

## Scents and Sensibilia

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*Beauty is an ecstasy; it is as simple as hunger. There is really nothing to be said about it. It is like the perfume of a rose: you can smell it and that is all.*

- W. Somerset Maugham, *Cakes and Ale*

An ongoing debate in the philosophy of perception is the one concerning how we should account for the phenomenal character—or the “what it is like”—of perceptual experience. Within this debate, there are those who think that qualia exist and those who do not. Qualia realists claim that there are introspectible properties of experience that play a crucial role in determining phenomenal character. Intentionalists are among those who think that there are no such properties. Intentionalism is the view that there is nothing more to the phenomenal character of a perceptual experience than its representational content—that is, the way that things in the world appear to be. In arguing that qualia do not exist, intentionalists have drawn attention to the alleged transparency of experience. Experience is said to be transparent in the sense that you “see right through it” and onto the objects and properties in the external world. Qualia simply aren’t there to be found.

This paper explores the notion of transparency. Most of the discussions of transparency have focused on vision, a sense modality for which transparency can seem intuitive. But most intentionalists take it that intentionalism is true for *all* of the sensory modalities. This is in keeping with what we can call the Unification Thesis—namely, the thesis that certain philosophical questions about perception will shake out in the same way for each of the sensory modalities. The focus of what follows is olfaction—a sense modality that, along with gustation, is the least discussed in the philosophical literature on perception. In humans, visual and olfactory experience differ greatly from one another with respect their richness.<sup>1</sup> When compared to visual experience, olfactory experience seems incredibly impoverished. For this reason, on the face of it, transparency seems unintuitive for it.

Is olfactory experience transparent or isn’t it? Answering this question involves looking closely at just what is meant by “transparency”—a question that has yet to be fully sorted out in the philosophical literature. Sections 1 and 2 of this paper provide a critical overview of what has been said about the transparency of visual experience. Section 2, in particular, introduces the notion of a “modality-salient” property as a means of further clarifying the kinds of properties with which the transparency claim is concerned. Section 3 turns to olfactory experience. This section formulates a transparency claim for olfactory experience and argues that underlying any resistance to such a claim are important differences between the phenomenology of visual and olfactory experience. In particular, it is argued that, while visual experience provides a basis for demonstrative thought about objects, olfactory experience does not, and this difference underlies any suspicion about the alleged transparency of olfactory experience. Finally, section 4 takes these phenomenological claims and argues that, despite any *prima facie* convictions to the contrary, olfactory experience is indeed transparent. The lesson learned is that explanations of transparency have been obscured by a reliance on the visual model. Considering transparency as it pertains to olfactory experience, then, clarifies the requirements of transparency.

### 1. Qualia and Phenomenal Character

Before turning to transparency, let us look more closely at what qualia are supposed to be. There is an entirely noncontroversial sense in which qualia *do* exist. On one conception of qualia, they are those properties, *whatever they are*, that determine the phenomenal character of an experience. This notion of qualia is a “cautious” one, as Eric Lormand (1994, p. 127) puts it. It is devoid of any assumptions about what kinds of properties qualia are—for example, properties of objects or intrinsic properties of the experience itself. According to this notion of qualia, to assert that experiences have qualia is merely to assert that experiences have phenomenal character. Given this, it would be silly to deny that there are cautious qualia. It would amount to denying that experiences have *any* phenomenal character. But clearly there is something that it is like to smell a rose, to hear middle C, and to look at an orange. So cautious qualia are not the source of any dispute.

The dispute is over a second, restricted, notion of qualia. Let’s call these properties *candid qualia*. Sydney Shoemaker (1981, 1996), Christopher Peacocke (1983), Ned Block (1990, 1996, 2003), and others argue that certain properties of perceptual experiences themselves account, at least in part, for the phenomenal character of experience. These properties are thought to have three defining characteristics. They are (1) *intrinsic* and (2) *nonintentional* features of mental events, and are (3) *directly accessible* by introspection.<sup>2</sup> It is helpful to take a closer look at features (1)-(3) of qualia.

Some philosophers claim that the fact that qualia are intrinsic properties of experience is supposed to be apparent to us from reflection on our own experiences. For example, Joseph Levine (2001) states that “if we consider a property like the reddishness of a visual experience, it certainly seems to be the paradigm of an intrinsic property” (p. 93). Similarly, Brian Loar (2003) describes visual qualia as those properties that “present themselves as intrinsic and non-relational properties of visual experiences” (p. 77). Historically, fueling remarks like these is the thought that a functional theory of the mind cannot account for the subjective character of perceptual experiences—that is, for what it is like to look at an orange, to hear middle C, and to smell the roses. According to functionalism, mental states can be defined in terms of their causal roles—that is, in terms of their causal relations to external stimuli, behavior, and other mental states. The inverted spectrum and absent-qualia arguments are supposed to show that it is possible for qualia-instantiation and causal role to come apart, and that a relational account of the phenomenal character of perceptual experience is implausible.<sup>3</sup> What these arguments show, the story goes, is that qualia are intrinsic properties of experiences. In the inverted spectrum scenario, these properties differ while functional properties are held constant. Similarly, intrinsic properties of experiences are the missing ingredients in the absent-qualia scenario.

