of perceptual presence include Seth (2014; 2015) explaining presence in terms of the predictive processing of sensorimotor contingencies, Riccardi (2019) in terms of object-based visual attention mechanisms, and Dokic and Martin (2017) by appeal to metacognitive monitoring and control mechanisms.

actual body. As such, we can speak of *the spatial location that the experience is had from* as a phenomenal feature of perceptual experience but not memory or imagination. This notion plays a key role in my descriptive condition for manifest spatial dependence.

6.7 Time

The temporal dimension of presence is less well remarked than the spatial, though see Ratcliffe's description of perceptual presence as 'the sense that one is accessing something 'here, now' (2015, 92), and Husserl's claim (quoted in Section 6.2) that perceptual objects are 'self-given there in the current now' (1998, 12).

If the right description of perceptual phenomenal character were, with Ratcliffe and Husserl, that objects are presented as *now*, where the indexical now refers to the temporal location of the perceptual experience, we would face the consequence that perceptual experience is always in error. For perception takes time, so the sensible appearance of the object at time *t* will always be experienced at *t+1*. The claim that perceptual objects appear to occupy a time *indistinguishable* from that of the subject is designed, in part, to address this concern.

Hoerl takes an altogether different approach, explaining perceptual presence by appeal to the apparent observation that perceptual experience is not 'temporally viewpointed' (2018, 142). Whereas we adopt a spatial viewpoint, distinct from the spatial location of perceptual objects, no such temporal viewpoint is available. In Paper 3, I note that if Hoerl's description is accurate, it is sufficient to distinguish the phenomenal characters of perceptual experience and episodic memory. But if this observation is to describe perceptual presence, it must also distinguish perceptual experience from sensory imagination. And it is not clear that sensory imagination is temporally viewpointed in a way that perceptual experience is not.

6.8 The Body and Action

My own account of perceptual presence identifies a particular role for the body in occupying a point of view. But there are alternative accounts that ascribe the body a different role in constituting perceptual presence, either by appeal to our proprioceptive awareness of our body's location, or the body's role in bringing forth action. Before I consider two of these positions, I note that I see my own account's proposal that perceptual presence requires the occupation of an egocentric point of view as deeply tied to our ability to perform embodied actions. As Evans puts it, '[t]here is only one egocentric space, because there is only one behavioural space' (1982, 160). The egocentric coordinates with which we locate objects are the same as those we would employ to perform bodily action. So rather than assigning our ability to perform embodied action a role in explaining perceptual presence, I take our egocentric spatial (and temporal) frames of reference to underlie both perceptual presence and our abilities to perform embodied action.

Noë develops a different view of the link between embodied action and perceptual presence. He thinks of perceptual presence as the 'showing up' or 'becoming available' of objects and properties in perceptual experience (2012, 19)[14]. Rather than a passive occurrence, Noë describes this as an achievement of the subject's, in that they bring to bear a practical understanding of the ways their own movements and the movements of the object shape the phenomenal character of their experience.

> An object or quality is *perceptually* present (i.e. it is an object of perceptual consciousness) when the perceiver understands -- in a practical, bodily way -- that there obtains a physical, motorsensory relation between the perceiver and the object or quality satisfying two conditions:
>
> (1) Movement-dependence: movements of the body manifestly control the character of the relation to the object or quality.

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[14] See also: 'the world is present as *out there* and as *available* to our inspection' (Noë 2005, 250).

(2) Object-dependence: movements or other changes in the object manifestly control the character of the relation to the object or quality. (2012, 22)

Noë's focus on the ways that experience depends on the object and the subject's relation to it are obviously deeply amenable to my project.[15] But note that the two conditions are not sufficient for perceptual presence if the contrast I am drawing with episodic memory is to be respected. For in recollecting a scene, it is no less manifest that the movements of my past body and the recollected object partly determine the phenomenal character of the memory experience than it is of my present body and object in the perceptual case. As I mentioned in Chapter 2, it is not always clear that Noë has in his sights perceptual presence as I use the term, but if that is his target, he needs to identify a way to pin Movement-dependence to the present body. My appeal to an occupied point of view does exactly this, but once one has the notion of an occupied point of view in play, the appeal to bodily movement becomes explanatorily superfluous.

McGinn (2004) identifies a different role for the body in accounting for perceptual presence. In keeping with many of the accounts I have discussed, McGinn describes presence as 'the sense that the intentional object is right there' (2004, 92). He proposes that in perceptual experience 'my body awareness interacts with my awareness of external objects to generate an impression of spatial relatedness' (ibid. 93). By contrast, in imagination the object is posited as absent. This experiential absence 'depends on the bodily [i.e. proprioceptive] presence of the self, as what the object is absent from' (ibid. 93). McGinn's account is brief and his proposal that proprioceptive awareness interacts with spatial awareness of objects stands in need of further development and support. But stepping back, his view shares the shape of my account of manifest spatial dependence. The apparent spatial continuity between the perceiver's body (the location their experience is being had from) and the perceptual object is identical to (on my account, necessary for) perceptual presence.

