I will be developing a suggestion about the way in which perceptual experience represents the world. I want to explore the consequences of this suggestion, and to apply it in addressing various questions about the relations between perception and the conceptual content of thought. These concerns set the itinerary for this paper. But there are also intriguing regions adjacent to the main route. I will indicate these as we go, especially in the later sections of this paper. It seems to me that our understanding of these issues is still extraordinarily primitive. I hope the suggestion I will be developing will lead to new routes into this still largely unmapped territory.

I. SCENARIOS INTRODUCED

I will be concerned with a subset of the representational properties of experiences: that is, with a subset of the properties of an experience in virtue of which the experience is assessable as correct (veridical) or incorrect in the way it represents the world as being. I'm not going to be concerned with all such representational properties. In particular, I am not going to be immediately concerned with those properties that depend upon the perceiver's abilities to recognize individual material objects, or to recognize an object as, say, a chair or a dog. I would argue, though, that the subset of properties I will be discussing is fundamental, in that the nature of representational properties outside the subset is to be explained at least in part by their relations to those inside the subset. Perhaps it is best to begin by giving a rough, intuitive statement of the thesis for which I shall be arguing.
The thesis is that a representational content of the sort in question should be individuated by specifying which ways of filling out the space around the perceiver are consistent with the correctness of the given representational content. So the content involves a spatial type, the type being that under which fall precisely those ways of filling the space around the subject which are consistent with the correctness of the content. On this model, correctness of a content is then a matter of instantiation: the instantiation by the real world around the perceiver of the spatial type which gives the representational content in question.

This account is potentially of importance to anyone interested in anchoring notions of conceptual content in some level of nonconceptual content. For a spatial type is just that—the notion of a type under which certain segments of the world may fall. A spatial type is quite different from a concept. The identity of a concept, as the term is used here, is answerable to Fregean considerations of cognitive significance. A concept is also ultimately individuated by the condition required for a thinker to possess it. A spatial type is not. So a theory of nonconceptual content which employs the notion of a spatial type provides one way in which a hierarchy of families of concepts can be grounded in a noncircular way.

Now let me sharpen up the intuitive formulation. There are two steps which we have to take if we are to specify fully one of these spatial types. The first step is to fix an origin and axes. The origin and axes will not be a specific place and set of directions in the real world. This is precisely because at the moment we are fixing a type which may potentially be instantiated at many different places in the real world. Nevertheless, it is important that the origin and axes be labelled by certain interrelated properties. It is this labelling by interrelated properties which helps us to constrain what are instantiations of the spatial type we are determining. Thus, for instance, one kind of origin is given by the property of being the centre of gravity of a human body, with the three axes given by the directions back/front, left/right and up/down with respect to the centre of gravity (in the standard upright orientation of the body). The use of a particular set of labelled axes in giving part of the content of an experience is not a purely notational or conventional matter. The appropriate set of labelled axes captures distinctions in the phenomenology of experience itself. Looking straight ahead at