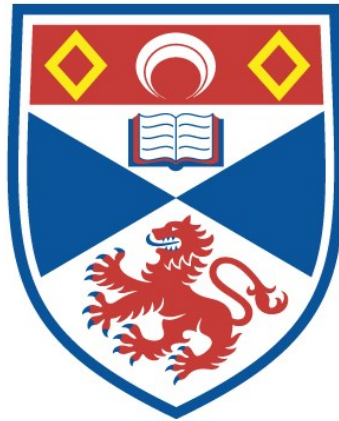# THE ACHIEVEMENT OF PERCEPTUAL PRESENCE: TO PERCEIVE BY HAVING ACCESS TO THE WORLD

Qianrong Gong

A Thesis Submitted for the Degree of MPhil
at the
University of St Andrews

2022

The Achievement of Perceptual Presence: To Perceive by Having Access to the World

Qianrong Gong
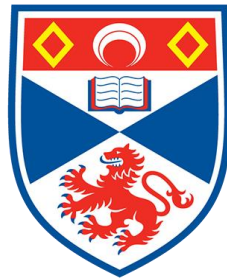
University of
St Andrews

This thesis is submitted in partial fulfilment for the degree of

Master of Philosophy (MPhil)

at the University of St Andrews

June 2022

Abstract

This dissertation provides an enactive approach to perception. It argues that perceptual presence is achieved by perceivers. They do this by having access to the world through the navigation of sensorimotor contingencies based on their understanding. In developing this view, the dissertation defends a version of the enactive account of perception that is originally proposed by Alva Noë and explores how this account challenges and competes with other accounts of perception, including sense-datum theory, naïve realism, etc. It also argues that Noë's enactive account is insightful as he acutely captures certain features of perceptual phenomena and so makes plausible challenges towards representationalism about perception. However, he fails to provide a clear and detailed thesis concerning the way we perceive, especially how sensorimotor understanding can help with the grasp of the two-dimensionality of presence, i.e., the fact that we perceive how things look and how they really are at the same time. In order to make the enactive approach a better account, the dissertation provides an improved explanation of the duality of presence. I argue that things are always practically remote for us. Such remoteness is the root of the duality as we have to cope with the remoteness by having access to objects through navigating sensorimotor contingencies. Because presence is achieved in such a way, it has the two-dimensionality feature. The final chapters provide an extended explication of the means to the achievement of access by drawing out the way that sensorimotor understanding is procured through perceivers' acquiring a sort of practical conceptual knowledge of their perceptual situations. The dissertation thus ends with the argument that concepts are necessary skills for perceivers to achieve sustaining access to the world.

I, Qianrong Gong, confirm that my thesis does not contain any third-party material that requires copyright clearance.

The following is an agreed request by candidate and supervisor regarding the publication of this thesis:

Printed copy

No embargo on print copy.

Electronic copy

No embargo on electronic copy.

Date   2022/10/27   Signature of candidate

Date   2022/10/28   Signature of supervisor

Underpinning Research Data or Digital Outputs

Candidate's declaration

I, Qianrong Gong, hereby certify that no requirements to deposit original research data or digital outputs apply to this thesis and that, where appropriate, secondary data used have been referenced in the full text of my thesis.

Date   2022/10/27   Signature of candidate

General acknowledgements

Now, at the end of the course of my MPhil research, I would like to express my thanks to those who have helped me complete the writing of this thesis.

First, I would like to express my sincere gratitude to my supervisor Professor Mike Wheeler, from whom I benefited greatly. Suggestions and comments from him help me clarify my philosophy and lead me re-find my commitment to philosophy. I would also want to say thank you to Dr. Adrian Haddock, who is another supervisor of mine. His comments help me to target the core problem of this research.

And my special thanks go to my family who gave me much encouragement and financial support respectively. I am particularly indebted to my mother, MS Huang Shukun, who always supports me and urges me to work.

Contents

Introduction

The perceptual presence of objects has been illustrated as perceivers' representations of objects by many philosophers including Immanuel Kant[1], John McDowell[2], Christopher Peacocke[3], Susanna Schellenberg[4], etc. The influence of this view does not only stem from its long history and philosophers' successive development of it, but also from a common temptation to draw an analogy between visual presence and flat images, such as paintings, snapshots, and films. The temptation generates several difficulties that theorists of representationalism can be faced. For example, what can be represented in a photo or a film is only the side of an object that is in front of the camera. Likely, what can be visually seen by us with our eyes is the facet of an object. However, what is perceived by us is the whole object. Besides, a snapshot can only represent an object at a frozen moment but we always perceive along as the time flows.

Some philosophers indicate that we should abandon the representational view to understand the nature of perception. Among them, Alva Noë argues that 'the world shows up not in so far as it is represented (as in a picture), but in so far as it is available.'[5] He also promotes taking perceptual presence as a matter of availability[6], instead of

---

1 Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, ed. and trans. by Paul Guyer and Allen Wood. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).
2 John McDowell, *Mind and World*. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996).
3 Christopher Peacocke, 'Does Perception Have a Nonconceptual Content?', *The Journal of Philosophy*, 98(2001).
4 Susanna Schellenberg, 'Perceptual Content Defended', *Noûs*, 4(2011), pp. 714–750.
5 Alva Noë, 'Précis of Action in Perception', *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, 3(2008), pp. 660–665(p. 662).
6 Alva Noë, *Varieties of Presence*. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012), p. 15. Relevant arguments can also be found in Alva Noë, *Action in Perception*, (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2004).

representation. Noë's argument is an enactive approach to perception. At the centre of his thoughts is the sensorimotor thesis. This thesis basically goes like this: presence is not given to perceivers who wait for it passively but is achieved by perceivers who have access to objects and make presence available for them. Perception is thus an activity that perceivers do. To achieve access, perceivers must have a sensorimotor understanding of their perceptual situation. Based on the understanding, they can achieve presence by navigating sensorimotor contingencies properly.

In my view, Noë's thesis is a viable start for us to give a satisfactory account of perception as I appreciate the merits of his thesis in explaining perceptual phenomena. However, he does not give detailed explications for the notion of sensorimotor understanding. He does not make it clear in what way can people perceive by sensorimotor understanding. The lack of elaboration makes it hard to evaluate how much perception is dependent on the sensorimotor understanding and whether the enactive approach is a compelling alternative to the traditional picture of perception. Thus, Noë's thesis turns out to be an inspiring illustration of perceptual phenomena and a controversial account of the way we perceive.

This dissertation spells out how could we achieve presence by having access to the world based on sensorimotor understanding. I draw the threads in Noë's work and make my explanations for thoughts that are not clarified by himself. Thus, I present my picture of the enactive approach to perception by developing Noë's thesis.

This dissertation proceeds as follows. Chapter 1 presents Noë's challenge towards

the representational account of perception and displays his enactive explanations for perceptual phenomena. Two contributions of Noë are introduced with his enactive account: the two-dimensionality feature of perceptual presence and the notion of sensorimotor understanding. Noë points out that the representational account of perception does not grasp and settle a crucial feature of perceptual presence. That is, presence has a two-dimensionality—objects are presented in a way that we can perceive how they look and how they are at the same time. For example, when a round plate is presented to me, I see that it appears to me elliptical when I perceive that there is a round plate in front of me at the same time. He argues that to have the duality presence of objects, perceivers must have a sensorimotor understanding of sensorimotor contingencies that are in their perceptual situation.

Chapters 2 and 3 consider how can the duality feature be granted by sensorimotor understanding, which is an issue that Noë does not expand on with detailed strategies. In chapter 2, my evaluation and development of this thought start from an investigation of the cause of the duality feature in perceptual experience. Based on my reading of Noë's work, I indicate and illustrate that presence of objects has a two-dimensionality feature because the presence of objects is dependent on objects themselves, movements[7], and navigation of sensorimotor contingencies by perceivers. Through this investigation about the cause of the duality, I develop Noë's suggestion that 'everything is always in some degree absent or remote'[8] and make my argument: things are always practically remote

---

7 Both movements of objects and perceivers, including bodily movements of perceivers, can be features that bring out the two-dimensionality. More details are to be given in chapter 2.
8 Noë, *Varieties of Presence*, p. 125.

for us. Accordingly, objects are perceptually remote for us in perception. The remoteness is the root of the three factors above that cause the duality of presence.

In chapter 3, I integrated my thoughts about the remoteness of things with Noë's proposal that presence is achieved[9] and argue that the remoteness of things forces perceivers to achieve access to them, which means they can achieve the perceptual presence. Then I respond to the question that how sensorimotor understanding grants the duality of presence by suggesting: that the navigation of sensorimotor contingencies that is constituted by sensorimotor understanding is the way perceivers achieve perceptual access to objects. This chapter also provides a comparison between the enactive approach and competitive accounts of perception.

After chapter 3, I concentrate on a more specific problem: how can perceivers have sensorimotor understanding. A more detailed elaboration of the way that perceivers achieve access to things in the world is given through the consideration of the procurement of sensorimotor understanding. In chapter 4 I introduce and expand the idea of access space[10]. The argument is that, when the world that is to be perceived is understood regarding its accessibility, it is presented to perceivers as their access space. Moreover, perceivers must have access space: they can only carry out the activity of achieving access in such a space where action guidelines on achieving access to each thing can be found from the accessibilities of things.

---

9 See Noë, *Varieties of Presence*. Introduction and chapter 2.
10 I borrow the notion of 'access space' from Noë, who only put forward this idea but does not spell it out. I provide my picture of the access space by delineating how is it structured and how do perceivers work to achieve access to things by it. For Noë's thoughts about access space, see chapters 4 and 5 in this dissertation or Alva Noë, Varieties of Presence.

Chapter 5 considers Noë's argument that concepts are skills people use to perceive.[11] By a brief assessment of this thought, I suggest that it is significant for the enactive account to become a complete rejection against the representational approach and a competitive subscription for it. As it is worth expanding this thought of concepts in perception, I investigate how are concepts used as skills in perception. Concepts are essentially necessary for achieving presence because perceivers rely on a sort of practical conceptual knowledge of their perceptual situation to achieve continuous access and preserve the availability of presence.

To conclude, Noë proposes an insightful enactive account of perception as he acutely captures features of perceptual phenomena and so makes plausible challenges towards the representationalism of perception. However, the sensorimotor thesis that he provides for explaining the way that perceivers have the perception is incomplete because of its lack of clarity and details. This dissertation endorses the spirit of Noë's sensorimotor thesis and develops a more explicit picture of how to perceive by the sensorimotor understanding of the perceptual situation. It argues that perceptual presence is achieved by perceivers who have access to the world through the navigation of sensorimotor contingencies by the understanding.

---

11 See Noë, Varieties of Presence. Chapter 2.

Chapter 1 The Enactive Approach to Perception

I argue that perception and perceptual consciousness depend on capacities for action and capacities for thought; perception is, I argue, a kind of thoughtful activity.[12]

—Alva Noë

Regarding the question of how we manage to perceive objects, Noë proposes that perception is thoughtful in *Action in Perception* as I quote above. His argument is built on a proposal about the nature of perception—it depends on capacities for action and thought. As perception is what we do based on that we can think and act, it is a thoughtful activity. This idea goes through works by Noë in the first decade of this century and is also developed later in his book *Varieties of Presence* (2012). In addition, Noë has written a paper to emphasise the crux points of his account of perception.[13]

Noë names his account of perception as enactivism, or actionism in later works. I take his enactive approach to perception to be anti-representationalist as he argues that '[T]he idea that presence is representation is a bad idea'[14]. By representationalism here, I refer to accounts of perception that take perception to be the perceivers' internal representation of objects. Namely, these accounts express the idea that perceivers make things show up for them by having mental images like pictures, photographs, models, or

---

12 Alva Noë, *Action in Perception*. (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2004), p. vii.
13 Alva Noë, 'The enactive approach: a briefer statement, with some remarks on "radical enactivism"', *Phenomenology and the Cognitive Sciences*, 20(2021), pp. 957–970.
14 Noë, *Varieties of Presence*, p. 30.

descriptions of objects. Against this sort of representational view, Noë argues that perceiving 'is not a matter of representing the world in the mind. It's a matter of exploring the world and achieving contact with it'[15]. He develops the enactive direct realism of perception according to which perceiving is contact with the world, rather than a representation. He suggests that 'perceivings […] are not *about* the world'.[16] I take his suggestion to be that perception is not limited to being about the world. Representation of the world can be about the world but it is an intermediary between the world and us. We shall not be satisfied with being separated from the world. Instead, we must have direct contact with the world. With which, we can also think *about* the world. Based on this view of perception, to perceive something, i.e., for something to be present for us in conscious experience is a matter of skilful access to the thing.[17] That is to say, perceivers have to achieve access to a thing to have contact with it and so perceive it. Now, if we want to understand and appreciate this account of perception, we shall better start with an overview of what is wrong with representationalism.

1.1 The orthodox paradigm and how we can challenge it

As Noë has indicated, '[m]any philosophers and thinkers take for granted that presence is representation'[18]. In my view, representationalism and the analogy between

---

15 Ibid., p. 29.
16 Ibid., p. 65.
17 Ibid., p. 27.
18 Ibid., p. 30.

visual experiences and pictures show a prevailing temptation of assimilating vision to pictures that are presented to people. The temptation is so common that it generates an orthodox paradigm of perception that is influential across both folk psychology and philosophy.[19] It usually has the following ideas about perception.

Firstly, what we see is divided into many frozen moments of experience. At each of those moments, people have a representation of the object, which is a mental image or a model of the object. This leads to the second prevailing idea about perception that the diachronic experience we have is composed of fragments, which are those momentary representations of an object. According to the view, the way we experience is like the way that a movie is filmed, i.e., we represent objects as frames and link them together to have episodes of experiences. Relevantly, our experience of an object as a whole can be composed of fragmental representations of the object from various perspectives, or inferred from those fragments. For example, it would be thought that we experience a bottle as a whole by inferences from fragmental representations of the bottle from different perspectives. Thirdly, perception could also be considered as what perceivers obtain from sensory stimuli that are received passively according to the orthodox paradigm. In this view, perception would be regarded as the result of sensory inputs or something that is given to perceivers. Perceivers could have perceptions from sensory stimuli that are given when they do not do anything to get the perception. People could have perceptual contents and experience objects without doing anything and

---

19 Noë has set out the tradition of the idea that vision is a picture-like process, see *Action in Perception*, section 2.2.

understanding what they are perceiving.

The first step to challenging representationalism is to undermine this prevailing paradigm of perception. By providing a new phenomenological account of perceptual experiences, Noë argues against the three features above, which are ascribed to perception by the orthodox paradigm. Through his arguments against the orthodox view, we can get to know about the core idea of the enactive approach: perception is something we do and achieve, rather than something that we wait for or happens to us without our active efforts.

To begin with, perception should not be likened to pictures. Noë rejects the idea that visual experiences represent the world the way pictures do.[20] He indicates an idea relevant to the presumption that vision has a pictorial character: vision is based on 'the retinal picture.'[21] I.e., the mental images we have in perception are images that are projected onto our retinas.[22] However, this idea is incompatible with the phenomena which we can find in perceptual experience: '[w]e experience the presence of the occluded bits even as we experience, plainly, their absence. They are present as absent.'[23] This sort of phenomenon is called 'presence in absence'[24] by Noë, and it is the main explanatory gap that has to be filled by the orthodox paradigm. If perception depended on retinal pictures, then we would not be able to experience what is not presented in those pictures. For example, when I look at a picture of a bottle, I only have the experience of the picture which shows a facet of a bottle. However, we can have a visual experience of

---

20 Noë, *Action in Perception*, p. 39.
21 Ibid.
22 Ibid.
23 Ibid., p. 61.
24 Ibid., p. 128.

what cannot be visually projected onto our retinas in perceiving an object. We can have the perception of hidden parts of objects, e.g., the backside of a bottle in front of me.

Relevantly, objects can be present in a sort of apparent shape that is different from the way that an object is shaped. For example, a circular plate can look elliptical from specific perspectives. If perception was pictorial processing, then it would be problematic where the difference comes from. Objects have apparent shapes when we perceive them from an observational perspective. In perceptual experiences, it is common for us to experience objects as to how they are, in their actual shapes when we perceive how they look from our perspectives at the same time. For example, the circularity of the plate can be experienced when it looks elliptical to us.

Furthermore, pictures of objects are usually incomplete, however, in most cases, objects present to us as the complete wholes that they are. When I look at a bottle from its left side, I do not only perceive its left facet and lose contact with the right facet. The bottle is not an item that only has one facet, other facets and the whole item are also available for me to perceive. As Noë has indicated, '[d]espite the fact that you can only see part of the object's surface, in looking at it we enjoy an experience as of a voluminous solid.'[25] For example, when we experience a bottle from only one perspective, the experience of the bottle will not merely be a plain image of its side. We can experience a bottle as a whole without walking around it, and we can know that its shape is a cylinder. Noë sums these ordinary scenarios of our experiences up in a Kantian way: 'the unity of

---

25 Ibid., p. 76.

experience does not require an experience of unity.'[26] We do not obtain perceptual contents separately, as if they are some fragments, in perception, and then have the experience of the whole object perceived based on the combination of those perceptual fragments. People who endorse the orthodox paradigm may argue that we can experience an object as a whole by inferring from those fragmental representations of it. However, this sort of explanation can be problematic as it can be further challenged by questions like 'how can we guarantee the inference to be right?' Instead of working on an account of how we can experience an object as a whole from fragmental perceptual contents, the enactive approach argues that we perceive an object as a whole because we perceive it by encountering it as how it is in perception.[27]

In addition, perception is a process that develops gradually and continuously. It is not something that can be given to us all at once like a short glance at one single moment. When perception is likened to pictures, the perception we have will be divided into separate moments and regarded as representations of what we perceive at different times. However, we always take time to explore an object gradually. The perception we have of the world develops naturally and smoothly as time goes by. It is not something that is produced by linking momentary perceptual fragments together. When I watch a speed skating game, I do not perceive by linking every moment of seeing, hearing, etc. Those competitors skating and the ice rink cannot be given to me all at once, either. I perceive

---

26 Alva Noë, 'Reply to Campbell, Martin, and Kelly', *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, 3(2008), pp. 691–706(p. 693).

27 I adopt this understanding of perception from Noë, please see 'Précis of Action in Perception', pp. 660–665. I admit that this argument is not a straightforward one. More illustrations of it are given throughout this dissertation.

both moving contestants and unmoving track when time passes.

1.2 A preliminary overview of the sensorimotor thesis about how to have the perception

If we regarded perception as a pictorial process following the orthodox paradigm, we would have perception from what was given to us through receiving sensory stimulation passively and motionlessly. We could act to adjust the way we perceive— e.g., I could walk around a bottle and perceive it as a voluminous item by representing it from each side—but our capacities to do so are not necessary for us to perceive. According to the orthodox paradigm, capacities for action are only instruments that we can choose to use or not. We do not depend on them to have perception. In this case, perception and action are regarded as two distinguishable stages of human cognitive activity. Agents, who received inputs from the world by perceiving and created outputs by acting, would be passive while perceiving and active while acting.

The enactive account of perception holds a different view on the relation between perception and action. When Noë argues that perception is a sort of activity that depends on capacities for action[28], we can see that the distinction between perception and action may be fuzzier than what is thought in the orthodox paradigm. Meanwhile, the enactive approach gives a good illustration of the nature of perception by indicating the

---

28 Noë, *Action in Perception*, p. vii.

dependence on capacities for actions of perception. This is the competitive advantage of the enactive approach compared with perceptual theories that are in the orthodox tradition, including the representational view. So far, I have illustrated how the orthodox paradigm could be challenged by making criticisms of its ideas about perceptual phenomena and providing alternative explanations that are consistent with the enactive approach. Through enactive illustrations of perception, we can find that there is a duality of the presence of objects: on the one hand, we have the experience of how an object looks from a certain perspective; on the other hand, we have the experience of how an object is. For example, when there is a bottle in front of me, it is presented to me in a way such that only one side of it can be visually seen by me. At the same time, it is presented to me as a bottle that is a voluminous container. Though representationalism makes efforts for explaining why there is such a two-dimensionality of presence, it fails to grasp that the world shows up for perceivers with both dimensions simultaneously. Its explanations are still about how we can have the perception of how an object is from how it appears to be from a specific perspective, or how we can perceive how an object is regardless of its appearance from a specific perspective.[29] Then, what causes this failure of representationalism? My answer would be: Because theorists of representationalism only recognise that capacities for action can be used as instruments for perceiving but do not realise that perceiving depends constitutively on such capacities, they cannot give satisfactory illustration and explanation for the duality of presence.

---

29 I come back to the way that representationalism treats the two-dimensionality of presence in the next chapter.

The dependence on the action of capacities for perception constitutively enables us to capture two-dimensional presence. Some people may worry that perception would be distorted by the dependence on capacities for action. Because what we do to perceive may result in the distorted presence of the world, we cannot have a veridical perception of objects. I shall note that perceivers do not act arbitrarily in perception. How they act is determined by the relation that perceivers have to objects. This thought is to be drawn out through this dissertation. Now we can first pay attention to how capacities for action bring about the two-dimensionality of presence.

This can be found in everyday scenarios. For example, when I observe a flask in front of me, the relation I have with it has a set of various characteristics, including the distance in between, the perspective I take to see it, the degree to which the item is illuminated by light in the environment, etc. If I move, or if this item moves or changes, then those characters of the interrelation show corresponding changes. As a result, the way that the flask shows up to me is mediated by those changes. For example, if I foveate on the top of the flask, its top shows up for me clearly while its bottom appears to be vague; if I foveate on the bottom, the contrary is the case. This first shows that the way we perceive—namely, how we act to mediate our relation to an object—determines how an object looks to us. Furthermore, this case also suggests that things can be presented to us in their absence. When we foveate a part of the flask, other parts of it are also there being present for us, though they may appear vague or even hidden from our sight. They are present because we can foveate them whenever we would like to. In this case, both

foveated parts and parts that are not foveated are available for us to foveate and perceive whenever we like because we can foveate them. The difference is only that we have better contact to a higher degree with the foveated parts. Besides, the whole flask is also available for us as a complete and voluminous item because we can explore the whole flask as we wish. This permits us to perceive it by mediating the relation between the flask and us with our capacities for action.

From this scenario, we can find that we do not act to produce the presence of objects and change it without restrictions. What we can do in having perception is restricted by the environment where objects and we are. The presence is the way that objects are presented and it is not produced solely by perceivers. Presence is not the representation that we can have of objects in our minds. It is rather achieved in the relation between objects and perceivers. The relation is where we have the presence of objects; it is also what we can work on to mediate the way that objects show up for us. The two-dimensional feature of presence depends on capacities for action, but not directly. The duality is generated in the relation that perceivers have with objects, which relation can be mediated by perceivers' capacities for action.

We can thus find that the relation must be determined by the perceived object (including changes of it) as there cannot be such a relationship without the object; meanwhile, it is also determined by what perceivers do in the relation. In this case, Noë indicates that the relation is a sensorimotor relation that must be determined by the

perceived object itself as well as the movements of both objects and perceivers:[30]

It must not only be the case that the perceiver's movements produce changes in the character of the standing motor-sensory relation; it must also be the case that changes in the object itself would manifestly perturb the character of the standing relation that the perceiver has to the object.

