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Experiencing Mandates: Towards A Hybrid Account

Abstract: In this paper I focus on a subset of experiences in which action properties are presented, namely those in which objects in our perceptual surroundings or environment ‘demand’ that certain actions be carried out, as *experienced mandates* (EMs). The critical part of the paper argues that a ‘complex contents’ view, which builds all the distinctiveness of such experiences into their perceptual content is unsatisfactory. As an alternative, I argue that EMs involve bodily potentiation best understood in terms of felt action readiness. I then outline a hybrid account, which combines content-based features of EMs with action-readiness.

Introduction

A topic of concern in the philosophy of perception is the *admissible contents of experience*. According to ‘conservative’ approaches, the only properties presented in perceptual experience are low-level proper sensibles, such as colour and shape. Contrastingly, ‘liberal’ approaches suggest that perceptual experiences can present high-level sortal properties (the property of being a table) and causal relations (A having caused B to occur).¹ Regardless of whether one finds the positing of these high-level perceptual contents plausible, there is a range of different properties the presentation of which in perceptual experience is in *prima facie* good standing, namely action-properties.

Our perceptual experiences are sensitive to a range of properties, as qualifying the objects of those experiences, which can only be adequately characterised by reference to the *possibility* of (or *opportunity* for) bodily-action. Here are examples: we perceptually experience – given the relevant background conditions are met, and we possess the relevant abilities – trees as *climbable*, walls as *scalable*, apples as *edible* (call these Φ -able properties). With such cases in mind, the term ‘affordance’, adopted from Gibsonian ecological psychology, has seemed appropriate as a way of characterising these action-properties and the perceptual experiences that involve them.²

In this paper, I focus on a subset of experiences involving such action properties, namely those in which objects (or situations) in our environment ‘call out’ or ‘demand’ that certain actions be carried out. The gestalt psychologist Kurt Koffka evocatively captures the phenomena in question: ‘fruit says, “Eat me”, water says “Drink me”, thunder says “Fear me”’.³ Following Susanna Siegel, I label these *experienced mandates* (EMs hereafter). One option in accounting for

¹ See Siegel 2010; Church 2013 (cf. Prinz 2013).

² See Siegel 2014; Noë 2006: 99-106 (cf. Nanay 2011). We can adopt the term ‘affordance’ without taking on the specifics of Gibson’s ecological psychology (see Gibson 1979). On the scope of affordance perception beyond bodily action see McClelland 2020 and Rietveld and Kiverstein 2014.

³ Koffka 1935: 7.

these experiences is to build all their distinctiveness into their perceptual content; I call this the ‘complex contents’ view, and here I show that its most developed version is unsatisfactory. As an alternative, I argue that EMs involve felt action readiness. I go on to outline a hybrid account, which combines perceptual content-based features of EMs with action-readiness.

Before proceeding, let me note the significance of the paper. The discussion contributes to the aforementioned project of determining the admissible contents of experience. If the arguments presented here are right, then while we might concede that some perceptual experiences involve ‘soliciting contents’ accounting for EMs need not lead us to posit additional ‘answerability contents’ – more on what these are later. Second, there is a broader issue about whether the phenomenal profile of EMs can be captured exclusively in terms of visual content. The discussion offered here suggests scepticism on this score.

In presenting the positive proposal, I will be drawing on the idea of bodily potentiation, which has been central to recent discussions in the literature on affordance perception.⁴ The original contribution here is articulating a proposal – the hybrid account – of specifically *experienced mandates*, rather than affordance perception generally, which reflects their phenomenology. Further to this, I provide a detailed account of how bodily potentiation figures in EMs that as yet has not been sufficiently explored. The third section of this paper also charts new ground in explicating how such bodily potentiation operates in EMs as connected to the kind of ‘soliciting content’ they plausibly have (as a hybrid account). Indeed, it is on the basis of the analysis provided there that we are able to capture distinctive features of EMs phenomenology, which provides us with an explanation of why we describe them in the deontic language of ‘demands’ and commands’.