Now let’s look at (2): *non-intentional* features of mental events. It is best to understand this claim by thinking about what an *intentional* property of experience is supposed to be (Crane 2000). Consider a philosopher’s favorite: the visual experience you have when you look at a ripe tomato. We might describe this experience as an experience *as of a red, round, bulgy object before you*—that is, as an experience with the content “red, round, bulgy object before me.”<sup>4</sup> In this case, your experience has the property of *being as of a red, round, bulgy object*. This is an intentional property. An intentional property is a property that an experience has in virtue of its having a certain intentional content. Because they enter into the characterization of the content of experience, represented properties are intentional properties “by association”—although they are not properties of the experience itself. So *red*, *round*, and *bulgy* fall into the category. Qualia, on the other hand, do not. They are bona fide properties of experience, qualia realists suppose. But they do not enter into an exhaustive statement of the representational content of an

experience. So, suppose that “red\*” is the name of a certain quale (and that the name indeed has a reference). According to the qualia realist, red\* determines (in part) the phenomenal character of such an experience. However, we will never refer to red\* in spelling out the content of any experience (although we may refer to *red*). Red\* is a property over and above the intentional properties of any experience that has red\*. For this reason, red\* is a *nonintentional* property of experience. Still, it “colors” the phenomenal character of such an experience.

And, finally, (3). Qualia are supposed to be *directly accessible* because, in becoming aware of their instantiation, we need not rely on the kinds of inferences that we rely on when attributing mental states to others (e.g., inferences from behavior). In particular, it is supposed that if your experience instantiates a quale, then you are in a position to come to know that the quale is instantiated merely by introspecting on that experience. The idea is that qualia are *available* to you in conscious introspection of your current experience. You need not notice other things that are going on with you—for example, how you are behaving—in order to determine whether your experience instantiates a certain quale.

As noted above, intentionalists claim that there is nothing more to the phenomenal character of an experience than its representational content.<sup>5</sup> Among the intentionalists are Fred Dretske (1995), William Lycan (1987, 1996), and Michael Tye (1992, 1995, 2000, 2002). Another way to state intentionalism is as the view that there are *no* candid qualia, and that cautious qualia are *one and the same as* represented properties. This idea is expressed by Lycan (1996) when he claims that qualia are “merely intentional aspects of sensation, represented properties” (p. 110). And Dretske (1995) tells us, “I...identify qualia with...those properties that...an object is sensuously represented as having” (p. 73). According to Lycan and Dretske, as well as all intentionalists, there is nothing more to phenomenal character than cautious qualia so conceived.

Let’s now think about the intentionalist’s strategy. Although qualia are supposed to be *non-intentional* properties, it is not enough to argue against qualia by arguing that experiences of a certain type, or of a certain modality, are representational. Doing this just shows that these experiences have intentional properties—not that they have *no* nonintentional ones. Representational experiences might have “extra” properties—properties that are intrinsic, nonintentional and directly accessible.<sup>6</sup> But, according to the intentionalist, the appeal to transparency shows us that there are no properties matching the description of candid qualia.

## 2. The Transparency Thesis for Vision

Let’s now turn to some of the statements of transparency that appear in the philosophical literature. But, first, an important qualification. Philosophers sympathetic to transparency say that *experience* is transparent, but any detailed discussion of transparency in the literature uses visual experience as the model. Few explicitly extrapolate from the results to the other sense modalities.<sup>7</sup> In considering what has been said about transparency, then, we are forced to begin with vision.

The transparency theorist takes an experience that is clearly representational (or, more generally, clearly world-directed) and directs our attention to a lack of evidence for qualia. According to the transparency theorist, when we introspect and focus on the way things look to us, we realize that there is no reason to think that there are qualia. The argument turns on the alleged accessibility of qualia. By the qualia realist’s own lights, if qualia do indeed exist, introspection ought to uncover them. But it does not, the transparency theorist claims. This is because experience is transparent.

Transparency is often introduced with a metaphor. As noted earlier, an experience is transparent in the sense that we “see right through it” and onto the objects and properties in the external world. This metaphor draws on Moore’s famous remarks in “The Refutation of Idealism” (1993 [1903]). Moore claimed that “consciousness” per se is something that “escapes us”; consciousness is “transparent,” he claimed (p. 37). The most commonly cited remark of his is,

When we try to introspect the sensation of blue, all we can see is the blue:  
the other element is as if it were diaphanous. (p. 41)

It is controversial just how Moore’s remarks relate to the contemporary notion of transparency.<sup>8</sup> For present purposes, it is enough to keep his remarks in mind when considering the contemporary debate.

The most frequently quoted statement of transparency in the contemporary literature is, without a doubt, that of Gilbert Harman (1990):

When Eloise sees a tree before her, the colours she experiences [for example] are all experienced as features of the tree and its surroundings. None of them are experienced as intrinsic features of her experience. Nor does she experience any features of anything as intrinsic features of her experience.... Look at a tree and try to turn your attention to intrinsic features of your visual experience. I predict you will find that the only features there to turn your attention to will be the features of the presented tree, including relational features of the tree “from here.” (p. 39)

Recently, Michael Tye (1992, 2000, 2002) has stressed Harman’s observations in an attempt to develop the appeal to transparency and to secure intentionalism:

Standing on the beach in Santa Barbara a couple of summers ago on a bright sunny day, I found myself transfixed by the intense blue of the Pacific Ocean.... It seems to me that what I found so pleasing in...[this] instance, what I was focusing on, as it were, were a certain shade and intensity of the color blue. I experienced blue as a property of the ocean not as a property of my experience. My experience itself certainly wasn’t blue.<sup>9</sup> (Tye 1992, p. 160)

What we are told in these passages is that an experience is transparent just in case it satisfies both a positive and a negative subthesis. The first is a claim about how the properties of which we are aware appear to be—namely, of external objects. The second is a claim about how these properties do *not* appear to be—namely, of the experience itself. In Harman’s case, the properties appear to be those of the presented tree. In Tye’s case, they appear to be properties of a body of water. In neither case do they appear to be properties of the experience itself.

