

## *Perceptual Content and Lucid Looks*

**Abstract:** A common argument for perceptual representational content starts from how in experience things look (“perceptual looks”). However, recently anti-representationalists have challenged the idea that perceptual looks can be associated with representation (Breckenridge 2007; Travis 2004, 2013). In this paper I defend the representationalist from these arguments. As I describe, the debate about perceptual looks turns on an issue of self-knowledge: the way the character of experience is subjectively available. On this issue, I argue for a view of experiential self-knowledge that supports the association between perceptual looks and representational content.

**Keywords:** Perceptual Content; Self-Knowledge; Transparency; Perceptual Looks

[there is] something at the heart of the problem [of perception], something which is rarely made fully articulate in discussion of it [...] that the more fundamental problem here is one concerning our knowledge of our own minds.

M.G.F. Martin 2000, p. 198

Consider your current visual experience. There are certain ways things look. The cup looks reddish in the late afternoon sun. The book looks to be located under the stack of exams. Judging from the brilliant display of colors in the sky, it looks like it might be raining later. Call these types of propositions, i.e. descriptions of how things look visually, “looks”-sentences.<sup>1</sup>

Traditionally, philosophers have taken “looks”-sentences as being importantly revealing of the nature of perceptual experience.<sup>2</sup> For example, it has been argued that sentences like “*a* looks *F*”, when true of appropriate visual experiences, can provide the basis for arguments that attribute to experience representational content.<sup>3</sup> On such arguments, the ways things look in an experience—the cup looking reddish, say—are best explained in terms of ways the experience *represents* the perceptible world as being. Accordingly, some philosophers take certain “looks”-sentences to in effect *express* perceptual contents. Recently, however, the connection between “looks”-sentences and perceptual representation has been challenged, most prominently by Charles Travis (2004; 2013). On Travis’s line of argument, there are many incompatible ways that things can look given a particular visual experience. The same “reddish” look, for

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<sup>1</sup> For now “looks visually” is intended broadly (excluding non-visual uses like “this case looks easy”). A more detailed treatment follows below.

<sup>2</sup> For the seminal treatment, Chisholm 1957.

<sup>3</sup> For such views: Tye 1995, 2000, 2009; Pautz 2010; Harman 1990; Siegel 2010; McDowell 1994; Peacocke 1992. For the specific association with looks-statements, see Schellenberg 2011.

example, may be associated with my white cup in the late afternoon sunlight, but it may also be associated with a reddish cup in ordinary sunlight. For Travis, no single way things may look provides a suitable candidate for being *the* way(s) my experience represents the environment as being. For Travis, there simply is no type of “looks”-sentence that, while properly characterizing my visual experience, univocally “asserts” the existence of a particular state of affairs, as perceptual contents are intended to do.<sup>4</sup>

While the debate concerning “looks”-sentences (and Travis’s argument in particular) has engendered significant literature, in this paper I will focus on a point that has been broadly ignored: the way “looks”-sentences express a form of *self*-knowledge. Consider that a “looks”-sentence, if suitably descriptive of a visual experience, expresses a type of self-awareness on the part of the subject, viz. awareness of what her visual experience is like.<sup>5</sup> After all, in experience things look ways to *someone*: viz., the subject of the experience. This raises the question how we should understand this subjective viewpoint. What type of self-awareness does the subject express when knowledgeably saying that “such-and-so is how things look to me”? I will argue that anti-representationalist arguments, including Travis’s, depend critically on a mistaken model of this type of experiential self-awareness, viz. a model that unduly relies on a narrow conception of phenomenal character in grounding the subject’s self-awareness of the nature of her experience. I argue that a corrected, richer view of experiential self-awareness blunts the force of these anti-representationalist arguments, and provides positive support for a representationalist treatment of looks.

The paper will proceed as follows. In §1 I introduce the argument for associating looks with representational content, and subsequently turn to anti-representationalist resistance to this argument. My focus will specifically be on the way the debate turns fundamentally on how to conceive self-awareness of experience. In §2 I introduce and reject two popular views of this type of self-awareness, both of which focus on experiential states being *represented* by the perceiving subject. In §3 I develop an alternative approach, on which experiential self-awareness is best associated not with *what* is represented, but *how* the

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<sup>4</sup> Here it does not matter whether perceptual representations are taken to be conceptual or non-conceptual, insofar both carry commitments to what is represented being represented as *some* definite way

<sup>5</sup> Note that this is not inconsistent with the common claim that experience is *transparent*, i.e. that experiential awareness does not include awareness of qualities of the experience itself. Even given transparency, “looks”-sentences express self-awareness. Consider, for example, that I can always say that things look such-and-so *to me*.

state represents. In §4 I argue that given this conception of self-awareness, there is natural representational treatment of how things in experience look, which moreover avoids Travis-style anti-representationalist arguments. In §5 I conclude.

### *1. Two Requirements on the Argument from Looks*

While long considered the default view on the nature of perception, in recent years there has been increased demand for a positive argument for representationalist views of experience.<sup>6</sup> In response, one popular way for representationalists to provide such an argument has been to reason from the way in experience the environment looks.<sup>7</sup> Here is how Wylie Breckenridge renders an impressionistic sketch of the argument (Breckenridge 2007, p. 117):

One reason that I sometimes hear in support of [the content] view (at least in conversation) is the following:

(1) When something looks a certain way, it makes sense to ask whether or not it is the way it looks.

[...] The claim is not always formulated in this way—sometimes it is formulated as follows:

(2) Visual experiences can be assessed as veridical or non-veridical, or as accurate or inaccurate, or as correct or incorrect.

When I ask what is meant by (2), I typically get (1) as a reply, so I take it that they express the same claim.