Thus, Noë summarises the determinants of the character of the sensorimotor relation between objects and perceivers as a sort of dual-dependence:[31]

(i) Movement-dependence: movements of the body manifestly control the character of the relation between the perceiver and the object or quality;

(ii) Object-dependence: movements or other changes in the object manifestly control the character of the relation between the perceiver and the object or quality.

The interrelation between objects and perceivers is dual-dependent on bodily movements and changes, including movements, of objects. These two kinds of dependencies form the basis of the occurrences and absence of possible sensorimotor contingencies. Characters of the interrelation between perceivers and objects perceived are determined by movements of perceivers and movements or other changes of objects perceived. And,

---

30 Noë, *Varieties of Presence*, p. 22.
31 Ibid.

what the interrelation is like in certain situations, i.e., characters of the interrelation, has a significant impact on what kinds of perceptual contents people can have from stimulation they receive from objects.

Due to rules of movement-dependence and object-dependence, various sensorimotor contingencies are possible to occur in the sensorimotor relation that perceivers have with their objects when they perceive. For example, a flask can show up to a perceiver with its side being in front of the perceiver or its top or bottom, etc. In perception, all these contingencies are potential, and all these contingencies result in corresponding perceptual contents that can be obtained by perceivers. The existences of sensorimotor contingencies have the consequence that, in perception, objects perceived and those different parts or qualities of them are all available for perceivers to have perceptual contents of them, so they can be included in perceivers' experiences. Meanwhile, their availability can vary. The access that perceivers have to these objects is controlled by characteristics of the relation between objects and perceivers, and those characteristics of the relation are determined by rules of movement-and-object dependence. Perceivers can mediate the relation they have with objects by making certain sensorimotor contingencies be activated and suppressing others. They can also mediate the relation by activating sensorimotor contingencies to different degrees. For example, I can make a flask be presented to me with both its top and side in front of me by looking down at it or by looking at it on its side. In the former case, its top is accessed by me to a higher degree, while in the latter case, the sensorimotor contingency—that if I look at it from top-down, then its top is seen

by me visually—is less activated. Meanwhile, objects are available for perceivers to have access to as the whole and complete object that they are.[32] Thus, perceivers can obtain the two-dimensional presence by enacting multiple sensorimotor contingencies at the same time.[33]

We can also understand why there can be the phenomenon of presence in absence with the thought of enacting sensorimotor contingencies. For example, observing an object from its left causes the left side to be significantly visible to me, while the right side is not equivalently perceptible, and actually, it is not visually presented to me. In this case, the left side is more accessible for me compared with the other side. The left side is visually presented to me already, but the right side is not, because the object is a voluminous item that is not transparent. Besides, my act of taking a spot that is on the left side of the flask also determines that the right side is less accessible for me. Therefore, according to the rules of object- and movement-dependence, I am in closer relation to the left side of the flask. The left side is thus more reachable for me. As I can adjust my observing perspective with my capacities for action, the hidden right side is also available for me to perceive. As Noë suggests, the presence of the detailed environment and the occluded parts of an object is grounded by our awareness of immediate contact with them.[34] Thus, it is presented to me in its absence.

Although I am in closer relation to the left side, my relation to the other side is not

---

32 I explain more about how an object shows up to perceivers as a whole in the next chapter.
33 I come back to how perceivers capture the two-dimensionality by enacting sensorimotor contingencies in the next chapter.
34 Alva Noë, 'Experience of the World in Time', *Analysis*, 66(2006), pp. 26–32(p. 27).

cut off given there are still relevant sensorimotor contingencies. The only difference is that the other side is less accessible for me as my sight cannot round the voluminous item and capture the side behind it. Nevertheless, the whole flask is available to me and I can get access to it by my capacities, thus, there is no difference in genre between visible parts and hidden parts of it. The flask is not divided into two separate kinds of perceptual contents but is merely accessed unevenly. In this case, we can understand Noë's proposal that perceiving is a matter of skilful access to the object and the perceptual presence is a matter of access, which I have mentioned at the start of this chapter. Moreover, the opposition of enactive theory to the idea that perception is pictorial processing can be emphasised more profoundly: perception should not be regarded as pictures, because 'the world shows up not in so far as it is represented (as in a picture), but in so far as it is available.'[35]

When different sensorimotor contingencies are activated to different degrees, the sensorimotor relation we have with our objects is characterised differently. Its characteristics turn to determine what kinds of stimulation and perceptual contents we can have from the object. Relevantly, we can act skilfully to navigate those contingencies and adjust the way that objects are presented to us. When the distance is long, the flask appears to be smaller, but perceivers can get closer to the item to have a better look. When the environmental light is strong, the flask appears to be clear; but if the light is too strong, then the item may be invisible.

---

35 Noë, 'Précis of Action in Perception', p. 662.

So far, I have introduced that perceivers can mediate their sensorimotor relation to objects by navigating sensorimotor contingencies. In this way, they can have contact with objects, i.e., achieve access to objects and perceive objects in their encounter with these objects. I assume that my readers may ask how it is that perceivers can know about what to do in navigating sensorimotor contingencies. More importantly, how could they even know that they have to do so? On this question, Noë proposes that there is a kind of understanding that underwrites our perceptual access to objects and properties, i.e., sensorimotor understanding.[36] It is suggested here that people can skilfully achieve access to the world thanks to their sensorimotor understanding of what they are perceiving. Thus, the presence which has the two-dimensionality feature is guaranteed by the sensorimotor understanding. We can also learn from Noë's suggestion that sensorimotor understanding is essential for perceivers to enact sensorimotor contingencies.

To conclude, Alva Noë proposes the enactive approach to perception, in which view, perception is to achieve the presence of the world through skilful access to the world. This view holds an anti-representationalist account of perception. It is against the idea that perception is pictorial processing. Apart from a new explanation of the perceptual phenomenon, the enactive approach also provides a new account of the nature of perception. It indicates that perception depends on perceivers' capacities for action. When perceivers achieve contact with the world based on their capacities, they can grasp the two-dimensionality presence of the world. Namely, the world is present to perceivers as

---

36 Noë, *Varieties of Presence*, p. 20.

how it looks like and how it is at the same time. E.g., when there is a book on my laptop, there will be a part of my laptop occluded. In this case, my laptop is present to me as partly absent, meanwhile, it is also presented to me as a complete laptop. To have the access to the world skilfully, Noë suggests that perceivers must have a sort of sensorimotor understanding, because, according to the enactive view, there is no perceptual experience when there is no exercise of such knowledge by perceivers. In this thread of thought, Noë argues: 'Perceptual awareness of objects, for actionist-direct realism, is an achievement of the sensorimotor understanding.'[37] The next chapter investigates exactly how sensorimotor understanding grounds the two-dimensional presence.

---

37 Ibid., p. 65.

Chapter 2

Two-dimensional Presence and its Dependence on Sensorimotor Contingencies

Following Noë's work, I propose that sensorimotor understanding grants the two-dimensional feature of perceptual experience. This is crucial for the sensorimotor thesis to stand as a better approach to perception than orthodox perceptual theories, as the two-dimensional feature is not captured and illustrated satisfactorily by the orthodox approach. Noë indicates the two-dimensionality of perceptual experience when he spells out and defends enactivism. He writes, '[a] satisfying account of perception must explain how the silver dollar can look both circular and elliptical'.[38] The sensorimotor thesis of perception is thus promoted by Noë to fill this explanatory gap. He suggests that perceptual two-dimensionality is granted by our sensorimotor understanding.[39] However, this suggestion is not given in an intensive and detailed way. On the one hand, he scatters illustrations of sensorimotor understanding over his works on perception but does not spell out the idea of such understanding intensively. He does not give clear answers to questions including what is sensorimotor understanding; how we have such understanding, etc. On the other hand, he does not delineate detailed strategies that perceivers use to capture two-dimensionality by sensorimotor understanding.

---

38 Noë, *Varieties of Presence*, p. 125.
39 Noë, 'Reply to Campbell, Martin, and Kelly', p. 693.

In the last chapter, I introduced the general idea of sensorimotor understanding following what Noë says about it and thus did not analyse and evaluate it very carefully. Now, I continue the journey to achieving enactive perception by digging into sensorimotor understanding. My illustration and evaluation of sensorimotor understanding do not track Noë's path. In this chapter, I analyse what brings the two-dimensional feature into the perceptual experience. In the next chapter, the journey is led to an explication of how we can grasp the two-dimensional feature of perceptual experience and what makes sensorimotor understanding constitutive in perception.

We are already familiar with the proposal that people perceive objects by getting access to them. According to this enactive view of perception, only objects that are accessible to perceivers can be present to perceivers. The way that objects show up for us in perceptual experience is the perceptual presence of objects. Perceptual presence is achieved through perception, which is an activity that perceivers do. Thus, we can also say that what is obtained in perceiving by us is perceptual presence. This means that perceptual presence must be two-dimensional.

What makes presence two-dimensional? Because 'presence is achieved, and its varieties correspond to the variety of ways we skillfully achieve access to the world'[40], it is worth investigating the achievement of access. Perceivers achieve access to objects and have perception by navigating sensorimotor contingencies. In this case, we can explore how features of sensorimotor contingencies affect features of presence. Sensorimotor

---

40 Noë, *Varieties of Presence*, p. xi.

contingencies are generated in sensorimotor relations between objects and perceivers. In the last chapter, I introduced that, sensorimotor contingencies are object-dependent on the one hand, and movement-dependent on the other hand. In this case, presence can also be partly determined by the object itself; it is also partly determined by movements that can mediate the sensorimotor relation between perceivers and objects. Moreover, as presence is achieved by achieving access to objects, presence is also directly affected by our navigation of sensorimotor contingencies, in which way do we achieve access to objects.

In short, presence depends not only on objects and movements in sensorimotor relation but also on perceivers' navigation of sensorimotor contingencies. Now, I would like to analyse how presence depends on objects and movements first. Objects that are perceived and movements that can adjust the motor-sensory relation between objects and perceivers are preliminary factors for the achievement of presence. Analysis of the dependence on the navigation of sensorimotor contingencies comes later in the next chapter. The latter analysis is combined with a solution to the problem of how we achieve access to presence by navigating sensorimotor contingencies. Finally, it is shown that the above dependencies are the foundation of the two-dimensionality of perceptual presence, and also perceptual experience.

2.1 Presence is dependent on the perceived object

The enactive approach is against the idea that we perceive how things are by inferring from how they look from different perceptual perspectives. Presence is dependent on *the object*, rather than merely *a part of the object*. Jason Leddington challenges Noë's sensorimotor theory on this point. He indicates that it is common for people to perceive only a part of an object or even a part of its surface.[41] Regarding this sort of phenomenon, Noë stresses that what people perceive is the tomato as a whole, which is a voluminous item. However, Leddington insists that Noë has not given a satisfactory answer to the problem of why seeing a tomato is like seeing a tomato part.[42]

There is a further challenge that can be raised against the sensorimotor thesis: How can presence stand as the presence of objects, given that there are parts of objects being superseded by the part that can be visually seen? For example, when a tomato matures, its colour turns into a darker red. If its colour does not change evenly, and its backside darkens before the front side, then the tomato may show up in an unchanged way, like one that has not matured yet. In this case, I suppose, some people may suggest that we fail to perceive the whole tomato because it is obvious that the facet which is visually seen outstrips all of the other parts of an object. And people can hardly perceive the tomato as a maturing one because there are no relevant perceptual contents obtained by perceivers when they observe the object from a side that is not changing. This can be an extreme example of the predicament, which is suggested to be shared by both orthodox theorists and Noë by Leddington. Namely, it has to take lots of effort to explain 'how can seeing a

---

41 Jason Leddington, 'Perceptual Presence', *Pacific Philosophical Quarterly*, 90(2009), pp. 482–502(p. 482).
42 Ibid., p. 496.

tomato be like seeing a tomato part[43]. After all, a tomato part contains much less than a tomato as a whole.

Against this kind of challenge, Noë can be defended in at least two ways. First of all, the response can simply be that seeing a tomato as a whole, especially as a three-dimensional object, does not imply that perceivers must know about every bit of its properties precisely. All we have to do is to know that the tomato we are perceiving is a voluminous object. And achieving this does not require us to know that the colour of its hidden side has been changing.[44] This is a smart response that captures Noë's idea correctly and precisely, though it may not solve the doubt that the enactive approach to perception is not dependent on objects that are perceived. After all, an account of perception has to make some explanations on how can perceivers capture changes in objects. Noë has indicated that 'an object is perceptually available when our motorsensory relation to the objects satisfies movement- and object-dependence.'[45]He also indicates that the object-dependence of motor-sensory relation and sensorimotor contingencies means: 'Movements or other changes in the object manifestly control the character of the relation to the object or quality.'[46] Thus, the availability of an object could be doubted, if the relation that perceivers had to objects appeared to be object-independent when it failed to be sensitive enough to changes in objects, especially when the theory failed to explain the insensitivity. Following this line, it is not sufficient to respond to Leddington's

---

43 Ibid., p. 496.
44 The credit for this response should go to Michael Wheeler. He reminds me of the difference between seeing a tomato as a three-dimensional object and having a precise idea of every bit of it.
45 Noë, *Varieties of Presence*, p. 22.
46 Ibid.

comment by merely saying that all we need to know is that the object is voluminous and three-dimensional.

The problem raised by Leddington can be tackled in another way after we investigate his reading of the enactive account deeper. He misunderstands the enactive approach as he considers the two-dimensionality of presence to be two kinds of ways that an object is presented or two stages of presence. According to his view, the two dimensions of presence are possessed separately in a certain order: the presence of how objects are is grounded by and even inferred from the presence of how things look. In this case, presence becomes something that can be produced by us internally. However, this thread of thought is resisted by enactive theorists.

When an object is present to perceivers, the object is available to them as a whole because of their capacity to explore the whole of the object. Based on their capacities, perceivers can be aware of the two dimensions of presence at once. They are capable of perceiving the apparent shapes of the object because they know they are capable of taking different perspectives. Meanwhile, they perceive the object as a whole, because they know that it is this very voluminous item that allows them to perceive from all those perspectives. I expand on this point later in 2.1(2) but please bear in mind that the object is not presented in the two dimensions separately for now.

In the given example, the whole tomato is perceptually present to perceivers, which means that the whole of it is available for being perceived. Perceivers are allowed to perceive the whole object when they perceive its apparent shapes. They are also capable

of grasping changes in objects through perceiving. Perceivers do not see a part of a tomato or a part of its surface, and then have the idea of the whole tomato based on the part that is visually seen. The perception of the whole object comes from the object itself, as a whole, rather than only a part of it. An object just stands as a whole, naturally. The whole of an object is not a 'feat of consciousness.'[47] That is to say, an object as a whole is not created by perceptual consciousness. Rather, dividing an object into different parts is what we do consciously. When the hidden side of a tomato turns darker but its facing side does not, perceivers still have the chance to perceive it as a maturing one by getting better access to the tomato. Moreover, perceivers have the awareness of their ability to explore the perceived object and possible changes in it. E.g., perceivers can explore the hidden facet with bodily movements, which are made as a result of their navigation of sensorimotor contingencies. On the contrary, when the hidden side of it does not change in any way, perceivers cannot capture any changes even in cases where they achieve better access to the tomato. And in this sense, it is clear that changes in the tomato can affect the perceiver's relation to it.

The whole process of perceptual exploration of the same object is the same activity that extends constantly. We do not obtain an isolated episode of presence from the hidden side and combine it with the other episode of the facet to perceive the tomato as a maturing one. What we do is perceive the whole object in one continuous activity of perception. When the activity proceeds to a higher degree when people manage to get better access

---

47 Noë, 'Reply to Campbell, Martin, and Kelly', p. 693.

to objects, more details are being treated more carefully in the activity. This does not mean that new fragments are being attached and added to the presence of the object. People do not achieve different kinds of presence but achieve the presence of the same object to different degrees. This is shown by Noë: 'What difference there is in the character of our access to front and back, to apparent shape and shape, are matters of degree, not matters of kind.'[48] In perceptual activity, people do not form the perception of a whole object through fragmental perceptions of its parts but get better knowledge about the same object, including different parts of it.

People have to spend time and make efforts to perceive an object in a way that is more and more detailed. For example, I probably only perceive the maturing tomato as a tomato, which is a voluminous item, at the first glance. Then I can perceive it as a tomato whose colour is not evenly the same. I should not be judged as unable to capture the colour change on the hidden side only based on what is visually observed and unobserved by me at a single moment. As long as I have the competence and willingness to continue my perceiving, I do not break my perceptual activity. A better perception can be achieved through the further exploration of presence.

The sensorimotor thesis is compatible with this situation because enactive theorists regard perception as an activity that develops when time passes. Noë indicates that perceptual activities are events, which 'are creatures of time [and] are temporally extended in nature.'[49] If we apply a sensorimotor thesis to evaluate my perception of the

---

48 Noë, 'Précis of *Action in Perception*', p. 661.
49 Noë, *Varieties of Presence*, p. 77.

tomato, the judgment will be that I have not navigated sensorimotor contingencies sufficiently yet, and it will be implausible to claim that I cannot capture the change in colour, which is available for me. After all, I can spend more time and continue my exploration of the tomato. As long as I am aware of the availability of the whole tomato, including its hidden side, I can know that I am welcome to exhaust its presence, and I am capable to do so based on my knowledge. My capability to perceive better and better corresponds to the fact that perceiving is temporally extendable. At the same time, I perceive the tomato as a whole, a voluminous item both before and after I get to know that its colour is not even.

In perceiving, objects and their properties are at distance. Meanwhile, we always observe them by different modalities of perception from our perspective. For example, we touch when we press objects with different forces, and we hear a voice from different angles. We never observe an object from all different perspectives at once, which is impossible for us to do. The distance between objects and us, and the fact that there are always some objects being hidden from our view, result in that we have to take actions to advance our exploring activities to objects and make them more observable and comprehensible.

This kind of advancing action includes bringing what is absent into an observable range by adjusting perspective, as well as encountering what is at distance by bringing it closer. Noë suggests that what we do is to 'bring what is present, but absent, into view'; and to 'achieve contact with the object and its different kinds of properties' by our

sensorimotor skills.[50] We have to do these activities, because 'everything is always in some degree absent or remote'[51]. Here, I hope that my readers can keep in mind that to say objects are remote is not exactly to say that they are away from us physically. Achieving contact with objects does not necessarily mean that the physical distance between them and us is to be measured and shortened. When I endorse Noë's words and say that objects are remote from us, what I mean is that we do not have access to objects effortlessly. and access is something that we have to achieve with effort. I will come back to this point when I spell out how can we have the access to objects in the next chapter.

Why does Noë suggest that since everything is absent or remote, we have to achieve contact with objects? He does not say much about it, but I will put the reason briefly here, and leave more details until the next chapter. Because objects are remote, we have to do something, and even repeat doing what we do, so that we can get better access to objects and bring them nearer to us in the sense that we can perceive them to a higher degree, e.g., to have a better look and a better taste of them, or to know about their properties with more details. Perception is not something that happens all at once, because coping with those existing objects that are remote from us must take time and effort.

I should point out that it is worth discussing how the remoteness of objects can affect perception. This discussion is important because it can suggest that we can't exhaust any objects all at once in perception. Relevantly, when we understand that we cannot exhaust an object at a glance, we can make sense of the co-existence of two facts that seem to be

---

50 Ibid., p. 125.
51 Ibid.

contradictory: one of them is that the perception of the same object does not happen at a single moment; the other one is that in perception, objects and their properties present to us all at once, nevertheless, we cannot exhaust them. The conflict here is that how can an object present to us as a whole when we are merely able to capture some of its properties? And I think that my readers can easily find that this is another way to put Leddington's challenge towards the enactive approach to perception — 'how can seeing a tomato be like seeing a tomato-part.'[52]

If we consider the remoteness of objects, then it is plausible to claim that these two contradictory facts are two sides of the same coin in perception. Noë has touched on the significance of objects' being remote in his work, unfortunately, he does not put it with the two-dimensionality of presence together in his work explicitly. However, there are still hints for us to develop this thread of thoughts with inspiration from his work:[53]

> […] we gain perceptual content by active inquiry and exploration. When we see, for example, we are not aware of the whole scene in all its detail all at once. We do enjoy a sense of the presence of a whole detailed scene, but it is no part of our phenomenology that the experience represents all the detail all at once in consciousness. The detail is experienced by us as *out there*, not as *in our minds*.

---

52 Ibid., p. 496.
53 Noë, *Action in Perception*, p. 33.

Objects and all the detail of their presence are 'out there.' In this quotation, Noë indicates that objects are present as a 'whole detailed scene', and we can have 'a sense' of such a scene; he also indicates that we do not gain perceptual content from the whole detailed scene all at once, but by 'inquiry and exploration'. Unfortunately, he does not put it forward that because the scene is present 'out there,' we can know that object exists there as a whole, but are not able to have all its details at once.

I think that it is reasonable to put 'being remote' in the picture and have another way to express what Noë says here. Objects exist and present as complete objects, but, due to their remote existence away from us—being remote makes them be 'out there,' perception is not something that happens all at once. For example, I can approach to tomato and check how it grows when it matures. The tomato presents to me in the same status during my approach. And I can admire its colour and check if there are any holes in it. I can also adjust the perceptual perspective that I take by bodily movements and observe the tomato from different sides so that I know it better. All these actions that I can do are done as time goes on. Meanwhile, even though the tomato is right in front of me, there is still more space for me to act so that I can perceive it more sufficiently.

Because objects are remote from us when they are present to us, they always wait to be better accessed and explored. There is always space for us to improve our perception, to perceive an object in a more detailed way, and to get to know it better. Although a glance can enable us to perceive an object and have the sense that there is an object presenting as a whole, it cannot permit us to capture all the details of the object firmly.

There are two aspects of reasons for this. On the one hand, we can hardly grasp all the properties of an object with our sense organs at a single moment. As what is indicated by Noë, '[t]he world always outstrips what we now touch, or hold, or can take in at a glance.'[54] For example, we cannot penetrate a tomato and see what is on its backside with our eyes. On the other hand, it is also common that we do not reach out to capture all the details that are included in what is sensed because of our insufficient navigation of sensorimotor contingencies. For example, when I look at a tomato in front of me, I am not able to exhaust it at once, or even exhaust its front facet which is more accessible to me. Though the whole tomato presents to me and welcomes my perception, I still have to mediate the sensorimotor relation and so get closer to what is available to me. In perceiving, there are always more things to be found from the presence of objects, and so, exhausting the presence of objects thoroughly can only be a target that we can point at but hardly realise. As a result, the fact that people have no chance to take all the details from what is present and the other fact that objects present as complete and whole objects are compatible with each other, nevertheless they seem to be contradictory.