Having described Harman’s and Tye’s claims as concerning the properties of *which we are aware*, we must consider one way someone could immediately object to the transparency claim. The objection proceeds as follows. Recall features (1)-(3) of qualia. Now consider the property *lasting more than one second*. Both Eloise’s and Tye’s experiences have this property.<sup>10</sup> This is certainly an intrinsic and nonintentional property of experience and it is, arguably, one that is available to you in introspection. For example, as you try and turn your attention to a presented tree, you can certainly be aware that you are aware of the tree. In virtue of this second order awareness, you are aware of your experience and, in particular, of one of its properties—

namely, *lasting more than one second*. So, it is concluded, this property satisfies (1)-(3). Here, then, is a case against transparency. Contra Harman and Tye, it appears that there *are* qualia.

There are two ways that the transparency theorist could respond to this challenge. First, she might simply deny that we are ever aware of such a property. According to the transparency theorist, the objector has confused represented time with an alleged temporal property of the vehicle of representation—namely, a visual experience. The transparency theorist agrees that we are aware of represented time—for example, for how long the waves were coming and going or for how long the tree was before us. But this is not the same thing as being aware of the duration of some mental event. This is not to say that we are never aware that we are aware of trees and oceans. Rather, it is to claim that we are not aware *of* an awareness of a tree—of some mental event or, as the objector puts it, some experience. The awareness we have is awareness *that* we are in a certain state—a state of awareness of the tree or of the ocean. That is, we are aware that we have, among other properties, the property of seeing a tree or of seeing the ocean. What’s more, we can also be aware that we have had that property for more than one second. According to the transparency theorist, rather than directing us at our experiences, the act of following Harman’s and Tye’s instructions shows us that we are never aware of our experiences.<sup>11</sup>

But the transparency theorist need not go as far as this. As a second way of meeting the objector’s challenge, she might happily admit that that we are aware of the property *lasting more than one second* yet maintain that visual experience is transparent. While recognizing that *lasting more than second* satisfies (1)-(3), this transparency theorist argues that the property does not play a part in the “what it is like” of experience, in determining how things look to a perceiver. Remember that, according to the qualia realist, qualia are properties of experience that determine phenomenal character. The transparency argument is meant to target the claim that there are properties fitting this description. If transparency shows that there are no such properties, then it shows that there are no qualia. And it does, says this transparency theorist. Despite the fact that it is a property of experience that satisfies (1)-(3), she reminds us that *lasting more than one second* is merely a function of the duration of a (mental) event. She tells us that we must distinguish between those properties that are byproducts of the operation of a modality and the properties that modality is “in the business” of presenting. *Lasting more than one second* is a property of the first type, not of the second. But it is the second type of property that is at issue in the debate about phenomenal character, she urges.

Despite this, the transparency theorist of this second response must concede that the objection shows us something important—namely, that the characterization of qualia needs an added feature. Qualia are (1) intrinsic, (2) nonintentional properties of experience of which one can be (3) directly aware. But they are also, the transparency theorist might say, (4) “modality-salient” properties. In this case, they are the *visually* salient properties—the “lookish” properties presented by vision.<sup>12</sup> The property *lasting more than one second* is not a visually salient, or “lookish,” property. Rather, as characterized above, it is a byproduct of the operation of the visual system; vision is not “in the business” of presenting such a property.<sup>13</sup> Given this, the appeal to transparency has nothing to do with it. When Harman and Tye ask you to introspect on your visual experience and take note of how the properties of which you are aware appear, what they are requesting of you is that you take note of the visually salient properties. According to both Harman and Tye, the visually salient properties appear to be properties of things like trees and bodies of water. They do not appear to be properties of the experience itself.

The choice between the first and second line of response is a controversial one, and no stand will be taken on it here. But, for the sake of clarity and simplicity, let’s explore the transparency claim in the language of the second line of response. After all, the examples of transparency we are given talk about

modality-salient properties—colors, in the case of Harman and Tye. Moreover, as we shall see, it is the modality-salient properties that are in dispute in the case of olfaction.

Given what we have been told, then, we can formulate transparency for vision as follows:

*Transparency for Vision:*

positive<sub>v</sub>: all of the visually salient properties of which you are aware appear to be properties of external objects

negative<sub>v</sub>: none of the visually salient properties of which you are aware appear to be properties of the experience itself.

Transparency for visual experience has serious intuitive appeal. As some argue, there are examples of “atypical” visual experiences that put pressure on these intuitions.<sup>14</sup> But we can agree that there is a canonical visual experience that does seem to exhibit transparency. Let’s call this the “typical” visual experience. Among the typical visual experiences is the one I have when I look at the contents of my desktop. My blue mug sits in the corner of it. The particular shade of blue I experience when I look at it appears to be a quality of the mug. I cannot “locate” the blueness on, or in, anything else; it appears to be “smeared” all over the mug’s surface. It does not seem to be a quality of my experience of looking at the mug.

