

Perceptual Presence

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Abstract: Plausibly, any adequate theory of perception must (a) solve what Alva Noë calls “the problem of perceptual presence,” and (b) do justice to the direct realist idea that what is given in perception are garden-variety spatiotemporal particulars. This paper shows that, while Noë’s sensorimotor view arguably satisfies the first of these conditions, it does not satisfy the second. Moreover, Noë is wrong to think that a naïve realist approach to perception cannot handle the problem of perceptual presence. Section three of this paper develops a version of naïve realism that meets both of the adequacy conditions above. This paper thus provides strong considerations in favor of naïve realism.

Suppose that under perfectly ordinary circumstances I am looking at a well-lit tomato. Call this perceptual experience ‘E’. What is E like? That is, what is it like to undergo E?

To begin with, it is a commonplace that an experience such as E is importantly *like* what it *is not*. For instance, the experience of seeing a tomato is

importantly like the experience of seeing an appropriately positioned tomato-part, as in Figures 1 and 2.

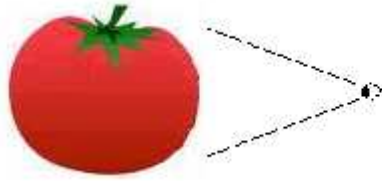


Fig. 1.

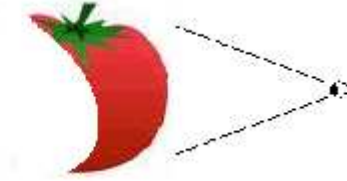


Fig. 2.

This is easily explained: without mutilating the tomato or using an aid such as a mirror or camera, you cannot see the tomato from all sides at once. Such is vision, and such are tomatoes. Perhaps, then, we should say that, phenomenologically, E is *precisely* like seeing an appropriately positioned tomato-part.

However, this would be a mistake. For one thing, given such a restriction, my *judgment* on the basis of E that there is a tomato before me would outstrip anything indicated by what E is like. This seems implausible. But epistemological concerns aside, it seems evident that when I see a tomato under normal circumstances it is part of what my experience is *like* that what lies before me is a tomato, not merely an appropriately positioned tomato-part. More generally, it seems that the experience of seeing a physical object typically involves a specifically *perceptual* sense of the presence of *that very object*, not merely of its unoccluded parts. Along these lines, Alva Noë writes: “The visual experience of the tomato...presents itself to one *precisely* as a *visual experience as of a whole tomato*,” and: “it seems to us...as if the whole [tomato] is

perceptually present” (2006b, pp. 413, 414-15; cf. 2006a, p. 26). Another way to put the point would be to say that the phenomenology of a visual episode typically does not fall short of its nature. Seeing a tomato is typically *like* seeing a tomato, and not merely a tomato-part. In this respect, we can say that E, as a normal tomato-sighting, is *like* what it *is*.

But now we seem to have a problem. On the one hand, E is like what it *is*—the seeing of a tomato. On the other hand, E is like what it *is not*—the seeing of a mere tomato-part. How can this be? How can E be like what it is *and* like what it is not? That perceptual experience typically *is* both of these ways is what Noë calls its “two-dimensional character” (2005, p. 235) and he calls the puzzle to which it gives rise “the problem of perceptual presence” (2004, pp. 59ff.; 2006b, pp. 413-14). I agree with Noë that perceptual two-dimensionality is a phenomenon to which any adequate theory of perception must do justice. The question is how.

On Noë’s view, the two-dimensionality of perception provides strong support for the “sensorimotor” or “enactive” approach to perception, according to which perceptual consciousness consists in present sensory stimulation *plus* a perceiver’s practical knowledge of how sensory stimulation varies with bodily movement. Indeed, two-dimensionality *does* seem to pose a problem for orthodox views of perception, which take the phenomenology of a perceptual episode to be determined primarily by how the episode represents the world to be.¹ Moreover, I think that Noë is right that his composite view of perceptual consciousness opens the door to an account of perceptual two-dimensionality.

But he is wrong to think that this gives us reason to accept the sensorimotor approach, for there is an alternative that yields an equally elegant account of perceptual two-dimensionality. A central aim of this paper is to show that a *naïve realist* approach to perception that takes the character of perceptual consciousness to be determined *nonrepresentationally* by the objects of perception can neatly handle this phenomenological puzzle. Noë, on the other hand, apparently dismisses this possibility altogether.ⁱⁱ

However, naïve realism is not just an alternative to the sensorimotor approach: naïve realism is to be *preferred*. Noë and I agree that a theory of perception should do justice to *both* perceptual two-dimensionality *and* the direct realist idea that what is given in perception are ordinary spatiotemporal particulars such as tomatoes and baseball games. Thus, Noë has made a point of arguing for the compatibility of the sensorimotor approach with direct realism (e.g., 2005). But this paper examines his arguments and finds them wanting; there is good reason to think that, unlike naïve realism, the sensorimotor approach cannot accommodate the idea that what is given in perception are garden-variety particulars. The result is that, if a theory of perception should do justice to direct realism and perceptual two-dimensionality, this paper provides strong considerations in favor of naïve realism.

The paper is in three parts. In the first part, I sketch Noë's sensorimotor account of perceptual two-dimensionality. In the second part, I consider his arguments for the compatibility of the sensorimotor approach with direct realism

and argue that this ostensible compatibility is illusory. In the third part, I sketch a naïve realist approach to perception that neatly accounts for perceptual two-dimensionality.

1. The Sensorimotor Approach

Noë's account begins with an instructive phenomenological insight. As he sees it,

[v]isual theory has tended to take as its starting point a way of thinking about seeing according to which visual experiences are like snapshots. The idea is that visual experiences represent the world the way pictures do—all at once, in sharp focus, from the center out to the periphery. (2006b, p. 419)

The problem with this view, however, is that it

...is no part of ordinary perceptual phenomenology.... Consider your current visual experience of, say, the view out of your window. You no doubt have a sense of the scene outside as dense and rich in detail. If you pause to reflect, however, you will notice it is not the case that it seems to you, *now*, as if all that detail is seen by you all at once, in an instant, in sharp focus and high resolution. (2006b, p. 421)

This seems incontestable. What Noë calls the “snapshot model” of visual experience is clearly inadequate.ⁱⁱⁱ His counterproposal is that, “[p]henomenologically, the world is given” to us in perception not immediately, but “*as available*.” “The presence of the detailed environment—of the occluded parts of the tomato...—consists, then, not of our feeling of immediate contact with those features, but of our feeling of access to those bits of detail” (2006b, p. 422). Noë then claims that the

...basis of our feeling of access is our possession of the skills needed actually to reach out and grasp the relevant details....