Understanding the compatibility is crucial in truly defending the sensorimotor thesis against Leddington's critics. Leddington's criticism stems from the idea that we perceive an object through the perception of a part of it, or a few parts of it. In his criticism of Noë's enactive account of presence, he urges people to consider a proposal: 'the surface of the tomato is to be individuated phenomenologically'. He illustrates this thought by

---

54 Noë, *Varieties of Presence*, p. 33.

writing: 'because only part of the tomato contributes to determining what my current visual experience is like, only part of the tomato is strictly speaking seen'.[55]

However, according to what I've discussed, it is implausible to say that the sensorimotor thesis cannot explain why we can perceive an object as a whole only based on the perception of a part of it. Firstly, it is not even a right summary of enactive account for perception. Though it is not denied by enactivism that what we can visually see is only 'part of the surface of an object,' [56] the enactive account for the perception of an object as a whole is not given in the way that Leddington conceives. I.e., what we do in perception is to have the perception of how things are based on perceptions of parts of them. According to the enactive account for perception, we experience things as the three-dimensional items they are when we are unable to see every bit of them because we have an understanding of how the way things look changes as we move.[57] This is what I discuss a lot in this work. Secondly, enactive theorists refuse the idea that perception of an object as a whole is generated from the perception of an object-part. It is resisted by Noë to 'factor experience into an occurrent and a merely virtual or potential part'[58]. An accessible object is available for being perceived and thus presents as a whole. One of the most important discoveries by enactive theorists is that objects do not present in parts, and we do not perceive them in parts, either. At the same time, we do not perceive it at one moment and another, but in a process that flows and develops naturally without being

---

55 Leddington, p. 488.
56 Noë, *Action in Perception*, p. 75.
57 Ibid., p. 77.
58 Ibid., p. 135.

divided into separated sections. We can do so, because experience 'always presents a structured field that extends outward to a periphery, with elements that are out of view. There is always room, within experience, for shifts of attention.'[59]

Therefore, the fact that objects are remote in perception helps with explicating that presence of objects is not the presence of parts of objects; it also helps with defending the sensorimotor thesis against Leddington's challenge.

At the same time, it can lead us to see that, when objects present to us, they present to us remotely. We can even say that presence of objects is also remote to us. I have this thought thanks to inspiration from Noë's work. Although he does not write down that presence is remote, he does say that '[t]he detail is experienced by us as *out there*, not as *in our minds*'.[60] Even though presence is generated when we get access to objects, objects that are present are still remote to us, at least to some degree. We get access to objects 'out there,' which means that what we achieve through the access to objects is 'out there,' i.e., remote. And so, we can say that presence of objects is also remote, like the objects themselves. The access to objects that we achieve is how we cope with the fact that objects are remote, but it does not change the fact that objects are something existing remotely, it does not change that presence of objects is also remote. Again, I will say more about this in the next chapter. But now, we can bear in mind that, objects are remote, though they are available for us to perceive. There is always space for us to get closer to objects in the sense that there is more, in their presence, for us to explore by proper navigation of

---

59 Ibid.
60 Ibid., p. 33.

sensorimotor contingencies. When an object presents the whole of itself perceptually to us at once, we have the access to this object, and its presence is available to us, but its presence is still remote, so it cannot be exhausted by our navigation of sensorimotor contingencies sufficiently and perfectly at once.

I have mentioned the idea that things in perception are always absent or remote to some degree. The absence and remoteness of objects determine that they are always present to us remotely, therefore, the presence is always remote. In the sense of the nature of perception, such remoteness means that presence always has to be achieved by perceivers. In the phenomenology of perception, objects including their parts can be presented to us even when they are absent, i.e., when there are no sensory inputs obtained from them. This sort of presence in absence can be achieved when we have a good mastery of sensorimotor contingencies. For example, we cannot obtain sensory inputs from a tomato apart from its front side, however, it is presented to us as a whole tomato even when there are no sensory stimulations got from its occluded parts. If we read the enactive approach in this way, then Noë's argument that 'perceptual presence is presence as absence'[61] is not a surprise. On this basis, Noë further suggests that perceptual presence is virtual. In my view, virtuality is a description of the phenomenal feature of presence, while remoteness is to explicate in what way objects present.

Some readers may be tempted to think that, objects' being remote means that the presence that we talk about here is incomplete. I would like to note here, that objects

---

61 Noë, *Varieties of Presence*, p. 95.

present remotely, or that we cannot explore presence in a throughout way all at once, does not mean that presence of objects is incomplete. When we encounter objects in perception, they are there, present, and available for us to explore, and they are there in a way that the wholes of them are there. If I use Noë's phrases to express this, then it will be that there is 'the presence of a whole detailed scene' out there.[62] As objects are not standing in the world incompletely and leaving some parts of them outside the world, they present completely. Thus, their presence is complete. Our developing and extending exploration of what is present through perceiving do not mean that presence is incomplete. On the contrary, this kind of enactive perception that improves through time suggests again that presence is complete, and it contains the whole object, though it is remote for perceivers. Presence is complete, so there is a reason and condition for us to always try out and manage to perceive objects in better ways. Otherwise, we only need to perceive those parts or properties of objects that are present and leave others behind.

2.2 Presence is dependent on the movements of objects and the bodily movements of perceivers

We have known that presence is dependent on sensorimotor contingencies. In the last chapter, it has been stated that, on the one hand, sensorimotor contingencies are determined by objects and, on the other hand, they can also be mediated by movements.

---

62 Noë, *Action in Perceptio*, p. 33.

Now, after looking into how sensorimotor contingencies are dependent on objects, we shall consider what influence the movement-dependence of sensorimotor contingencies has on presence.

Regarding the dependence on movements, there are at least two important points that should be considered. Firstly, sensorimotor contingencies are not only dependent on bodily movements of perceivers, but also dependent on movements of objects, including movements that are made by themselves, e.g., an animal and a vehicle can move, as well as cases where objects are made to move.[63] Secondly, sensorimotor contingencies are dependent on movements in the sense that the sensorimotor relation can display specific contingencies as correspondences to specific movements, and it can also display certain contingencies when there are no movements. For example, if I sit still with my sight down at my keyboard, then the keyboard is present to me. Though I do not make movements, the sensorimotor contingency that if I look down, then the keyboard is present to me is still enacted. In this case, I still take action to achieve contact with the keyboard by holding the sitting position, even though I do not move.

Both movements of objects and the bodily movements of perceivers can highlight specific sensorimotor contingencies. For example, when I read a book, the relation between the book and me is determined by conditions including the size and the clearness of letters in the book, the colour of the paper and how it reflects light, my vision, and

---

63 Noë puts cases where sensorimotor contingencies are dependent on movements that are made by objects themselves into the kind of cases suggesting that sensorimotor contingencies are object-dependent. Please refer to Noë, *Action in Perception*, pp. 64-65. I do not follow Noë here because I would like to make the classification more straightforward and clearer. Either my way of classification or the classification adopted by Noë shows that sensorimotor contingencies are dependent on objects' own movements. The difference in classification is not essential to what I discuss here.

lengths of my limbs, and so on. Based on this relation, when I pull the book nearer or push it farther, those contingencies corresponding to these movements can be highlighted, e.g., if I pull the book near, then lines that I read can appear clearer; or if I move the book from left to right, then new words appear at the centre of my vision, etc. These contingencies can be highlighted, not only by movements of the book that are caused by my actions but by subtle movements like movements of my eyeballs.

Noë considers the corresponding relation between movements and sensorimotor contingencies in the following way:[64]

The way sensory stimulation is affected by changes in a perceiver's geometrical relation to an object is an example of this sort of movement-dependent sensorimotor pattern, as is the way stimulation varies as a result of the perceiver's manipulation of an object (e.g., turning it in relation to a light source).

Here, Noë indicates that patterns of sensory stimulation we get from objects are changeable. More importantly, those patterns change in a way according to what movements happen. How should we understand Noë's proposal here? Various patterns of sensory stimulation come from various sensorimotor contingencies. The movement-dependence means that movements can enact corresponding contingencies or make corresponding contingencies more influential in perceptual activity. When the

---

64 Noë, *Action in Perception*, p. 129.

sensorimotor relation is adjusted by different sensorimotor contingencies being enacted, the quality of the access we have to objects is improved or degraded. As a result, the way that objects are present can change phenomenologically. The presence may appear in different intensities and clearances throughout the process that different sensorimotor contingencies are highlighted.

The variation of presence and how the sensorimotor relation is mediated by movements are trackable and so they can be mastered by perceivers. I would like to explain why they are trackable here and say more about how perceivers have a mastery of them later. Although the sensorimotor relation can be mediated by movements, these movements do not mean that the object that is perceived has changed. Noë has made it clear that our relation to the object is not only highly movement-dependent, it is also object-dependent.[65] Considering this argument together with the case that sensorimotor relations can be mediated by movements, we may find that, as long as objects present to perceivers without changing themselves, they present as the same items. This makes it possible for perceivers to track the variation of presence on the ground in the dependence on the object. When the object remains the same, the set of all the possible contingencies that are produced by the interrelation between perceivers and objects can be trackable.

How could this be possible? Noë uses the notion of 'visual potential' to name those possible contingencies that can occur in the visual experience of one same object. All those possible contingencies amount to 'the way [an object's] aspect changes as a result

---

65 Ibid., p. 65.

of movement [...]. Any movement determines a set of changes in perceived aspect; any set of changes in perceived aspects determines equivalence classes of possible movements.'[66] When a perceiver perceives an object at a time, those perceptual potentials, i.e., possible sensorimotor contingencies, are generated when there comes to be the sensorimotor relation between perceivers and objects. As long as the perceived object itself does not change at the time it is perceived, the potential patterns of stimulation that can take place are within a maintaining range. The range is determined by the interrelation between objects and perceivers. The relation is built based on perceivers, objects, and the perceiver's ability to mediate the relation, i.e., the ability to act. These factors can either maintain the same or be monitored when the object is perceived. As a result, the way patterns of stimulation change following movements can be tracked.

The thought that the range of sensorimotor contingencies that can occur is stable can be better understood if we take a look at the theory of affordances.[67] Noë has said that 'to feel a surface as flat is precisely to perceive it as impeding or shaping one's possibilities of movement'[68]. He makes an argument about how the perceived object could affect movements that can happen in the interrelation between the object and perceiver by adopting the affordance theory that is originated by Gibson[69]. The work by Gibson is mainly in the field of ecological psychology, which also holds a non-

---

66 Ibid., p. 131.
67 Michael Wheeler suggests I introduce the relevance between the enactive approach and the affordance theory to better spell out my argument here.
68 Noë, *Action in Perception*, p. 105.
69 See James Gibson, *The Ecological Approach to Visual Perception*. (Hillsdale, NI: Lawrence Erlbaum, 1979).

representational view of cognition.[70] There are rich meanings of the notion of affordance in ecological psychology. I cannot go into detail about them due to the limit of space. Recently, there are pieces of literature engaging in the dialogue between enactivism and ecological psychology.[71] Here, I take a simplified way to understand the theory of affordances provided by Eric Rietveld and Julian Kiverstein: 'Up till now affordances have typically been understood as motor possibilities the environment offers to a creature.'[72]As objects limit the possible movements that can be made with them, the sensorimotor relation between the same perceiver and the same object is rather stable. That is to say, our environment including objects that we can perceive structures the possibilities that we can move and cause movements in it, thus, our explorations of objects are structured by these objects themselves and their surroundings. Sensorimotor contingencies that are involved in the relationship are within a range and so can be trackable. In this ground, how objects are can be presented through all those possible sensorimotor contingencies and varied presence. For example, a ball can structure and limit the way that our hands move around it, which reveals that the ball is round.[73] In this case, different patterns of sensorimotor contingencies that stand out due to different movements are limited by objects.

70 Kevin Ryan and Shaun Gallagher, 'Between Ecological Psychology and Enactivism: Is There Resonance?', *Frontiers in Psychology*, 6(2020), pp. 1–13.
71 For examples of how enactivism and ecological psychology are discussed together, please see Yanna Bontcheva Popova and Joanna Rączaszek-Leonardi, 'Enactivism and Ecological Psychology: The Role of Bodily Experience in Agency', *Frontiers in Psychology*, 10(2020), pp. 1–16; Catherine Read and Agnes Szokolszky, 'Ecological Psychology and Enactivism: Perceptually-Guided Action vs. Sensation-Based Enaction', *Frontiers in Psychology*, 7(2020), pp. 1–19.
72 Eric Rietveld and Julian Kiverstein, 'A Rich Landscape of Affordances', *Ecological Psychology*, (forthcoming).
73 Noë, *Action in Perception*, p. 103.

In perception, some sensorimotor contingencies can be significantly enacted by movements, while others may stay relatively potential. However, all these sensorimotor contingencies are existing based on the sensorimotor interrelation between objects and perceivers. Some contingencies may be less enacted, but this does not mean that they do not exist. These contingencies that may not be significantly selected and singled out by a specific movement in perception are also included in the whole set of contingencies that are afforded by the sensorimotor relation. Moreover, they can be enacted by other movements at any moment. For example, a laptop can afford several sensorimotor contingencies at the same time. If I look at its case, then I can see the brand logo of it, i.e., it will be presented to me as a laptop of a certain brand. If I look at its illuminated screen, then it will be presented to me as a working laptop. There can be the case that I see the case of an opening laptop rather than its screen behind the laptop. Then, the sensorimotor contingency that if I see the case and logo, the laptop can be presented as a laptop of a certain brand is enacted.

Although I do not see the screen, the sensorimotor contingency—that if I see its illuminated screen, it will be presented as a working laptop—also exists. When I have a good understanding of these sensorimotor contingencies, the latter can still be enacted by my understanding. Though this sensorimotor contingency is less enacted, it can lead people to enact them more. Rietveld and Kiverstein suggest that there is a sort of relevant affordance: 'A particular affordance becomes a relevant affordance when it solicits or

motivates an individual to engage with it in way that is adequate to the situation.'[74] We

can also say that those less enacted sensorimotor contingencies are relevant contingencies,

which are also influential in the way that objects are present to perceivers. Their influence

does not contradict the fact that they do not affect patterns of stimulation as obviously as

those sensorimotor contingencies that are more highlighted at some specific moments. In

this way, the sensorimotor relation is mediated by movements regarding its intensity and

quality, which result in variation of the presence.

To conclude, on the one hand, objects always present as complete items, as wholes

in perceivers' gradual and continuous access to objects. Meanwhile, the whole set of

sensorimotor contingencies that are afforded by objects can be stable. On the other hand,

the presence of objects can change phenomenologically, because patterns of stimulation

from objects can be changed when different patterns of sensorimotor contingencies are

enacted by movements. This is the foundation of the two-dimensionality of our perception.

We shall now move forward to see how this two-dimensionality is achieved by perceivers.

Then, we are close to addressing how we achieve access to presence by navigation of

sensorimotor contingencies.

---

74 Eric Rietveld and Julian Kiverstein.

Chapter 3

To Achieve Access to Objects and Perceptual Presence

So far, I have illustrated how the presence of things is dependent on objects and movements. Nevertheless, presence is also partly determined by factors that are more relevant to perceivers, e.g., the way they make movements in perceiving. At the beginning of the last chapter, I quote Noë to point out that presence is what we achieve in the activity of perceiving. We manage to do this by navigating sensorimotor contingencies. That is to say, presence is a result of what we do skilfully to perceive. In this chapter, I focus on what makes presence dependent on the navigation of sensorimotor contingencies, i.e., what perceivers do skilfully in perception, and start to explicate how they achieve presence by such navigation.

3.1 The navigation of sensorimotor contingencies is constitutive in perception

Presence is determined by how we navigate various sensorimotor contingencies. Thus, presence is dependent on what we do as perceivers in perception. I will not be surprised if readers are doubting this argument or taking it as insufficient to support the thesis that action is constitutively involved in perception. They may think that the fact

that how things are presented to us can be affected by our actions does not prove that action is a constituent of perception.

Here, I want to argue that the remoteness of objects in perception is exactly what generates the necessity of our enactive activities when we perceive, and the key to understanding why perception is dependent on capacities for action. I shall indicate that the being present remotely of objects has not been investigated in a proper way that can be equivalent to its significance. Noë does not stress the remoteness of objects enough, as he pays more attention to showing those better explanations for perceptual phenomena that we can give by sensorimotor thesis. The remoteness of objects is mentioned when he proposes that understanding and skills are necessary for us to achieve perception, yet incidentally. For example, in *Varieties of Presence*, he says, '[s]ince everything is always in some degree absent or remote, understanding is necessary for perceptual consciousness'[75]. However, he does not say more about why the being remote and absent of objects makes understanding necessary. In addition, when he uses 'remote' to say that objects are present to us because we achieve access to objects in *Varieties of Presence*, his focus is not on perception but on thought.[76]

There are three confusing points caused by the lack of explanations for the remoteness of objects. Firstly, it is unclear whether being remote for objects means the same in cases where we consider perception and cases where we consider thought. Secondly, there can be a sort of misreading that objects are remote only because they are

---

75 Noë, *Varieties of Presence*, p. 105.
76 See Noë, *Varieties of Presence*, p. 27.

physically away from us. Perception is dependent on capacities for action because we need to pull objects closer in the physical space. Thirdly, it is vague what 'having access to objects'[77] means in perception. Now, I investigate these three problems and suggest how can we handle them.

First, we have to know clearly whether being remote in the perception of objects means the same as being remote in thought or not. According to the way we use the word 'remote', it is normal to say that a friend in another city is remote from us, but it could be less ordinary to say that a cup right in front of me is remote. As a result, to say that what I am thinking about is remote from me seems to be more reasonable than to say a visible item, which is right in front of me, is remote from us. Thus, thinking about a remote friend can be more understandable than looking at a remote friend. If being remote means something different for objects that are perceived and objects that are thought, then more explanations are required to claim that understanding is necessary for perception, which depends on the prior claim that all things are remote.[78] Likewise, it also needs more explanations to demonstrate why both objects in perception and objects in thought are remote in the same sense. Noë does not give enough explications about why we can ascribe remoteness to both two cases in the same sense; he does not explain if there are any differences between them, either. Thus, the fact that objects are remote from perceivers is not explicated by him in a way that is clear enough.

---

77 Ibid.
78 Noë, *Action in Perception*, p. 105.

The second problem is closely related to the first one. We tend to think that it is more reasonable to say that a friend in another city is remote than to say that a cup in front of me is remote because the long physical distance between objects and us is usually taken as the indicator for something to be remote. In addition, when Noë suggests that everything is absent or remote, some readers may refer to physical distance or obstacles between objects and perceivers. Based on this thought, people may think that actions are required in perception because we have to eliminate the physical distance between objects and ourselves. Moreover, they may regard being remote and being absent as two separate kinds of difficulties that are to be solved by movements, so they can dismiss that both being physically remote and absent are caused by the same fact, i.e., objects are presented to us remotely. E.g., there are several feet between an object and me, then I walk forward to shorten the physical distance to make the object present to me more clearly, given that its locus becomes closer to me. Or, when a tomato is placed in front of me, I cannot see its backside, so I walk around the tomato to have a look at its back. Considering these cases, some people may think that my walking towards the object or walking around it is exactly the action of achieving access that I do and I do not need to do anything else. To conceive the argument that objects are remote in this way is problematic. It cannot provide much help to convince readers of the idea that sensorimotor understanding is indispensable to perception. After all, orthodox theorists can also say that we have to walk and get closer to an object to give it a better look.

The third problem comes after the former two. Noë emphasises that 'presence is achieved' in the way that 'we skillfully achieve access to the world' at the very beginning of *Varieties of Presence*.[79] However, according to the orthodox approach, activities of probing remote objects are not constitutively necessary for perceivers to have perception—perceivers can choose to have a better perception through these activities or not to do so. To promote the enactive approach to perception, it has to be set out what is wrong with the idea that capacities for actions are at best beneficial toppings on perception.

Then, how do we treat these three problems? To start with, a perceptual object is remote to us in the same sense that an object in thought is remote when we consider perception and thought by the enactive approach. In the example of thinking about a remote friend, Noë says that the friend 'is present for me insofar as I have access to him'[80]. This suggests that, in thought, a remote object presents for us, as a result of our access to it. What we do in thought is the same as what we do in perception to make an object present for us –we achieve access to objects in both cases. In addition, there is no difference of kind between the access we achieve in thought and the access we achieve in perception. I will say more about this later.

Regarding the second confusion, whether objects are remote because they are physically away from perceivers, my answer is no. The perceptual relation between objects and perceivers is not exactly a spatial relation. We shall recognise that, how well

---

79 Noë, *Varieties of Presence*, p. xi.
80 Ibid., p. 33.

can we perceive an object is not only determined by the physical distance between objects and us, or whether any things are standing in between us. I have mentioned in the last chapter, in perception, that the physical distance or obstacles between objects and us are not exactly what causes every object to be remote, or absent. How well we can perceive an object is constitutively determined by our ability to capture the stimulation from objects. This sort of ability stands apart from the spatial relationships between objects and perceivers. E.g., some of the elders who have presbyopia may incline to move the newspaper several inches away to have a clearer view of what is in it. In this case, even though the newspaper is farther from the reader spatially, perceivers have better access to the newspaper, as they can read it more easily. On the contrary, those people who do not have presbyopia do not do this when they read.

We can find that our physical conditions, including the wellness of our sense organs, heights, lengths of limbs, etc., can all result in different requirements for mediations of the relation between objects and ourselves in perception. Like Noë argues, 'it is only given our biological natures that this world exists for us, that we have access to the world in this mode.'[81] The relation we have to objects is grounded by the fact that we can capture sensory stimulation from them by our sense organs. In addition, we have to mediate the relation by movements due to our need to adjust the functions of sense organs properly. On the one hand, the relation is sensory; on the other hand, it is motor. To mediate this sensorimotor relation properly, we must have the sensorimotor

---

81 Noë, *Action in Perception*, p. 156.

understanding of the sensorimotor relation and the ability to act skilfully so that we can mediate the sensorimotor relation.

Therefore, the presence of objects cannot be given to us when we do not know how to achieve it or do nothing. As Noë says, 'presence is achieved'[82]. In this case, objects are remote because they are not something that we can be aware of by doing nothing. They are not something that presents to us in cases where we do nothing. Features of our bodies, which include our sense organs, together with objects, determine that there is a sensorimotor relation between objects and us. This sort of relation forces us to act and achieve access to objects, otherwise, there is no way for those objects to be present for us. In this sense, objects are remote. Accordingly, the physical distance between objects and us is, at best, merely a condition that may affect how we mediate the sensorimotor relation between objects and us, rather than the reason for us to say that objects are remote to us in perception.

The sensorimotor relation that we have to objects brings about the consequence that objects are remote to us, in the sense that we have to make efforts to achieve access to objects and make them present to us. Therefore, specifically speaking, objects are not only physically distanced from us but practically remote from us in perception. As for objects in thought, they are also practically remote as we have to achieve access to them and refer to them, even though the relation between objects in thought and us usually can only be 'quasi-perceptual'—objects can be 'too far to be seen.'[83] Likewise, those objects

---

82 Noë, *Varieties of Presence*, p. xi.
83 Ibid., p. 27.

that are present to us in an absent way are also practically remote to us. This forces us to continue the activity of achieving access to objects that are already present to us. Thus, there becomes the variance of presence through our perceiving, e.g., various apparent shapes of the same object can be achieved by us. As the whole object is available for us all along through the whole processing of perception, the variation of presence displays a difference in the degree to which we achieve access to an object, rather than a difference in kinds of presence.