What this means is that qualia realists are often reluctant to deny the intuitive appeal of transparency in the case of visual experience. The challenge for the qualia realist is to grant that it is intuitive in these canonical cases and yet argue that there is still reason to suppose that qualia exist. As hinted at above, this sometimes takes the form of highlighting alleged counterexamples to the typical case. But others argue that transparency is compatible with the existence of qualia. Loar (2003), for example, argues in this way. Any discussion of these alleged counterexamples or the alleged compatibility is left for another paper.<sup>15</sup> What is important to stress, at this point, is that the transparency of visual experience does seem intuitive—to transparency theorists and qualia realists alike. Let’s now turn to olfactory experience and to the question of whether it ever exhibits transparency.

### 3. The Transparency of Olfactory Experience?

Now, anyone will admit that, once we turn our attention to olfactory experience, the term “transparency thesis” is no longer very appropriate. Transparency is defined in terms of vision. Things that are transparent are things through which we can see. Because of this, the transparency metaphor does not translate so nicely for olfactory experience. Still, we can formulate its two claims for the case of olfactory experience. Given what we have been told, if transparency holds of olfactory experience, it must satisfy both a positive and a negative subthesis. In particular, the olfactorily salient properties of which one is aware must appear to be properties of external objects. These properties must *not* appear to be properties of the experience itself.

Michael Tye (2000, 2002) stands out as one of the few philosophers who discusses transparency for the other sense modalities—although his treatment of them is much less thorough than his treatment of visual experience. He states that “[a]ll of...[my] points generalize to other perceptual modalities...” (2002, p. 142). He also tells us that it applies to the case of sensation, such as pain, as well as felt emotion.

According to Tye (2002), olfactory experience represents the properties of stuff in the air. Consider how the smell of garbage lingers in the kitchen long after you have taken it outside. You smell the odor of

the garbage—that airborne stuff that it has emitted or given off.<sup>16</sup> Even when there is a locatable source object, as when the garbage is still in the kitchen, we think of an odor as being “around us,” in the air. We might say that the room smells. But what we really mean is that the *air* in the room has a distinctive property.<sup>17</sup> What Tye identifies as being in the air are odors—and it is clear that we are to think of odors as clouds of molecules or gaseous emanations. He tells us,

We smell things by smelling the odors they give off. They too are publicly accessible. You and I both smell the foul odor of the rotting garbage. Odors, like sounds, move through physical space. (p. 142)

What’s more, not only does Tye (2002) think that these are *in fact* what we perceive in olfactory experience, but he also takes it that it *appears* to us as so when we introspect on such an experience. He says:

When we introspect our experiences of hearing, smelling, and tasting, the qualities of which we are directly aware are qualities we experience as being qualities of sounds, odors, and tastes. The qualities of which we are directly aware via introspection are not qualities of the experience of hearing, smelling and tasting.<sup>18</sup> (p. 142)

According to Tye, then, when we introspect on an olfactory experience, those olfactorily salient properties of which we are aware are placed on or in odors—clouds of molecules in our environment.

For the case of olfactory experience, then, Tye-Transparency is as follows:

*Tye-Transparency for Olfaction:*

- positive<sub>o</sub>: all of the olfactorily salient properties of which you are aware appear to be properties of odors (i.e., external objects)
- negative<sub>o</sub>: none of the olfactorily salient properties of which you are aware appear to be properties of the experience itself.

While Tye’s observations about visual experience are certainly telling, his remarks about olfactory experience do not seem to be supported by its phenomenology. To take an example from Sanford (1970), consider the experience you have when, standing in the kitchen, you smell breakfast cooking. You can distinguish the smell of warm maple syrup and the smell of frying bacon. That is, you distinguish *this* property and *that* property—namely, the syrup-smell and the bacon-smell. But do these properties appear to be properties of odor clouds? The implicit doubt in this question is understandable. Rather than distinguishing that there are certain things before you that have the syrup-smell and the bacon-smell, it seems as though you simply smell that these properties are instantiated. But this is not to smell by what thing (or things) they are instantiated. While transparency seems plausible for visual experience, there is something about olfactory experience that makes transparency *prima facie* implausible for it. Compared to the intricate scenes given to us by visual experiences, where we are typically able to distinguish an array of objects before us, olfactory experience presents an undifferentiated smudge of properties. Rather than supporting a transparency claim, then, olfactory experience seems to present significant challenges to motivating a modality-generalized version of it.

Indeed, Tye stands out in being so confident that transparency holds of olfactory experience. It is true that discussions of olfactory experience in the philosophical literature are rare. Still, the others that there are take as their starting point observations that are in tension with transparency—in particular,

observations to the effect that olfactory experience isn't representational. This is the view that positive<sub>o</sub> is false and negative<sub>o</sub> is false. The idea is that, if none of the properties presented appears to be those of external objects, then they must appear to be properties of one's experience. This seems a reasonable idea—at least at the outset.<sup>19</sup>

Christopher Peacocke (1983) and William Lycan (1996, 2000) are two who think that olfactory experience is not, or may not be, representational. Peacocke claims that “a sensation of [smell]...may have no representational content of any sort, though of course the sensation will be of a distinctive kind” (p. 5). Lycan claims that it is at least prima facie plausible that olfactory experiences do not represent, although he does go on to argue that they are indeed representational. So Lycan (2000) claims that “phenomenologically speaking, a smell is just a modification of our consciousness, a qualitative condition or event in us” (p. 281). If olfactory experiences are nonrepresentational, then we have a serious case for qualia. Peacocke's and Lycan's remarks suggest that the phenomenology of olfactory experience supports this kind of move—at least prima facie.<sup>20</sup>

Given the degree to which olfactory experience differs from visual experience, Peacocke's view, and the one that Lycan finds prima facie plausible, are certainly understandable. But what facts about olfactory experience ground their claims? We will delve into this question in detail below and see that, despite their protests, olfactory experience is representational and can support a transparency claim. But, by way of diagnosing the task before us, it is enough to say this much now. If we consider the phenomenology of olfactory experience, we see that there are not objects of olfaction in the same way as there are objects of vision. As a result, it is tempting to think that olfactory experience doesn't predicate properties to anything at all. As suggested above, olfactory experience presents no objects that we can single out—unlike the visual case where we can pick out *this* mug and *that* pen. We are simply unable to achieve this in olfactory experience. This is why Tye's remarks about olfactory experience feel overreaching.