It is also worth noting the guiding assumptions of the paper. I will be assuming that Φ -able properties (action properties) are presented in perceptual experience rather than inferred on the basis of a perceptual experience that does not include them amongst its contents. A convincing case has been made for including action-properties among the contents of direct perception, such that we *see* (or at least seem to see) the *climbability* of the tree or the *scaleability* of an obstacle (although complex action properties relating to states of affairs like ‘the war being winnable’ are not plausibly amongst the admissible contents of perceptual experience).⁵ Further to this, I won’t be discussing the metaphysics of action properties or EMs; my focus will be on elucidating the conscious character of a particular type of perceptual experience. Connected to this, let me make explicit that my discussion will concern visual phenomenology (and other related

⁴ See McClelland 2020 and Rietveld 2012: 213.

⁵ See Nanay 2010; Siegel 2014; McClelland 2020 (cf. Prinz 2012). One of Gibson’s central claims was that affordances can be directly perceived (see Gibson 1979).

phenomenologies) and therefore types of *conscious experiences*, rather than the workings or operations of perceptual systems. Indeed, it is specifically in the context of a discussion of *visual experiences* and their phenomenology that giving an account of EMs and their distinctive phenomenal profile is a pressing issue.

Finally, let me make explicit that I will be assuming that perceptual experiences have *intentional contents*, and much of the discussion and argument that follows will depend on that assumption (I explain how I understand content at the start of section 2). However, there is a body of literature, and one which also concerns itself with experiences of affordances and solicitations (similarly drawing on Gibsonian ecological psychology, and the work of early phenomenologists), that denies that assumption, offering a non-representationalist take on direct perception.⁶ While the goal of this paper is not to settle the question of whether perceptual experience has content, I signal this divergence since in the final section of the paper I consider a non-representationalist challenge to the account offered here.

1. The phenomenal profile of EMs

A first question we might ask is why anyone would be led from the view that perceptual experiences are sensitive to action-properties to the idea that there are a distinctive class of experiences which involve experiencing actions as *mandated*.

Consider the following case:

In the restaurant: I am at a restaurant, and the dessert trolley is wheeled over. Everything on it looks *edible*, but as I peruse the options, certain desserts seem particularly inviting, and then I see them...The chocolate eclairs! They ‘call out to me’, they ‘simply must be eaten!’ I reach out to grab them, only to be rebuked by the waiter, “Please sir, allow me”.

The above case reflects a distinction between three ways in which the objects of perceptual experience can manifest action properties. In the first instance, the object(s) is experienced as *merely edible*, then as *positively inviting eating*, and finally as *outright demanding eating*.

Given this, we can make a three-way distinction between types of perceptual experiences:

Non-soliciting Affordances: X provides a *mere opportunity* for Φ -ing.

Soliciting Affordances: X invites Φ -ing.

⁶ See Rietveld 2008; 2015; Rietveld and Kiverstein 2015; Kelly 2006; Dreyfus 2002; Dreyfus and Kelly 2007. The key source in phenomenology is Merleau-Ponty on bodily intentionality (see his 1962).

Commented [MOU1]: AE said concerning the non-representationalist challenge: ‘I would recommend that the author pull together the different parts of this discussion and put it in its own section, explicitly dealing with the non-representationalist challenge’.

Au Response: Here I indicate where in the paper this will be dealt with, namely the final section.

Experienced Mandates: X demands Φ -ing.⁷

First, on non-soliciting affordances: Amending our example, say I have eaten well, and the prospect of having anything more strikes me as a non-starter. Nonetheless, my dining companions request the dessert trolley. As it is wheeled over, I might perceptually experience the desserts as edible, as providing *opportunities to eat*, but feel no ‘pull’ from the desserts. Non-soliciting affordances are psychologically familiar; we experience objects or situations as providing *opportunities* for bodily-actions, but they are often experienced as affording *mere opportunities to Φ* , with respect to which we feel no ‘draw to action’.⁸

Charting out the distinction between soliciting affordances and EMs proves to be more difficult. Arguably, EMs are a distinctive sub-class of soliciting affordances in which there is what Susanna Siegel calls a ‘high degree of felt solicitation’ and necessarily ‘some increment of motivation to do what is solicited’.⁹ To make matters clearer, we can introduce the following two features of the experiences:

Soliciting Phenomenology: *I feel solicited/invited/prompted to Φ .*

Motivational Phenomenology: *I feel motivated to Φ .*

Making use of this distinction between soliciting and motivational phenomenology, the central difference between soliciting affordances and EMs can be clarified by considering putative cases in which the relevant object is experienced as soliciting Φ -ing, but in which the subject nonetheless lacks *felt motivation* to ‘take up the solicitation’. Consider the following two cases:

After sickness: I am recovering from food poisoning. I would like to eat something and am considering my options in the supermarket. On the confectionary aisle, I see the chocolate bars lined up perfectly. The bright colours on the packaging seem especially inviting, they ‘call-out’ to me (and I’m certainly partial to sweet things). Nonetheless, I am unmoved by them.