Familiarity with the ways sensory stimulation changes as we move is the ground of our perceptual access.... The presence of the tomato to me as a voluminous whole consists in my knowledge of the sensory effects of my movements in relation to the tomato.

(2006b, p. 423)

The idea seems to be that *present* sensory stimulation explains the first aspect of perceptual two-dimensionality, on which seeing the tomato is *like* seeing a tomato-part. (After all, seeing a tomato typically involves a pattern of sensory stimulation that *could have been* caused by an appropriately positioned tomato-part.) What explains the second aspect of perceptual two-dimensionality, on which seeing the tomato is *like* seeing a tomato, is then present sensory stimulation *plus* the perceiver’s *practical knowledge* of the way *future* sensory stimulation is contingent on hypothetical courses of action. In other words,

according to Noë, it perceptually seems to me that I am seeing a tomato, not a mere tomato-part, because over and above present sensory stimulation, which constitutes my current perspective on the tomato, I have a sense of being able to gain access to the tomato's presently occluded parts by moving my body in certain ways.^{iv}

The important point here is that Noë's account gives explanatory priority to the first aspect of two-dimensionality, on which seeing the tomato is *like* seeing a tomato-part. The second aspect is explained in terms of the first *plus* what it is like to have a certain sensorimotor understanding. This strategy results from what seems to be an essential feature of any sensorimotor approach to perception—namely, the view that the perceptual relation is *strictly speaking constituted* by occurrent sensory stimulation.^v Thus, the fact that light reflected by the far side of a tomato typically fails to affect your optic nerve leads Noë to claim that “[w]hen you see a tomato, you only see, *strictly speaking*, the visible face of the tomato” (2006b, p. 414, my emphasis). More generally: “It is a basic fact about perception that opaque, solid objects, when seen, have visible and invisible parts.... From a given position, you can only see part of the surface of an object” (2004, p. 75).^{vi} Given this view about what is strictly speaking seen, the first aspect of two-dimensionality needs no further explanation and the problem of perceptual presence becomes the problem of how visual phenomenology could outstrip what is strictly speaking perceived—namely, the surface or face of the object—to embrace the object *per se* (2006a, p. 26). Again, Noë's view is that the phenomenology of a tomato-sighting typically

outstrips what is strictly speaking perceived because you have a specifically perceptual sense of being able to *alter* in familiar ways *what* you strictly speaking perceive by moving your body.^{vii}

Now, any restriction of what we strictly speaking see to surfaces of objects should give us pause. Noë recognizes this, but he argues that his view remains compatible with direct realism:

The sense-datum theorist was right to this extent: perceptual access to the world is mediated by how things sensibly appear. But this is compatible with direct perception.... The status of the claim that perception is mediated is exemplified by the fact that you can't see the peach from all sides at once. I can hold you, but I can't hold you by holding every single part of you. I can see you, by seeing your surface. You and the world can be available to me thanks to my sensorimotor understanding of the way my contact with you is a kind of contact with the world that is *beyond view*.
(2005, p. 243)

Thus, even if what I see, strictly speaking, is merely the surface of the tomato, this is a way of seeing the tomato itself. Just as holding your hand is a way of holding you, seeing your surface is a way of seeing you.

It is important to understand just how this is supposed to amount to direct realism. After all, the notion of "direct perception" is notoriously imprecise. But Noë's view seems to be that perception is "direct" so long as it is not the

case that perceivers are perceptually aware of ordinary objects such as couches in virtue of being aware of some kind of *intermediary* (e.g., 2002a; 2002d, pp. 57-62). Just what makes something an “intermediary” in the relevant sense is not, to my knowledge, addressed in Noë’s published work. Yet his assertion of compatibility with direct realism appears to amount to the claim that the sensorimotor approach does not require appeal to anything that *could* reasonably be taken for an intermediary (e.g., 2002d, p. 61). This is the import of the notion of *seeing surfaces*: if what is given or strictly speaking perceived in a tomato-sighting is the surface of the tomato, then perceptual contact with the tomato is not mediated by an intermediary, since the surface of the tomato is *part* of the tomato.

2. Criticism

Mention of tomatoes and tomato-parts recalls Thompson Clarke’s classic 1965 paper, “Seeing Surfaces and Physical Objects.” In this paper, Clarke employs the example of seeing a tomato to examine what he calls the “How Much” or “*HM* fact:” “that normally we can see no more of a physical object than part of its surface” (1965, p. 99). Clarke argues that the “*HM* fact” is not a fact at all: what we see under normal circumstances is not plausibly tomato-parts or tomato-surfaces, but *tomatoes*, full stop. Clarke’s view thus draws attention to the second aspect of perceptual two-dimensionality. Indeed, Noë mentions Clarke, along with P. F. Strawson, as a philosopher who insists on this second aspect (2006b, p. 413). At the same time, however, Noë clearly

endorses the *HM* fact (what we see of the tomato is strictly speaking only its surface), but he does not explicitly consider Clarke's principal argument against it. No matter: in what follows, I show that the strategy that Clarke employs against the *HM* fact counts decisively against Noë's attempt to reconcile the sensorimotor view with direct realism.