We are led, then, in two directions. Recall the Unification Thesis. It states that certain philosophical questions about perception ought to shake out in the same way for each of the sensory modalities. Tye, with his tacit acceptance of the Unification Thesis, assures us that olfactory experience is transparent. But a consideration of what olfactory experience is like does not vindicate Tye's assurances. Positive<sub>o</sub> claims that the olfactorily salient properties appear to be properties of external objects, but olfactory experience seems disengaged from any particular object.

The remainder of this paper shows that the conflict between the Tye view and the Peacocke-Lycan view arises from each party mistakenly casting olfactory experience in the visual mold. Tye defines transparency much too narrowly and in the “image of vision”—so we are left suspicious of his remarks that olfactory experience satisfies it. Peacocke and Lycan do something similar, tacitly granting visual experience the role of the canonical representational experience. Given how much olfactory experience departs from visual experience, how could olfactory experience be representational? What follows is an argument that olfactory experience is representational as well as transparent. Rather than showing us that transparency is false for olfaction, our discussion of Tye has forced us to question whether Tye's notion of transparency is the one that should figure in the Unification Thesis. What the olfactory case shows us is that a modality-generalized Tye-Transparency should not be a part of the Unification Thesis. But it also directs us to the correct modality-generalized notion of transparency.

As a way of evaluating how things appear (or, more generally, what an experience “tells us”), we can think about the kinds of judgments we are disposed to make on the basis of that experience. While olfactory experience might seem impoverished when compared to visual experience, while it doesn't “pin”

smells on any particular thing, we are certainly inclined to report that we are coming into contact with something outside of us. After all, integral to smelling is breathing; without literally taking in some of your environment, you cannot hope to smell anything. Given this, we shouldn't think that olfactory experience differs from visual experience because visual experience is predicative and olfactory experience is not. Rather, olfactory experience differs from its visual counterpart in terms of the *richness* of its predicative structure.

How might this richness continuum be characterized? In order to see how, let's return to the case of visual experience. Using her introspective task, the transparency theorist directs our attention to the fact that, in visual experience, individual things such as trees and bodies of water appear to have certain visually salient properties—for example, colors. This is the way that *things* look. But more can be said about why it is that things look this way. Vision presents us—for the most part, at least—with a structured sensory field. Colors are instantiated at more or less determinate points of the visual field. These colored patches, in turn, bear spatial relations to one another. The result is a sensory field with geometrical properties—a “color mosaic,” as it is sometimes put.<sup>21</sup> Again, to put it figuratively, the world is carved up and divided for us. Consider again the experience I have when I look at my desktop. My experience places blueness at a determinate point of my visual field (namely, where we would say my mug is located) and places redness, greenness, and various other properties at other determinate places (namely, where we would say the various pens and pencils strewn about my desk are located). By means of this spatial differentiation, visual experience achieves “object bundling”—it bundles properties into object “packages” that we can pick out.

As suggested by the earlier syrup-smell/bacon-smell case, there is no olfactory analogue. There is no way that *things* smell because there is never this kind of spatial differentiation in olfactory experience. The perception of individual objects presupposes a determinacy in the presentation of properties that olfactory experience simply does not have.<sup>22</sup> Visual experience places colors at more or less determinate places, but olfactory experience does not. Consider the following example to illustrate this point. I spray lavender air freshener in an attempt to mask the smell of cigarette smoke. But I do not succeed in completely masking the smell. As a result, I can still smell the smoke smell as well as the air freshener smell. Although I can distinguish two different olfactory properties, my experience does not report at which points of the “olfactory field” these properties are instantiated. In this way, olfactory experience is different from visual experience.<sup>23</sup> I would not be able to tell the difference between a case in which I cover the whole room with air freshener but in which I can still smell the smoke smell, and a case in which I miss a spot. There might be a difference in perceived intensity of the two smells, but this would not amount to a difference in perceived location. Compare this to the case in which I move one of the pens on my desk. In this case, I would be able to tell (if suitably attentive) that blueness is now located in a different portion of my visual field. We can now understand why the earlier syrup-smell/bacon-smell case felt so troubling for the case of transparency. In that case, your experience discriminates individual properties but lacks the requisite spatial differentiation to “mark off” any individual objects.

This is not to deny the obvious point that we are able to track smells to their source objects. Nor is it to deny that we can determine where an odor is and where it is not by moving around our environment.<sup>24</sup> In these two circumstances, one might say, olfactory experience does present us with objects. Up until this point, we have been concerned with the static olfactory experience—the experience one has when one is not moving or acting upon the world. Let's call this a “minimal” perceptual experience. But a lot of our perceptual experience is not minimal. It occurs when we are engaging with the world, when we are walking around and doing things. This seems especially evident in the case of olfaction. Olfactory

perception seems, in a distinctive way, to be investigative. A thorough analysis of the nature of olfactory experience would require us to take into account the active engagement of perception. But, as the next section will show, we have reason to believe that even the “minimal” olfactory experience is transparent. And this is so much the better for the transparency claim.