As Breckenridge here illustrates, the heart of the argument from looks to content is that sentences that register looks—“the apple looks green”—are accuracy-evaluable, and that likewise contents are understood in terms of such evaluation. Accordingly, the latter seem perfectly placed to explain the former. In an example, consider Susanna Schellenberg’s “Master Argument” (Schellenberg 2011, pp. 719-20). On this argument, if a subject is visually aware of her environment, then she is visually aware of the environment being some way: the apple, for example, looks *green*. The conclusion Schellenberg draws from this observation is abductive: what best explains that in experience the environment looks some way to the

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<sup>6</sup> The pressure being due, no doubt, to increasing competition from non-representationalist views (e.g. those of Campbell 2002, Brewer 2011, Martin 2006, Fish 2009, Genone 2014, 2016).

<sup>7</sup> E.g. Tye 2006, Chalmers 2006, Siegel 2010.

subject is that the experience bears content to the effect that her environment *is* that way. Accordingly, experience has content.

Recently anti-representationalists have questioned the association between looks and content. I here focus on an argument by Wylie Breckenridge (2007), and an argument by Charles Travis (2004; 2013) that has received especially significant attention. I will introduce the arguments in turn.

On Breckenridge's version of the objection, the problem lies not in associating experience with accuracy-evaluable looks. Instead, Breckenridge challenges the abductive inference to experiential content. Consider assertions of e.g. walking or talking some way (e.g. "proud" or "American").<sup>8</sup> For Breckenridge, such assertions are accuracy-evaluable ("John talks American, but is he?"). However, as Breckenridge is surely right to note, this hardly means that activities like walking and talking are associated with content: walking and talking do not represent. For Breckenridge this shows that the abductive inference from looks to content fails (Breckenridge 2007, p. 117):

I take it that the move [from a looks-sentence] to the claim that visual experiences have representational content is supposed to be an inference to the best explanation [...]. I have just argued that this inference is too strong to be a good one. The similarity in form between the [looks-sentence] and [the applicability of correctness to cases of walking some way, talking some way, etc.] suggests that they be given a uniform explanation. So if the explanation just given is the best explanation of the [looks-sentence], then corresponding explanations are the best explanations of [the applicability of correctness to cases of walking some way, talking some way, etc.]

As Breckenridge argues, the grammatical surface similarity between cases of looking some way and walking some way or talking some way suggests that these phenomena be explained in a uniform manner. However, the application of correctness to "walks"-talk and "talks"-talk does not ground an abductive inference to content. Accordingly, such an abductive inference cannot be sustained in the case of looks-talk either.

How should we consider Breckenridge's argument? As formulated, the argument begs the question against the representationalist. In sentences like "John walks proud", John's manner of walking may be

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<sup>8</sup> Breckenridge intentionally chooses the non-adverbial grammar of phrases like "John talks American", but argues that such phrases are grammatical and that, moreover, using ungrammatical sentences in arguments is not problematic (Breckenridge 2007, p. 120). One way to approach my criticism of Breckenridge below is to suggest the grammar is not unproblematic, and serves to import representation where it isn't present.

some *indication* that he is, in fact, proud, raising the question whether the sentence is true.<sup>9</sup> By insisting on a uniform treatment of the surface grammar, Breckenridge effectively argues that the same is true for the “looks”-sentences associated with visual experience.<sup>10</sup> However, the representationalist treatment of looks in experience involves a different idea: how things look does not *indicate* they are that way, but rather—the suggestion goes—represents them *as being* that way in a stronger sense. Accordingly, Breckenridge is wrong to assume we should treat “looks”-sentences in the same way we treat “walks”-sentences or “talks”-sentences.

However, Breckenridge’s argument does bring out a deeper challenge to the association between looks and representational content. As several philosophers have recently pointed out, there is a sense in which in which assigning representational content to a state comes cheap (e.g. Vuletic 2015, pp. 8-12). Perhaps some notion of evaluation for correctness is sufficient grounds to associate experience with *some* form of content. In this limited sense, the looks-argument for representational content is bound to succeed. But what Breckenridge’s argument brings out is that this limited representationalist success is not very interesting: mere accuracy-evaluability does not establish the particularly strong way in which perceptual looks are supposed to establish representational content. In motivating her own argument for representational content, Schellenberg frames the difficulty as follows (Schellenberg 2011, p. 720; italics altered):

On the weakest way of understanding this relation [between the way things look to the subject and content], it is simply one on which content is *associated* with the experience. This way of understanding the relation is too weak to give support to the content thesis: it does not give support to the thesis that experience is *fundamentally* a matter of representing the world.

As Schellenberg here points out, the task for the looks argument extends beyond establishing merely *any* relation between experience and representational content: experience must, in some *fundamental* sense, be

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<sup>9</sup> More precisely, there seem to be two possible readings: “John does a particular type of walking, i.e. walking proudly”; or “John walks like a proud person typically walks.” Neither is representational, and for the latter the question of accuracy arises, but only as constituting a possible expression of John’s pride.

<sup>10</sup> Breckenridge effectively accepts this characterization of his view, describing the upshot of visual experience in terms of evidential import, and suggesting that any intuitive differences between vision and the walking and talking cases can be explained by the facts that the evidential support they provide is weaker than it is in the visual case. If I am correct in this paper, it is wrong to characterize the sense of “looks” that grounds representationalism in terms of merely providing evidence for a proposition (i.e. so-called “evidential” looks, see Chisholm 1957 and discussion of Travis 2013 below).

understood in terms of representation. Accordingly, we can formulate a criterion on the success of the looks argument:

**Strong Content** The representationalist must show why the way things in experience look supports perceptual content in some at least more fundamental sense than looks merely being evaluable for correctness.