Clarke's argument against the *HM* fact is rather involved, and I want to concentrate on an idea that comes at the end of his paper and that he takes to be the critical point (1965, p. 114). Essentially, Clarke challenges the *HM*-theorist to say exactly *how much* of the object we see in seeing its surface. The difficulty is that there seems to be no non-arbitrary way to answer this question.^{viii}

Consider what seems to be the most obvious proposal: the surface of the tomato is that part of the tomato that is causally responsible for the sensory stimulus, *S*. Well, just *how much* of the tomato is thus responsible? This should strike you as an odd question. Here are two parallel cases. First, a baseball shatters a window and someone asks: but *how much* of the baseball did this? Second, an earthquake wrecks a house and someone asks: but *how much* of the earthquake did this? These questions are, as they stand, perverse. This is because we do not without special reason attribute causal responsibility to *parts* of objects or events; rather, we would say that the agents of destruction are the baseball and the earthquake, not some baseball-parts and earthquake-parts. Similarly, in the perceptual case, we should say that what is causally responsible for *S* is the full-blown *tomato*, absent special reason to do otherwise. Now, it

seems to me that such special reason is lacking, but the proponent of the *HM* fact will most probably demur. Presumably, she will point out that vision scientists focus on surfaces, because this is where the physical process of light reflection actually takes place.^x As J. J. Gibson puts it: “The surface is where most of the action is” (1979, p. 23). But does this really give us reason to treat only part of the tomato as causally responsible for S? The relevant principle would be something like this:

AP (Action Principle): O is causally responsible for the sensory stimulus, S, if and only if O consists to at least a very high degree of bits of matter involved in the physical process of reflecting the light that is the proximate cause of S.

The trouble is that we have no reason to accept AP or anything like it. The fact that the tomato consists only in small part of bits of matter involved in the process of reflecting the light that is the proximate cause of S does not give us reason to attribute causal responsibility for S only to *part* of the tomato. It is true that the tomato reflects light as it does in virtue of its surface properties and that these are the aspects of the tomato on which the vision scientist will concentrate. At best, however, this gives us reason to say that it is in virtue of possessing certain surface properties that the tomato causes S. Parallel considerations apply to the case of the earthquake. The house is wrecked in virtue of features of the earthquake that are local to the house. This is “where the action is,” and these are the features to study if you want to understand *how* the earthquake wrecked the house. However, none of this suggests that what

caused the wreckage, strictly speaking, was *part* of the earthquake; at best, it means that it is in virtue of possessing certain local properties that the earthquake caused the wreckage. Again, we need special reason to attribute causal responsibility to parts of objects or events, and there is no such reason here. *Pace* the proponent of the *HM* fact, the right thing to say is that the *tomato* causes the sensory stimulus *S*. (Moreover, this means that, if events are individuated by their causes, then the presence of the (undivided) tomato turns out to be causally *necessary* for *S*.)

An appeal to causal responsibility for the sensory stimulus thus appears to be incapable of individuating anything resembling a tomato “surface,” and it is hard to see how any method could succeed where this one fails. After all, it seems to be by picturing *S* as *caused by* light reflected by some *part* of the tomato that we arrive at the idea that only part of the tomato is strictly speaking seen. Nonetheless, there is at least one more proposal worth considering: perhaps the surface of the tomato is to be individuated *phenomenologically*.^x The thought is that, because only part of the tomato makes a contribution to determining what my current visual experience is like, only part of the tomato is strictly speaking seen. The relevant principle would be something like this:

PP (Phenomenological Principle): *O* is strictly speaking perceived in undergoing experience *E* if and only if *O*'s absence would have made a difference to core phenomenological features of *E*.

But **PP** is far too weak to individuate anything resembling the surface of the tomato. For example, suppose that the tomato lies on a table whose legs are

out of sight: if cutting away the legs would have altered core phenomenological features of the experience, then PP counts the legs as strictly speaking perceived. (So, too, the backside of the tomato, since, in its absence, the tomato falls over.) Thus, unlike the *HM* fact, which is too restrictive in insisting that we only ever see the surfaces of objects, PP is far too permissive. And it is not at all clear how one might plausibly strengthen it to bring it in line with the *HM* fact.

The foregoing considerations strongly suggest that it is an illusion that there is some *part* of the object—its so-called “surface”—that constitutes what is directly given in visual experience. In fact, I think that a bit of reflection shows that the idea that seeing objects is seeing surfaces depends on a crucial conflation. Go ahead: *try* to attend to the surface of an object. Just what happens? It seems that in doing this we inevitably attend to a particular *look* that the object happens to have—in the case of a tomato, a look that it has in common with an appropriately positioned tomato-part—and *not* to some *part* of the object itself.^{xi} This, I think, is the thrust of Clarke’s argument: saying, “What we see of the tomato is *really* just its surface,” amounts to saying, “All that we really encounter in experience are *looks* or *appearances*,” which are, despite what we *wanted* to say in using the word ‘surface’, not even *parts* of objects. In this respect, the so-called “surface” floats free of the particular object to which it ostensibly belonged. The very same “surface” could have belonged to a different object. But now Noë’s analogy between seeing your “surface” and holding your hand breaks down. In holding your hand, I am holding *part* of you.

But in seeing your so-called “surface” I am *not* seeing your “unoccluded parts;” I am seeing a look or appearance that you happen to have, and looks or appearances are not *parts* of objects, not even *unoccluded* parts.

At this point, then, the argument for the compatibility of the sensorimotor approach with direct realism discussed at the end of the last section falls apart. This argument hinges on the idea that the surface of an object does not constitute a perceptual intermediary because the surface is *part* of the object itself. But there is no nonarbitrary way to say what portion of the object plays the role of this supposed mediating non-intermediary. Instead, it seems that in talking of “surfaces” we were all along really talking of looks or appearances. And since looks or appearances are not parts of objects, there is no longer any guarantee that Noë’s so-called “surfaces” are not perceptual intermediaries.

However, as Noë would be quick to point out, even if the notion of “seeing surfaces” is unserviceable, looks or appearances are nonetheless genuine *properties* of objects:

[L]ooks are not mental entities. Looks are objective, environmental properties. They are relational, to be sure. But they are not relations between objects and the interior, sensational effects in us. Rather, they are relations among objects, the location of the perceiver’s body, and illumination. (2004, p. 85)^{xii}

Indeed, it seems that *this* is the real ground for his claim that direct realism is compatible with the view that “perceptual access to the world is mediated by

how things sensibly appear” (2005, p. 243). “Seeing surfaces” aside, Noë’s idea is that we perceptually encounter objects *by* encountering particular properties that they genuinely have—namely, *sensible appearances*. As he puts it:

“Perception is a way of finding out how things are from an exploration of how they appear. In this sense, appearances are perceptually basic” (2004, p. 166).