⁷ The reference to ‘demands’ is reminiscent of the Gestalt Psychology notion of ‘demand character’ (see Lewin 1938 and Koffka 1935).

⁸ This distinction between non-soliciting affordances and soliciting affordances which have a different character is well-recognised. On the philosophical side see, for example, Dreyfus and Kelly 2007; Rietveld 2008; Dings 2018. In the psychological literature see Frijda 1986; Bruineberg and Rietveld 2014; Withagen et al. 2017.

⁹ Siegel 2014: 55.

American advert: I'm on holiday in the United States. I switch on the television and come across a particularly brazen advert which is different from what I'm used to on British television. It's selling a 100% 'additive and hormone-free' beef burger. Its abrasive character – including its depiction of a semi-naked woman holding said beef burger – *positively invites* buying the burger (or in this case perhaps eating it). Nonetheless, being a vegetarian, I feel no motivation to perform the relevant action; I remain unmoved despite experiencing the *solicitation*.

In both cases, we seem to have experiences of soliciting affordances but we lack motivational phenomenology.

So, insofar as we grant the psychological reality of non-motivating soliciting affordances, then we are justified in positing a further class of experiences involving action-properties which involve motivation to do what is solicited, as EMs.¹⁰ Here are further examples:

The Office: Sat in my office, working at my desk, I am expecting a call concerning a matter of grave importance. The telephone rings and I experience it as 'demanding answering', and I feel motivated to reach over and pick up the receiver.¹¹

The Marine Corps: Having joined the Marine Corps, I am assigned to a particular regiment with a drill instructor. There is a command-obey structure, such that if the DI commands something I obey. The DI is issuing a series of orders: I experience the orders as demanding that the relevant actions *must* be done, as mandates which have authority over me and motivate me to act.

Reflection on these cases allows us to be more precise about EMs. First, it bears emphasising that experiencing an object as *demanding* Φ -ing, and feeling motivated to Φ , is not to be confused with *actually* Φ -ing – our focus is on experiences in which there is some kind of *phenomenology of answerability* rather than whatever phenomenology characterises 'the answering itself'. What is distinctive about EMs is that they involve a phenomenology of answerability.¹² And it is the lack of such a *phenomenology of answerability* in the examples discussed above ('After sickness' and 'American advert') that partly allows us to distinguish between cases of non-motivating soliciting affordances and EMs, as genuinely motivating soliciting affordances.

¹⁰ See section 4 for discussion of a non-representationalist view which rejects the psychological reality of non-motivating soliciting affordances.

¹¹ This example is amended from Koffka 1935.

¹² See Siegel 2014: 55.

There is, however, an additional feature of EMs that warrants highlighting. In the cases above, the ‘demands’ are made with authority; it is as if the relevant objects do not merely *demand* Φ -ing, but demand it authoritatively. To mark out this feature, consider a final case:

The demands of a child. A petulant child is constantly making demands of its parents. In a particular instance, the child demands that the parent buy them a toy. The parent nonetheless feels no pull to cede to the demand.

Cases like this purport to show that we can be experientially sensitive to an object making a demand on us to Φ , but an experience of something as demanding Φ -ing can fail to move us. This is because the child’s demands are not experienced as having authority over the parent (contrast the demands of the drill instructor). As we shall see, when considering different accounts of EMs, capturing this ‘sense of authority’ is critical.

Let’s now take stock. There are arguably phenomenal contrasts between three different types of perceptual experiences that involve a sensitivity to action-properties; non-soliciting affordances, non-motivating soliciting affordances, and EMs (as genuinely motivating soliciting affordances). The phenomenal profile of EMs includes both a soliciting and a motivational phenomenology, the latter of which we have framed in terms of a *phenomenology of answerability*. This phenomenology is part of an experience in which an object ‘demands Φ -ing’, yet this demand is also experienced as having authority over us, such that we *feel answerable* to that demand. The goal of an account of EMs is to cash out these metaphors of ‘authoritative demands’ and ‘felt answerability’, reflecting the distinctions between cases considered in this section and the phenomenal profile of EMs.