In the case of visual experience, then, spatial differentiation allows us to speak of a world of (visually presented) individual objects. In the case of the minimal olfactory experience, there is minimal spatial differentiation. This is why the smudge comparison feels so appropriate. Olfactory experience always lacks a rich predicative structure. As stated earlier, this is not to claim that olfactory experience is nonrepresentational. But, as is now clear, it is representational in a much weaker way than visual experience is. Olfactory properties are presented “out there” or “around me”—but there is no more spatial differentiation than that. While olfactory experience gives us the ability to refer to the instantiation of certain properties (e.g., smokiness and lavenderness), it does not allow us to refer to the particular things that instantiate them. That is, olfactory experience does not allow me to have demonstrative thought about objects. Instead, a given olfactory experience only ever represents that there is *something or other* “out there” with certain olfactory properties.<sup>25</sup> Interrogating the experience further will not supply us with what kind of thing it is—an odor, as in Tye’s case, or a source object such as a lavender sprig or a cigarette. In this way, olfactory experience differs from the typical visual experience. Not only can I refer to the instantiation of blueness, I can also refer to the object that instantiates this property—namely, my mug. The same goes for redness and my pen, greenness and my ruler.

#### 4. Transparency Generalized

What does this show us about transparency? Contra Peacocke and Lycan, the lack of structure in olfactory experience does not show us that experience is not transparent. To be sure, if we take Tye-Transparency as definitive of transparency, then olfactory experience is not transparent. Tye-Transparency requires that a given olfactory experience pin the olfactorily salient properties to a particular, apparent object. It does not do this, however. But need it be definitive of transparency that an experience pin the modality-salient properties to a particular object? It seems not. We can redescribe transparency at a level of abstraction that respects the differences between the senses but retains transparency’s overall claim. Let’s call this notion of transparency Generalized Transparency:

*Generalized Transparency:*

An experience is generally transparent iff all of the modality-salient properties of which you are aware appear to be properties of something other than the experience itself.

Does olfactory experience satisfy Generalized Transparency? Yes. It has been shown that olfactory experience presents properties such as smokiness and lavenderness as properties of an external “something we know not what.” How might Generalized Transparency still fail? It could fail if (a) we find any further, “extra,” olfactorily salient properties that appear to be properties of our olfactory experience, or if (b) smokiness and lavenderness also appear to be properties of our olfactory experience. Does it fail in either of these ways? No. Again, smokiness and lavenderness are presented as properties of some external “something or other.” Do we find any other properties when we sniff in the air in the room? It seems not. Do smokiness and lavenderness also appear to be a property of our experiences? Once it is conceded that they are presented as “out there,” we have very little motivation to think so.

The benefit of considering olfactory experience lies in realigning the spotlight at the target of the appeal to transparency—namely, the denial of qualia. The visual examples we are given obscure this target. As the case of olfactory experience has shown us, there need not be any apparent object of experience (although, if everything has gone right, there is something in the world that has the presented property). But the visual examples we are given would have us believe that transparency is a claim about the richness of predicative structure—in particular, the claim that properties are presented as those of individual objects. The olfactory case shows us that this is not so. The purpose of the appeal to transparency is the demonstration that there are no qualia. All that is required for this is that the modality-salient properties appear to be properties of something other than the experience itself.

What's more, in alerting us to Generalized Transparency, the olfactory case clears up an additional confusion about transparency. There is controversy over whether transparency is compatible with a sense-datum view. The sense-datum theorist thinks that all perceptual experiences are directed upon an inner, phenomenal, object. Some have thought that transparency is not compatible with such a view. According to Harman (1990), the sense-datum view is "counter to ordinary visual experience" (p. 39). The Eloise transparency passage is given, in part, as evidence for this. This point is seconded by Michael Martin (2002), who claims that "the diaphanous character of experience would seem to indicate a lack of evidence for the existence of sense-data at a point where one would expect to find it" (p. 378). But, as the olfactory case has shown us (albeit indirectly), the nature of the object presented has no bearing on the success or failure of transparency. All that matters is that no modality-salient properties appear to be properties of the experience itself. So, while there may be a debate over whether perceptual experience involves sense-data, the resolution of this debate will have no bearing on the transparency thesis. Experience is either transparent or it isn't. It doesn't matter what kind of thing, or indeed whether there is any particular thing, it is transparent to.

## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> Obviously, there are vast differences between the acuity of the human sense of smell and that of other animals. The focus of this paper is human olfactory experience.

<sup>2</sup> In this paper “qualia” is always used to refer to candid qualia. There is also the original sense of the term (see Lewis 1929), with “qualia” referring to the alleged properties of sense-data. Qualia in the “sense-datum sense” are also controversial. A later stage of the paper argues that we should not think of the appeal to transparency as targeting this original conception of qualia.

<sup>3</sup> See, e.g., Block (1980, 1990) and Shoemaker (1981).

<sup>4</sup> Suppose, for the sake of argument, that this characterization is both accurate and exhaustive.