This version of the looks argument—specified to include Strong Content—is the target of the influential anti-representationalist argument provided by Charles Travis (2004, 2013). The nature of Travis’ argument has attracted considerable controversy, and I will here follow an understanding provided by Keith Wilson (2018).<sup>11</sup> On this construal, Travis’s anti-representationalist argument is stronger than Breckenridge’s argument. Breckenridge’s target is the abductive inference from looks to content; by contrast, Travis argues for the positive claim that *no sense of looks* can support Strong Content. Accordingly, Travis rules out a representationalist argument from the way in experience things look.

Travis’s argument point of departure is a familiar way of taxonomizing senses of how things might look.<sup>12</sup> In particular, Travis distinguishes two different sorts of looks to which visual phenomenology may seem to give rise: so-called “evidentiary” looks and so-called “comparative” looks.<sup>13</sup> On the evidentiary sense of looks, the way some scene or object looks may be taken as evidence to believe some proposition. In this sense, a painting may look to be a Van Gogh. On the comparative sense of looks, some scene or object presents a look that is comparable to the look of some other scene or object. For example, a straight stick partially submerged in water has the same sort of look as a bent stick might.<sup>14</sup> Provided the distinction between “evidentiary” and “comparative”, Travis provides a dilemma argument for the association between “looks” and content. Evidentiary looks are evaluable for correctness: the painting may look like it is a Van Gogh, but it turns out to be a forgery.<sup>15</sup> However, as Travis points out—surely plausibly—evidentiary looks are not distinctly visual: that fact that the painting looks to be a Van Gogh is not a feature of my visual

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<sup>11</sup> For a different discussion, see Brogaard 2015.

<sup>12</sup> The *locus classicus* of this taxonomy is Chisholm 1957. For a more recent treatment, see Martin 2010.

<sup>13</sup> Or as Travis also calls them, “thinkable looks” and “visual looks”.

<sup>14</sup> For some philosophers, this fact has served in non-representationalist explanations of perceptual illusions. See the classical treatment in Austin 1962, and a more contemporary treatment in Kalderon 2011.

<sup>15</sup> Note this is the same sense of evaluability for correctness that pertains to “walks”-talk or “talks”-talk: the correctness of an item appearing to *indicate* something being the case.

experience itself. By contrast, comparative looks are arguably properly experiential. The commonality between the look of stick submerged in water and a bent stick makes reference to my subjective, experiential point of view. What is expressed by speaking of a common comparative look is the nature of my experience in both cases. However, comparative looks are not evaluable for correctness. This is because any look in this sense is ambiguous between any number of comparative looks. If this is correct, it is unclear what type of accuracy conditions would be associated with a comparative look. For example, a wax imitation of a lemon looks as much like a wax imitation of a lemon as it does like a lemon. If a wax imitation looks like a lemon this is not because my experience represents the perceived item as a lemon, and is therefore accurate only if the item really is a lemon. The comparative look that characterizes the experience does not single out lemons as opposed to wax lemons. Accordingly, the experience is not incorrect insofar as the wax imitation is not in fact a lemon. Instead, in the experience the subject is simply presented with the look of the wax imitation, its visual appearance, which is comparable to the look of a lemon. Thus, Travis concludes, there exists no sense of looks to suit the representationalist's argument.<sup>16</sup>

While Travis's reflections are thought-provoking, it can be difficult to see the precise set of premises on which the argument relies. In order to render these considerations more precise, Keith Wilson has provided the following premised-form presentation of Travis's argument, which I will follow in my discussion (Wilson 2018, p. 206):

- P1** If visual experiences were [representational] then their content would be recognisable in virtue of how, in experience, things perceptually appear, or look [...] (*Looks-indexing*)<sup>17</sup>
- P2** Visual looks are incapable of making [representational] content recognisable since they are comparative and so equivocal between multiple contents.
- P3** Thinkable looks are incapable of making p-representational content recognisable since they are not wholly perceptual.
- P4** There is no further notion of looks that is both wholly perceptual and capable of making p-representational content recognisable.
- C1** (*From P2 through P4*) The content of visual experiences cannot be recognisable on the basis of how things look [...]
- C2** (*From P1 and C1*) Visual experiences are not p-representational.

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<sup>16</sup> Schellenberg 2011 argues that Travis misses a third sense of looks: *phenomenal* looks ("The book looks blue"). However, Schellenberg in effect begs the question against Travis. Travis's question is *precisely* whether the phenomenal character of experience sustains such a third sense of looks, or whether we can understand the properly phenomenal character of experience merely in terms of comparative looks.

<sup>17</sup> Wilson characterizes Travis's target, i.e. the type of representation required by Strong Content, as "p-representation". But for simplicity of exposition I speak simply of representation, and representational content.

In this argument, P2, P3 and P4 state Travis' above-discussed claims about looks: comparative looks are perceptual but not accuracy-evaluable, while evidential looks are accuracy-evaluable but not perceptual. While these claims are themselves interesting, what is especially illuminating about Wilson's representation of Travis's argument is that it indicates that Travis relies on also on P1: that if experience has content, this content must be subjectively available by being (in Wilson's terms) "recognizable" from the look of the experience. Wilson calls this commitment "looks-indexing", and writes that it constitutes "the *pro tem* assumption that the most plausible way for the representationalist to satisfy [the subjective availability of perceptual content] is for experiential content to be recognisable to the subject — or "indexed" to use Travis's term [...] — on the basis of how things visually appear, or look".<sup>18</sup> So consider,

**Looks-Indexing:** If visual experiences have content, then their content must be recognizable in virtue of how, in experience, things perceptually appear, or look.