2. A Complex Contents Account

One strategy for providing an account of EMs, which attempts to respect their phenomenal profile, is to build their distinctiveness into their perceptual content. I call this the complex contents view.

First though, let me make explicit the notion of ‘content’ that will be operative in the following discussion. In what contexts is it legitimate to introduce this notion in characterising experiences? One starting point on these issues is the thought that intentional experiences exhibit directedness towards something. More specifically, those objects are manifest as having apparent properties and qualities. Reflecting a similar point, Sydney Shoemaker says, in the visual case, “if I see something, it looks somehow to me”.¹³ The relevant objects, therefore, experientially present as

¹³ Shoemaker 1975: 299.

possessing apparent properties – the relevant objects *seem a certain way*. Reflecting this, the intentional content of an experience, as understood here, is *the object experientially presented as being a certain way* (as experiential content). As such, there need be no commitment to the claim that the object of visual experience, what is perceived, has the structure of a proposition or that visual experience fundamentally consists in a propositional attitude. This point needs distinguishing from the fact that we can typically approximately *display* that content by way of the canonical subject-predicate propositional form with a *that-clause*. These displayed contents are linguistic attempts to approximate the relevant experiential content. However, that such displayed contents exhibit linguistic structure should not confuse us into thinking that the content of visual experiences themselves have such linguistic structure.

Connected to the above, it is worth emphasising that a visual experience of a red ball is one thing, whereas a report of it, involving a linguistic specification of its content is something of a fundamentally different kind. Specifying or otherwise displaying the experiential content of a perceptual experience, say in a propositionally-structured perceptual report, is not and could never be, a way of having that experience. Given this, the *mere fact* that the structure of a specification of the content of the intentional state (the displayed content) takes a propositional form, *at least* leaves it open to further investigation what the structure of the experiential content of that intentional state itself is. So understood the relevant notion of content is a *personal-level* notion apt to characterise aspects of the phenomenology of visual experiences. I proceed on the assumption that it is experiential content that is being discussed in the case of EMs.

To get a better sense for the complex contents view, it helps to start by framing the phenomenal contrast argument which is used to motivate the view. The structure of phenomenal contrast arguments is as follows. Take any pair of overall perceptual experiences E1 and E2. There is non-controversially a phenomenal contrast between E1 and E2. What best explains the phenomenal contrast is a difference in what *properties* are presented. This argument structure is used to test hypotheses about what properties are presented in experience. Now, so framed as an argument from *best explanation*, phenomenal contrast arguments should include a premise (or sub-argument) to the effect that alternative explanations of the relevant phenomenal contrasts are either (a) ruled out on grounds of independent implausibility or (b) explain the relevant phenomenal contrast in a way that is less satisfactory than an explanation in terms of a difference in what properties are presented. As we shall see in section 3, there is a competitor to the complex contents view with respect to which neither (a) or (b) hold.

Let's now turn to the most developed complex contents view as offered by Siegel.¹⁴ For Siegel what motivates the search for a view which can account for EMs in terms of perceptual content

¹⁴ See Siegel 2014.

Commented [MOU2]: AE said: "The discussion on pp. 7-8 of recognitional capacities and their role in perception seems too quick and hand-wavy to genuinely contribute to the discussion. I suggest cutting it."

Au Response: In line with the AE's suggestion, I have cut the part of the paragraph referencing to recognitional capacities. The remaining part of that paragraph has been lightly rephrased just to emphasise the difference between the structure of displayed contents and the structure of manifest experiential contents.

is the following framing of some of the contrasts discussed in the previous section. She considers a case of two perceptual experiences which putatively involve the same soliciting content, that is, in which the object is presented as inviting Φ -ing – in which the content *as displayed* would be $\langle X$ is to-be- Φ -d \rangle – but which nonetheless differ phenomenologically.¹⁵

Consider perceptually experiencing music as soliciting dancing. We can certainly imagine experiencing a piece of music as soliciting us to dance where we are motivated to dance (call this E1), and a (putatively) different experience in which we still experience the piece of music as soliciting us to dance but feel no motivation to dance (call this E2). There is a shared soliciting content; both E1 and E2 have an experiential content which can be partly displayed in terms of \langle music is to-be-danced-to \rangle . Nevertheless, there is a phenomenal contrast between them since E1 includes motivational phenomenology.