“We see things by seeing how they look,” and we manage this because how things look is determined by how they are (2004, p. 165).^{xiii}

But this should not satisfy us. That appearances are real properties of objects means only that we cannot come into contact with appearances without coming into perceptual contact with objects. By itself, this does not substantiate the claim that coming into contact with appearances is our way, or even a way, of coming into perceptual contact with objects. It is perfectly compatible with the reality of appearances that this should not be so, but that contact with objects rather than appearances should have explanatory priority. Indeed, the most natural view, and the view most consonant with direct realism, seems to be that whenever we encounter appearances we do so *by perceptually encountering objects*, not the other way around. Here are two points in favor of this claim.

First, according to direct realism, perceptual awareness is first and foremost of *particular* objects. On the other hand, looks or appearances are *general* properties: they can be shared by different things. This makes it hard to see how coming into contact with looks or appearances could be the means by which we come into perceptual contact with particular objects. How can seeing

how you look, as such, be a way of seeing see you, if other things can look as you do? And it will not help to note that coming into contact with an appearance is always coming into contact with a particular instance of it. This is just another way of saying that appearances are real properties of things. The question is: how could coming into contact with such a general property be the *means* by which I come into perceptual contact with a particular that instantiates it?^{xiv}

Second, Noë himself urges us to understand perceivings “on the model of touchings” (2005, p. 255). This is a fine metaphor for the directness of perception precisely because touching an object involves making unmediated contact with it. Note, however, that I cannot touch an object without touching something identical with it or with one of its parts. But appearances are, again, identical neither with objects nor with any of their parts. True, appearances *belong* to objects (objects *have* appearances) and parts *belong* to objects (objects *have* parts), but *not in the same way*. In particular, appearances are not touchable, but parts are. So, coming into contact with appearances cannot be a way of achieving perceptual contact with objects if this contact is conceived on the model of touching. I can touch you by touching your hand, and I can see you by seeing your hand, but I cannot see you simply by seeing how you look. To say otherwise is to conflate perceiving *appearances* of objects (a kind of property) with perceiving *parts* of objects, and now we are back to the idea of “seeing surfaces.”^{xv} Once we finally reject this mythical conflation *tout court*, it seems that there is simply no way to retain the idea that direct perceptual access to particular objects is *mediated* by how they sensibly appear.

In this respect, Noë's view threatens to collapse into a form of *phenomenalism*: what is given in perceptual experience is merely mind-dependent sensory stimulation or appearance, and the *sense* that we are encountering a world of mind-independent objects is reconstructed from our sense of being able to alter the course of experience in predictable ways. In its essentials, Noë's view closely resembles the radical empiricist pragmatism that C. I. Lewis developed earlier in the 20th century, and there is a remarkable parallel between Noë's insistence on direct realism and Lewis's reply to the charge of phenomenalism:

It is still possible... to affirm that the content of presentation [occurrent sensory appearance] is an authentic part or aspect or perspective which is ingredient in the objective reality known. Such language is figurative, when measured against the ordinary meaning of 'part'.... But the view thus figuratively expressed may be consistently and literally correct—provided one is prepared to accept the implications that an elliptical appearance may be genuine ingredient of a real round penny.... (Lewis 1946, p. 187n)

Lewis would thus deny that what is strictly speaking perceived is a *part* or *bit* of the object; he would not say, for instance, that we see only tomato-*surfaces*. Instead, he would say that we see the ways a tomato *looks*, and that these looks are "part" of the tomato in virtue of being properties of it. Thus, Lewis rejects the conflation implicit in the notion of "seeing surfaces" and accepts that we

encounter objects by encountering their properties. Again, I take this view to be obviously incorrect (which is not to say it is undeserving of detailed consideration): after all, how can I perceptually encounter an object without perceptually encountering anything identifiable with it or with any of its parts? At any rate, the point is that Noë's sensorimotor approach seems to collapse into a view virtually indistinguishable from Lewis's, and that this constitutes a very serious objection to Noë's claim that his view is compatible with direct realism. In general, it is very difficult to see how a sensorimotor approach could avoid this result.

3. A Naïve Realist Counterproposal

One of Noë's main reasons for endorsing the sensorimotor view is that it offers a way to account for perceptual two-dimensionality. He believes that perceptual two-dimensionality gives us reason to accept a "two-step" view of perception on which we perceptually encounter objects by encountering appearances.^{xvi} Again, I think that Noë is right that perceptual two-dimensionality is a phenomenon to which any adequate account of perception must do justice. However, in the remainder of this paper, I show that he is wrong that a view that takes our perceptual encounter with objects to be unmediated by appearances lacks the resources to do this.

As I understand it, *naïve realism* is the view that to perceive is to stand in an unanalyzable, nonrepresentational, yet cognitively significant relationship to objects and events such as tomatoes and baseball games.^{xvii} Thus, there can be

no question that naïve realism does justice to the direct realist idea that what is given in perception are garden-variety particulars of the kind that we ordinarily take ourselves to perceive. My preferred articulation of naïve realism takes the primary cognitive significance of perception to consist in the fact that perceptual relations are essentially and unanalyzably *knowledgeable perspectives on the world*, which is *not* to say that perceiving is *itself* knowing. Rather, the idea is this:

If S perceives an object, O, then there is some property, F, such that O is perceptibly F and S perceives of O that it is F, and thus, knows of O that it is F.

Focusing on the case of vision, the idea is, first, that some features of objects are *visible features*, and second, that, if S sees O, there must be some F that is a visible feature of O such that S *visually recognizes* of O that it is F, and so, *knows* of O that it is F. Just what S can know about an object by seeing it therefore depends, first, on the object's visible features, and second, on S's visual recognitional capacities.

It is helpful to consider some examples. I enter the gallery and see the painting. If I see the painting, then I know something about it. Perhaps I can't see that it's a Vermeer, but I must know *something* about it on the basis of seeing it—for instance, that it's definitely not a Cézanne, or that it's a portrait, or even just that it's a painting or rectangular or that this shade is brighter than that one. Moreover, it seems that there's almost always something more that I *could*

know about the painting strictly on the basis of seeing it; thus, it is only after studying it closely over time that I come to know it well. And sometimes even when a painting is right before my eyes I don't see it at all. It's within my visual field, it's present to me, I'm sensorily stimulated by it, but I don't see it. In this case, there's no property F such that I see of the painting that it is F. And so I don't have any current perceptual knowledge about the painting. (This does not rule out the possibility that the unseen painting could later rise to consciousness, allowing me to "see" it in memory.)