I will argue below (§2) that the representationalist case will turn on how to understand (and whether to accept) Looks-Indexing. For now, however, the core observation is that Travis's argument ultimately turns on a question of *self*-knowledge: the question is how an experience's content is subjectively available, and in particular, how this mode of self-awareness is associated with the way in experience things look. Looks-Indexing constitutes a substantive commitment on this topic: the way in experience things look must make it "recognizable" to the subject what the content of the experience is. As Wilson himself notes, it is among the critical points in his exposition of Travis' argument that the debate about perceptual "looks" turns on views of self-knowledge. As Wilson frames this focus (Wilson 2018, p. 200):

Travis' argument from looks places upon representationalists [the task] to explain not only how experiences come to have representational contents, [but] how – or indeed whether – they are available to perceivers for the purposes of thought, reasoning and action.

The question, then, is how to understand the issue Wilson here frames: how subjects access the character of their experience, and the role, if any, that content plays in this regard. In other words: we must understand

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<sup>18</sup> Wilson 2018, p. 206. As the focus on "recognition" makes clear, on Wilson's perceptive reading the issue for Travis is not that looks must *determine* or *contribute* the contents of experience, but rather how the subject becomes subjectively aware of the contents of her experience. For a reading of Travis that focuses on the content-determination, see Burge 2010, p. 344; Siegel 2010, p. 62.

experiential self-knowledge. I will turn to this topic now.

## 2. *Higher-Order Representation and Self-Representation*

As is commonly observed, one salient starting point for thought about experiential self-knowledge is the nature of the especially intimate relation between a subject and her experience, a relation that the subject does not bear to other ordinary objects of knowledge. On one version of characterizing this relation, philosophers have pointed out that the subject herself seems to figure, perhaps indirectly, in the character of the experience, e.g. by occupying a particular subjective point of view within the experience. As Peter Carruthers has put the idea (Carruthers 2006, p. 300):

it is plausible that the contents of perceptual experience contain an implicit reference to the self. Objects are seen as being closer or further away, for example, or as being above or below. Closer to or further from what? The only available answer is: oneself. Equally, when one moves through the world there is a distinctive sort of “visual flow” as objects approach, loom larger, and then disappear out of the periphery of the visual field. The experience of visual flow is normally apprehended as—that is, has as part of its intentional content—motion through a stationary (or independently moving) environment. Motion of what? Again the only available answer is: oneself.

As Carruthers here describes, it may seem plausible that the subject herself is found, in some way, among what the perceptual experience takes as its content or its phenomenal character. Specifically Carruthers emphasizes the perceptual role of spatial egocentricity and the subject’s place as the stationary center of an experiential “flow”.

However, the central place of the subject within the character of experience does not exhaust the intimate relation between subject and experience. Specifically, it has recently been pointed out that the relation between subject and experience is also *epistemically* especially intimate. Consider my experience of being struck (visually) by an especially bright neon green kite flown over the beach. How am I aware of the character of this experience? What is my mode of epistemic access to the experience? Many philosophers have suggested that the visual experience appears to be *eo ipso* available for my self-knowledge. Nothing *beyond* the presence of the experience itself is required for my self-knowledge. In the common terminology, experiential consciousness seems “lucid” in grounding an especially immediate type

of self-knowledge.<sup>19</sup> As Keith Lehrer writes in one observation of experiential “lucidity” (2006, pp. 410-11): “The knowledge of the [experiential] conscious state is somehow intrinsic to it. [...] Representation of the conscious state is somehow contained in the conscious state itself yielding immediate knowledge of the state.”<sup>20</sup> If this is broadly right, then it can seem that a form of self-awareness is itself *part* of the character of experience. Accordingly, it may not be possible to characterize the nature of experience without understanding its introspective epistemology, since the latter may crucially shape the former.<sup>21</sup>

In this paper, I will be concerned with one increasingly popular approach to the lucidity: an intentionalist program on which experience is lucid in virtue of a type representation.<sup>22</sup> There are two main varieties of this intentionalist program, distinguished by whether the view explains lucid self-knowledge in terms of representation by a higher-order state, or in terms of representation by the state itself.<sup>23</sup>

Accordingly, consider the following two views:

**Higher-Order Representationalism (HR):** a mature human state  $M$  is lucidly conscious if it is represented by a higher-order (or “reflecting”) state  $M^*$ .

**Self-Representationalism (SR):** a mature human state  $M$  is lucidly conscious if it is represented by  $M^*$ , where  $M^*$  is identical to  $M$ .

Much discussion has focused on the distinction between these two views, and specifically the tenability of SR’s suggestion that lucid states represent themselves.<sup>24</sup> However, my present aim is to introduce a third

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<sup>19</sup> Importantly, to point out the lucid character of conscious states is not to commit to the *infallibility* of our knowledge of such states: lucidity concerns the peculiar immediacy with which we access our own states, not our infallibility in doing so.

<sup>20</sup> The same phenomenon has been described in terms of the “luminous” nature of certain mental states (Williamson 2000, Chapter 4), their “self-intimating” nature (Armstrong 1968) and their “transparency” (Boyle 2011). I turn shortly to the “self-representational” element in Lehrer’s characterization of this idea.

<sup>21</sup> The lucidity of experience is something that I simply accept in this paper. This should not, however, be a problem for my argument. Anti-representationalists like Travis do not condition their treatment of “looks” on specific view of experiential self-knowledge. Therefore, experiential content is to be ruled out for *any* (plausible) way of understanding self-knowledge.

<sup>22</sup> Lehrer himself takes this approach. As Lehrer puts it in the cited passage, lucidity is a matter of “representation of the conscious state”) There are of course alternative approaches, including for example the metaphysical view advanced in Shoemaker 2009. I will not be concerned with these views.

<sup>23</sup> For the latter, see e.g., Kriegel and Wiliford 2006; Brook and Raymond 2006; Carruthers 1996; 2000 Chapter 9; Caston 2002; Gennaro 1996, 2002; Hossack 2002, 2003; Kobes 1995; Kriegel, 2003a, 2003b, 2005, 2009; Smith 1986, 1989 Chapter 2, 2004; Van Gulick 2001, 2004, 2006.