The question Siegel then poses is whether, concerning E1, ‘the motivational part of the mandate...[could] be reflected in contents that characterise how the *music* sounds.’¹⁶ That would be to seek an explanation of the phenomenal contrast in terms of a difference in what properties are presented. More specifically, we get the search for a property related to the *phenomenology of answerability* characteristic of EMs, which can be used to explain the phenomenal contrast between E1 and E2. Siegel’s view is that EMs have *answerability contents* which embed soliciting contents in a ‘nested structure’. So, the content of E1 – the case in which we experience the music as *soliciting us to dance*, and we are motivated to dance – has a content which can be expressed as follows: \langle It is answered that: music is to-be-danced-to \rangle . Answerability contents in their generic form would be as follows, \langle it is answered that: X is to-be- Φ -d \rangle . The question is whether this proposal successfully specifies a content that correlates with the phenomenology of answerability possessed by EMs.

The central problem is that we can generate phenomenal contrast arguments in which – given we accept for the sake of argument that experiences can have answerability contents – two experiences have the same answerability contents but differ phenomenally with respect to *felt answerability*. If this is correct, then answerability contents are not necessarily correlated with *felt answerability*.

¹⁵ A note on soliciting contents: the case for framing soliciting phenomenology in terms of contents we might approximately display in the form $\langle X$ is to-be- Φ -d \rangle – is not uncontroversial. Nonetheless, it reflects the fact that in the relevant experiences it is the external object which is experienced as *soliciting* Φ -ing – the object *seems to solicit* Φ -ing – as something external that we perceptually experience. So, the move is plausible given the notion of experiential content we are using. Note again though, just because the experiential content *as displayed* takes the propositional form $\langle X$ is to be Φ -d \rangle there need be no commitment to the claim that the relevant experiences themselves are structured by some such proposition.

¹⁶ Ibid: 67.

Commented [MOU3]: AE said: ‘the material from “A note on soliciting contents...” to the end of paragraph belongs in a footnote or should be cut altogether.

Au response: In line with the suggestion of the AE I have moved this material into a footnote (see fn.17)

Consider the following case. Watching a football match, I am taken in by a particular situation. There is an open net, and the approaching player is poised to score by kicking the ball into it. I see the footballer approaching the ball in such a way that a specific answerability content characterises the experience. My perceptual experience has a content which can partly be specified in terms of the answerability content <it is answered that: the football is to-be-kicked>, such that what I perceive as required *for the footballer* is the ‘right mix’ of soliciting and motivational content. Indeed, the idea that one can perceive affordances for others’ actions was suggested by Gibson and has been supported by experimental evidence.¹⁷ Yet, in this case, I don’t (or needn’t) experience any *felt answerability* myself.

Contrast this with a case in which I am approaching the ball, poised to score by kicking the ball into the empty net. We can partly characterise this experience in terms of the answerability content <it is answered that: the football is to-be-kicked>. Yet in this case I will experience the relevant motivational phenomenology, feeling answerable to the ‘demand’ of the football to be kicked into the net. But if that’s the case we have a pair of experiences in which the answerability contents are identical but which differ with respect to that phenomenological-motivational aspect which the account under consideration was supposed to secure as present by positing answerability contents. Generalising, there doesn’t seem to be any principled reason why we can’t characterise a range of perceptual experiences in terms of the content <it is answered that: X is to-be- Φ -d>, where the subject of the relevant demand is someone other than ourselves and so where we don’t feel motivated to do anything, and so no *felt answerability* is present.

One response is to rule out such cases by building in a self-referential component in the following way: <it is answered that: X is to-be- Φ -d *by me*>. However, there are problems with such a response. The first pertains to complexity. The idea that the way action-properties figure in perceptual experience is as manifestly self-referential implicates self-representational capacities in a way that would arguably make it such that non-human animals and human infants, to whom it is implausible to ascribe such complex capacities, could not enjoy EMs (so characterised). The second worry is phenomenological. It is contestable whether action-properties are experienced as relational. In one sense the tree is only *climbable* for me, given my abilities and the satisfaction of other background conditions, but that is principally a point about the metaphysics of action properties. Action properties are by nature relational but might nonetheless be phenomenologically *monadic*. As such, it is possible that our experience of action-properties includes no explicit self-referentiality.¹⁸ Note that even if we disagree on this point, an appeal to self-referential contents is an additional commitment that would need an independent argument.