Now, what I'm capable of knowing about an object depends on what concepts I possess. But what I'm capable of knowing about an object *just by perceiving it* additionally depends on my *recognitional capacities*. Paul may have the concept *painting by Vermeer*, but he may not know a Vermeer when he sees one. Perhaps he can't tell a Vermeer from a Cézanne or a painting from a print. Presumably, however, if Paula has the capacity to know a Vermeer when she sees one, then her knowledge that the painting on the wall is a Vermeer is *exhaustively explained by* her seeing it. There is simply no room left to wonder how she could know this. (This is not to say that you couldn't wonder at Paula's capacity to visually distinguish a genuine Vermeer from a competent forgery.) Finally, it seems that recognitional capacities are strongly *occasion-sensitive*. Under normal circumstances, I know a tomato when I see one. But when there are tomato-façades around, I might no longer possess this visual recognitional capacity, though I might think that I do. (Similarly, when a Van Meegeren forgery

is in the neighborhood, Paula may no longer know a Vermeer when she sees one, though she may think that she does.)

The objective counterpart to the idea of a visual recognitional capacity is the idea of a *visible feature*. What we are capable of knowing about objects and events by seeing them is what visible features they possess. Visual recognitional capacities are capacities for recognizing visible features (*mutatis mutandis* for other sensory modalities). But what is the difference between a feature simpliciter and a *visible* feature? Well, being a tomato is in every context a feature of a tomato. On the other hand, being a tomato is *not* in every context a *visible* feature of a tomato. If there are tomato-façades in the area, then being a tomato may not be a visible feature of local tomatoes. Visible features are thus a particular *kind* of feature, and they are no less real than other kinds of features. Being visibly a tomato is a perfectly real feature of most tomatoes in most circumstances. This is just to say that, in most circumstances, we can have visual recognitional capacities for tomatoes, though, of course, we may not. In any case, visible features, like visual recognitional capacities, are strongly occasion-sensitive. There is no such thing as a context-invariant visual recognitional capacity for tomatoes, and there is no such thing as the context-invariant feature of being visibly a tomato.^{xviii}

Now consider more closely the case of the tomato-façade. Being a tomato is in most contexts a visible feature of tomatoes, but being a tomato is *never* a visible feature of a tomato-façade. On the other hand, tomato-façades have the visible feature of *looking like* tomatoes. (Of course, this is also a visible

feature of most tomatoes. Most tomatoes look like what they are.) This suggests that there are *two kinds of visible feature* (VF):

- 1) the VF of being F; and
- 2) the VF of looking F.

Now, if a tomato can fail to have the VF of being a tomato, then it does not follow from something's being F that it has the VF of being F. But if something has the visible feature of being a tomato, then it *is* a tomato. In other words, it follows from something's having the VF of being F that it *is* F. Furthermore, if a tomato-façade can have the VF of looking like a tomato without being a tomato, then it does not follow from something's having the VF of looking F that it has the VF of being F, and so, *is* F. On the other hand, if a tomato has the VF of being a tomato, then it presumably also has the VF of looking like a tomato. Generally, if something has the VF of being F, then it also has the VF of looking F. These points can be summarized as follows:

The Logic of Visible Features

For any object, O, and property, F:

It is not legitimate to conclude from O's being (an) F that it has the VF of being (an) F.

O has the VF of being (an) F. \supset O is (an) F.

O has the VF of being (an) F. \supset O has the VF of looking (like) (an) F.

It is not legitimate to conclude from O's having the VF of looking (like) (an) F that O has the VF of being (an) F.

How does perceptual phenomenology fit into this picture? First, what a perceptual episode is like is a matter of how things perceptually appear; what an episode of seeing is like depends on how things look. Second, what it is like to perceive an object plausibly depends on what I *notice* in perceiving it. The fact that a painting looks like a Vermeer will not contribute to determining what my experience is like unless, in seeing it, I notice or recognize that the painting looks this way. In other words, perceptual phenomenology seems to depend on the recognition of appearances.^{xix} More strongly, however, I want to suggest that the phenomenology of perception *is* the phenomenology of appearance-recognition. What it is like to perceive *just is* what it is like to *acquire knowledge of appearances by perceiving*; what it is like to see an object *just is* what it is like to recognize it to look whatever ways one recognizes it to look in seeing it. This view requires development and defense, but plausibility suffices for present purposes. To this end, it is worth taking a moment to consider an obvious objection.

Perceptual experience, particularly visual experience, is notoriously rich in detail. This is central to the phenomenology of most visual episodes. By contrast, it seems that perceptual knowledge of appearances is extremely coarse-grained. For instance, in looking out my window, I might come to know that the flowerbed looks trampled, but such knowledge falls far short of capturing the rich detail evident in my experience, and this might seem to tell against the identification of perceptual phenomenology with the phenomenology

of appearance-recognition. However, this objection relies on a mischaracterization of perceptual knowledge. When I look out at the scene before me, I actually come to know a great deal about how things look. Whatever detail is evident in my experience is ipso facto detail that I *notice*. That I cannot adequately *describe* this detail does not prevent me from *registering* it, and knowledgeably so. Thus, in looking out on the yard, I not only come to know that the flowerbed looks trampled, but that the flowers look *just so*, that the lawn looks *just so*, and so forth. (That I fail to retain much of this knowledge when I turn away from the scene is only a failure of *memory*.) Arguably, then, a wide variety of perceptual recognitional capacities are continually operative during the course of perceptual experience, and it is at least plausible that what a particular perceptual episode is like *just is* what it is like for the perceiver to recognize or notice the appearances that she does.

We are now in a position to account for perceptual two-dimensionality. In ordinary circumstances, a tomato has the visible feature of *being* a tomato. Typically, tomatoes are *visibly* tomatoes. Moreover, you typically know a tomato when you see one—you typically possess this visual recognitional capacity. Now, any tomato that has the visible feature of *being* a tomato (as opposed to a tomato-part) *also* has the visible feature of *looking* like a tomato (as opposed to a tomato-part). Anything that is visibly a full-blown tomato is also visibly possessed of the *look* of a full-blown tomato. Thus, seeing something that is *visibly* a tomato is necessarily *like* seeing a tomato, *provided that you have the relevant visual recognitional capacity*—that is, provide that you know a tomato-

look when you see one. (It seems that anyone that knows a tomato by sight necessarily knows a tomato-look by sight; in fact, the former seems sufficient *and necessary* for the latter.) In sum, what primarily explains the second aspect of perceptual two-dimensionality, on which seeing an object is *like* what it *is*, is: (a) that many objects are *visibly* the kinds of objects they are, and that, in virtue of being thus, they visibly have the *look* of those very objects; and (b) our various capacities to know how things look by looking at them.