<sup>24</sup> SR has also been attributed to Brentano (1995) and Reid (2011). As Brentano appears to give voice to the idea (1995, p. 129):

version of intentionalism by bringing into focus a common feature (and failing) of HR and SR, namely that both views explain lucidity in terms of the way the state itself serves as the *intentional object* of a state.<sup>25</sup> By contrast, I will argue lucidity can only come into view by considering *the way* the state represents. The remainder of this section will present my criticisms of HR and SR, while the next section presents the positive view.

Consider the *explanandum* of lucid consciousness: the peculiar mode of epistemic access associated with a state's conscious character. In an episode of lucid consciousness, the subject has access to her conscious state in an especially direct way that somehow allows for ready self-knowledge. In my view, neither HR nor SR exploits intentional resources in a way that can satisfy this *explanandum*. I will consider the accounts in turn.

In regards HR, the most familiar critique is that it engenders a regress of meta-representational states, since in order to count as conscious, each meta-representational state requires positing a further meta-representational state.<sup>26</sup> However, here I will focus on a different objection. On HR, the *explanans* of a state *M*'s lucid character is the way *M* is represented by a higher-order state *M\**. To succeed at this explanatory task, *M\** needs to represent *M* as “mine”, in the way a state's lucid character consists in my awareness of it as mine. After all, consider in what way—by what mode of access—*M\** singles out *M* as a state of mine. Any way of doing so would seem to *presuppose* a type of awareness of *M* as mine, rather than explaining it. For comparison, a compelling objection along similar lines has been raised by Martin (1998) against Peacocke's view of self-awareness of states as “mine” (1998; 2014).<sup>27</sup> For Peacocke,

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The consciousness that accompanies the presentation of the tone is a consciousness [...] of the whole mental act in which the tone is presented and in which it is itself also given. Apart from the fact that it presents the mental phenomenon of the tone, the mental act of hearing becomes at the same time in its totality its own object and content.

Note Brentano's emphasis on the self-representing state as the *object* of it's own representational character. I turn to this feature of SR below.

<sup>25</sup> For insightful treatment, see Lycan 2001, p. 4; Drummond 2006, p. 208.

<sup>26</sup> As John Drummond puts the point, “[if] the subject is aware of the reflecting experience [...] then the subject is aware of it only in another reflecting experience [...] extrinsic to the reflecting experience [...] and so on *ad infinitum*.”

<sup>27</sup> Peacocke's topic is “possessive self-awareness”—awareness of states as mine—in general rather than lucid self-awareness specifically (in an example of *R* provided by Peacocke during a lecture attended by the author (Peacocke 2016), a subject with the representation “this body is next to a ravine” is primitively entitled to believe “I am next to a

awareness of a first-order state  $M$  as mine is the result of a transition from  $M$  to an intellectual second-order conscious state  $M^*$ , where this transition is justified by a *sui generis* rule of rationality  $R$ . However, as Martin points out: not *any* first-order state  $M$  is suitable for self-knowledge as sanctioned by  $R$  (e.g. states about which the subject is deceived, unconscious beliefs, etc.) So what distinguishes those states to which  $R$  applies from those to which  $R$  does not apply? Martin's conclusion, as seems right, is that the answer trades on the fact some states and not others are lucidly conscious. But in this case Peacocke's rule  $R$  presupposes lucid consciousness, rather than explaining it.

Revealingly, SR faces similar problems in assuming the *explanandum* of lucidity.<sup>28</sup> The self-representational view is that lucid states represent not merely their objects, but also themselves and/or their subject. As Peter Carruthers helpfully states the view (2006, p. 300): "it seems that conscious experiences, in their distinctive subjectivity, somehow present *themselves* to us, as well as presenting whatever it is that they are experiences *of*." Accordingly, for SR the representation of a state by itself is supposed to do the explanatory work of capturing the "distinct subjectivity" of lucid consciousness. What does this involve: what is it for a state to represent itself? We can note that, since representational states are (at least in part) individuated by their content, presumably representation of the state involves some representation of its content. That is, in presenting the subject with the state itself, what is presented to the subject includes the content of the state.

But this produces a problem. Say  $M$  has content  $C$ , such that for  $M$  to represent  $M$  to the subject, it needs to represent  $C$ . But for  $M$  to *have*  $C$  is presumably already to represent that content to the subject. If so, then either  $M$  represents  $C$  in a way that is lucidly conscious, or it does not. The former option renders self-representation moot: lucidity is already attained. Accordingly, it must be the latter: if  $M$  has  $C$  as its first-order content,  $M$  does not thereby represent  $C$  to its subject lucidly. But this raises the following question: if  $M$ 's representing  $C$  to the subject is not lucid, then why does  $M$ 's representing  $M$  representing  $C$

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ravine"). For present purposes, however, Peacocke's account is easily tailored to lucid "mineness" specifically; this does not affect the objection under consideration.

<sup>28</sup> It is not clear that SR avoids the same problem that affects HR: how does the self-representational part of the state's content single out the state itself as the relevant item to be represented? The content being *part* of the state does not do this work (after all, most contents are not self-representing). Like HR, it seems SR presupposes what it seeks to explain: an awareness of the represented state as one's own.

constitute lucidity? If representation *as such* is not lucid, then it is not clear why representation of representation is lucid. Self-representation is nothing but just *more* representation.

At this point the self-representationalist might respond that a representational content makes available to the subject what it represents, such that *M* representing itself, *M*, representing *C* makes available *M* representing *C*. But crucially, this misconstrues the *explanandum* of lucidity. Lucid awareness is not merely the ability to know *in an ordinary way* that one is in *M*—and such would be the awareness grounded by self-representation, understood this way. Rather, lucidity is a first-personal immediate consciousness of being in *M* (signaled by the way the conscious state “self-intimates”). A cognitive system might allow for knowledge of the subject possessing *M* without this being a matter of a subject’s lucid consciousness of *M*. Accordingly, a representation of *M* representing *C* does not account for a subject’s lucid awareness of being in *M*.