<sup>5</sup> Intentionalism actually comes in two forms: a weak one and a strong one. Intentionalists of both kinds agree that perceptual experience is representational and that mind-independent things, together with their properties, enter into the content of experience. Weak and strong intentionalists differ, however, on what they think the relation between phenomenal character and content is. Weak intentionalism is the view that phenomenal character supervenes on representational content. According to the weaker form of intentionalism, experiences that are alike with respect to content are alike in their phenomenal character, so that any change in the phenomenal character of an experience is reflected in a change in its representational content. McGinn (1991) holds such a view. Weak intentionalism is consistent with there being qualia. Strong intentionalism is not. In its strong form, intentionalism says that the phenomenal character of a perceptual experience just is its representational content. It is the strong form of intentionalism that the appeal to transparency is meant to motivate. Because the point of this paper is to examine the appeal to transparency, it is strong intentionalism and the strong intentionalist that is referred to throughout.

<sup>6</sup> Ned Block (1996, 2003), for instance, happily admits that most visual experiences are representational. He also holds that visual experiences have qualia. The experience you have when you look at a ripe tomato is one such experience. In order to understand this claim, we have to understand that Block thinks there are two kinds of qualia: what he calls *mental paint* and *mental oil*. Mental paint consists of those properties of an experience that represent other, external, properties. Mental oil, on the other hand, consists of those properties of an experience that do not represent any other property. Experiences that are clearly non-representational (according to Block), such as orgasm experience, pain experience, and other bodily sensations have mental oil. He admits that he does not know whether normal visual experience has any mental oil properties. But the experience of looking at a ripe tomato, he takes it, has mental paint. So, to take this example, Block thinks that there is an experiential property that represents redness—call it red\*. Although red\* represents redness, this experiential property is distinct from the represented property redness, which is the one that we would refer to in a statement of representational content. According to Block, we would not refer to red\*. Red\*, therefore, is nonintentional.

<sup>7</sup> As we shall see, Tye (2000, 2002) is an exception.

<sup>8</sup> For discussion of this controversy, see Kind (2003) and Stoljar (2003).

<sup>9</sup> It must be noted that this example differs slightly from the one Harman gives. In Tye’s example, he is not reporting on what he discovered when he introspected on an experience. Rather, he is reporting on what he remembered an experience to be like. Harman’s example constitutes a projection of what someone—Eloise or you, yourself—will find when they introspect on a current visual experience. Nevertheless, it is fair to read Tye as reporting on what he *would have found* had he introspected on the experience at the time.

<sup>10</sup> The objection assumes, quite reasonably, that following Harman’s and Tye’s instructions will take time and, in particular, more than one second.

<sup>11</sup> Recently, Dretske (2003) has advocated this kind of view. Dretske’s concern is with the question of self-knowledge and not the transparency of experience per se, but his remarks about the former constitute a transparency claim. He claims that “our awareness of things, is not something we are, at least in perceptual experience, aware of” (p. 2).

<sup>12</sup> Consider Tye (2002): “Focus your attention on the scene before your eyes and on how things *look* to you. You see various objects; and you see these objects by seeing their facing surfaces.... Intuitively, the surfaces

you directly see are publicly observable physical surfaces.... *None* of the properties of which you are directly aware in seeing the various surfaces *look* to you to be qualities of your experience. You do not experience these qualities *as* qualities of your experience" (emphases in original; p. 138). Note that according to my use of "presented," a property is perceptually presented in experience if and only if it seems as if that property is present (around, in my environment, etc.). "F is presented to subject *s*" is nothing more than shorthand for "it (perceptually) seems as if F is present in *s*'s environment." In this way, my use of "presented in experience" is different from that of Byrne and Hilbert (1997). In distinguishing three kinds of experiential property, they claim that "if a property is *presented in* an experience then, necessarily, something...really does have this property" (p. xix). Byrne and Hilbert's use of "presented" is one that a sense-datum theorist would accept; if it seems as if F is present, then F is instantiated. Unlike Byrne and Hilbert, my use of "presented" remains neutral on whether anything instantiates the presented property. It is the use that anyone who holds a representational view of perceptual experience would endorse.

<sup>13</sup> Those who deny qualia might immediately claim that vision is not in the business of presenting qualia. But the proponent of qualia has a ready response. Qualia are certainly going to play a discriminatory role in perceptual experience. For example, if red\* is the property that "colors" my experiences of red (of ripe tomatoes, fire engines, and so on), then visual experience is in the business of presenting these properties. It is because of the felt difference between red\* and, say, green\* that I am able to discriminate ripe tomatoes from unripe ones. So, this way of characterizing visually salient properties does not favor the intentionalist at the outset.

<sup>14</sup> Block (2003) cites phosphene experience as a kind of visual experience that lacks transparency. He tells us that "phospene-experiences are visual sensations 'of' color and light stimulated by pressure on the [closed] eyes" (p. 13). Block claims that we can attend to "something more" (p. 13) than the representational properties of such an experience. Other examples of "atypical" visual experiences are cases of double vision, blurred vision, and afterimages. For intentionalist responses to these cases, see Tye (2000, 2002).

<sup>15</sup> Loar (2003) tells us that "philosophers who point out that visual experience is transparent...typically regard this as incompatible with the reality of qualia.... My argument will be that this incompatibilist view is not correct" (78). Loar's argument hinges on a distinction between two different perspectives that we can take on our visual experience. The first is the perspective that supports transparency judgments—a perspective of "transparent reflection" (p. 84), as Loar calls it. The second is the perspective of "oblique reflection" and involves "abstract[ing] from the objects of experience, and attend[ing] to *how*...visual experiences *present* their apparent objects" (emphases in original; p. 85). Loar's idea is that qualia-spotting is something we can learn, or train ourselves, to do.