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[15] For a related enactivist account of perceptual presence see O'Regan 2011.

7 Conclusion

In this *Kappa*, I have introduced my doctoral project, discussed its findings, and positioned it in relation to the wider research landscape. I presented both the descriptive and explanatory wings of the project, examining its background assumptions, methodological considerations and how its aims are met by the individual papers. I have considered the relation of my account of perceptual presence to historical and contemporary research, and suggested areas for future investigation.

7.1 Summary of Articles

Paper 1 – 'Is Presence Perceptual?' (Minden Ribeiro 2022)

In the first half of this paper, I offer a descriptive account of presence. Presence is instantiated when (1) the object is presented as a constituent of mind-independent reality *such that* (2) the experience seems, by the very kind of experience it is, to reveal how things are. I argue that this account explains why visual imagination, pictorial experiences and intuitions do not instantiate presence. In the second half of the paper, I examine Dokic and Martin's (2017) claim that presence is not intrinsically perceptual. I show that the authors' appeal to derealisation disorders, the false senses of presence associated with Parkinson's disease, virtual reality and hallucination fail to motivate their claim.

Paper 2 – 'An Assembled Message: Matthen on the Content of Perceptual Experience' (Minden Ribeiro 2023)

In this paper, I critically examine Matthen's division of perceptual content into descriptive and referential elements. I argue that once the metaphysical framework is divided in this way, perceptual experience cannot play the experiential and functional roles Matthen takes it to have. The referential element – the feeling of

presence – is unable to both provide demonstrative reference and assert that the visual state reflects how things are. Meanwhile, I provide reason to think that the descriptive element is a mental image. But a mental image proves a defective ingredient in assembling perceptual content that purports to present reality. There are problems integrating the depicted viewpoint with the subject's actual viewpoint, and problems maintaining a coherent notion of assertion.

Paper 3 – 'Perceptual Presence as Manifest Dependence' (Minden Ribeiro, ms. under review)

In this paper, I offer a descriptive and explanatory account of perceptual presence. In the first part of the paper, I argue that perceptual presence is an experience's manifest dependence on mind-independent objects. I identify two forms that manifest dependence takes: Manifest Spatial Dependence and Manifest Temporal Dependence. I show that this account has the resources to resolve a puzzle that arises when we try to balance a number of intuitive descriptions of perceptual presence against the conviction that sensory imagination and episodic memory do not instantiate presence. In the second part of the paper, I develop a naïve realist explanation of manifest dependence in terms of the constitutive dependence of perceptual experience on mind-independent objects.

Paper 4 – 'Manifest Dependence and the Attitude-Content Framework' (Minden Ribeiro, ms. under review)

In this paper I argue that the attitude-content framework cannot explain perceptual experience's presentational phenomenal character. I first propose that presentational phenomenal character is best described as the manifest spatial and temporal dependence of experience on its objects. I then argue that these manifest spatial and temporal dependences cannot be explained within the attitude-content framework. My line of argument is simple. The attitude-content theorist must explain phenomenal character in terms of attitude, content or their combination. Explanations that place the explanatory burden on attitude commit to an error theory of perceptual presence. Explanations that place the explanatory burden on content face counterexamples from non-presentational representations partly composed of the same content. On examining the systematic way that individual elements of content and attitude contribute to explanations of functional role and phenomenal character, I conclude that no combination of attitude and content will be jointly sufficient to explain perceptual experience's presentational phenomenal character.

Paper 5 – 'Pastness' (Minden Ribeiro, ms. under review)

Experiential memory involves a distinctive phenomenal character of pastness. Rather than considering pastness to be a simple datum, I propose that it is a complex strand of phenomenal character involving *Presence in Absence, Personal Past, Actuality, Fixity, Personal Significance* and *Fragmentariness*. I argue that pastness can be explained by the characteristic pattern of dependence of memory experiences, both on their objects and on their subject. This pattern of dependence reflects the unique success conditions of experiential memory. I show that the Dependency Thesis provides a framework for accommodating the proposal that remembered objects once resisted but now fail to resist our impressions of them.

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Perceptual Presence

There are different ways to bring a cypress tree to mind. We might think about a tree, speak about it, or imagine it. The cypress might come to us unbidden in memory, or in dream. But we might also see a cypress tree, or feel its branches in our hands. This way of bringing the tree to mind is distinctive because the tree itself seems to be present in our experience. Our experience has perceptual presence.

In this doctoral thesis, I defend an account of perceptual presence. I argue that perceptual presence is the manifest dependence of experience on mind-independent objects. I propose that it is best explained within a point of view-act-object metaphysical framework.

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