What about the first aspect of two-dimensionality? How can seeing a tomato be *like* seeing a tomato-part? Typically, a tomato not only visibly *is* a tomato and has the *look* of a tomato, but it also visibly has the look of an appropriately positioned tomato-part; in other words, it has the visible feature of looking like a tomato-part. Typically, then, seeing a tomato will be like seeing a tomato-part provided I know such a look when I see it. Furthermore, this is not a look the tomato has in virtue of visibly *being* a tomato-part (after all, it's a full-blown *tomato*). So, what explains this potentially misleading look? Simply put, such is vision, and such are tomatoes. Or, more precisely, as Bill Brewer writes, "from various points of view, and in various circumstances of perception, physical objects [such as tomatoes] have visually relevant similarities with paradigms of various kinds of...things," such as tomato-parts, where the "visually relevant similarities are identities in such things as, the way in which light is reflected from the objects in question, in the given circumstances, and propagated to the subject's viewpoint" (2006b, pp. 9-10). Notice, however, that while the visually relevant similarities between tomatoes and tomato-parts can

explain why a tomato typically looks like what it is not—namely, a mere tomato-part—they *cannot* explain why a tomato typically looks like *what it is*. Instead, what explains a tomato’s looking like a tomato is the fact that the tomato is *visibly* what it is, and that it therefore *looks* just that way. No further explanation is needed.

In conclusion, as I have presented it, naïve realism takes the visibility of objects to be explanatorily fundamental. By contrast, Noë accounts for the visibility of objects by reconstructing our *sense* of their visibility in terms of present sensory stimulation or appearance plus the feeling of sensorimotor access. Despite his direct realist ambitions, crystallized in the thought that seeing your “surface” is a way of seeing you, Noë’s view appears to collapse into a form of phenomenalism. Fortunately, however, naïve realism yields an alternative and plausible account of perceptual two-dimensionality. Lastly, to endorse naïve realism is not to deny the importance of sensorimotor capacities for perception. On the contrary, I think there is very good reason to believe that sensorimotor capacities are a necessary enabling condition for the possession of perceptual recognitional capacities.^{xx} But this is not to say that the operation of sensorimotor capacities is in any way constitutive of perceiving. In fact, as I see it, the fundamental error of the sensorimotor view is to mistake this necessary enabling condition of perceiving for something constitutive of it.^{xxi, xxii}

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ⁱ On the orthodox view, what makes undergoing a certain perceptual episode *like* seeing a tomato is that the episode visually represents there to be a *tomato* before the perceiver. Thus, if undergoing a perceptual episode is to be like seeing a tomato *and* like seeing a mere tomato-part, the episode must represent the very same object *simultaneously* as a tomato *and* as a mere tomato-part. But this is impossible, since whatever is a tomato is *ipso facto* not a mere tomato-part, and vice-versa. Of course, this sort of consideration might well lead the proponent of the orthodox view to reject perceptual two-dimensionality. (Indeed, for a discussion of various attempts to reject perceptual two-dimensionality, see Noë, 2005, pp. 236-41. Also see Siewert, 2006, for some extended skeptical reflections on the very idea of perceptual two-dimensionality.) On the other hand, my purpose here is not to argue for the existence of perceptual two-dimensionality, which I regard as phenomenologically obvious, but to reflect on how best to account for it.

ⁱⁱ See §3 below, especially note 16, and Noë, 2005, p. 258.

ⁱⁱⁱ I think this primarily on the basis of attention to the character of my own visual experience, and I think that Noë's strongest argument against the snapshot conception involves just such an appeal to introspection. (See Noë (2001, pp. 48-50; 2002d, pp. 4-6; 2005, pp. 248-9), Noë and O'Regan (2000, p. 6; 2001, pp. 961-2) and Noë, Pessoa, and Thompson, 2000, pp. 102-4.) On the other hand, Noë at the same time frequently appeals to phenomena such as change blindness as empirical evidence for rejecting the snapshot conception. This strategy is less compelling (see Prinz, 2006, pp. 11-13).

^{iv} As stated, however, this is not a perfect representation of Noë's current view; it is much closer to the view presented by Noë and O'Regan (2001). Nonetheless, for the purposes of this paper, this difference can be ignored. Let me explain. An obvious challenge for the view that I have presented is the so-called "explanatory gap:" how exactly is mere sensory stimulation, even if married to knowledge of "patterns of change" in sensory stimulation, supposed to explain the phenomenological features of an experience (Noë, 2004, p. 228)? Apparently motivated by this objection, Noë revised his earlier view so as "to take a *little bit* of consciousness for granted" (2004, p. 230). Rather than beginning with raw "sensory *stimulation*," he now begins with "sensation or appearance" (2004, p. 228). Presumably the idea is that, unlike the mere stimulation of sensory organs, a sensation is a kind of qualitative consciousness—namely, an appearance. Thus, beginning with sensation or appearance is a matter of *bypassing* the explanatory gap and starting with something whose phenomenological import is clear. (Cf. 2002c, p. 74: "The qualitative character of experience... depends on two factors. First, it depends on the qualities that we experience (e.g. looks, sounds, etc.). This is a representational feature. Second it depends on the character of the activity in which the temporally extended activity may consist.") However, despite this modification, Noë continues in recent work to speak of knowledge of sensorimotor contingencies as knowledge of "the ways sensory stimulation changes as we move" (2006b, p. 423),