Amy Kind (2003) suggests that Moore's view was actually a precursor to Loar's. She suggests that Moore did not hold the view that it is *impossible* to avoid "seeing through" our visual experience, but only that it is *difficult* to do so. As support for this suggestion, she draws attention to the sentence that immediately follows his claim about diaphanousness. Moore (1993 [1903]) claims: "Yet [the other element] *can* be distinguished if we look attentively enough, and if we know that there is something to look for" (p. 41).

<sup>16</sup> Notice here that "odor" refers to a particular—some airborne portion of stuff. We also sometimes use "odor" to refer to a property. For the sake of clarity, "odor" is used to refer to particulars throughout this paper.

<sup>17</sup> Consider an example from Smith (2002):

If a particularly malodorous cheese is carried through the room, the smell remains. If we attribute the smell to any physical object, it will be to the room: the room smells, we say. But really, of course, it is the air in the room that smells....Hence, we speak of foul air, and the fragrance of the air. If I put a rose to my nose, I am coming into proximity with the *source* of the smell; and even then, I appreciate the smell only by drawing the odour into my nostrils—that is, the air that has been sweetened by the immediate presence of the rose. (p. 143)

<sup>18</sup> Presumably what Tye means (and all he needs) here is that the properties do not *appear* to be properties of the experience of smelling. Given that qualia are supposed to be directly accessible by introspection, it is enough for Tye that introspection does not come up with them, that no properties appear as such.

<sup>19</sup> There are two other ways that Tye-Transparency can fail. It can fail if positive<sub>o</sub> is false and negative<sub>o</sub> is true. This would be a situation in which some olfactorily salient properties are attributed to nothing at all. They appear to be, as it were, "bare properties." It is difficult to imagine what that would be like. As Peacocke's and Lycan's remarks indicate, the natural impulse is to suppose that, if properties do not appear to be those of external things, then they must appear to be properties of the experience itself. Experience must attribute properties to *something*. Transparency can also fail if both positive<sub>o</sub> and negative<sub>o</sub> are true. This would be a case in which an olfactory experience is representational, but one in which some of the

olfactorily salient properties appear to be both a property of an external object and a property of the experience itself. We will return to the kinds of transparency failure later in the paper.

<sup>20</sup> It is also plausible that Reid (2000 [1764], 2002 [1785]) held a Peacocke-Lycan view. According to Reid, perceptual experiences consist of two components: sensation and perception. Sensations are “object-less.” A sensation does not imply “the conception...[or] belief in something external” (2002 [1785], p. 199). But a given sensation does give rise to, as Reid describes it, “an immediate conviction and belief of something external” (2002 [1785], p. 199). This belief is a perception. According to Reid, then, perception consists in the formation of noninferential beliefs about the instantiation of external qualities. Reid claims that “smell” is sometimes used to refer to an olfactory sensation and, at other times, is used to refer to something external to the perceiver—namely, an external property. (The same is true, he claims, for “taste,” “sound,” and “feel”.) “Color,” on the other hand, is different. “Color” always refers to “a quality or modification of bodies, which continues to be the same, whether it is seen or not” (2000 [1764], p. 85). Reid proposes that visual sensations are “so little interesting” that they pass unnoticed (2000 [1764], p. 87). This remark is reminiscent of transparency. The fact that Reid contrasts visual experience with olfactory experience in the way he does aligns his remarks—at least in spirit—with the Peacocke-Lycan view.

<sup>21</sup> It is this aspect of visual experience that Clark (2000) draws attention to when he claims that visual experience is *feature-placing*. Visually salient properties—e.g., colors and shapes—are placed at more or less determinate locations of the visual field.

<sup>22</sup> Sanford (1970) maintains a similar condition on object discrimination. He claims that “two balls [a blue and a yellow one] appear to be distinct only if they appear to be in different places” (p. 80). And he summarizes that “although there is a kind of distinction by properties, the difference in properties is relevant only because it marks a difference in place” (p. 79).

<sup>23</sup> Of course, olfactory experience might not have been this way for us. We might have been more like the shark, for example. The shark’s sense of smell is remarkable in that it is directional. Like the human sense of hearing, sharks can typically determine the direction that an odorant is coming from (see, e.g., Hodgson and Mathewson 1971). Consider the hammerhead shark as an extreme example of the physiology that makes this possible. The distance between the nasal cavities is large in most sharks but is at its largest with the great hammerhead. An odorant coming from the extreme left of the shark’s head will arrive at the left nasal cavity before it does the right. To be sure, this is an extreme case. But researchers have shown that, in many other cases, the hammerhead is able to sample more of the medium than other sharks and, as a result, is able to resolve differences in odorant concentration between each nostril. This also allows the shark to locate the direction of the odor source. There is some evidence that humans can localize odor sources in highly controlled circumstances (Porter, Anand, Johnson et al., 2005; von Békésy 1994). But these circumstances are the exception, not the rule, and do not represent the typical experiences of human subjects in their environment.

<sup>24</sup> Remember that “odor” refers to an odor cloud or a collection of molecules.

<sup>25</sup> This is not to say that a perceiver must have the concept of existential quantification or, indeed, the concept of object in order to have olfactory experiences. Rather, if we are to account for the fact that infants and other animals have representational olfactory experiences, then it better be the case that the content of olfactory experience is nonconceptual (although in the case of animals with much more acute senses of smell than our own, this content might be object-involving as opposed to existentially quantified). Having made this observation, the issue of conceptual versus nonconceptual content is set aside for the remainder of the paper.

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