These explanatory problems with HR and SR stem from a common failing: separating out a state’s lucid character from possessing its world-directed content. On both HR and SR, a lucid state serves as the *object* of a bit of generic representational content, which type of content does not as such include a notion of lucidity.<sup>29</sup> But nothing about being the object of generic representation sheds light on lucidity. Being the object of generic representation is an entirely commonplace phenomenon, and the fact that the representing state itself serves in this role says nothing about the state being *lucidly* self-known or self-knowable. This is the common flaw in HR and SR, manifesting itself in distinct ways. In contrast to this approach, in what follows I will take lucidity to be associated with a state bearing a *certain type* of content. The difference here is between what is *the object* of a representation, and *the way* the representation is enjoyed: namely lucidly, or self-consciously.<sup>30</sup> The issue is not what the state represents as being the case, but that the manner of representation ensures that the state is enjoyed with an awareness expressed as the state being “mine”. I now turn to develop such an approach.

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<sup>29</sup> In John Drummond’s (2006) vocabulary, this type of explanation of lucidity is structured by an “accusative” grammar. By contrast, Drummond recommends taking seriously the “dative” or “genitive” surface grammar of expressions of lucid states (“my current thought”, etc.). The proposal in this paper is one way of developing Drummond’s suggestion.

<sup>30</sup> In a manner of speaking, lucidity is associated with the *form* of representation, not with its *content*.

### 3. *Experiential Self-Consciousness*

Both HR and SR exemplify one way to develop an intentionalist approach to lucid knowledge: both involve the lucid state itself serving as the object of a representational content. I will turn now to a different intentionalist approach, on which a state's lucidity is associated with the type of representation involved.<sup>31</sup>

The place to start in understanding this idea is the nature of thought and judgment. Suppose a subject *S* forms a judgment *J* with the content that *p*. Here is the suggestion: *J* is a *self-conscious* state, such that the subject is aware that *she* is judging in the relevant way.<sup>32</sup> That is, *J* would be expressible as, "I think that *p*."

<sup>33</sup> To express self-knowledge of *J* in this way is to articulate something already in some sense part of *J* itself. It is important to note that the suggestion is not that the self-referential form of *J* is part of its content, which is *p*.<sup>34</sup> Rather, *J* – with its content *p* – is self-conscious. The "I think" is part of the form of *J* as a conscious state: the way it represents, not what it represents.

The next step is to take self-consciousness as characterizing not merely thought, but rather a broader form of subjectivity or mentality, which includes perceptual experience. While not frequently explicitly developed, the observation that rational subjects enjoy perceptual experience with an element of self-awareness is not uncommon. For example, Mike Martin notes that reflection on non-rational animal experience involves reflection on the *merely conscious* enjoyment of states we enjoy *self-consciously* (Martin 2006, p. 379). Likewise, John Campbell emphasizes the significance as integrating the perceived environment "into the subjective life of the thinker" (Campbell 2002, p. 6). Of course, sense perception has

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<sup>31</sup> There is a great deal to be said on the topic of self-awareness generally, and since my focus here is on perception, the exposition of the present view is inevitably somewhat truncated. For longer expositions of my preferred view of consciousness, see the work Matthew Boyle 2011, 2016, Sebastian Rödl 2007, Andrea Kern 2017. The idea of self-consciousness also plays an important role in the work of John McDowell, (e.g. 2011, 2013).

<sup>32</sup> As a judgment, it may not be quite natural to call *J* a state (more natural might be a mental act). This point should not matter for my view: it one may adopt an act or event based mental metaphysics, or simply think of the belief formed by judgment as self-consciously held.

<sup>33</sup> This, of course, dovetails with the idea that the "I think" accompanies my thoughts (Kant 1997, B131-32).

<sup>34</sup> Should *J* not be expressible merely as "*p*"? I take it as Kant's main claim to deny that this properly expresses the form of mature human consciousness, which is inherently self-conscious. Now of course, a subject can simply judge "*p*". But for Kant she would do so self-consciously in a way expressible as "I think that *p*." As Rödl puts this point (2013, p. 261) "being conscious of thinking a thought is not a different act from thinking this thought, the act of the mind expressed by *p* is the same as the one expressed by *I think p*."

an imagistic character, which is not associated with the capacity for thought as such. However, the idea is that in a rational subject these sensory states are enjoyed in the distinctly self-conscious form of subjectivity expressed by “I”. Compare Christopher Peacocke’s following remarks about visual imagination (Peacocke 1985, p. 21)

[visualizing] always involves imagining from the inside a certain (type of) viewpoint, and someone with that viewpoint could, in the imagined world, knowledgeably judge “*I’m thus-and-so*”, where the thus-and-so gives details of the viewpoint.

As Peacocke here notes, a viewpoint expressible through the first-person pronoun is internal to visual imagination (and *mutatis mutandis*, perceptual experience). To be sure, for Peacocke self-consciousness need not be part of this “point of view”<sup>35</sup>, but such is the present view. For rational subjects perceptual experience is in its nature wholly integrated into the self-conscious life of the subject. Perception presents things as available for the subject’s self-conscious life as a whole. Accordingly, the suggestion is that once self-consciousness is in play for perceptual experience, things appear in experience as “standing under” the structure of the subject’s self-conscious life. The self-conscious nature of experience indexes experience to the broader nature of the self-consciously existing subject in a whole-to-parts order of explanation.<sup>36</sup> Accordingly, even as sense perception is not as such an intrinsically rational type of mental states, in thinking subjects it must be understood against the background of the mode of self-conscious subjectivity associated with the rational “I”. Summing up these ideas, we can formulate the following approach to lucid perceptual experiences:

**Self-Consciousness:** for certain mental states  $M$ , if  $M$  is a conscious state, then it is the form or nature of  $M$  to be self-conscious of  $M$ , where self-consciousness is a *sui generis* form of subjective consciousness associated with rationality.