Now, let us move to the third problem. Given the fact that objects are practically remote, rather than merely physically remote, what we have to overcome in achieving access to objects and the world is beyond simple physical distance and obstacles. In the view of the orthodox approach to perception, movements and actions are often taken as instruments to overcome the negative effects that physical distance and blocks cause for perception. Because physical distance and blocks are not the only things that we have to deal with in perception, the activity of achieving access by acting in perception cannot be exhausted by that kind of instrumental action in perception. Actions are welcomed in the orthodox picture of perception as they can improve perception functionally, but they are not constitutively significant in the orthodox picture—according to this sort of view, if there were no actions there, we could still have perception. In the view of the orthodox picture, the biggest thing that we can miss by not having action in perceiving is just a better perception that could bring us a better knowledge of objects that we perceive.

However, capacities for action are far more significant for perceptual activities than what has been disclosed by the orthodox view of perception. The fact that objects are all practically remote means that we have to know, practically, how to cope with remoteness. Otherwise, they are too far from us to be encountered and perceived. This is to say, if we do not achieve access to objects, there are no objects that can be perceived, i.e., there are no objects available for us to perceive. Therefore, there cannot be any perception at all. Because access to objects is constitutive of perception, it is different from actions that are only taken as instrumental means to improve perception by orthodox theorists.

The access to objects enables us to achieve the presence of the world, i.e., to have the perception, so the whole perceptual activity is an action to make objects show up for us by achieving access to objects. To have access to them successfully, we are not only ready to adjust to the situation where the object and we are, and navigate sensorimotor contingencies generated in the situation, but are already doing so at the very beginning of perception. The action of navigation has to be put in place at the very start for the activity of perception to exist at all.

Because the navigation of sensorimotor contingencies goes throughout the whole processing of perception, we must have the sensorimotor understanding to perceive. Having sensorimotor understanding makes us know that we can act to achieve access to objects by navigating sensorimotor contingencies and we must do so to perceive them. Only in this way, can we perceive objects that are remote or absent. Otherwise, we would, again, fall in the gap between how things look from a perspective and how things are. For

example, Daniel Dennett makes the argument that what is present in our blind spot—I take this to be another way to put what is absent or remote for us—is simply dismissed by our brain. Regarding the phenomenology of having presence in absence, Dennett develops another argument with an example of a wall that is covered by many identical faces of Marilyn Monroe.[84] According to Dennett's example, when we enter a room where the wall is covered by this kind of wallpaper, like the work by Andy Warhol, what we can see is just one piece of Marilyn's portrait, because we can foveate only one picture, and others cannot be visually captured by us in high resolution. Meanwhile, we have the impression that we 'are actually seeing hundreds of identical Marilyns'[85].

The sensorimotor thesis helps us out of the orthodox problem of how we represent things as wholes in our minds based on what we perceive from only one limited perspective. Noë illustrates the example of the Marilyns' wall in a way that holds better: we 'experience the wall as present, and [we] experience [ourselves] as having access to the wall, by looking here, or there, by attending here, or there'[86]. Although the wall is remote and even absent for us, they are there. They are available for us to encounter by navigating sensorimotor contingencies properly, at the very same time when they are remote and absent. We do not represent all of those Marilyns in our minds by inferring from the one picture of Marilyn that we can capture at the focus of our vision but encounter them in places where they are by having access to them. Therefore, I know that

---

84 Daniel Dennett, *Consciousness Explained*. (New York: Back Bay Books/Little, Brown and Company, 1991), pp. 354–355.
85. Ibid., p. 355
86 Noë, *Action in Perception*, p. 56.

what I am seeing is not only one Marilyn, but many Marilyns; I also know that I can foveate each of them by mediating my navigation of sensorimotor contingencies in the given situation.

Presence is achieved by having access to objects. This is to say that presence is immediately dependent on objects that are perceived. We deal with the fact that objects are practically remote for us in perceiving, rather than objects' perspective appearances that are different from how they are. Noë indicates that 'we have the impression that the world is represented in full detail in consciousness because, wherever we look, we encounter detail'[87]. We perceive the world in full detail because we encounter it when we perceive it. That is to say, we have to perceive actively so that we can encounter the world in detail and have the perception of it in detail. Action and the achievement of access by action exist in perception at the very beginning of the activity to obtain the very perception. Thus, we shall find that action is constitutively in perception in a sense that is more profound and subtle than specific bodily actions that can help us improve how we perceive. Action is not something that we call on when we need it and abandon when we do not in perception but is the way itself to perceive. When we highlight some of the sensorimotor contingencies by movements in perceiving, we are not switching from a perceptual status without any actions to another in which we are acting, but adjusting what we are already doing by those movements. At any moment that we perceive the world, the world surrounds us, and there is a sensorimotor relation between us and objects.

---

87 Ibid., pp. 49–50.

The relationship is influential to both us and the world. To perceive in such a relation, 'we are always in the midst of making adjustments to the world around us. And we are always liable to be caught in the act!'[88] To conclude, achieving access to objects is not only about making movements to improve perception. It is constitutive in perception, rather than a supplement to the perception that can be removed.

Achieving access to objects is constitutive of perception, so this kind of action is in perception throughout the whole activity of perception, i.e., the whole process of perceiving. It is not something, that is necessary for the perception to start existing but dispensable when we have achieved the presence of objects. When orthodox theorists accept the idea that action can help with perception, they do not only assume that action can be called into perception whenever it is needed, but have the assumption that action can be stopped when we have adjusted to a better gesture to perceive. For example, when a painting is 10 feet away so that I cannot observe brush strokes on it clearly, I can walk closer to the painting to perceive its details better. Orthodox theorists can regard my walking as an action to change the fact that the painting is remote. By walking, the painting is not too far for me to be perceived, so it is not remote anymore. However, the fact that objects are practically remote is not changed thoroughly by movements that are made to shorten the physical distance between objects and perceivers.

I have indicated and illustrated that being remote, practically, is beyond being physically distanced or hidden. When we achieve access to objects, they are still remote

---

88 Noë, *Varieties of Presence*, p. 4.

for us. Having access to an object means that we can encounter it whenever we want—

we have the right, the ability, the permission to attend to the world and perceive it, but

having access to an object does not mean that we possess it forever. Accessible objects

are available for us to perceive, and they do present to us when we achieve access.

However, even in cases where we achieve access to objects and they are accessible to us,

being accessible to objects does not mean that these objects are meant to be perceived.

Perception is always achieved, or even, to be more accurate, always being achieved. This

is because, primarily, that perception is an activity we do. In the last chapter, I have

discussed Noë's argument that activity is an event, and an event is a creature of time. He

also argues that events 'are never whole. At the beginning, they have not yet achieved a

conclusion. At the end, their beginning is done with.' Thus, it would be confusing to

'suppose that the beginning of an event would be available, and so present, at its

conclusion.'[89] Besides the active nature of the perceptual activity, the remoteness of

objects is another factor that causes the need to achieve access to an object constantly in

perception. We are already familiar with the suggestion that 'everything is always in some

degree absent or remote'[90]. Here, I have to add that everything, no matter whether it is

present to us or not, is always to some degree absent or remote. Even in cases where we

have already been perceiving something, if we stop making efforts to have access to it, it

will not be present to us. Therefore, when we achieve access to objects, they are still

practically remote for us. I believe that this can help my readers have a better

---

89 Ibid., p. 77.
90 Ibid., p. 125.

understanding of the argument that the activity of achieving access to objects and capacities for action are constitutive in perception.

Achieving access to objects is constitutive for the whole activity of perception, so whenever we perceive and have a perception of the world, we are attending to the world, encountering it, and making efforts to have access to it. Things can only be accessed when we have access to it. That is to say, perceptual access to everything is not given to us without being asked, or better, possessed by us effortlessly. Access to objects is always achieved by our mastery and navigation of sensorimotor contingencies based on our sensorimotor understanding of the situation where objects and we are. Therefore, when something is accessible for perceivers to perceive, perceivers must have access to it. It is impossible for something being accessible to a perceiver in cases where the perceiver does not have access to it. When we say that presence is achieved by having access to objects, there is no distinction between being accessible and being accessed for the very same object. When an object is accessible to a perceiver, it must be accessed by the perceiver.

I shall mention here that Noë himself does not use the phrase 'being accessed' as I do. We can hardly find any hints suggesting that he takes it as an issue if something can be accessible for a perceiver when it is not accessed by the same perceiver. Nevertheless, it is worth clarifying and emphasizing that there is no distinction between being accessible and accessed in his view, or more broadly, according to the enactive approach.[91]

---

91 I realise the need for this clarification thanks to discussions with Michael Wheeler.

It is an ordinary scenario where we describe something as accessible but not accessed in our daily dialogue. For example, we can say there is an accessible changing room in a theatre but it is not accessed by anyone at the moment given that there is nobody in the room.[92] This divergence stems from the everyday use of the word access and its derivative words. In everyday language, access can mean that we can get into a place or make use of something. E.g., I have the access to a changing room means that I can go into it and use it. To have the access does not necessarily bring out that I realise the access in daily dialogue. That is to say, I can hang out in a mall but do not use its changing rooms, though I do have the access to these rooms. In this case, I am not accessing any changing room, even though I have access to them. I.e., no changing rooms are accessed by me. This situation introduces another derivative notion of access, which is accessible. We can see that being accessible and having accessibility for something does not necessarily mean to be accessed.

However, in my view, the enactive approach has to resist this sort of divergence that is well adopted in daily life. The resistance comes from the nature of enactive theory. I have set down that, objects are always remote from us in perceptual activity, which holds even when we have been navigating sensorimotor contingencies and making objects present to us. The presence comes from the achievement of access to objects by perceivers at the very moment perceivers are navigating sensorimotor contingencies. The presence is achieved through access at present. Presence cannot hold without being achieved. In

---

92 The credit for this example goes to Michael Wheeler.

the picture of enactive theory, only access that we have to objects can make objects accessible for us. An object cannot be accessible to us when we do not achieve any access to the object. In the enactive picture of perception, the accessibility of an object is grounded in the fact that perceivers have been achieving access to it by navigating sensorimotor contingencies. Here, I adopt a technical sense of access and its derivatives which makes sense in the enactive framework.[93] According to this technical use, if I say something has accessibility to us, what I mean is that it is accessed by us.

Objects are present to us, as they are accessible. If there were accessible objects that are not accessed by perceivers, then there would be the conclusion that we can have a perception of objects when these objects are not accessed by us, i.e., when we do not get access to them. This would separate perceptual accessibility, and then the presence, of objects from the activity of achieving access to objects. It would further shake the argument that only when we navigate sensorimotor contingencies can we have any perception of anything. In this case, it is unacceptable for the sensorimotor thesis of perception that accessibility can be applied to any objects when they are not accessed.

My illustration of the enactive approach does not contradict Noë's thoughts. The distinction between objects being accessible and objects being accessed cannot hold within his view of the sensorimotor thesis. For example, when talking about the phenomenon that we can have a visual perception of what we do not really 'see', like the backside or inside of a tomato, Noë writes:[94]

---

93 Due to the limit of space, I cannot expand on the applicability of my technical use of the notion of access in fields out of the enactive framework, though it is worth doing so.
94 Noë, *Varieties of Presence*, pp. 19–20.

[The detail] shows up as present […] in that I understand […] that by the merest movement of my eyes and head I can secure access to an element that now is obscured on the periphery of the visual field. It now shows up as present, but out of view, insofar as I understand that I am now related to it by familiar patterns of motorsensory dependence. It is my basic understanding of the way my movements produce sensory change given my situation that makes it the case […] that elements outside of focus and attention can be perceptually present.

What he sets down explicitly here is that things that are not exactly seen in our vision are present for us based on our understanding that we can act to secure access whenever we want. Some readers may take this to be suggesting that he does not get access to the discussed detail. This is a misreading. Having a sensorimotor understanding of the situation means that we have been achieving access to objects already. Noë suggests that we can have 'a distinctively visual style of access to' what is unseen based on our mastery of sensorimotor contingencies that can be generated in the sensorimotor relation between the unseen and us.[95] In the example above, as the perceiver has an understanding of his sensorimotor relation to the obscured detail, he has achieved access to the detail to some degree. Meanwhile, the detail is accessible to him—it cannot be so if he did not achieve

---

95 Ibid., p. 20.

any understanding of it. In this case, being accessible and being accessed are merely two expressions of the same thing, which means there are no distinctions between the two.

This conclusion might be challenged by some people. An object can be present in a way that its presence is full of detail, however, it is common for us to fail to 'see' some of those details. When we mediate how we perceive with bodily movements, these details that were unseen in our vision could become seen. Some people may ask: even if we agree that these details are accessible through the whole process, how can we accept that what does not appear in our vision is accessed by us? More importantly, how can we say that what is unseen and what is visually seen are both accessed by us?

Firstly, what is not in our vision, or does not present by high resolution, is either practically absent or remote for us. The absence and remoteness of objects do not make it impossible for us to have access to objects. According to the sensorimotor thesis, we can have access to what is absent in our vision, like the back of the tomato we discuss above. From that sort of example, we shall find that absence and remoteness do not prevent us from having access to objects. On the contrary, they are exactly what forces us to achieve access to objects. As what can be foveated is changeable by movements, the given objects are placed in a sensorimotor relation that is shared with perceivers. In the situation of sensorimotor relation, having access to objects amounts to having the mastery of sensorimotor contingencies and navigating them, by which way the perceiver gets access to objects. Therefore, what is not in our vision can be accessed by us, given that we get access to it in sensorimotor relation.

Secondly, when we mediate the sensorimotor relation between objects and us by specific movements, what is changing about the presence of objects is the degree of it, rather than the kind. Thus, 'there is no sharp line to be drawn between that which is and that which is not perceptually present.'[96] When we foveate what was visually unseen, we have higher access to it, so it becomes more accessible for us. It is accessible to us, both before and after those movements. Again, we can take the tomato to be an example: 'the front of the tomato is maximally present; the back a little less so; the hallway even less so.'[97] In perception, we do not start navigating sensorimotor contingencies and monitor the sensorimotor relation that we have to objects when we mediate the relation by movements due to the need for a better view of specific details. The mediation is a part of our navigation, which is carried out anyway—no matter whether there are those movements to foveate the aimed detail or not. As we are navigating sensorimotor contingencies and so make objects present to us anyway—nevertheless some details are not foveated or visually seen, but they are present. When we mediate the sensorimotor relation by making more movements, we get better access to it. Different accessibilities can be attributed to the detail. This is based on the fact that the detail is accessed perceptually, though the level to which it is accessed can be changed. Being accessible for an object is a thing that can change in degree, so we can also evaluate how an object is accessed by degree. In this case, both the object that is present but not visually seen and the object that is present and visually seen can be described as being accessed.

---

96 Ibid., p. 26.
97 Ibid.

To summarise, the fact that objects are perceptually remote for us makes sensorimotor understanding and achieving access to objects to be constitutive components in perception. Objects are practically remote for us in perception and thought. In perception, they can be physically far from us so that we cannot perceive them well, but this is not always the case. It is the sensorimotor relation that is shared by objects and perceivers that makes objects practically remote, rather than physical distance or obstacles. Therefore, access to objects that we achieve contributes to the movement that is merely made to improve perception. Such access is indispensable for perception, and exactly the way that we perceive, while movements that we make to improve perception can be replaced and even removed. These movements are means that we take to mediate the sensorimotor relation that we have with objects and so achieve access to objects. To cope with the fact that objects are practically remote or absent for us, achieving access to objects is what we do to approach perception. In this way, we make what is not given to us become available for us to perceive, so anything that is perceptually accessible is perceptually accessed at the same time. As everything is always remote or absent to some degree—even when it is accessed, achieving access to objects is constitutive for perception. In this case, perception is an activity that we do, and action is in perception.

3.2 How to navigate sensorimotor contingencies

The sensorimotor relation we have to objects determines that objects are remote from

us when we perceive them. To cope with this fact and achieve access to objects, we have to act skilfully. Therefore, presence is dependent on what we do in perceiving, i.e., our navigation of sensorimotor contingencies. Such navigation is possible because different contingencies can be enacted to different degrees when the sensorimotor relation between objects and perceivers is mediated by movements. The movement-dependence of sensorimotor contingencies provides conditions for us to operate our perceptual abilities and so capture what presents to us. People can mediate the sensorimotor relation by bodily movements and making objects move, etc. Perceivers do not always make these movements happen, but they are still able to understand what they can do and what sensorimotor contingencies can be enacted by different movements. This understanding can help perceivers to know what mediations they can bring to the sensorimotor relation by their activities. This knowledge is sensorimotor. Noë makes a detailed description of the scene where we operate this knowledge:[98]

> In looking at the tomato, you implicitly take it that were you to move your eyes a bit to the left or right, or up or down, you would bring previously hidden or obscured parts of the tomato into view. […] You visually experience parts of the tomato that, strictly speaking, you do not see, because you understand, implicitly, that your sensory relation to those parts is mediated by familiar patterns of sensorimotor dependence.

---

98 Noë, *Action in Perception*, p. 77

Sensorimotor knowledge enables us to perceive, especially to perceive as we wish. We manage to do this by navigating sensorimotor contingencies and highlighting those contingencies relating to the patterns of sensory stimulation that we are more interested in. Noë concludes the way that we perceive the world by enacting different sensorimotor contingencies as: '[w]e enact it by enabling it to show up for us'[99]. For example, when a farmer wants to observe how a tomato grows by checking its leaves, she can pick up it and observe from upside down rather than look at its side, then the stem and leaves of the tomato can present in a more significant way to her. At the same time, what was visually absent to her could be seen after the change of observing perspective. Nevertheless, the tomato still presents to her as a voluminous item, rather than merely several leaves on the circular top. This suggests that perceivers can explore objects in an active, changeable and continuous style by mediating the sensorimotor relation through the mastery of sensorimotor contingencies.

Thanks to the object-dependence of presence and the fact that objects present to perceivers remotely, perceivers can perceive how an object is at the same time they perceive how it looks. In the farmer's case, though the tomato looks to her differently when she checks it from its top and its side, the tomato still, at the same time, presents as a whole, which is a voluminous item. Through this activity of perceiving the tomato, the set of possible sensorimotor contingencies remains the same. The theory of affordance

99 Noë, *Varieties of Presence*, p. 132.

can lend help for us to understand such stability of sensorimotor contingency again: 'to perceive is (among other things) to learn how the environment structures one's possibilities for movement and so it is, thereby to experience possibilities of movement and action afforded by the environment.'[100] In the tomato example, we talk about here, the perceiver, the object, and the perceiver's ability to act do not change in the short time in which perceptual activity takes place, thus it is the farmer's navigation of sensorimotor contingencies that is adjusted, rather than the set of sensorimotor contingencies. Through the farmer's navigation, specific sensorimotor contingencies can be enacted, while others are made to be less influential on how the tomato presents to her. For example, when she checks the leaves of the tomato by turning it around and directing her sight to those leaves, the contingency, that leaves are present to her right in front of her eyes if she turns the tomato and looks at the top, is enacted. Meanwhile, other possible contingencies, such as that only parts of leaves extending to the side can be captured by her visually if she looks at the side of the tomato, become potential contingencies waiting to be enacted to a higher degree.

In this example, the bodily movements, such as grasping the tomato and turning it around, that the farmer makes in checking the tomato, show her mastery of sensorimotor contingencies. However, this perceiver's mastery of sensorimotor contingencies goes far deeper than these movements. This movement is rather the observable aspect of her navigation. The whole of her mastery of sensorimotor contingencies is like an iceberg,

---

100 Ibid., p. 105.

and the movement is only the tip of it. Without the iceberg itself, there cannot be the tip. Likewise, those movements will not be brought about, if the perceiver does not have mastery of sensorimotor contingencies in the sensorimotor relation between the tomato and her.

When the tomato is present to the farmer, she perceives it as a voluminous tomato. She perceives that there are inside, backside, top and bottom of this tomato because she has the sensorimotor understanding that there is such a voluminous item placed there, available for her to perceive. Having this understanding, she gets access to the tomato itself, and she encounters the tomato as a whole. At the same time, the tomato is accessed by her, because she is achieving access to it. Those sides of the tomato are remote—e.g., some of them are hidden, others are not at the centre of the perceiver's vision. Regarding this sort of phenomenology, Noë writes: 'all perceptual presence is presence as absence. Perceptual presence, as it were, is virtual all the way in.'[101] Noë suggests that presence is virtual because things are presented to us remotely and absently even in cases where we have been achieving access to them. Though we can only have the so-called virtual presence, we can be perceptually aware of them regardless that things are remote to her because we achieve access. Meanwhile, we have the knowledge that these sides can be more accessible when we mediate the sensorimotor relation properly.

In perceiving the tomato, the farmer's awareness of what is remote and absent is like the other perceiver's perceptual consciousness of those Marilyns' faces, which are not

---

101 Ibid., p. 95.

visually captured by the perceiver's eyes, when he entered the room that is covered by hundreds of Marilyns. We can take a look at Noë's illustration of this kind of perceptual experience again: '[w]e have the impression that the world is represented in full detail in consciousness because, wherever we look, we encounter detail.'[102] Regarding this kind of example, orthodox theorists may propose that all those Marilyns, or all the different sides of tomatoes, are represented by us in mind. They may also try to explain how can we have such representations. They may suggest that we can make movements to receive patterns of stimulation from all the different details that are remote or absent, and produce the representation of them by combining them. This is not true. Indeed, we have the impression that everything is represented to us with a lot of details. However, it is what we do in perception that makes us be able to encounter the world in detail, whenever and wherever we look, listen, touch, taste, smell, etc. 'Representing' is not an accurate way to explicate the style that world shows up for us. According to enactivism, perceiving something does not amount to depicting or constructing it as a representation or a model of itself in minds. Perceiving is to explore the world that stands there.[103] That is to say, the world suffices to consist of perception, once we have access to it, while to represent it transcends what we need for perception. Thus, we encounter detail because we are achieving access to it. The action of achieving access makes objects to be accessed, and accessible at the same time.

---

102 Ibid., pp. 49–50.
103 Ibid., p. 21.

To perceive the tomato, the farmer's action of achieving access to the object starts early when she has the mastery of sensorimotor contingencies in the situation that the object and she are in. Thanks to her sensorimotor understanding and the foveating front side of the tomato, the tomato shows up in the way that its front side is present by higher accessibility. The whole tomato is accessed because of the farmer's mastery of sensorimotor contingencies, but what is in front of her is better accessed and so more accessible. Without sensorimotor understanding, the perceiver cannot be aware that the top of the tomato is available to be perceived at all. She cannot have the tomato being more accessible to her by bodily movements without the mastery of contingencies because she would have no idea why she has to do so if she does not have the mastery. I acknowledge that moving around the tomato and having a better look at its top are not ignored or rejected by the orthodox approach to perception. People who support orthodox views or have doubts about the sensorimotor thesis probably think that these instrumental movements equate with the activity of achieving access to perception. This is not true for the sensorimotor thesis. Movements derive from the perceiver's mastery of sensorimotor contingencies and are a part of such mastery. It is the mastery that enables the farmer to encounter what is present to her. Mere movements are insufficient for better perception. Moreover, we cannot make bodily movements to have perception but do not achieve access to the world. That is to say, there must be the activity of achieving access for us to make movements and have perception.

3.3 Distinctiveness of the enactive approach: capturing presence by its two-dimensionality.

So far, I have laid out factors that can determine the way an object presents itself. The presence of objects is determined by objects, movements that can highlight different sensorimotor contingencies and mastery of sensorimotor contingencies by perceivers. My analysis above can show that all these factors that presence is dependent on are facts that are not object-independent. When we perceive objects by achieving the presence of them, we are encountering the object in the specific situation where the perceptual activity takes place, rather than producing mental images of the objects. When we encounter objects with the above factors being effective, objects present how they are to perceivers, meanwhile, they also present to perceivers how they look.