though he also describes it as knowledge of, for instance, “*how* [an object’s] look [or visual appearance] changes as you move” (2006b, p. 426). (For an insightful discussion of these issues that identifies them as the source of a deep tension in Noë’s view, see Clark (2006).) Therefore, for the purpose of this paper, I will for the most part ignore this difference between Noë’s earlier view and his current view; i.e., I will generally ignore the question of the relationship between sensory stimulation and sensation/appearance—the explanatory gap—and allow that we can move unproblematically between talk of sensory stimulation and talk of sensation/appearance. (After all, Noë frequently allows himself to do just this.) Moreover, I will ignore what seems to be a second explanatory gap for the sensorimotor view: the gap between knowledge of sensorimotor contingencies and perceptual phenomenology. (This second gap was pointed out to me by an anonymous referee at *Pacific Philosophical Quarterly*.) According to Noë, knowledge of sensorimotor contingencies contributes to perceptual phenomenology in being a particular kind of practical knowledge or “comfortable mastery” (2006b, p. 423). One might wonder how this could be so. Perhaps the idea is that such knowing has a specifically perceptual feel in virtue of the fact that a sense of mastery over particular sensorimotor contingencies is something we “experience” only in the face of (suitably familiar) sensory stimulation. I am uncertain how to adjudicate this issue. In the end, however, I want to argue that even if *all* of these troublesome features of Noë’s view(s) can be resolved, the sensorimotor view *still* falls short of direct realism.

^v This is true even if occurrent sensory stimulation only counts as constituting a *perceptual* relation to the object if this stimulation gives rise to at least some sensorimotor expectancies. However, Noë sometimes makes the stronger claim that even *basic* perceptual appearances—such as looking like a mere tomato-part—are constituted by occurrent sensory stimulation *plus* certain very basic sensorimotor expectancies (2004, p. 89). But it is hard to see how this constitutive claim could avoid reintroducing the explanatory gap that Noë seems to want to bypass in his more recent work (cf. Clark 2006, p. 3; Jacob 2006, pp. 9-10; Noë 2004, pp. 228ff.; and the previous note).

^{vi} The idea that what is strictly speaking perceived in an ordinary object-sighting is merely the visible “bit,” “surface,” or “part” of the object is repeated frequently throughout Noë’s work, usually without argument. For instance, there is a detailed characterization of the problem of perceptual presence in terms of seen and unseen parts at Noë, 2004, pp. 59-65. For other characterizations of object perception in terms of parts perceived and unperceived, see Noë (2001, p. 51; 2002d, pp. 8-11; 2004, pp. 76-7; 2005, pp. 242-3, 246-9, 257-8; 2006a, pp. 26, 28-9; 2006b, pp. 413-15, 418, 422-3) and Noë and O’Regan (2000, pp. 5-6; 2001, pp. 948, 963).

^{vii} Here I have followed Noë in innocently oversimplifying his view. He actually thinks that what I strictly speaking perceive is usually only *part* of the near or facing surface of

the tomato. The idea is that, in looking at the tomato, I “don’t visually experience the *whole* of the facing side...,” since I “cannot simultaneously attend to every spot on [its] facing surface” (2005, p. 248). From the arguments of section two of this paper it should be clear that taking this into account could hardly improve the case for the compatibility of the sensorimotor approach with direct realism. Note, however, that Noë goes on to suggest that this feature of surface-perception actually brings it about that, in a certain sense, “the distinction between the given [what is strictly speaking perceived] and the merely available is erased” (2005, p. 248-9). But this is false. Perhaps the distinction between the given and the merely available is *not neat*, but it is not therefore in any sense *erased*. Indeed, further down the very same page, Noë writes that “objects [such as tomatoes]...transcend what is given”—i.e., they themselves are *not* strictly speaking perceived (2005, p. 249). If this denial is to have any meaning, then there must be something that *is* strictly speaking perceived, even if it is hard to say just what this is. Presumably, in the case of the tomato, it is *some* part of its “visible face” or surface (2006b, p. 414). In the end, the distinction between the given and the merely available is indispensable to Noë’s view, though the arguments in section two of this paper make it clear why he might want to downplay it.

^{viii} In his brief mention of Clarke’s opposition to the *HM* fact, Noë does not address this argument. Instead he considers the proposal—discussed at length by Clarke—that the concept of *seeing* is like the concept of *nibbling* in being a “unit concept.” In this case, just as one nibbles at units of cheese (*pieces* of cheese), but not at cheese-parts (*parts* of pieces of cheese), so, in visually confronting tomatoes, one sees tomato units (*full-blown* tomatoes), not tomato-parts (Clarke, 1965, pp. 105-10). Noë finds these claims “unconvincing:”

Consider that when you nibble a piece of cheese, you really do nibble only a part of the cheese, not the whole of it. If you were to cut off the part you nibbled, you’d be left with an unnibbled piece of cheese. And so, likewise, when you turn the tomato around, you get to see facets of the tomato that had been hidden from view. (2004, p. 76)

But it is not Clarke’s aim to deny what is obvious: that cutting a nibbled piece of cheese in two can leave you with a nibbled piece of cheese and an unnibbled piece of cheese. His point is rather that *it does not follow from this* that the uncut piece of cheese consisted of nibbled and unnibbled parts. Similarly, it does not follow from the fact that some portion of a sighted tomato can be cut away to yield tomato parts seen and unseen that the unutilized tomato consisted of such parts. On the contrary, to take this for granted is just to presuppose the *HM* fact. (This is precisely what Noë does in saying that “when you turn the tomato around, you get to see facets of the tomato that had been hidden from view.” This presupposes that what you were seeing in the first place were just tomato-facets, not the tomato *simpliciter*.) Finally, it is only when conjoined with the “decisive reason for rejecting the ‘*HM* fact’,” discussed on the last

page of Clarke's text and unmentioned by Noë, that the suggestion that *seeing* is a unit concept gains real force. In other words, Noë seems to miss that it is only at the very end of his essay that Clarke engages in a "direct assault on the *HM* fact" (1965, p. 112). On the other hand, this direct assault is my concern in section two of this paper.

^{ix} This strategy is evident in Sorensen, 2008, ch. 2.

^x Thanks to an anonymous referee at *Pacific Philosophical Quarterly* for insisting on the possibility of a phenomenological reply to Clarke's challenge to the *HM* fact.

^{xi} First, in order to counter this phenomenological claim, one would have to specify what part of the object we attend to in attending to its surface, and, again, it is very hard to see how to do this. Second, this is not to deny that there are contexts in which attending to the *surface* of an object is a matter of attending to some *part* of it: e.g., "Look at the surface of that tree trunk," *might* mean: look at its *bark*. What is being denied is just that the visual relation *by itself* individuates parts of objects to which we can then attend.