¹⁷ See Gibson 1979; Stoffregen *et al.* 1999.

¹⁸ Cf. McClelland 2019: 159.

What about affixing a self-referential component to the overall answerability content rather than the ‘nested’ soliciting content? So, it would be <it is answered *by me* that: X is to-be- Φ -d>. If that is the content of E2 then that will distinguish it from E1. But there now emerges a worry about how much sense can be made of specifying the content of an EM in such terms. Remember, the motivation behind the complex contents view under consideration is finding a *property* correlated with felt answerability, which is present in the case of EMs but not in non-motivating soliciting affordances, such as to account for the phenomenal contrast. But what kind of property, as capturing a way the object of perception *looks* or *appears*, is reflected in a content of the form ‘it is answered by me’. Do the particular objects of external sense-perception ever have the look of being ‘answered by me’, as a property characterising the motivational part of EMs which is supposed to reflect, say, how the eclairs look? The worry is that the complex contents view has lost its grip on the phenomena it is supposed to be elucidating. In the next section, I show that there is an alternative, which can make better sense of the phenomenal contrasts we have been considering.

3. Towards a Hybrid Account

First, a note on the account that will be offered: What follows is not a full-dress account of EMs but an outline. Let’s begin by returning to the idea of motivational phenomenology and felt answerability. One way of thinking about the feeling of being motivated to act in some specific way is in terms of bodily phenomenology. More specifically, a central feature of *feeling motivated to Φ* involves what is often referred to as felt action readiness.¹⁹ Consider our central cases of EMs. In the case of ‘The Office’, it is plausible that part of what I feel in experiencing the phone as ‘demanding answering’ is a *felt bodily readiness* to answer it. Alternatively, take the case of the chocolate eclairs. Again, part of what I feel, part of what-it-is-like to experience those eclairs as ‘demanding eating’, is a *felt bodily readiness* to eat them. What does this consist in?

Felt bodily action readiness can be framed in terms of a specific *gestalt* of bodily sensations. In the cases we have been considering the bodily sensations would include relevant changes in skeletal muscles, the activation of certain grip tendons in the hands and forearms, and so on. These bodily sensations would not be given atomistically – as distinct, specific and singular bodily changes – but would form a *holistic bodily stance*, as a combined synthetic bodily feel. Critically though, this gestalt of bodily sensations would amount to a kind of preparedness, as one’s body automatically *geared* towards the phone as to-be-answered or the eclairs as to-be-eaten. Indeed, this is a natural way of thinking about part of the motivational phenomenology involved in EMs.

¹⁹ The notion of felt action readiness is prominent in discussions of emotion (see Frijda 1986).

On the proposed view, we would be accounting for EMs as follows. EMs are perceptual experiences of the relevant object as to-be- Φ -d, as having the relevant soliciting contents. The *felt answerability* such EMs include, however, is not specified in terms of the presentation of a property of the external object, but rather in terms of *felt bodily action readiness*, as one's body being automatically geared towards the object as to-be- Φ -d. In that sense, there is a component of EMs that speaks to a notion of 'it is answered that', but it is not cashed out in terms of visual content but rather in terms of *felt bodily potentiation*. So, whereas the complex contents view considered previously proposed the following content for EMs <it is answered that: X is to-be- Φ -d>, the hybrid account locates the *felt answerability* in a gestalt of bodily feelings which constitute the relevant felt bodily potentiation appropriate for the relevant object *qua* to-be- Φ -d, as generated by the way the object perceptually seems. The account is a hybrid insofar as it posits soliciting contents – and so commits to objects *looking* not merely Φ -able, but *perceptually seeming to solicit* Φ -ing – but marries those perceptual contents (which we can approximately display in the form <X is to-be- Φ -d>) with bodily potentiations. Indeed, it is one's body being 'potentiated' or 'geared up' with respect to performing the relevant action concerning the object, that, along with the relevant soliciting content, is distinctive of EMs on this account.²⁰