This two-dimensionality is captured through perceivers' action of achieving access to objects. In this sort of activity, perceivers encounter objects that are available to them as wholes, so they can perceive how things are. At the same time, objects present their properties in a way that can change in correspondence to changes in situations, which can be monitored by perceivers with mastery of sensorimotor contingencies. Thus, perceivers can achieve the presence of how objects look from their vantage perspectives. In the last chapter, a discussion is made on Noë's proposal that our experience has a two-dimensional feature. Now, we can understand that experience has this feature, because the presence of objects, which consists of our perception, has this feature:[104]

---

104 Noë, *Action in Perception*, p. 163.

There's the way experience presents the world as being, as it were apart from your perspective. This is one aspect of its content. And there is the way the world is presented in experience, a way that always incorporates some reference to how things look or sound or feel from your vantage point.

In addition, we can grasp two-dimensional presence, as objects present to us in such a way that the two-dimensional feature is contained within that presence, being available for us to grasp. Thus, presence can display phenomenal changes while showing the object itself, which usually maintains the same through perceiving, to perceivers.

The two-dimensionality of presence is not a challenging and shocking idea in philosophy. Different theorists notice that we experience how things look when we have the perceptual experience of how things are and make explanations for this sort of feature in perceptual experience. Nevertheless, not all of them attribute this feature to perceptual presence—this is involved in the discussion below. Controversies are usually found in different suggestions regarding how we should understand this two-dimensional feature of perceptual experience and provide explanations for it.

For example, sense-datum theorists use 'sense data'—colour patches and shapes, etc.—to address how an object looks, and suggest that we get to know about how things are by inferring and judging from sense data that are given to us in perception. In sense-datum theory, sense data, which present how an object looks, are taken as the phenomenal

character and content of perception. The experience of how things are can be reduced to the sense data. More importantly, the process of having experience of how things are is mind-dependent, which causes the main concern of sense-datum theorists and target that is attacked by opponents against this theory. These difficulties for sense-datum theorists have been summarised by James Genone:[105]

> [I]f our awareness of mind-independent physical reality is mediated by awareness of something internal to the mind (sense-data, mental images, or the like), we would seem to be epistemically isolated from physical reality itself, and perhaps lack adequate evidence of its existence.

Even worse, we would be inclined to scepticism. This is because we lack strong and direct evidence of the existence of objects, when the experience of how things are that we can have from sense-data is blocked from reality, i.e., the world that is outside and independent from the mind.

Naïve realists, in contrast, insist that we perceive objects the way they are. Perception of how things look, e.g., a circular item looks like an elliptical one, is usually ascribed to the non-veridical perception of them. 'The central commitment of naïve realism is that mind-independent objects are essential to the fundamental analysis of perceptual

---

105 James Genone, 'Recent Work on Naïve Realism', *American Philosophical Quarterly*, 1(2016), pp. 1–25(p. 4).

experience.'[106] Thus, naïve realists pay more attention to keeping the perception of how things are as veridical perception.

According to naïve realism, perception is directly constituted by objects and their properties, whose existence is independent of our mind. In addition, 'perceptual phenomenology is constituted by the mind-independent world, so the way things appear to a perceiving subject is determined by the objects and properties that are perceived'[107]. Thus, some naïve realists, e.g., Michael Martin, take how things look to be properties of objects and deny that there are any other appearances properties, which would participate in the constitution of how things look, being ascribed to objects beyond those basic properties.[108] This thread of naïve realism is challenged by an inquiry that asks where can we find the properties that constitute the looks of objects when the objects lack the relevant properties. For example, when a round coin looks elliptical to me, how could the round coin have the shape property of an ellipse? Under the pressure of this challenge, situation-dependent properties, or situational properties, are proposed to be included in the picture of naïve realism.[109] According to this view, '[s]ituation-dependent properties are (nonconstant) functions of the intrinsic properties of the object and the situational features.'[110] That is to say, objects have situation-dependent properties which are the way

---

106 Ibid., p. 1.
107 Ibid., p. 9.
108 Michael Martin, 'What's in a look?', in *Perceiving the World*, ed. By Bence Nanay (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), pp. 160–225.
109 See Susanna Schellenberg, 'The Situation-Dependency of Perception', *The Journal of Philosophy*, 2(2008), pp. 55–84; also see Boyd Miller, 'Naïve Realism and Illusion', *Ergo: an Open Access Journal of Philosophy*, 2(2015), pp. 607–625(p. 619).
110 Susanna Schellenberg, 'The Situation-Dependency of Perception', *The Journal of Philosophy*, 2(2008), pp. 55–84(p. 60).

that properties of objects show up to perceivers in specific situations. The elliptical look of a round coin, for example, is such a situation-dependent property.

It can be found that this view is similar to the enactive approach that is proposed by Noë. However, we still have to notice the subtle difference between the revised version of naïve realism and the enactive approach and so appreciate the advantages of the enactive approach. If the looks of objects are explained with the idea of situational properties, then there would be a problem with how can we grasp the so-called intrinsic properties of them, i.e., how things are. Boyd Miller indicates there is a failure to capture the constancy of perception in this line of thought. Namely, it does not address how perceivers still see the round coin as circular when they see it as elliptical in certain perspectives.[111] Susanna Schellenberg, who proposes the improvement of naïve realism, turns to representation for a solution.[112] I have no space for detailed comments on her view here but her solution can take us in circles. After all, our goal is to eschew representational ideas from the beginning.

To 'account for the phenomenology of experience as being explained by objects and properties in the mind-independent world', naïve realism is faced with the dilemma of choosing the sort of mind-independent properties with which they can explain perceptual phenomena, between properties constituting how things are and properties constituting how things look. It lacks a way to address the conflict between the two. If it sticks to the properties of objects that do not change with the situation, then explanations for

---

111 Boyd Miller, 'Naïve Realism and Illusion', *Ergo: an Open Access Journal of Philosophy*, 2(2015), pp. 607–625(p. 619).
112 See Schellenberg, 'The Situation-Dependency of Perception', pp. 55–84.

perspectival perception are merged into explanations for the perception of how things are. If it takes the other way, then explanations for the perception of how things are will be in the shadow of the explanations for the perception of how things look.

Adverbialists adopt a different way to settle the two-dimensionality of perceptual experience. They do not address the experience of what is presented directly. Instead, they turn to give an account of the character of experience. For example, they take how things look in perception to be a property of how we perceive. I.e., when we perceive a circular coin in an elliptical shape, we perceive it elliptically. Likewise, if we perceive a circular coin as what it is, then we perceive it circularly. In this way, the adverbial theory can include the two-dimensionality of perceptual experience by capturing the characteristics of experience with adverbial modifications, though this theory rejects that perceptual experience is obtaining what shows up for us.

However, the two dimensions of perceptual experiences can only be described by the adverbialist approach separately. It would be rather confusing to say that I perceive a coin circularly and elliptically. It is problematic if the experience is modified by the two adverbs separately, or even worse if one of the two adverbs is modified by another. For other theories that embrace the thought that perception is directed to objects that present, the property of being circular or being elliptical can be directed to the object or the way it presents. Panayot Butchvarov points out that adverbialists are 'incapable of doing justice to the most obvious and indeed essential phenomenological fact about perceptual

consciousness…namely, its intentionality, its object-directedness' [113] . They have difficulty explaining what causes modifications that are used to describe the experience exactly. Moreover, as they pay more attention to the acknowledgement of the way that perceptual experience is modified, perception is not related to objects that show up for perceivers. As a result, veridical experience shares the same nature as illusory and hallucinatory ones.[114] It thus fails to provide a foundation for a satisfactory defence of the epistemic role of perceptual experience.

While there are different solutions to the nature of perceptual experience, many philosophers agree with Noë that presence has a two-dimensional feature. However, these philosophers can have various ways to address the two-dimensional feature. For example, Leddington argues that the two-dimensionality can be addressed in naïve realism and does not agree with Noë's solution to how do we capture the two-dimensionality.[115] Prinz argues against enactive perception.[116] Campbell admires Noë's sensorimotor proposal but doubts the enactive way to address two-dimensionality.[117]

Although the two-dimensionality of perceptual experience is not entirely new in philosophy, the way that Noë takes to illustrate it is rather original. I would like to propose here that the distinctiveness of the enactive account for the two-dimensional feature contains at least two levels. On the primary level, the two-dimensional feature is correctly

113 Panayot Butchvarov, 'Adverbial Theories of Consciousness', *Midwest Studies in Philosophy*, 3 (1980), pp. 261–280(p. 272).
114 Tim Crane, '*The Problem of Perception*', (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, 2005) < https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/perception-problem/#AdvOut > [accessed 2 December 2021].
115 Leddington, pp. 482–502.
116 Jesse Prinz, 'Putting the Brakes on Enactive Perception', *Psyche*, 1(2006), pp. 1–19(p. 8).
117 John Campbell, 'Sensorimotor Knowledge and Naïve Realism', *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, 3(2008), pp. 666–673.

ascribed to the perceptual content, i.e., perceptual presence, rather than anything else like how we treat perceptual content or what we can construct based on it, etc. On the second level, the two dimensions are ascribed to perceptual presence simultaneously.

Firstly, this feature is not only taken as_a phenomenal character in perceptual experiences but an essential aspect of perceptual content: 'perceptual content has a dual aspect. There's the way experience presents the world as being, as it were apart from your perspective.' [118] Relevantly, this two-dimensionality of perceptual experience is generated by the presence of objects directly: 'perception is a way of coming into contact with the way things are, apart from how they perspectivally present themselves, by coming into contact with the way they present themselves.' [119] It is a key move to acknowledge this dual aspect of presence, and so of perceptual content. Because this step suggests that, in perceptual experience, perceiving how things look from a vantage perspective and perceiving how things are as wholes are not reducible to each other. Either of them can be directed to the way that mind-independent objects present themselves to perceivers.

Secondly, the enactive theory provides explanations for the simultaneous being of the two dimensions in presence, rather than merely an acknowledgement of them. The enactive theory shows us that the two dimensions are not related together in a way that one of them is reduced to, or contained by, another. They are two parallel aspects of the same thing—the presence of objects. This guarantees that they are compatible with each

---

118 Noë, *Action in Perception*, p. 163.
119 Noë, *Varieties of Presence*, p. 48.

other, and the conflict between them is only prima facie. Moreover, it helps us settle the problem of how things that are not completely sensed can be perceived and experienced, i.e., how the presence of what is absent is possible. For example, we can perceive hundreds of Marilyns even though we only foveate one of them and the others are obscured on the periphery of our visual fields. The two dimensions are closely related to each other because both of them are derived from the way that objects show up for perceivers.

Misreading is brought to Noë's enactive illustration of perceptual presence when commentators fail to incorporate those distinctive enactive insights into the two-dimensional feature. Many commentators, including Campbell[120] and Leddington[121], agree that a satisfactory account of presence is supposed to explain the way that people know about what objects are when they perceive how objects look. However, they suggest that Noë does not settle how we capture two-dimensionality in a better way that is different from former theorists. Their reasons can amount to that, Noë takes how things look to be a primary aspect, but does not explicate how we can see an object as a whole when the presence of a part of it outstrips the others. I have defended the enactive theory against this sort of doubt and criticism at the beginning of this chapter based on the idea that presence is object-dependent. Here, I will go further and briefly set out that commentators are attracted by such criticism because they fail to appreciate the distinctiveness that I propose above.

---

120 John Campbell, *Reference and Consciousness*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 114.
121 Leddington, p. 482.

Campbell does not appreciate how enactive theorists treat the relation between the two dimensions. He suggests that Noë will be forced to take the representational approach to perception because the proposed enactive account fails to clarify the relation between perspectival perception and perception of objects as the wholes they are. Campbell thinks that what perceivers obtain from negotiating with various aspects of the world will collapse into counterfactual implications of the sensorimotor activity.[122] What Campbell implies here is that perceivers can merely have perspectival perception through navigating sensorimotor contingencies, and they are not able to have a grasp of the mind-independent world from those perceptual appearances of objects. Thus, he suggests that representational theory will be appealing to the enactive theorists as they need to refer to it as a strategy to have the perception of how things are—to construct a mental image of how things are based on perspectival perception. If we contrast Campbell's reading with what is distinctive about the enactive theory, it is obvious that he misses that perception of how things are is not reducible to perspectival perception. He does not capture that the former is also constituted by the presence that is achieved through the navigation of sensorimotor contingencies just as perspectival perception is. In evaluating Campbell's reading, we shall bear in mind that, the way that the world shows up for us contains not only various appearances that objects seem to have but also the variance between apparent and factual presence. How things are and how things look are parallel aspects of presence, and are not reducible to each other.

---

122 Campbell, 'Sensorimotor Knowledge and Naïve Realism', p. 667.

Leddington does not grasp that the enactive theory embraces the idea that objects and their properties are constituents of presence, which is rather a direct-realist-style idea. He also fails to follow the thought that the two dimensions are in place for presence at the same time. His criticism is largely based on his reading of the enactive approach according to which how things look—the perception of an object-part in his phrase—is the primary aspect among the two dimensions. Relevantly, the two dimensions of presence are conceived to be obtained in perception successively by him. In this sense, his criticism goes on a track similar to Campbell's: he argues that Noë's theory can collapse into a sort of phenomenalism because seeing the surface of an object is taken as a way of seeing the object by the theory.[123]

Leddington's criticism even goes further as he writes, 'the surface of the tomato is to be individuated phenomenologically,' by which he suggests that seeing the surface cannot even count as seeing parts of an object that is not hidden and visible. In this case, what the perceiver sees is only a look or appearance that the object happens to have. Meanwhile, looks or appearances are not even parts of an object.[124] Thus, Leddington's criticism even alludes that the enactive approach fails at achieving the reliable perception of an object-part because the apparent perception is mind-dependent and can be isolated from reality.

What Leddington attacks is more of a jackstraw. He claims that how things look is a perception of an object-part first, then argues that such perception can be isolated from objects that are perceived because it is not mind-independent. However, we shall take the

---

123 Leddington, p.486.
124 Ibid., p.488.

thread of thoughts here carefully, because the equivalence between the apparent shape of an object and perception of an object-part is ascribed to the enactive account by Leddington. There is a subtle difference between these two. The way that an object looks does not have to be the perception of a part of it. Moreover, the appearance of an object is very likely to be different from seeing a part of it. Take the experience of looking at a coin as an example again, its apparent shape can be elliptical, even though its actual shape is circular. If how an object looks is the same as seeing an object part, then the sort of perceptual phenomenon that circular objects look elliptical ones would be odd because a coin does not have an elliptical part.

Even if we ignore the difference between the perception of how things look and the perception of a part of an object, Leddington's criticism is still implausible in two ways. On the one hand, he dismisses that presence is object-dependent, which entails that both appearances and factual perception are aspects of the way that the reality shows up for perceivers. On the other hand, it is more accurate to say that apparent perception is movement-dependent than tag it as mind-dependent if we would like to indicate that it is constituted by elements that are perceiver-relevant.

Appearances are not something that objects 'happen to have,' or something that is attributed to objects by perceivers being indifferent to reality, but consequences of the fact that objects present. They come from the fact that sensorimotor contingencies are highlighted to different degrees in the perceptual activity. It is implausible to deny that such activity does take place in reality. In perceptual activity, perceiver-dependent

elements, like sensorimotor understanding, can be effective only through mastery and navigation of sensorimotor contingencies, which are always dependent on mind-independent objects. These mind-independent objects are what we achieve access to when we perceive them. We can have contact with them but we cannot manipulate them without actually making changes to them. As we cannot manipulate or leave out these mind-independent objects, our mastery of sensorimotor contingencies is not completely determined by us as perceivers. It is restricted by objects. Though it is accepted by the enactive approach that we have the perception of an object as a whole by encountering it from a particular vantage point, it is not a part of its theory that the perception is constructed by perceivers internally based on what is obtained from the vantage point. Perceivers have the perception of objects as wholes by perceiving them from vantage points in the sense that perceptual activities of specific objects initially unfold from the vantage points. This is shown by a perceptual scenario that is described by Noë:[125]

> When you see the cube from a particular vantage point, you encounter its aspect from that vantage point. As you move with respect to the cube, you learn how its aspect changes as you move-that is, you encounter its visual potential. To encounter its visual potential is thus to encounter its actual shape.

---

125 Noë, *Action in Perception*, p. 77.

The criticisms we have discussed here do not stand strong, as they fail to truly appreciate what is distinctive in the enactive theory. Enactive theory discloses that the two-dimensionality of perceptual experience derives from the co-existence of the two dimensions of presence. In this chapter, I have provided a detailed presentation and discussion of how we can guarantee two-dimensionality by the action of achieving access to objects. I also explain that objects' being practically remote for perceivers is the reason that makes achieving access to be constitutive in perception. Meanwhile, sensorimotor understanding enables us to achieve access to objects. Only when we have the sensorimotor understanding of the situation that objects and we are in, can we navigate sensorimotor contingencies and achieve access to objects.

Chapter 4 Achieving Presence in Access Space

So far, I have spelt out how the problem of presence is addressed by the sensorimotor thesis. We capture the two-dimensional presence of things by achieving access to things that are always remote. We achieve access to objects by navigating skilfully sensorimotor contingencies that are afforded by objects in specific perceptual situations. While I am explaining and illustrating this picture of perception, I keep reiterating two statements: that our achievement of access is a skilful activity and that we can make this achievement thanks to our sensorimotor understanding of the perceptual situation. Here comes a problem that has to be settled in the framework of the enactive approach—What is the relation between skills and understanding in the achievement of perception? To deal with this problem, it has to be made clear how we achieve contact with the world skilfully, i.e., in what way do we use skills to achieve access to the world. Moreover, we need an explanation of the role that understanding plays in this activity of achieving access to the world.

4.1 Doubts about the thought that we achieve contact with the world skilfully

The enactive proposal that we use skills, including bodily skills especially, to achieve access to the world leads some philosophers to take it as a suggestion of 'wide

supervenience'[126], which is a notion that I take from Jesse Prinz. He uses it to indicate

that, in the enactive view of perception, 'some conscious experiences supervene on

interactions', rather than merely the brain.[127] Block makes a similar comment: the

enactive approach by Noë's enactive view suggests that the active skilled body is part of

that minimal supervenience base, i.e., the minimal sufficient condition for perceptual

experience.[128] They present two different versions of 'wide supervenience' here. The

version that Prinz points out is that conscious experience such as perception can

potentially go beyond the body and extend to the world. Block is stricter that he thinks

the minimal supervenience base for perception is the brain. Since the skilled body is

involved in perception according to Noë, Block judges the enactive approach as an

account proposing wide supervenience. In addition, there is a theory of mind related to

the wide supervenience I discuss here—the hypothesis of the extended mind. It appears

to be a theory being independent of the enactive approach, however, some philosophers

suggest that the enactive approach can potentially lead to the extended mind.[129] Due to

the limit of space, I will not expand on the possible relation between the enactive approach

and the extended mind hypothesis.

Block and Prinz doubt the enactive approach because they think that nothing outside

of the brain can be part of what the perceptual experience supervenes on. In Block's view,

Noë does not make enough arguments for the claim that the exercise of sensorimotor

---

126 Prinz, 'Putting the Brakes on Enactive Perception', p. 15.
127 Ibid.
128 Ned Block, 'Review of Alva Noë, *Action in Perception*', *Journal of Philosophy*, 102(2005), pp. 259–272(p.264).
129 For relevant discussion, please see Dave Ward & Mog Stapleton, 'Es are good. Cognition as enacted, embodied, embedded, affective and extended', in *Consciousness in Interaction: The role of the natural and social context in shaping consciousness*, ed. by Fabio Paglieri, pp. 89–104.

skills is constitutive of perceptual experience. He also insists that sensorimotor know-how and perceptual experience are only causally related.[130] Jesse Prinz suggests that Noë goes astray in having the idea that some experiences supervene interactions between mind and world. Prinz argues that 'the qualitative character of a perceptual experience depends exclusively on the brain: if one changed the environment and kept the brain constant, the character of the experience would remain unchanged.' Thus, he is against the claim that conscious experience partly supervenes the external world.

Although the perceptual presence of the world depends on the mastery of sensorimotor contingencies, which involves bodily skills and the environment, the enactive approach that Noë proposes is compatible with the case that there must be changes in the brain for any changes to be produced in consciousness. Moreover, when changes are being produced in the brain, there can be changes in consciousness, even in cases where the environment does not change.[131] In the view of Block, Noë abandons what is distinctive about the enactive approach by acknowledging the supervenience on brain states.[132] Prinz even criticises Noë for holding a hybrid position,[133] meaning Noë 'conceding that some experiences supervene on the brain, while insisting that others depend on interaction with the environment.'[134] According to comments by Block and Prinz, the enactive approach can only hold when this approach insists on 'wide supervenience' and denies that experience can only supervene on the brain. Based on their

---

130 Ibid., see p. 262 and 267.
131 Noë, *Action in Perception*, p. 221.
132 Block, p. 270.
133 Prinz, 'Putting the Brakes on Enactive Perception', p. 17.
134 Ibid., pp. 16–17.

view, the enactive thought that perception is a skilful exploration of the world contradicts the limited supervenience on brain states because the limited supervenience expels bodily skills and the external world. However, bodily skills and the encounter with the external world are important in the picture of the enactive approach.

In my view, the distinctive crux of the enactive approach is not exactly that it provides an explanation for what perceptual experience supervenes on but that it illustrates how it is that the world is presented. What perceptual experiences supervene on is a consequence of the way that things are made to be presented. I.e., when we achieve contact with different things skilfully so that things are made present, how we achieve the access can supervene on different range of things. The supervenience is determined by the style of our activities of achieving access and what we are exploring. We shall not draw a line between what can be supervened on and what cannot, then define the experience as supervening on certain things. Thus, our experiences of achieving access can sometimes supervene bodily skills and the external world, or, at other times, supervene on a smaller range of things. In this case, what experience supervenes on is determined by the way that we achieve access to the world. We can not only have a hybrid position but a dynamic position about the supervenience of experiences.

When Block and Prinz concentrate on the discussion of what perceptual experience supervenes on, their attention is drawn away from the main thread of the enactive approach: What we do in perceptual activity is to achieve access to objects that are practically remote for us by navigating sensorimotor contingencies properly. Our

navigation of sensorimotor contingencies is granted by our capacities for action and the understanding of what interactions can happen between the world and us, given these capacities and things in the world. In this case, sensorimotor skills, including bodily skills are constitutive in achieving presence. When we perceive an object, e.g., a tomato, the perceptual experience we have supervenes on the understanding of sensorimotor contingencies that are afforded by the perceptual situation we have with the tomato. This understanding can involve certain brain states. Moreover, if we enact certain sensorimotor contingencies more than others by bodily skills to explore the tomato better, then certain bodily skills can be part of the supervenience base of the perceptual experience.