Since my concern in this paper is with perceptual representation, I will not here further defend this approach to lucidity. Instead, I will now return to suggest the way the account supports a view of perceptual representation, and more specifically one that answers Travis’s seminal critique of the idea.

#### 4. *Lucid Looks*

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<sup>35</sup> For an attenuated “point of view”, see e.g. Gregory 2013, Chapter 2.

<sup>36</sup> See Engstrom 2009.

Travis's central claim is that there is no sense of looks proper to experience to support an association with perceptual content. As became clear from Wilson's discussion, part of the foundation of Travis's argument is a commitment in the area of self-awareness. For Travis, an experience's content must be recognizable to the subject from the way things look. Accordingly, recall:

**Looks-Indexing:** If visual experiences have content then their content must be recognizable in virtue of how, in experience, things perceptually appear, or look.

As Wilson points in his paper, Looks-Indexing is an attractive place for representationalists to resist Travis's argument. The reason is that Looks-Indexing expresses a philosophically substantial view of the relation between looks and content: the idea that any acceptable notion of perceptual content must be "recognizable" to its subject from the experience's phenomenal character. This is not the view of all representationalists.<sup>37</sup> In this section I will argue that we should reject Looks-Indexing: self-awareness of the representational content of experience involves no cognitive "recognition" task from how things look (where this comes down, at bottom, to the phenomenology of experience). Instead, there is a sense of how things look is *identical* to the experience's representational content.

In order to appreciate how ultimately Looks-Indexing is to be rejected, it is important to first recognize, as Wilson emphasizes, that doing so is far from straightforward. In effect, the upshot of Travis's argument is to concentrate attention on the question of how subject relates to her experience such that the contents of it are experientially available to her.<sup>38</sup> As Wilson points out, this is an important and little-discussed question. Moreover, if the representationalist must answer this question, it is not straightforward how she might do so while rejecting Looks-Indexing. Wilson situates the difficulty as a dilemma. Either (a) the representationalist can reject the subjectively available character of perceptual contents and provide some reason why experience involves content in a way that does not rely on its subjective availability; (b) or the representationalist can find some alternative, non-looks-indexed explanation for their subjectively availability. Neither (a) nor (b) seems *prima facie* attractive. On (a), if representational contents do not

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<sup>37</sup> For example those who take content as the supervenience basis for phenomenology, rather than the other way around (Schellenberg 2011, Dretske 2003).

<sup>38</sup> Indeed, Wilson considers the focus on this issue of recognition to be one of Travis's major contributions to the debate. For discussion Wilson 2018, p. 213ff.

capture what is subjectively available to a subject in experience, then the representationalist faces the task of providing an account of what renders her account explanatorily superior to non-representational accounts. This task is complicated by the fact that representationalism is an account of *conscious* experience, thereby making it dubiously useful to invoke e.g. representational characterizations of cognitive processes that fall short of subjective consciousness. On (b), if representational contents are subjectively available but not in virtue of how things look to the subject, then this undercuts the association between looks and correctness that, on typical accounts, is supposed to motivate the representational view of conscious experience.

However, while focusing on the problematic choice between (a) and (b), Wilson mentions in passing that there is a third alternative—call it (c). On (c), the representationalist rejects looks-indexing but insists on the subjective availability of contents. According to this view, a state having perceptual content *eo ipse* implies the subjective availability of such content. This is the sort of approach I will here develop.

Consider the content of a thought. How is this content subjectively available? Plausibly, there is no need to “recognize” this type of content: the thought *having* its content involves this content being subjectively available.<sup>39</sup> *Mutatis mutandis*, the same view can be applied to experiential content. If perception has contents *self-consciously*, it would not be difficult to see how such contents were subjectively available: it would be in the nature of experiential content to make this content available to the subject.<sup>40</sup> At this point my strategy in this paper should be clear: Self-Consciousness allows for a natural way of implementing strategy (c). On this approach, there is a distinct sense of looks that is *identical* with the representational content of an experience. When a rational subject suffers conscious phenomenal experience, then there is a way things self-consciously look to her. How for example? Suppose I turn my gaze to my grey coat: I may then be self-conscious of it looking to me that there is a grey coat in front of me. The suggestion is that this is a sense of looks not captured by either evidentiary or comparative looks. The look of my experience is not some evidence for there being a grey coat in front of me, in the way that

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<sup>39</sup> Plausibly, it is in actively forming the thought *p* that I am aware that it is *p* that I am thinking.

<sup>40</sup> Elsewhere I develop a conception of content grounded in this idea [removed for purposes of review].

some painting may look to be a Van Gogh. Likewise I am not registering some look that the red cube shares in common with other items. It looks to me *that there is* a grey coat in front of me.<sup>41</sup> The look is a fact apparently made manifest to me.<sup>42</sup> Call these:

**Lucid Looks:** What the subject has lucidly available in conscious visual experience includes a way things perceptually look to be.

While not explicitly considering Lucid Looks, Wilson rejects option (c) more generally, and it is worth considering the source of his resistance. For Wilson, there *must* be a sense in which the representational content of experience is “recognized” on the basis of perceptual phenomenology. The alternative, so argues Wilson, is to reduce perceptual phenomenology to an empty wheel in cognition — what Mark Johnston (2006, p. 260) has described as “The Wallpaper View” of phenomenology, i.e. a view on which phenomenology is cognitively epiphenomenal. Further supporting the supposed recognitional link between content and phenomenal character, Wilson also argues that it is intuitive to think that visual phenomenology ‘shows’ the subject the contents of experience. In this sense, experience is supposed to stand in intuitive contrast to thought, where it is plausible that contents are by their nature available to the subject.