^{xii} Also see Noë (2002c, pp. 60-2; 2004, pp. 79-86; 2005, pp. 243-5).

^{xiii} Note that, by saying that we see things by seeing how they look, Noë cannot simply mean that, whenever I see an object, O, there is some property, F, such that I see that O looks F or see of O that it looks F. This would just be to say that, *in* seeing objects, we also always see at least one of the ways in which they look, in which case there would be no need to appeal to the reality of looks properties to legitimate a claim to direct realism. Instead, by saying "we see things by seeing how they look," Noë must mean that I see O by seeing F, where F is a looks property actually possessed by O. (Thanks to an anonymous referee at *Pacific Philosophical Quarterly* for suggesting this clarification.)

^{xiv} This point warrants elaboration. Unlike appearances, *instances* of appearances are particulars, so it might seem that the door is open to an explanation of perceptual contact with particular objects in terms of perceptual contact with appearance-instances. (This objection was pressed on me by Mark Kalderon at the 2008 Joint Session of the Aristotelian Society and the Mind Association at the University of Aberdeen.) But an appearance-instance is an appearance (a general property) *as borne by a particular object*. In other words, an appearance-instance is a complex particular that *inherits its particularity from the appearance-bearing object*. (Thus, demonstrative reference to an appearance-instance is parasitic on demonstrative reference to the appearance-bearing object: 'That instance of F-appearance' just means "F-appearance as borne by that object.") The particularity of the object of perception is, in this sense, irreducible. Perceptual contact with a particular object cannot take place *by way of* perceptual contact with some appearance-instance. The correct order of explanation is precisely the opposite. Contact with appearance-instances takes place by way of appropriate contact with particular appearance-bearers. Of course, as mentioned in the previous note, it might be true that, in perceiving an object, I always perceive some way

that it appears, but this just means that, in seeing things, we see how they look, and not, as on Noë's view, "We see things by seeing how they look."

Nevertheless, there is a way to neutralize the objection that I have presented: endorse a version of the so-called "bundle theory" of objects, according to which objects are no more than "bundles" of properties, or, on some versions, property-instances. However, bundle theory is at best false and at worst unintelligible, and Noë gives no indication of subscribing to such a radical metaphysics. As I see it, the problem with bundle theory is that it issues from a misguided skepticism about *substrata*, as if to refuse the reduction of an object to its properties is to endorse the existence of a "something I know not what" in which those properties mysteriously "inhere." On the contrary, in a Fregean vein, I think that the object/property distinction is conceptually basic, and therefore, not a candidate for explanation, which is not to say that it is *mysterious*; rather, it is to say that nothing could be *clearer*. (Of course, the canonical route to bundle theory, à la Hume, is by means of the thought that all that we encounter in experience are qualitatively characterizable impressions, ideas, appearances, or whatnot. This easily leads to the claim that it would be improper to assume the existence of anything *beyond* those qualities encountered in experience, in which case, if it is to be proper to speak of objects, they must be treated as collections or bundles of qualities. Thus, it should be no surprise that a view that treats appearances as perceptually basic should occasion a temptation to bundle theory.)

^{xv} There is a tendency throughout Noë's work to move back and forth between talk of parts and talk of appearance properties (e.g., looks) when discussing the problem of perceptual presence. For instance, compare the passages at Noë (2002b, p. 9; 2005, pp. 242-3, 246-7, 258; 2006b, p. 414).

^{xvi} Hence Noë's characterization of his dispute with John Campbell, who takes a perceptual episode to consist in an unmediated nonrepresentational relation between perceiver and perceived, and thus, rejects the idea that perception is mediated by appearances in any way: "What is at stake in my disagreement with Campbell, really, is a controversy about the character of perceptual phenomenology.... This is the point of my extended discussion...of the two-dimensionality of perceptual content" (2005, p. 258). Noë seems convinced that we must take perceptual contact with objects to be mediated by appearances to do justice to perceptual two-dimensionality. Thus, he does not so much as consider the possibility that a view such as Campbell's might have the resources to do this. As Noë sees it, his disagreement with Campbell *just is* a disagreement about perceptual phenomenology.

^{xvii} Philosophers who have found reason to recommend such a view include J. L. Austin, John Campbell, M. G. F. Martin, Charles Travis, and Bill Brewer. See Austin, 1962; Campbell, 2002; Martin, 2002; Travis, 2004; and Brewer, 2006a, 2006b. I once thought of this view as "nonintentional" rather than merely "nonrepresentational," but, as Maura Tumulty pressed in her comments on an earlier version of this paper: why cede the

notion of intentionality to the representationalist (2007, pp. 5-6)? A similar point was raised by an anonymous referee for *Pacific Philosophical Quarterly*. (For discussion of the possibility of nonrepresentational intentionality, see Leddington, 2008.)

^{xviii} Whether *seeing a tomato* is also occasion-sensitive depends on whether *seeing* or *being a tomato* are occasion-sensitive notions. For considerations that tell in favor of such a view, and for detailed discussion of occasion-sensitivity, see the papers collected in Travis, 2008.

^{xix} This is to deny the supposed distinction between “phenomenal” and “access” consciousness. See Block, 2007.

^{xx} See, for instance, the empirical results discussed in chapter one of Noë (2004).

^{xxi} Similar concerns are raised by Block (2005), Clark (2006), and Prinz (2006).

^{xxii} Earlier versions of this paper were presented at the 2008 Joint Session of the Aristotelian Society and the Mind Association at the University of Aberdeen, the Department of Philosophy at Georgia State University, the 104th Annual Meeting of the Eastern Division of the APA, and the Fall 2006 Meeting of the Kentucky Philosophical Association (KPA). The final version of this paper owes a great deal to feedback I received from audiences on these occasions, and I am particularly grateful to Maura Tumulty and Kevin Scharp for incisive commenting at the APA and KPA meetings, respectively. The ideas developed in this paper have benefited substantially from many conversations, especially with Charles Travis, David Finkelstein, and Tom Ricketts, but also with Mark Kalderon and Fiona Macpherson. S. Brian Hood provided me with valuable comments on a late draft. Finally, a report from an anonymous referee at *Pacific Philosophical Quarterly* greatly helped me to clarify some of the core arguments of this paper.

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