As everything is practically remote for us, we have to cope with the remoteness with our skills practically. When we encounter things, we are not merely getting closer to them physically. That is to say, the existence of the external world does not suffice for its presence, though it is constitutive of its presence when it is made to be presented. When we get access to things, our skills do not bring out the achievement straightforwardly— there must be the exercise of skills. And we have to understand how we can enact different sensorimotor contingencies with these skills to operate skills well.

Block and Prinz have an incomplete understanding of how skills work in achieving access to the world due to their deficient reading of the enactive approach. Block suggests that the only kind of sensorimotor awareness that can be constitutive in perception would be spatial sense: 'If there is a constitutive role for anything sensorimotor in perception, I think it is likely to be a matter of one's spatial sense.' He thinks that the presence in

absence like the back of a tomato can be a sort of multimodal or amodal spatial imagery.[135]

Prinz argues that conscious content can only be causally related to the world.[136] These thoughts allude that they think having perception is about perceiving things that are spatially close enough to be perceived. That is to say when things are located in positions that are physically close and sensible for us, then the perception can be caused by them. On the contrary, Noë writes that perceptual presence is not only about objects' being existing and close, but about their availability. I have illustrated in the last chapter that their availability is determined by the contingencies that they afford given their properties and our abilities to enact contingencies. Moreover, it is understanding that decides 'the scope of what is available, beyond mere existence or proximity.' He further sets down, '[t]o see an object, it must be there for us, and to be there for us, we must, in some sense, know it'.[137] In these remarks, it is clear that being physically close to things and knowing where they are in the physical space is not enough for us to perceive. To encounter things in the world, we have to know about their availability. This is why we have to achieve the mastery of sensorimotor contingencies with our skills to achieve the presence. In this case, the dynamic supervenience of our experiences is a result of the nature of our activity of achieving access. We cannot insist that experience supervenes on the brain and consider nothing about the nature of the activity.

I have repeatedly emphasised that the accessibility of objects outstrips mere being physically close enough for perceivers to observe them. Accessibility discloses the degree

---

135 Block, p. 270.
136 Prinz, 'Putting the Brakes on Enactive Perception', p. 15.
137 Noë, *Varieties of Presence*, p. 15.

to which objects are practically remote for perceivers inversely—the higher accessibility that an object has, the less practically remote it is from perceivers. The existence of things is not sufficient for things to show up for perceivers. In addition, there is no fixed correlation between how physically close an object is and how accessible it is to the perceiver. Perceivers have to figure out the accessibilities of things to know where they are practically and how practically far those things are because practical remoteness determines the degree to which perceivers can perceive and what they have to do to perceive better. I have explained in the last chapter that the set of sensorimotor contingencies is determined by objects and what we can do with them. Those sensorimotor contingencies that are afforded are the potential to be enacted by our skills. In sensorimotor relations, our skills first participate in determining what sensorimotor contingencies are there. What sensorimotor contingencies are afforded by objects are partly determined by our capacity to act, i.e., what skills we have to achieve access. Thus, we are able to use the skills we have to enact sensorimotor contingencies and achieve access to them. When we use skills to perceive, we can find out where objects are regarding their perceptual accessibility, i.e., what sensorimotor contingencies they afford and how those contingencies are enacted. In this way, we can know about the accessibility of an object and have further guidance to achieve access to it from the understanding of the relation between the object and us.

I am not suggesting that the existence of objects and how far they are from us physically do not matter at all when I emphasise that we should pay attention to the fact

that they are practically remote from us. After all, we encounter the world in physical space. Also, many times, we probe what is practically remote for us by closing the physical distance to objects. In this sense, we are capturing what there is in physical space. A whole picture of perceptual activity, thus, should display how perceivers encounter what is practically accessible in the physical world based on their understanding.

There is a dogmatic idea of the boundary between the mind and the world. In this view, the physical world is separate from the mind and cannot be directly examined and explored by the mind. Representationalism is under the influence of this idea: we can have a mental representation of the world so that we can examine and explore the mental image instead of the world itself. The representation is used as a model of the world in this case. Resisting this sort of dogmatic thought, Noë draws our attention to the world itself: 'The world is right there. Why inspect a model when you can just inspect the original?'[138] According to the enactive approach, we encounter the world, which is physical, based on our understanding skilfully and practically. How can we manage to do this? The answer can be found in Noë's work: 'skillful practices open up the world, by affording access.'[139] However, Noë does not expand on what the world is like when it affords access and how the world must be to afford access. I am happy to do this work. In my view, the world that affords access is an access space for us to explore.

---

138 Ibid., p. 30. Noë is not the only one who proposes that the world can serve as its own model. Brooks has suggested that the world is the best model of its own. Dreyfus also writes about this topic. See Rodney Brooks, 'Intelligence without reason', *Artificial Intelligence*, 1–3(1991), pp. 139–159; Hubert Dreyfus, *What Computers Still Can't Do*. (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1992).
139 Noë, *Varieties of Presence*, p.153.

I borrow the phrase 'access space' from Noë, who does not use it as I do in this thesis. He uses it to argue that a friend in a remote city can be visually presented to him, though to an extremely limited degree: 'Dominic is located at a point in my visual access space that is very remote, and so, correspondingly, his visual presence for me is very faint.'[140] I would like to deepen the idea of access space with what I have said about the achievement of access. When the world is available by affording access, it is understood in regards to what possible movements can be made in it and what possible sensory stimulation can be caused, etc. The structure of the world is supposed to be captured with its accessibility, rather than merely its physical existence. The idea of access space paves out a path to do this as it makes a connection between 'access' and 'space'. The former is what we are to achieve and the latter is where we can manage to have the achievement. When we encounter the world by navigating sensorimotor contingencies in the access space, what we do is reach out and access things in the physical world.

4.2 Having the world as access space

Limited explanations about the structure of access space have been made by Noë. He writes: 'We can think of our skills, of our know-how, as defining an access space. Things can be nearer or farther away in access space. To distance in access space there corresponds the intensity or degree of presence.'[141] Though this explanation is short, it

---

140 Ibid., p.34.
141 Ibid.

carries crucial information that can help us to develop a more detailed and complete picture of access space. It suggests that access space is built based on skills and know-how with which we operate to have access to objects. Accordingly, access space covers the range of the world where we can have mastery of contingencies and achieve the presence of things by skills.

It is straightforward to understand this: Only when we have skills, including sensorimotor skills to enact sensorimotor contingencies that are afforded by things in the world, can we achieve access to these things and make them accessible to us. Things in access space have to be accessible for us so the access space is defined by our skills to achieve access. In addition, they can be accessed to different degrees. Those things that are better accessed are practically closer to us compared with those which are less accessed. Therefore, things can be practically far from or close to us in access space. As presence is achieved through having access to things, the practical distance we have to things corresponds with the quality and intensity of presence that we achieve. The higher accessibility an object has the closer it is for us practically in the access space. Relevantly, it shows up for us in a way that its presence is more intense and has better quality. For example, if we are in a daze, things can look obscure to us even if they are at the centre of our visual field or stared at by our eyes. We may even have no idea of what is present to us because we achieve very limited access to things that are present to us. Even though they are right in front of us, we are practically distanced from them. The presence can be improved if we turn to attend to the perceptual situation and really foveate what is in front

of us. In this case, we get practically closer to our objects.

To develop Noë's explanation a little more, two points can be told from access space. The first is how practically closer we have got to a thing in the world, i.e., to which extent we have achieved access to it. The second is how much more we need to do to achieve the presence better or how much more our skills and the environment all us to do to improve the access regarding our skills. These two are important information about how can we mediate our navigation of sensorimotor contingencies to make things show up for us in a way that is wanted. Again, the distance in access space is not about the physical distance between things and us but about how things are accessed by us through our skilful activity of enacting contingencies. To say a thing is near or far from us in access space is to say that it is accessed by us to a comparatively higher degree or lower degree.

Therefore, knowing about the physical locations is not sufficient for us to achieve access to objects. Finding out where objects are is, by this finding itself, merely about the objects' locations, rather than these objects themselves. Some philosophers like Lucy Allais[142] and Susanna Schellenberg[143] have underlined perceivers' representation of the space (in the physical sense) and locations of objects. Schellenberg particularly argues that perceivers always perceive from a specific location, and they represent their locations as spots they perceive objects from. She thus proposes: 'perception depends on the capacity to know what it would be to act in relation to objects.'[144] Schellenberg seems to

---

142 Lucy Allais, 'Kant, Non-Conceptual Content and the Representation of Space', *Journal of the History of Philosophy*, 3(2009), pp.383–413.
143 Susanna Schellenberg, 'Action and self-location in perception', *Mind*, 463(2007), pp.603–632.
144 Ibid., p.603.

suggest that as the capacity for acting is constitutive for representing locations of objects, perception depends on the capacity to act.

Though I agree with Schellenberg on the point that perception depends on the capacity to act, I think her thread of thoughts fails to be a successful argument. I have two concerns. Firstly, she argues for an idea that takes presence as the representation of things, which fails to show the nature of presence. I have been explicating and arguing for the enactive view that presence is a matter of access, against the idea of representationalism, throughout this thesis.

Putting my opposition against representationalism aside, my second concern is that the perception of an object's location does not necessarily guarantee a veridical perception of the very object, which means, an account of the perception of locations is not yet an account of perception itself, i.e., the perception of objects. Even in cases where philosophers like Schellenberg explain the perception of objects' locations, these theorists still have to explain the perception of those very objects. For example, I can perceive that there is a stick in a half glass of water in front of me and represent the stick, which is actually intact, as broken off simultaneously. Moreover, having the perception of an object does not necessarily mean that the object's location is being well perceived. For example, I can perceive a building and perceive it as one that is physically close to me, however, it can take me a lot of time to walk to the building in the physical space. In this case, my perception of the building does not enable me to perceive its spatial location. To conclude my arguments here, it is an idea that is not enough to argue that perception

depends on the capacity to act by setting out that the representation of objects' location in the physical space depends on the capacity to act.

I shall put it clear that if I perceive an object, it is the object that I perceive, and my perception of the object is not exactly my perception of its location. Things do occupy a place in the physical space. However, this does not mean that an account of perception can be given immediately when we have an account of perceiving locations. An account of perception has to target the achievement of objects' presence directly. Therefore, we have to know where objects are concerning their accessibilities. The location that we perceive is in the access space, and the location is perceivable because it is determined by its accessibility, which means that we can get access to the object in its place in the access space by achieving access to it. In this process, we are not representing an object's physical location, but understanding the object's accessibility and encountering the object itself. The perception of an object and its location is obtained in a practical way, rather than a representational way. There are knowledgeable thoughts about how to achieve access to the objects embedded in the perception.

My perceptual activity is having direct contact with the objects themselves. When my access to objects is good enough given the navigation of sensorimotor contingencies I make, an object is presented in a way that it occupies the place it takes in the physical space. Thus, the awareness of an object's location and the awareness of the perception of this very object can be accompanied by each other. In cases where I did not make proper

access, an object can be presented in a place that it does not take in the physical world, or an object can be presented distortedly in its location.

Having the world as an access space is like having a heat map that is embedded in the world. In access space, those things and properties that are accessed to a higher degree can show up to us more significantly. This is similar to those highlighted areas in a heat map as it shows us the magnitude of intensities of presence, which are determined by the accessibilities of objects. In perception, objects afford sensorimotor contingencies and we enact them with our skills to have those objects be presented to us. We highlight certain sensorimotor contingencies in this way. These highlighted sensorimotor contingencies bring out the presence of objects. Thus, the presence is the way that things are highlighted for us to perceive in the access space. The more that an object is accessed the more it is highlighted. When different contingencies are enacted to different degrees, different objects and properties are highlighted at different levels. This is like different areas can be highlighted with different colours on a heat map. Hot spots on the heat map are highlighted with brighter colours so they are easier to be found and caught than those colder spots marked by fainter colours. Likewise, things and properties that are accessed to a higher degree are enacted more so they can be more perceivable to us. They are more significant than those which are less enacted. That is, they are more accessible. In achieving access to a larger world, i.e., achieving access to more objects to a higher degree, we are having a larger access space. Here, we can find that to have the access space is itself the process for us to achieve access.

I should also note that the analogy with a heat map is only for helping us understand the structure of access space. Access space does not represent the intensities of presence as colours in two dimensions. Instead, it is the world presenting how it is accessed by us. Things that are more accessible for us are more significant is the access space. The variance in the significance in access space is like the variance in colour on a heat map.

When we use skills to navigate sensorimotor contingencies, we highlight certain sensorimotor contingencies with our skills. By highlighting them, we can encounter them as we know that there are such-and-such objects, including their properties available for us to perceive when sensorimotor contingencies that are dependent on those objects are enacted. For example, I can listen to a song thanks to my auditory skills including capturing voice, distinguishing sounds, discriminating tones, etc. If we do not use our skills to navigate sensorimotor contingencies by enacting them, then the objects and properties on which these sensorimotor contingencies depend are not accessed by us. In this case, our access space does not extend to where they are in the world. They will not be accessible and show up for us then. For example, I can hear nothing when there is a song played. The case could be that I was enchanted by an intriguing philosophical thought or that I was struck by a huge sound and was temporarily unable to exercise my auditory skills. In these cases, I did nothing to master those audition-related contingencies afforded by the piece of music. I did not highlight it so I did not make it available for me to perceive. Though the music is played, I have no understanding of it. I have no idea that there is such a piece of music. It is not included in the access space by me. As a result, I

could not encounter it and perceive it. There can also be cases where objects and properties are accessed to a very limited degree. Correspondingly, they are highlighted to a limited degree in the access space. It is like a spot marked with dim colour on a heat map. For example, when I read a book with a companion to a song, then I could hear the melody of the music but be unable to hear the lyrics clear. The lyrics of the song are accessed at a low level so the intensity of their presence is limited.

From the examples above, we can also find that the presence of different objects—and even, of the same object—in access space is not even, or plain, but is ascribed with fluctuating intensities. In a specific occasion of perceptual activity, if we have better sensorimotor skills regarding the situation and object, i.e., we know more about the situation and object, and if there are more positive conditions for us to operate our sensorimotor skills, e.g., the light is strong enough for us to observe, then the object or its properties will present themselves to us to a higher degree. The intensity of presence is determined by sensorimotor contingencies and our sensorimotor skills to mediate the sensorimotor relation between objects and us. The former is dependent on objects and movements—of objects or perceivers—that can happen in the situation where we perceive objects; and the latter includes the capacity to act, the ability to understand what consequences can be brought by actions into our sensorimotor relation to objects.

Having the world as access space, we achieve access and have contact with the world itself, even though the way we measure distance and evaluate our relations to different things in the space outstrips measuring physical distance and alike. The idea of a heat

map is used here to explain the structure of access space. I do not mean that we have a heat map, which is intermediate, between the world and us. The access space is the world that we have contact with. The access space is the world itself. The point is that we take the world as a space where we can achieve access to things in it when we have the world as the access space. It is the world that we explore and nothing else. When we achieve access to the world, it opens up for us and welcomes us to encounter it by affording access. Accessibility is a feature that it has, which allows us to understand and engage with it in regards to its accessibility. This is like that we observe and evaluate the world by having it as a physical world because being physical is also one of its features.

I suggest that we can fail to enact some sensorimotor contingencies that are afforded by objects. This can happen when we do not have a proper and sufficient understanding of the situation in which we try to achieve access to objects. Three kinds of reasons can cause this:

1) We do not exercise skills that we have because of not attending to the situation, having no intent to perceive, etc. Hearing a song vaguely, or not hearing a song that is played, while reading a book can be an example of this kind of case. Philosophers working on problems related to attention can suggest that, if we pay attention to a specific task and so do not attend to a stimulus (which is irrelevant to the task), then we are likely to fail to perceive the stimulus, even if it occupies a significant part of our visual field.[145] According to the sensorimotor thesis, we

---

145 Bence Nanay, 'Aesthetic attention', *Journal of Consciousness Studies*, 5–6(2015), pp. 96–118(p. 97).

suggest that perceivers are practically blind because they do not attend with understanding, i.e., even attention cannot guarantee perception, there must be understanding. For example, O'Regan and Noë have indicated that a colour pitch in a picture can change without being noticed even in cases where people intend to admire the picture.[146] Regarding the phenomenon of change blindness and many other perceptual phenomena, Noë argues that 'sensory events alone, without skill and understanding, are blind'[147].

2) We are not able to exercise certain skills that we normally have or once had due to diseases, injuries, forgetting, or being rusty. This could also be the case that we cannot exercise certain skills as well as we had done. In this sort of case, the sensorimotor stimulation can be given to us, received by our sense organs, however, we fail to master the pattern of stimulation and fail to make things show up for us. Noë introduces an example of this kind. Patients who had cataracts can suffer 'experimental blindness' after the operation where the cataracts are removed. In the period following the operation, they can receive light again without the obstacle of cataracts, however, they still lack sight.[148] Regarding this kind of phenomenon, Noë writes, 'where there is an object, but no understanding, there is nothing that even rises to the level of being misleadingly like perceptual consciousness; there is only, in effect, blindness.'[149]

---

146 O'Regan, J. Kevin, and Alva Noë, "A Sensorimotor Account of Vision and Visual Consciousness," *Behavioral and Brain Sciences*, 24 (2001), 939–973.
147 Noë, *Varieties of Presence*, p.123.
148 Ibid., p.5.
149 Ibid., p.25.

3) Sensorimotor contingencies afforded by objects can be context- or culture-bound, by which I mean that which sensorimotor contingencies may be afforded by an object can be dependent on social convention based on average or common skills that a group of people have. If there are people who lack certain prevailing skills, then they might fail to enact sensorimotor contingencies afforded by objects. For example, as an international student who is not a native speaker of English, my English skills are limited compared to local people. When locals speak too fast, the words they say can sound like a whirl to me. I am not able to enact contingencies depending on these words like others in the environment do.

The relation between contingencies afforded by things and social convention is a big topic and I cannot expand much on it here. Nevertheless, I would like to show that it is worth considering and being involved in the account of perception by noting some former work on it. Gibson mentions that affordances can be dependent on 'the whole spectrum of social significance'.[150] Rietveld and Kiverstein have developed this suggestion and 'develop an account of affordances for humans that foregrounds their embedding in socio-cultural practices.'[151] Following this thread, as sensorimotor contingencies are also affordances, sensorimotor contingencies could also embed in socio-cultural practices. As a result, sensorimotor contingencies that are afforded by things are possibly dependent on skills that are prevailing among a group of people. This thought could also be endorsed by Noë, who has considered the 'cultural practices'[152] of tools for perceiving the world.

---

150 James Gibson, *The Ecological Approach to Visual Perception*. (Hillsdale, NI: Lawrence Erlbaum, 1979), p.128.
151 Eric Rietveld and Julian Kiverstein.
152 Noë, *Varieties of Presence*, p.105.

There is space for us to investigate the possibility that sensorimotor contingencies can also be dependent on cultural or social practices of skills.

4.3 Guidance for achieving access

When we are achieving access to objects in the world, we can be aware of the different intensities of the presence of different things. We have this awareness because the world becomes our access space through our mastery and navigation of sensorimotor contingencies. The world shows up for us like a heat map of accessibility. We can perceive those significant 'hot spots' which are things accessed to higher degrees. Meanwhile, things that are presented to us less intensively—like cold spots on a heat map—are also available to us. As we are exactly those who act to achieve access to objects, we know what impact our navigation has on different sensorimotor contingencies. It is our sensorimotor knowledge and perceptual activity that makes various sensorimotor contingencies enacted to various degrees, thus, we can know how accessible objects are.

By promoting the idea of access space, I am not suggesting that we should construct a space beyond the world or a model between the world and us. I do not intend to say that the access space is not physical but intellectual; I am not saying that the access space is used to relocate and represent objects' positions in a space that is mentally constructed. My suggestion is instead that, the world is understood and perceived based on its accessibility when we achieve access to it. In perceptual activity, the world is not only a

physical space but also an access space where we are achieving access to different things in it. I do not need to put objects in a space other than the world. We only need to understand the world as an access space, which is structured with an orientation to practice.

I do not need to shape the access space as a Cartesian space or take a perceiver-centred coordinate system to represent it to show the relationship between objects and perceivers, either. I know that understanding the perceptual world by representing it in a perceiver-centred coordinate system is an appealing idea. Even philosophers who admire the enactive approach to perception can be inclined to this track. For example, Schellenberg suggests that '[w]hat is crucial for determining the coordinates of perception are the spatial locations from which possible movements originate and the directions of the relevant movements.' Based on this thought, she argues that perception is dependent on the capacity to act because '[t]he possibility for action that is involved in the egocentric organization of perception allows one to represent one's location in relation to perceived objects.' She regards the perceiver's egocentric spatial coordinate as the target of perceivers' capacities for action and the support for the argument that capacities are constitutive of perception. [153] However, the spatial coordinate is a by-product of perception—the activity of achieving access to objects. The spatial coordinate is not a preliminary condition for perception. We have it when we achieve access to the world and have contact with it. If we do not reach out and probe anything, how can we have the

153 Susanna Schellenberg, 'Action and self-location in perception', p. 603–631.

coordinate by spinning in the void? In perception, the world is the access space for perceivers. Having the world as an access space allows perceivers to perceive things in the world. Spatial locations of objects and spatial coordinates can be defined on the basis that objects are accessible.　Only then are they involved in the presence of certain things. This does not mean that the Cartesian coordinate is a preliminary and background condition of all the activities of achieving access.

When we encounter things in the world, the relationship that we share with those things is always mediated by what we do to achieve access to them. As a result, how far things are from us is changeable. This sort of change includes that, things can be physically nearer to us when we shorten our distance to them by bodily movements. The change can also be that things present to us more clearly when we foveate them, etc. Since we encounter things in the world, rather than in a constructed space that represents the world, what we do to achieve access to objects has immediate impacts on the relationship between objects and us. The same object can be accessed by a perceiver to different degrees in the activity. Things can become more or less significant in the access space as a result of our navigation of sensorimotor contingencies. This is like a hot spot can become a cold one if the spot is less accessed or enacted on a heat map. At the same time, it can never happen that a perceiver has perfect access to the same object and makes it entirely accessed.

By highlighting objects in the access space to different significances, perceivers can be aware of the degree to which objects are accessed by them. The awareness can be a

sort of practical knowledge on the part of perceivers. They can know how to navigate sensorimotor contingencies further so that they can deal with their practical distance to objects and achieve the presence of things in the access space in a practical way.   Access space thus provides perceivers with a guide to find out how far—in the practical sense — objects are from them and what navigations are needed to handle the practical remoteness of objects. Consequently, when the world is access space for us, the world can provide guidance for us to achieve access to it. That is to say, when we are aware of all those things that are highlighted by our enacting sensorimotor contingencies, we perceive them by understanding that they are available for us to encounter. Moreover, we can know to what degrees they are accessed through the awareness of their being highlighted. We can find out whether a thing is highlighted to a satisfactory degree or not. If not, we can mediate our navigation of sensorimotor contingencies. In this case, the access space provides us with guidance to achieve access, or, to be more accurate, better access to the world. For example, my cup shows up vaguely to me at the periphery of my visual field when I am looking at my laptop. I can see that there is water in my cup but cannot see how much water there is. I turn to my cup and foveate it to see clearly. When I do this, I enact the sensorimotor contingency that if I look at the cup, it will be presented to me more, therefore, I highlight the cup in the access space more and make it more significant. If the cup is not included in my access space at the beginning, I cannot know that I can make it more significant by turning towards it. I have guidance for achieving better access to the cup from my access space.