But both of these related points – the idea of a problematic “Wallpaper” conception of phenomenology and the alleged distinction between doxastic content and experiential content in the way experience “shows” its content – are questionable in ways that illuminate the suggestion advanced in this paper. Starting on the opposition between thought and experience, it is worth considering the following observations from Matthew Soteriou (Soteriou 2013, p. 183):

an assumption [...] that is sometimes made in representationalist accounts of experience is that [...] if we specify the particular time, subject, and perceptual modality we have in mind, we can then ask after *the* content of *the* perceptual experience of the subject, within that perceptual modality, at that time—e.g. ‘what is the content of the visual experience you are having now?’. This, I think, is symptomatic of a more general tendency to assume that it is possible to learn something about the

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<sup>41</sup> To be sure, “looks *that*” has an awkward grammatical ring. Moreover, above I noted—*pace* Breckenridge—that we cannot simply dismiss grammar as indicative of underlying logical structure (fn. 8). However, in this case there is significant support for the representational rendering. For example, a number of *prima facie* synonymous formulations are unproblematically grammatical, e.g. “it *appears* that” and a predicative-construction like “the book looks blue” (where this is construed as *to be* blue, rather than comparatively). Here I use “looks that” merely to make explicit the representational rendering; nothing hinges on the grammar of this specific formulation.

<sup>42</sup> Facts, on this use, are true thinkable contents—true Fregean Thoughts, in other words.

experience one is having by first attending to it and then determining its nature. [...] the assumption is that one can introspectively pick out, and home in on, some experiential state or event and then come to some judgment about the representational content of that experiential event or state. [...] We can contrast this sort of assumption about experience with the sort of assumptions we tend to make about belief. [...] We specify beliefs in terms of their contents, and the question, ‘what is the content of your belief that *p*.’ answers itself. [...] In other words, it doesn’t seem right to think that a subject can check what the content of a particular belief of hers is, by introspectively homing in on that target belief and *then* determining its content.

Articulating the distinction Wilson draws, Soteriou here contrasts the contents of thoughts (or beliefs) and the contents of perceptual experiences. While beliefs are individuated by their content, it is commonly assumed that representationalists take a different view of perceptual experiences. In Soteriou’s words, it is assumed that for experiential contents “one can introspectively pick out, and home in on, some experiential state or event and then come to some judgment about the representational content of that experiential event or state.” In other words, content is supposed to be the object of some cognitive process that is directed at the experience itself, and specifically (one presumes) its phenomenal character. This is the upshot of Wilson’s comment that experience “shows” us something in a way not true for thought.

But must we accept Wilson’s point? The idea that experiential content becomes available by “introspecting” the experience’s character suggests presupposes that the experience is somehow available independently of and prior to content being available. This we may deny. To be sure, experience “shows” us *our environment* and it does so by means of its content. But there is no reason to suppose that the experience’s character shows us its content. Accordingly, there is no need to posit a contrast between self-awareness of thought contents and self-awareness of experiential contents: the distinction between thought and experience need not lie there.

This brings us to Wilson’s other point: does denying Looks-Indexing reduce us to a problematic “Wallpaper View” of perceptual phenomenology? I do not see why it should. Arguably, Lucid Looks isolates a sense of looks that is properly phenomenal, and accordingly gives phenomenology a proper place in perceptual cognition. What is denied is merely that phenomenology plays an *independent* cognitive role, characterized in terms of the subject “recognizing” or “reading off” the content of her experience from a phenomenology that is somehow available independently. By contrast, on the present view the content of experience itself articulates a properly phenomenal aspect of experience: the way things look from a self-

conscious point of view. For this idea, compare D.W. Smith's view of the role of self-consciousness in perceptual phenomenology (Smith 1986, 1989, 2004). In Smith's terminology, self-consciousness modifies the "modality" (or fundamental character) of sense perception. For Smith it follows that mature human experience is phenomenal in a way that is inextricably bound up with subjective self-aware character. As Smith characterizes experience's phenomenal character, "it [embodies] the 'raw feel' of an experience, its subjective quality, what it is like to have the experience, *the way it is experienced or lived through*" (Smith 2004, p. 99). The key aspect of Smith's view is that the phenomenal character of experience includes its self-conscious character: to characterize experience phenomenally is to capture, in part, what it is like as self-consciously lived through.<sup>43</sup>

### 5. Conclusion

Let me briefly sum up my discussion. Charles Travis has rejected the association between how in experience things look and the idea that perception bears representational content. For Travis, the relevant sense of looks must make any putative representational content recognizable to its subject, and there exists no sense of looks to play this role. In this paper I have offered a response to Travis based on a view of our self-awareness of experience. The core premise of Travis's argument is that perceptual contents must be *recognized* from the phenomenology of experience is false. In rational creatures, self-awareness is *part of the nature* of experience. Accordingly, I argue there is a specific way we are naturally self-conscious of how things look in experience: namely how they are they to be thought to be. Rejecting Travis's view of the relation between representation and phenomenal character, perceptual contents are not to be *recognized* from how, but rather to be *identified* with the relevant sense of looks.

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<sup>43</sup> To illustrate, consider me seeing a flipped coin tracing its arch through the air. Comparatively the coin at  $t$  may look like an ellipse, and  $t+1$  it may comparatively look like a circle. However, at both  $t$  and  $t+1$  the flipped coin may also lucidly look *to be a flipped coin*; and given the self-conscious character of experience this sense of looks is perfectly phenomenal. The point is that since experience is self-conscious, relatively sophisticated aspects of the subject's self-conscious position in the world can be exploited to account for how things self-consciously look to be (and phenomenally are).



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