I have mentioned that the world as access space can expand. It does not extend evenly or plainly because the accessibilities of things in the world do not increase or decrease progressively. The way that the world expands as an access space is that it becomes enacted due to our skilful activity of exploring it. Between two things that have higher accessibilities, there can be one that is less accessible, like, on a heat map, there can be a block of cold colour surrounded by warm colour. At some points, accessibilities of things can be too low to be significant enough for those things to be present for people sufficiently and vividly so that people can feel that these things are not perceptually present to them. Moreover, the more and deeper the world is enacted by us because we achieve access, the larger and more intensive access space we can have. Consequently, more guidance for achieving access can be obtained from it, which allows us to achieve access to more things. The same object can be highlighted to different degrees in the process. What is unchanged by the activity of achieving access is the practical remoteness of objects. Objects are always practically remote for us in access space and they can be always taken as aims that we target in achieving access to them in the access space. Therefore, how objects are highlighted in access space is dynamic guidance for us to achieve access to them. How things are significant for us is changeable because of the changes in how we achieve access to things.

To make a summary, the access space is where we achieve access to objects in perception. We can also carry out other kinds of access activities, like thought, in the access space. When we perceive and achieve access to things in the world, the world itself

is the access space for us. To be an access space does not mean that the structure of the world or things in it are distorted or transformed. In perception, the world is perceptually accessible. In this case, what we explore is still the world itself, rather than a world that is distorted for being accessed. Objects are practically remote for people in the access space. This is different from the idea that things are physically distanced from people in the physical world. The difference is that how practically far objects are in the access space is determined by their accessibility. In perception, the difference between accessibilities of different objects can be measured and evaluated by people based on their knowledge of sensorimotor contingencies. In this way, perceivers can know about the intensities of the presence of objects, so they can know how far objects are from them, practically. This sensorimotor knowledge of the situation enables them to make further efforts to achieve access to objects and perceive them. Thus, access space turns out to be the perceptual guide for perceivers. In perception, people perceive objects by achieving objects in the world, which is the access space.

Chapter 5

Perceiving objects in the access space with concepts

I have so far illustrated the way that we achieve contact skilfully with the idea of access space. In this chapter, I finally come to the last two problems which I mention at the start of the last chapter: How does sensorimotor understanding play its role in perception? And what is the relation between skills that we use to achieve access to the world and understanding that enables us to achieve access and make the world present? I would like to address these two issues by an investigation of concepts in perception. Noë has argued that concepts are skills that we use to perceive the world.[154] He has also suggested that sensorimotor understanding includes conceptual understanding.[155] These claims suggest that, in the enactive picture of perception, concepts can bridge the discussion about skills by which we achieve access to the world and the discussion about sensorimotor understanding. In this case, I take it worthy to do an investigation into concepts in perception.

5.1 The overall view: Concepts are skills

I argue that concepts are skills by which we perceive, following the path that Noë paves. This view of concepts stems from his proposal that presence should not be

---

154 Noë, *Varieties of Presence*, p. 35.
155 Noë, 'Précis of Action in Perception', p. 664.

understood as representation. In former chapters, I have introduced the point that Noë is against those views that regard presence as a perceiver's mental representation of the world. I have also illustrated why it is necessary and compatible for enactive theorists to refuse the representational view of perception and why this enactive proposal is an accurate attitude towards perception. Holding this opposite attitude towards the idea that the presence of objects is their representation, it would be incompatible to think that the way we use concepts in perception is to represent things in our minds. I suppose that this line of thought is what makes Noë abandon views in which concepts are taken as categories, sets, prototypes, or Fregean senses.[156] He suggests that when we consider concepts as these things, what we do is suppose that 'concepts are ways we represent the world as being' and attribute the function such as 'elements or constituents of our representations' to concepts.[157] Here, Noë argues that considering concepts as categories, sets, prototypes, etc., is a pro-representation thought about perception. Then, why is it a pro-representation thought?

Categories and sets are used to sort out different things and divide them into different groups concerning common properties that those things have. The prototype theory provides an account of how things are categorised. Something falls under a concept because the object has enough properties that are shared by other constituents of the category. Concepts are thus used as prototypes to make the similarity comparison.[158]

156 Ibid. For theories that take concepts as categories, sets, prototypes, and Fregean senses, please check this overview of contemporary theories of concepts: Margolis and Laurence, '*Concepts*', (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, 2019) < https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/concepts/ > [accessed 11 February 2022].
157 Margolis and Laurence, '*Concepts*', (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, 2019) < https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/concepts/ > [accessed 11 February 2022].
158 Ibid.

Frege suggests that senses of signs—e.g., names—contain modes by which signs present their referents, i.e., things that signs refer to.[159] If concepts were used in perception as categories or sets, they would be used by perceivers to make judgments on which categories things are supposed to be put in. Such judgments are made in regards to those properties that the perceived object shares with other things in the category or set. Because concepts are used to make judgments about things, it is blocked for them to be used in the process of making things show up for us. After all, we can only make judgments about something that is already presented to us. Thus, we can easily incline to a representational view of perception and concept if we think that concepts are used as categories, sets and prototypes. If concepts are considered as Fregean senses, then perceivers' conception of a thing is rather an internal image.[160] As Fregean senses, concepts would be individualised ways to conceive of things. That is to say, different perceivers can have different ways to conceive of a thing and concepts are such ways. In Frege's phrase, '[t]he conception is subjective: One man's conception is not that of another.'[161] Thus, what is presented by concepts is not the thing that is perceived but rather the ways that the perceived thing is conceived. Concepts are used to represent things as mental images that perceivers have and thus are isolated from the perceived world.

I suppose that my readers can understand that it is inconsistent with the spirit of the enactive picture of perception to perceive objects by concepts in a way that objects are represented with concepts. A proper view of concepts should be determined by the nature

---

159 Gottlob Frege, 'Sense and Reference', *The Philosophical Review*, 3(1948), pp. 209–230(p. 210).
160 Ibid., p. 212.
161 Ibid.

of the sensorimotor thesis of perception. That is to say, the thought of how are concepts used in perception has to be in accordance with the idea that presence is achieved by the skilful achievement of access to objects. Thus, the enactive theorists have to promote a nonrepresentational view of concepts. Moreover, this view is forced to be skill-and-access related. In this case, we can understand why Noë makes the following suggestion regarding concepts and why we shall embrace this proposal:[162]

> …there is a nonrepresentational way of thinking about concepts. Concepts, in this nonrepresentational view, are not so much categories or sets, or prototypes, […] they are rather skills for taking hold of what there is. To say that perceptual experience is conceptual, from this standpoint, is to say that perceptual experience is a skillful grappling with what there is.

I have so far illustrated that we encounter things in the world by having the world as our access space. Then, how can concepts help us grapple with things in the access space? Relevantly, how can we understand the nonrepresentational view of concepts? The former question is about delineating the detailed way that concepts are used in perception as skills. The latter question is about how are we supposed to understand the use of concepts based on the general idea that perception is a matter of access, rather than representation.

We can start with the former one. In the last section, I have illustrated that the world

---

162 Noë, *Varieties of Presence*, p. 35.

that we perceive can be present to us as an access space when we understand the world regarding its accessibility. Once the world is present as an access space, we have the place to carry out our perceptual activity by achieving access to things. In this case, the world that we are to perceive becomes the place where the perceptual activity of achieving presence takes place. Then, in this access space, we can have guidance from the world itself and map things in it. Namely, we highlight things in access space by enacting sensorimotor contingencies that depend on these things, in which way, things are made to show up for us in different intensities. Highlighting things in the world, which is our access space thanks to our activity of achieving access, is like making different areas on a heat map visible with different colours. By enacting contingencies skilfully, we not only find things in the world by highlighting them but are aware of the degree to which they are highlighted, i.e., accessed. Thus, by finding things in the access space, we can perceive them and even improve the access we have to them, i.e., improve their presence. To be short, in my picture of access space and the achievement of access, the perceptual activity of achieving access is constituted by two phases. Firstly, we highlight things by enacting sensorimotor contingencies that depend on those things, in which way, these things are included in the access space. Thus, we have access space and map things in it. Secondly, we have to spot and pick out certain things when we perceive specific objects, otherwise, we might mix things that we aim to perceive with their environment.

Based on this picture of access space, I endorse Noë's suggestion that 'perceptual

experience is a skillful grappling with what there is.'[163] In this case, concepts can play

two roles in our perceptual activity. On the one hand, we have the access space depending

on concepts; on the other hand, concepts enable us to navigate sensorimotor contingencies

and achieve access to specific things. Here, I would like to clarify that I do not mean that

one of these two roles that concepts play in perception is primary. They depend on each

other and usually happen simultaneously. We explore a specific item when we have some

knowledge of its surroundings, while we also explore the whole world by exploring each

thing in it. In this case, I spell out the role of concepts by laying out two parts of it for the

clarity of illustration.

5.2 Having the world as access space and achieving access to things with concepts

Concepts play a part in making it such that the world is presented as an access space.

This is firstly manifested in that concepts are skills, with which we achieve access to the

world.[164] In the last chapter, I explained how the access space is structured. When we

achieve access to the world, it becomes our access space. The access space expands as

our activity of achieving access goes on. When we access an object, it is involved in our

access space and becomes highlighted in the world, i.e., it shows up for us. Things can be

---

163 Ibid.
164 The role that concepts play also has another manifestation. By 'first manifestation' here, I do not mean that this manifestation is more important than the other. What I intend to note is that this aspect can be more obvious than the other one, which I explain more afterwards.

highlighted to different levels because the access we have to different things can be different in degree. This is like different areas on a heat map that are highlighted at different levels and become heat spots. Different accessibilities of different things in our access space result from our navigation of sensorimotor contingencies by skills, i.e., how specific sensorimotor contingency is enacted by the specific skill that we use. I argue that this should be the way that we understand Noë's idea that access space is defined by skills.[165]

Noë has suggested that concepts are 'skills for taking hold of what there is.'[166] How can we understand his suggestion? Well, I do not intend to claim that all skills that we use to achieve access to things are concepts. What I would like to suggest is that concepts are involved in our perceptual activities as skills. Moreover, the way that they are exercised can be distinctive compared with other skills, which is worth figuring out. If concepts are involved in our tool kit for perceiving, then the world is defined as an access space by concepts, at least partly. In addition, figuring out the way that concepts are used and what is special about this way can help us better understand the enactive suggestion that concepts are skills.

Though Noë does not say much about how concepts are skills in a detailed and straightforward way, he does give us some clues to think about it. He writes: 'Don't think of a concept as a label you can slap on a thing; think of it as a pair of calipers with which you can pick the thing up.'[167] The metaphor Noë uses here could be obscure for readers

---

165 Noë, *Varieties of Presence*, p. 34.
166 Ibid., p. 35.
167 Ibid., p. 36.

to understand, but I think it can make sense when we give the opposition to representationalism from enactivism and my picture of access space a good consideration.

According to the representational view, we make judgments about things that we perceive with concepts. We define them to fall under different categories. In this way, we attach concepts to things that show up for us like tagging labels. Concepts can be attached to objects after these objects are present so they are not even necessary for us to have the perception. Moreover, when we tag concepts to objects like slapping labels, we have representations of objects—mental images with a label indicating which categories the objects are supposed to fall into. This account of how we use concepts in perception cannot be accepted by enactive theorists. According to the enactive view, we perceive objects by encountering them in their surroundings rather than having mental images of them. I have introduced and explained how can we have the world as our access space and how we highlight things in the world and make them available present for us. Here comes a problem how can we encounter certain objects and properties specifically, rather than merely make a compound mixture of objects and properties show up for us. Relevantly, how can we grapple with certain things in the access space and take hold of it? This matters about grasping things precisely in their surroundings but not mixing them with their surroundings. It also matters about spotting a specific thing throughout the processing of perception that is changeable and takes time. For example, I can hear the sound of the violin out of a symphony. In addition, when the sound goes on along with the whole piece of music, I can track it.

I am inspired by Noë's analogy between callipers and concepts—we use concepts to enact sensorimotor contingencies and make things show up for us in a way that we pick them out and take hold of them. Namely, concepts are such a kind of skill with which we can select certain sensorimotor contingencies and enact them. With concepts, we highlight things in access space by spotting them in their surroundings. With concepts, we achieve the presence by taking a firm hold of things rather than making them show up for us randomly. When we grasp things with concepts, we take a grip on things, which allows us to perceive persistently and carefully. This is like picking out something with callipers. We navigate sensorimotor contingencies and make things show up with concepts is like using callipers to measure something. With concepts, which are callipers we use, we can have a more accurate measure of things.

In this picture, the concepts themselves are callipers, and different concepts can be different callipers. Conceptual abilities are about picking out things with concepts. To perceive with different concepts is to perceive with different skills, which means to achieve access to the things with different focuses. To pick out things in their surroundings does not mean that we distinguish things from their surroundings and then slap labels on them with concepts. We do not slap labels on things with concepts—we do not make judgments on whether something can be categorised by a concept. Concepts are the way that we pick out things. It is not merely about picking out things where they physically are but picking out things that can be highlighted by certain concept skills. Things can fall under a concept because we can grasp them with the concept. When we achieve access

to a thing with the right concept, the thing can fit in the concept-calliper, and we can make the thing show up in a way that it falls under the concept. If wrong concepts are used, then we cannot select and enact sensorimotor contingencies and fail to perceive the thing as something that falls under the concept.

In perceiving, conceptual skills are different from other skills in the sense that, with conceptual skills, we enact sensorimotor contingencies by spotting and taking a grip of them with different concepts. The degree to which we achieve access to things and their properties can be affected by what concepts we use. If we perceive without any concepts, it will also be possible for us to enact something. However, we will not be able to enact contingencies conceptually. That is to say, we cannot spot anything or pick it out in its surroundings. Things that are enacted can mix. Moreover, what we highlight in the access space can vanish quickly if we do not take a hold of it with conceptual skills.

Here is an example of how can we achieve access to objects through conceptual skills. When I learn to perform forward swizzles on ice, I watch my coach skate two arcs with his feet on the ice. I also watch several videos to learn the step. I perceive the way people perform it and imitate them. However, I cannot perform it until my coach tell me that my feet have to open up and close. When I watch my coach do swizzles with the two concepts 'open' and 'close', I achieve better access to the step because I make the way that skaters move their feet more significant to me. Thus, I achieve better access to their performance when I watch them. If I do not use the two concepts to watch the step, I will lose the grasp of how skaters make it with their feet.

In addition, I also have to emphasise that, concepts themselves are skills in achieving access to things. Some people may adopt the idea that conceptual skills are skills that consist of concepts and some other things. They could take mathematical skills as an example.[168] Numbers, mathematical symbols and notations are what we use to do math but they are not mathematical skills themselves. They have to be taken into use with other things that can count as skills, e.g., operating skills. It may be suggested that concepts are like mathematical symbols here. Namely, they cannot count as skills by themselves but can only consist of conceptual skills with other things, e.g., the skills to distinguish something from its surroundings or represent a thing in our minds. The thought that concepts themselves are not skills goes against the nature of the sensorimotor framework. It has been repeated that perception is not a matter of representation but availability. In perception, we encounter what is available to us by achieving access to it and making it show up for us with skills. These skills determine how we achieve access to objects, rather than what representation we have of objects in our mind. If concepts were not themselves skills, they would be excluded from the activity of achieving access. In this way, they were used as something applied to perception, like categories. This is a pro-representational view of concepts that has been refused by the enactive approach.[169] According to the enactive view, concepts are themselves callipers that can take a hold of things, rather than labels attached to callipers.

The use of concepts is not only about bringing an object that I perceive into a category,

---

168 Michael Wheeler reminds me of this possible reading of what I say about concepts above: the skills used in perception involve concepts among other things.
169 I say more about why concepts must be themselves skills later.

e.g., name a cup-like object by the concept 'cup'. But more practical, I spot things in their surroundings with concepts. Things can afford such a kind of sensorimotor contingency: If we pick something out with a concept that the thing fits, then this thing will be spotted and picked out in its surroundings. I perceive a cup in a way that I understand there is a cup available for me to perceive through looking at it, touching it, etc. The concept cup I use here is a skill to grasp the available item out there, being practically remote for me. If I do not have the conceptual skill, I would be unable to highlight the item as what it is. We would not be able to conceive it as a cup or think of this cup without the concept cup being a skill because the concept is missing from our tool kit to achieve access to the world.

The group of conceptual skills and the group of sensorimotor skills overlap with each other but neither of them can exhaust the other. A similar view has been made by Noë that sensorimotor understanding includes conceptual understanding among its manifestations[170]. Noë only suggests that sensorimotor understanding can be manifested as conceptual understanding but does not make the further claim that conceptual understanding is the only kind of manifestation of sensorimotor understanding. In my view, we can have conceptual knowledge of a sort of sensorimotor contingency but not have a sensorimotor understanding of it. In addition, it is common for us to have concepts that are hardly used as sensorimotor skills or have sensorimotor skills that are not strictly conceptual.

---

170 Noë, 'Précis of Action in Perception', p. 664.

For example, when a film is played to us, we can know that there is an extremely short pause in each frame of the picture that is played by learning about film and the physical theories that tell us how films work, but we can hardly perceive those pauses. We can have a conceptual knowledge of the contingency that the stimuli of a single frame of a picture can maintain for a short time before being replaced by the stimuli of the next frame of the picture, but we do not have the sensorimotor skill to capture this sort of contingency. This kind of sensorimotor contingency is so faint that we cannot have a prudent sensorimotor understanding and mastery of them. We lack the practical knowledge of navigating these sensorimotor contingencies because of the lack of relevant sensorimotor skills. However, at the same time, we can have conceptual knowledge of such contingency.

Cases, where conceptual skills are not sensorimotor, are even more common. For instance, when I read John Williams' novel, *Stoner*, I can have an understanding of the life story of Stoner by concepts. I know that this character went to the University of Missouri at Columbia, did not serve or fight in WWIbut continued his study and got a PhD degree, etc. I have such a knowledge of the story depending on concepts including university, Missouri, WWI, etc. They are conceptual skills for me to understand and think about the story, i.e., achieve access to the story of the character. However, these concepts of the University of Missouri and WWI are not sensorimotor skills. I do not perceive the object of the University or the war as I cannot have any sensorimotor relation to the university or the war by reading the story—what I refer to with those conceptual skills

are the university and the war in the fictional story, rather than the university that I can take a trip to visit in the US or the war that took place more than a century ago.

There are also cases where sensorimotor skills seem not to be exactly conceptual skills. For example, when a friend shows me her mother's old photo, I say: 'You look the same as your mom at your age!' I perceive and recognise the similarity between the appearances of my friend and her mother. However, I might not tell what makes me feel that they look alike so much or why they look different from other people. Some people may suggest that not all of the skills that I use to perceive my friend and her mother's faces are conceptual, as I cannot name and give propositional descriptions of all the characteristics that can be found in their features, facial-muscle flows, expressions, etc. This kind of comment comes from the fine-grain-content argument that is promoted by Evans[171], Peacocke[172], and many other philosophers. According to their view, our experience has fine-grained characteristics about textures, shades, and other properties of objects.[173] Relevantly, these characters cannot be exhausted by concepts but are included in our perceptual contents.

Even though there can be nonconceptual skills in perception, I have so far made it clear that concepts can be used as skills in perception. However, sensorimotor skills are not sufficient yet for perceivers to achieve access to the world and make it be access space for them. People can have bunches of skills that can be used to achieve access to objects before they reach out to achieve the access, e.g., foveating specific objects, tracking the

---

171 Gareth Evans, *The Varieties of Reference*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982).
172 Peacocke, pp. 239–264.
173 Ibid., p. 245.

trajectory of movement, collecting acoustic stimulus, etc. It has to be learned about how can we use these skills in achieving access to the world. If perceivers failed to use these skills properly, then sensorimotor contingencies could not be navigated appropriately. In this case, perceivers would not have the mastery of sensorimotor contingencies that is needed for achieving the presence of objects.–

At the very beginning of the perceptual activity, sensorimotor skills might be used without sensorimotor understanding. Skills can make some sensorimotor contingencies be enacted. However, without sensorimotor understanding, perceivers cannot select specific sensorimotor contingencies and enact them with skilful mastery of them. Instead, they are only able to enact random sensorimotor contingencies clumsily, like a headless chicken. This does not mean that perceivers are only passively receiving stimuli from the world when they begin perceiving at the start. Sensorimotor contingencies are still enacted by perceivers with skills. The mastery that we can have of sensorimotor contingencies is very limited.

It is pointed out by Noë that presence has a fragile character when he makes the argument that, presence is always achieved in our active adjustments of what we do in the perceptual activity. He suggests that we have a 'cognitive predicament' by which fragility of presence is manifest: We can only have the fragile presence which is always sensible and potentially problematic.[174] Noë's suggestion and explanation can be obscure for some readers. I think we should understand the fragility of the presence by a

---

174 See Noë, *Varieties of Presence*, p. 41 and 44.

consideration of the way that sensorimotor contingencies depend on objects and movements. Presence is so sensitive to the situation where we perceive, that minor changes in the perceptual situation and slight inappropriate navigation of sensorimotor contingencies can result in problems of presence. Presence can fall into parts, distort, and even vanish when we fail to navigate sensorimotor contingencies appropriately. For example, when I text messages during a lecture rather than pay attention to what the speaker says, the speech can be presented to me as white noise and even fail to be present to me auditorily. The fragility is part of the modality that we perceive and what forces us to continuously adjust our perception actively.

I admire Noë's insights a lot here in his argument about the fragility of presence. And I would like to shed light on the necessity of concepts in perceivers' having the world as the access space by stressing the fragile character of presence.

When sensorimotor skills, including conceptual skills and nonconceptual skills, are not used with sensorimotor understanding, the access perceivers can achieve to the world is extremely limited. Noë argues that sensorimotor understanding enables us to 'occupy a vantage point from which it is possible to see.' He also writes: 'Sensorimotor understanding is the background skill thanks to which we succeed in making direct contact with the world.'[175] In my view, Noë suggests that sensorimotor skills can only be successfully exercised based the sensorimotor understanding. I would like to expand this thought here. We can possess concepts skills and other skills with which we achieve

---

175 Ibid., p. 67.

access to the world. We can also use them when we need to achieve the presence of things. However, we cannot guarantee the success of making things show up for us if we use skills without an understanding of the perceptual situation. For example, if I would like to make some fries presented to me gustatorily, then staring at the fries would be the wrong way to enact sensorimotor contingencies relevant to the taste of fries. Most people have the skill to taste foods and other things, however, it would be unusual for us to taste the air because few of the sensorimotor contingencies afforded by the air can be enacted with our taste skills.

Sensorimotor understanding helps us to take the perspective from which we can perceive. To take such a perspective, we also need to know which skills are to be used in the situation. To be more detailed, the knowledge is about sorting out, selecting, and enacting sensorimotor contingencies in needed ways with specific skills. For example, when I am going to enact sensorimotor contingencies that are of an auditory pattern of stimulation, I have to select and enact my auditory skills rather than visual skills. When we achieve access to the world, we enact sensorimotor contingencies skilfully, meanwhile, our skills are also 'enacted' by sensorimotor contingencies. Sensorimotor contingencies call for skills that can enact them. It is like there is a dual-enactment relation between sensorimotor contingencies afforded by objects and our skills. To take the vantage point to perceive, we have to understand such dual-enactment.

Without the understanding, the access we accidentally achieve by using skills randomly would be so thin and turbulent that the presence of things is too fragile to be

available for perceivers to grasp. The encounter perceivers have with things, in this case, is so shallow and ephemeral that the access they have to things is like something written in water. I have so far illustrated the thought that perceptual presence is a matter of availability, and what determines the range of what is available is understanding. Here I would like to add an argument that, without understanding, those sensorimotor contingencies that are enacted by accident cannot make the availability of presence withstand its fragility. As presence is fragile, the availability of presence has to be monitored and maintained by perceivers through the active adjustments of their navigation of sensorimotor contingencies.

When sensorimotor contingencies are enacted by accident, they are enacted without the understanding of the perceptual situation. The access that can be made is not enough for perceivers to have and maintain such a fragile presence. When perceivers enact some sensorimotor contingencies in a lack of proper navigation which can only happen based on the sensorimotor understanding, perceivers encounter the cognitive predicament that Noë describes. The reality that nothing can be firmly grappled with urges us, as perceivers, to continue operating the sensorimotor skills that we have and adjust our operation. Through such practice of skills, a sort of complex knowledge of their perceptual situation can be gradually generated. This kind of knowledge is necessary for us to perceive the world in the predicament that is caused by the fragility of presence. With this knowledge, we do not only know about what sensorimotor contingencies are there in the perceptual situation, but more importantly, we know what kinds of skills can and should be engaged

in our navigation of those contingencies. Relevantly, to know what kinds of skills are called for the navigation of contingencies and use these skills. We have to acquire the knowledge of whether the needed skills are possessed by ourselves. We also have to know to what extent can we navigate those sensorimotor contingencies with the skills we have. This knowledge amounts to sensorimotor understanding.

Here, the sensorimotor understanding covers both what can be done by us and what cannot be done. However, the boundary between sensorimotor contingencies that we can navigate and sensorimotor contingencies that we cannot navigate can be fuzzy. The fuzzy line can be manifested in two ways.

The first is that what cannot be navigated can sometimes be shown by others that we already have a good mastery of. For example, when a person is asked to taste two glasses of wine, he or she may say that 'they taste differently for me but I am not sure what the difference is.' The person can navigate sensorimotor contingencies to the degree that the flavours of the two kinds of wine are present not in the same way, however, the navigation is not enough for the difference to be shown clearly. Nevertheless, what has been navigated can indicate that there is still something that is not navigated sufficiently.

Secondly, it is possible that perceivers can navigate some sensorimotor contingencies, but fail to do so appropriately or thoroughly. For example, when a group of people sings a song in Greek and I hardly know anything about the Greek language, I can hear the sound they make, the musical melody, etc., but I cannot hear what they sing. Or even, I am not sure whether they are singing in any human language. In this case, I can navigate

the auditory stimulations to the extent that I hear them as a piece of music, but fail to navigate the patterns of stimulations of different tones to the extent that I can hear them as words with meanings. Again, we evaluate the navigation of sensorimotor contingencies by the degree to which we can navigate.

Sensorimotor understanding is a kind of knowledge know-how about coping with the practical distance between us and the world with our skills. In this sense, we say that it is a sort of background skill. We navigate sensorimotor contingencies skilfully based on the knowledge of what is needed to be done and how much of the needed can be done in certain perceptual situations. The understanding of what we can do enables us to achieve access to objects to a degree as high as possible; while the understanding of what we cannot do is also crucial for our achievement of access because it alerts us about the fragility of presence and so urges us to procure more skills and cultivating a better understanding of the perceptual situation. In this processing, sensorimotor understanding is gradually procured in adjustments that perceivers are forced to make in their perceiving. It is a characteristic of the enactive approach that it takes the fragility of presence into serious consideration. Presence is not a representation in our minds. It is not something that we create intellectually but rather something that we achieve in the encounter with things that show up for us. It cannot be held by us tightly but must be carefully maintained in the achievement of access with knowledge and skills.

The sensorimotor understanding that we procure in this way is conceptual. Sensorimotor understanding is the background skill which enables us to take the vantage

point and use the needed skills to perceive. To take the vantage point, we have to spot what is to be perceived. Thus, concepts are involved in because they are what we use to calliper things that are available for us to perceive. Sensorimotor understanding must involve the use of concepts. In this sense, it is conceptual.

As perceivers, we can have this conceptual knowledge of how to navigate sensorimotor contingencies even when I lack knowledge of the names of some things. I can foveate an object to enact the sensorimotor contingency that if I foveate such-and-such an object, then the object will be presented to me. E.g., I can make a laptop present to me as an object over there, available for me to perceive, even if I have no idea of the name laptop. I can do so because I know about the inter-enactment between my visual skills and the visual presence of the laptop. I do not have to know all the names to make my understanding of the perceptual situation conceptual.

We can also make sense of the use of demonstrative concepts by understanding that concepts are skills that we have to perceive. The thought of using demonstrative concepts in perception is originally promoted by John McDowell[176], who argues for a conceptualist approach to perception. A challenge that non-conceptualist theorists raise against conceptualism is the problem of fine-grained contents in perception. As I mentioned earlier, these philosophers argue that there is a sort of fine-grained content within our perception. This kind of content cannot be captured by concepts as we do not have concepts for the content of the kind. For example, we could only have the concept of red

---

176 Bill Brewer also argues for this thought. See *Perception and Reason*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999).

to describe two shades of red that are very similar but different from each other. According to the non-conceptualist thought, there are non-conceptual contents in our perception of those two shades of colour because we do not have distinct concepts for them. McDowell proposes that we can use demonstrative expressions to capture those different shades of colour.[177] I.e., we can use concepts to capture those shades of colour as 'that shade' or 'that colour'.

The thought of demonstrative concepts has been criticised by philosophers including Kelly and Prinz. Kelly argues that the possession of demonstrative concepts should be context-independent: 'possession of a demonstrative concept requires the subject to have the capacity to entertain that concept independently of the context in which it originally had its application.'[178] He sets a condition of re-identification for the requirement of context-independence and argues that demonstrative concepts fail to fulfil the re-identification requirement. He suggests that we can fail to recognise the shade of colour which we used to describe with demonstrative concepts among other shades of colour which are close to the one we aim to recognise.[179] Therefore, Kelly is against the proposal of demonstrative concepts.

Prinz makes a comment that shares a similar spirit with Kelly. Prinz argues that concepts are supposed to be controllable by those who use them endogenously.[180] That is to say, he thinks we must be able to entertain a concept alone, without relying upon any

---

177 McDowell, p. 58.
178 Sean Kelly, 'Demonstrative Concepts and Experience', *The Philosophical Review*, 3(2001), pp. 397–420(p. 403).
179 See Kelly, 'Demonstrative Concepts and Experience'.
180 Jesse Prinz, *Furnishing the Mind: Concepts and Their Perceptual Basis*. (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2002), p. 197.

external inputs. Otherwise, we are not qualified to have the concept. In his view, the use of demonstrative expressions promoted by McDowell is a representation that depends on 'the presence of exogenous inputs' so it does not qualify as the use of concepts.[181]

The difficulty that the McDowellian proposal of demonstrative concepts derives from his insistence on the representational view of perception. I have introduced that the use of concepts is like slapping labels on objects. This involves making judgments about objects with concepts. As a result, the concepts have to be used to categorise something, i.e., making judgments about something. To slap a label, we must have something to slap the label on. The way that we use concepts would then be understood like this: we have perceptual content first and then make conceptual judgments about them. When we categorise things by concepts, concepts are what determine categories. The conceptual categories are to be filled by things that are categorised into them. Otherwise, they would be empty and unable to qualify as concepts with which we make judgments. This brings the predicament where representational use of demonstrative concepts is in: we do not know what category of things is determined by demonstrative concepts. This sort of concept cannot determine any category so it would be doubtful that it can make judgments about things.[182]

If we take the skill-view of the use of concepts, the thought demonstrative concepts can be well-adopted. We can use demonstrative expressions to calliper things in the access

---

[181] Prinz, 'Putting the Brakes on Enactive Perception', p. 14.

[182] McDowell provides an account of how concepts are used both in experience to judgment but he still thinks that having perception is to have representation. I cannot introduce it here due to the space limit. See 'What Myth?', *Inquiry: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Philosophy*, 4(2007), pp. 338–351.

space and make them highlighted, in which way we can perceive them. We do not need the representation of things to make conceptual judgments about them. What we have to do is to spot things in their surroundings with the demonstrative concept and so achieve access to the object itself. The key is to know about the correspondence in the enacting relations between what I do and what is made to be presented. With such understanding, sensorimotor contingencies are enacted in a practical style, by which they are signified with the selecting-and-enacting method, instead of being enacted accidentally[183].

I do not exclude the use of nonconceptual skills from perception by pointing out the conceptuality of the achievement of presence in this way. Nonconceptual sensorimotor skills can be used in enacting some sensorimotor contingencies, these skills have to be used along with conceptual skills and based on the possession of sensorimotor understanding. Accidental and temporary use of sensorimotor skills is not enough for people to achieve presence. It is sensorimotor understanding, instead of mere sensorimotor skills, that guarantees that perceivers are capable of perceiving skilfully in the cognitive predicament they encounter, i.e., in which presence is fragile. The availability of fragile presence needs to be preserved and maintained by persistent work of navigating sensorimotor contingencies based on sensorimotor understanding. In short, perceivers cannot achieve stable access to the world and grasp presence without sensorimotor understanding.

---

183 By accidentality, I mean that sensorimotor contingencies are enacted without perceivers' understanding of the perceptual situation.

Although some of the sensorimotor skills are nonconceptual skills, concepts and conceptual knowledge are necessary for a satisfactory and appropriate achievement of presence, if not strictly constitutive. My argument here is limited as I do not strengthen it to the extent that concepts are constitutive in presence. For an argument that concepts are constitutive, I have to prove that it is impossible to achieve any presence—even the most fragile one—with the enactment of sensorimotor contingencies without the proper understanding. This task needs more work than what can be set out in this thesis. Thus, I would like to leave it to future research. Concepts are necessary because the continuous presence, which is needed by our perception, thought, reflection, action, and life, has to be preserved through perceivers' active adjustments of the navigation of sensorimotor contingencies based on their conceptual knowledge of the perceptual situation and what to do to achieve presence in such a situation.

The vantage point that we can take by having a sensorimotor understanding of the perceptual situation is a critical stance. I borrow the notion of 'critical stance' from Noë and I will say more about his use of this term soon. Before that, I would like to make it clear that I expand the use of this notion and fit this notion into the picture of access space. I think it can help us have a more vivid understanding of access space and the way that we occupy our positions in the space. In the last section, I have illustrated that when perceivers achieve access to the world and so understand the world regarding its accessibility, the world is the access space for perceivers to achieve presence by getting access to things in it. I have also spelt it out that we can have guidance on how to achieve

access to things from the access space when we understand the world concerning its accessibility. Now, I would like to develop these thoughts about access space by filling in more details with the notion of the 'critical stance'. Here, the key point is: The critical stance that we can have in the access space is what we count on to have practical guidance in access space.

Noë describes perceivers' perceptual activity as a sort of aesthetic activity, which means that perception and art share the same features. He explains this idea by writing down: 'the encounter with the world, like the encounter with a work of art, unfolds against the background of aesthetic conversation' [184]. Aesthetic experience is the sort of experience in which admirers always make efforts to achieve a better understanding of the artworks by interrogating them and finding the connections that we have to them. For example, when I visit the Sagrada Família in Barcelona, the more time I spend looking at it, as well as hanging around and in it, the more magnificence of the building I can grasp. To admire it, I have to examine and explore it with my skills, as well as my understanding of the building. Similarly, '[p]erceiving is an activity of securing access to the world by cultivating the right critical stance, that is, by cultivating the right understanding'[185]. By laying out the connection between perception and art, Noë makes it clear that, like art admiration, perception also calls for critical examination. To make such an examination, perceivers have to take an appropriate stance, i.e., acquire an appropriate understanding.

---

184 Noë, *Varieties of Presence*, p. 128.
185 Ibid.

I would like to develop Noë's work further here and argue that we can only have the right critical stance for perceiving in the access space. Only by knowing that objects are always practically remote and remote objects can be accessed by us skilfully,' can we be in the right critical stance to achieve a thorough understanding of the object and the situation where we perceive things. Only when we are in such a critical stance, can we make use of the exploration that can be captured in the access space. That is to say, when we are in the critical stance, we can understand the accessibilities of things that are perceived, and develop the way we explore and perceive according to the understanding of accessibilities of things. Though Noë himself does not make the arguments that we have the world as an access space by having a conceptual-sensorimotor understanding of the perceptual situation and taking a critical stance, this thread of my thoughts goes along with the spirit of the enactive account that is promoted by Noë. In *Varieties of Presence*, he has once written:[186]

'What criticism affords is the cultivation of the understanding, the development and so the procurement of the conceptual tools that enable us to pick up what is there before us. Concepts are ways of achieving access to the world around us.'

Here, I take Noë to be suggesting that by having a critical stance and making a critical examination in the exploration of the world, perceivers can improve their understanding

---

186 Ibid., p. 127.

of the situation where they achieve access to things, as well as acquire an understanding

of a larger range of things in their environments. The development of this understanding

is granted by the growth of perceivers' conceptual knowledge of their perceptual situation

and skills to spot what is accessible to them. In this case, concepts are themselves methods

by which we achieve access to the world.

These thoughts from Noë go in the same vein as mine does. My argument is that

having conceptual knowledge of perceptual situations enables us to have a firm hold of

things that are available for us to perceive. This allows us to critically examine what we

are to perceive and understand the world regarding its accessibility. In this way, we can

make the world to be access space for us. By having the world as an access space, we can

perceive in a place that we understand, which is important for us to resist the fragility of

presence. The difference between Noë's thoughts and mine is that I make a more detailed

analysis of the role that concepts play in achieving presence. Unlike Noë who only makes

the argument that conceptual tools are used to grasp what there is, I illustrate the way that

concepts are used from two aspects: on the one hand, concepts are necessary for us to

have the world as the access space for us, i.e., we have the place where we can achieve

access to objects by having an understanding including concepts; on the other hand, we

explore specific things that are in the access space by picking out them in a conceptual

way, i.e., we spot what is available for us by callipers of concepts.

If we read what Noë writes in the quotation above with a consideration of my picture

of access space, then the expansion of access space can be taken as another way to present

the cultivation of understanding. That is to say, when we cultivate our understanding of the perceptual situation through the development of our conceptual tools, we are expanding the range of our access space simultaneously—a larger world is made to be the access space when we improve our understanding and conceptual tools. Thus, the expansion of access space is realised by having the critical stance to examine the perceptual situation with conceptual knowledge of the situation.

So far, I have illustrated how can concepts help us to grapple with things that are available for us to perceive. I have also explained how we can capture the thought that sensorimotor understanding is a sort of background skill by which we take the vantage point to perceive. These can lead us to the conclusion that the use of concepts in perception is non-representational.

Regarding this question, Noë has made a suggestion: 'there is a nonjudgmental use of concepts; a deployment of concepts in, as I put it earlier, a perceptual or experiential mode'[187]. In his view, the representational use of concepts is to make judgments about what is an object with concepts, i.e., to categorise an object or represent it in the perceiver's mind by concepts.[188] I have already introduced this sort of use at the beginning of this chapter. Noë describes this way to use concepts as slapping a label on a thing.[189] This representational view takes concepts as something used to frame what is obtained in experience, i.e., something that is added into the experience when the experience happens or even after. In this way, concepts are attributed to experience by

---

187 Noë, *Varieties of Presence*, p. 127.
188 Ibid., p. 125.
189 Ibid., p. 36.

judging an object to belong to a certain category of things. This is like slapping the label of a category on a specific object. In opposition to this view, Noë promotes 'a nonjudgmental use of concepts.'[190] That is to say, concepts are not attributed to experience according to what perceivers denote objects to be, but are the way that we perceive and experience by deploying skills that we have. When we perceive a pair of Air Buds as a pair of Air Buds, we do not frame raw materials and judge them to be Air Buds. Instead, the concept of Air Buds that we have deploys the way we perceive, i.e., how do we navigate sensorimotor contingencies by skills. In this process, the concept of AIR BUDS is not used to make judgments about the bud-like wireless earphones but to spot and pick out the pair of Air Buds which are available for us to perceive.[191] In this case, concepts are used practically in perception.

---

190 Ibid., p. 127.
191 In cases where people do not have the concept of Air Buds, the colour concepts, shape concepts, and other concepts they have can also deploy the way they perceive.

Conclusion

To take a whole view of the thesis, I introduce and illustrate the enactive approach to perception, i.e., having the perceptual presence of the world is a thoughtful and skilful activity of achieving access to the world. I develop a detailed illustration of how people achieve access to objects. In Chapter 1, I make an overall introduction to the enactive account, i.e., perception is about achieving presence by having perceptual access to the world. Following Noë's thoughts, it is suggested that access to the world is grounded by a sort of sensorimotor understanding. In chapters 2 and 3, leaving Noë's illustration aside, I develop my investigation of sensorimotor understanding and argue that this understanding is constitutive for our achievement of presence, which is realised through the navigation of sensorimotor contingencies. The investigation starts with a detailed explanation of the two-dimensionality of presence and includes an explication of what is sensorimotor understanding about and how can perceivers grasp the duality of presence based on the understanding generally. Chapters 4 and 5 make a more detailed exploration of the way that people achieve access to the world with sensorimotor understanding. The exploration focuses on the conception of access and provides a picture of achieving access in the access space. It also includes a consideration of the use of concepts in perception, and even more general, in thought and action.

Noë has suggested that a theory of direct perception needs a theory of access.[192]

---

192 Noë, *Varieties of Presence*, p. 29.

What I do in this thesis is to set out how can a theory of access be adopted to explain perception. What can be done in the future is to explore: How could the theory of access be applied to explaining other activities such as thought and action? This sort of research can help us better understand that perception is a thoughtful activity depending on capacities for action and thought sometimes is about achieving the presence of the world. Moreover, in this way, we can develop the general theory of access that can help us understand the nature of action, perception, and thought, as well as the relationship among these three.

Bibliography

Lucy Allais, 'Kant, Non-Conceptual Content and the Representation of Space', *Journal of the History of Philosophy*, 3(2009), pp.383–413.

Ned Block, 'Review of Alva Noë, Action in Perception', *Journal of Philosophy*, 102(2005), pp. 259–272

Yanna Bontcheva Popova and Joanna Rączaszek-Leonardi, 'Enactivism and Ecological Psychology: The Role of Bodily Experience in Agency', *Frontiers in Psychology*, 10(2020), pp. 1–16.

Bill Brewer, *Perception and Reason*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999).

Rodney Brooks, 'Intelligence without reason', *Artificial Intelligence*, 1–3(1991), pp. 139–159.

Panayot Butchvarov, 'Adverbial Theories of Consciousness', *Midwest Studies in Philosophy*, 3 (1980), pp. 261–280.

John Campbell, *Reference and Consciousness*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).

John Campbell, 'Sensorimotor Knowledge and Naïve Realism', *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, 3(2008), pp. 666–673.

Tim Crane, '*The Problem of Perception*', (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, 2005) < https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/perception-problem/#AdvOut > [accessed 2 December 2021].

Daniel Dennett, *Consciousness Explained*. (New York: Back Bay Books/Little, Brown and Company, 1991).

Hubert Dreyfus, *What Computers Still Can't Do*. (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1992).

Gareth Evans, *The Varieties of Reference*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982).

Gottlob Frege, 'Sense and Reference', *The Philosophical Review*, 3(1948), pp.209–230.

James Genone, 'Recent Work on Naïve Realism', *American Philosophical Quarterly*, 1(2016), pp. 1–25.

James Gibson, *The Ecological Approach to Visual Perception*. (Hillsdale, NI: Lawrence Erlbaum, 1979).

Immanuel Kant, Critique of Pure Reason, ed. and trans. by Paul Guyer and Allen Wood. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

Sean Kelly, 'Demonstrative Concepts and Experience', *The Philosophical Review*, 3(2001), pp. 397–420.

O'Regan, J. Kevin, and Alva Noë, "A Sensorimotor Account of Vision and Visual Consciousness," *Behavioral and Brain Sciences*, 24 (2001), 939–973.

Jason Leddington, 'Perceptual Presence', *Pacific Philosophical Quarterly*, 90(2009), pp. 482–502.

Eric Margolis and Stephen Laurence, '*Concepts*', (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, 2019) < https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/concepts/ > [accessed 11 February 2022].

Michael Martin, 'What's in a look?', in *Perceiving the World*, ed. By Bence Nanay (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), pp. 160–225.

John McDowell, *Mind and World*. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996).

John McDowell, 'What Myth?', *Inquiry: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Philosophy*, 4(2007), pp. 338–351.

Boyd Miller, 'Naïve Realism and Illusion', *Ergo: an Open Access Journal of Philosophy*, 2(2015), pp. 607–625.

Bence Nanay, 'Aesthetic attention', *Journal of Consciousness Studies*, 5–6(2015), pp. 96–118

Alva Noë, *Action in Perception*, (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2004).

Alva Noë, 'Experience of the World in Time', *Analysis*, 66(2006), pp. 26–32

Alva Noë, 'Précis of Action in Perception', *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, 3(2008), pp. 660–665

Alva Noë, 'Reply to Campbell, Martin, and Kelly', *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, 3(2008), pp. 691–706

Alva Noë, 'The enactive approach: a briefer statement, with some remarks on "radical enactivism"', *Phenomenology and the Cognitive Sciences*, 20(2021), pp. 957–970.

Alva Noë, *Varieties of Presence*. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012).

Christopher Peacocke, 'Does Perception Have a Nonconceptual Content?', *The Journal of Philosophy*, 98(2001).

Jesse Prinz, *Furnishing the Mind: Concepts and Their Perceptual Basis*. (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2002).

Jesse Prinz, 'Putting the Brakes on Enactive Perception', *Psyche*, 1(2006), pp. 1–19.

Catherine Read and Agnes Szokolszky, 'Ecological Psychology and Enactivism: Perceptually-Guided Action vs. Sensation-Based Enaction', *Frontiers in Psychology*, 7(2020), pp. 1–19.

Eric Rietveld and Julian Kiverstein, 'A Rich Landscape of Affordances', *Ecological Psychology*, (forthcoming).

Kevin Ryan and Shaun Gallagher, 'Between Ecological Psychology and Enactivism: Is

There Resonance?', *Frontiers in Psychology*, 6(2020), pp. 1–13.

Susanna Schellenberg, 'Action and self-location in perception', *Mind*, 463(2007), pp.603--632.

Susanna Schellenberg, 'Perceptual Content Defended', *Noûs*, 4(2011), pp. 714–750.

Susanna Schellenberg, 'The Situation-Dependency of Perception', *The Journal of Philosophy*, 2(2008), pp. 55–84.

Dave Ward & Mog Stapleton, 'Es are good. Cognition as enacted, embodied, embedded, affective and extended', in *Consciousness in Interaction: The role of the natural and social context in shaping consciousness*, ed. by Fabio Paglieri, pp. 89–104.