Let me now unpack the account. First, the phenomenal profile of any given EM with respect to felt action readiness will be highly specific. The precise way one's body is automatically 'geared up' to interact with the object as to-be- Φ -d will depend on (amongst other things) the spatial location of the object, its shape, and other sensible properties, and the specific type of action that is 'demanded'. For example, the way one's body is potentiated in response to an object experienced as demanding *eating* will differ significantly from how it is potentiated when it is responding to a situation experienced as demanding *dancing*. It is an empirical matter to determine the relevant patterns of, for example, muscle-skeletal activation for specific cases. However, it again bears emphasising that the bodily potentiation will be felt as an overall gestalt, as a synthetic 'bodily feel' rather than as specific atomised bodily sensations (e.g., the muscles on the inner palm extending). Connected to this, there is a growing body of empirical evidence that in the cases of genuinely motivating soliciting affordances that we have characterised as EMs, that is in which there is a distinctive motivational phenomenology, the body is potentiated for action in this 'involuntary' and 'automatic' way.²¹

Second, it might be questioned whether the hybrid account has the resources to differentiate EMs from non-motivating soliciting affordances with respect to the contrast cases we discussed in sections 1 and 2. Let's return to the dancing case. The idea was that there is a phenomenal

²⁰ See also Frijda 2007: 205.

²¹ See the studies in Ellis and Tucker 2000; Bub et al. *forthcoming*; Yamani, Ariga and Yamada 2015.

Commented [MOU4]: AE said: "The material after the semi-colon to the end of the period is grammatically hard to parse.

AE said: There is a right-hand single quote dangling after the three ellipsis.

Au Response: the grammatically hard to parse section here was the quote from Nico Frijda which I agree is clunky. Since it doesn't add much, I have now just referenced Frijda's discussion in a footnote. This also has the added benefit of saving on words.

contrast between two cases which putatively share the same soliciting content, but in one case we are motivated to dance and the other we are not. Not only can the hybrid account respect the idea that there is shared content – both experiences having the same soliciting content – but it can easily explain the relevant phenomenal contrast. In the case where we are motivated to dance what accounts for the *felt answerability* is the relevant felt bodily action readiness. In the case of the non-motivating soliciting affordance, this felt bodily-potential is absent (one is ‘unmoved’). So, EMs on the hybrid account have the relevant felt bodily potential as a necessary component, which as we have seen is not the case in either non-soliciting affordances or indeed non-motivating soliciting affordances.

Another feature of the hybrid account is that it explains why, with respect to EMs, we use the normative language of ‘demands’ and ‘commands’ rather than the non-deontic language of ‘invitations’ and ‘prompts’. We describe EMs using deontic language because we *feel like we are being commanded by the object*. On the hybrid account, this is made sense of as follows: the relevant bodily potential is experienced as an *automatic and involuntary* response to the object as to-be- Φ -d, such that one is, as we might put it, ‘getting ready to do what is being demanded of one’. The hybrid account can also speak to the putative experience of the authority of the demands. On the account being proposed, it is not as if the music *qua* to-be-danced-to is experientially presented as having authority over us; it is difficult to see how a property pertaining to something like this could be presented in perceptual experience (as characterising a way the relevant object *looks* or *appears*). Rather we experience ‘the authority of the demand’ insofar as we feel our body being drawn into action in a way that is automatic and involuntary.

The hybrid account also provides a neat explanation of the following feature of EMs. There will likely be no experiential dissonance if one does not go on to perform an action one’s perceptual experience presents as *merely Φ -able*, or indeed in a case in which one experiences the object as *soliciting Φ -ing*, but feels no draw to act. In seeing the apples in the bowl as edible, there won’t be any experiential dissonance if I pass over this opportunity. Likewise, there needn’t be any experiential dissonance if I see the confectionary as positively inviting me to purchase a chocolate bar, but ‘reject the invitation’ given I feel no draw to act. Contrastingly, if I experience the chocolate eclairs as ‘demanding’ to-be-eaten and feel my body ‘geared’ towards doing so, there will be experiential dissonance if I resist performing the action. That familiar experiential dissonance is a consequence of a ‘restrained inhibiting’ of one’s body as it was getting prepared for a specific action. And on the flip side, an account of EMs which appeals to felt action readiness in the way suggested can also explain why when we let action-tendencies follow their course, that is when we go on to perform the relevant action that we were prepared for, there is an experience of ‘flow’. Part of the phenomenology of ‘flow’ can be understood in terms of a

Commented [MOU5]: AE comment: ‘The sentence beginning with ‘Since’ is hard to parse.

Au response: I have rephrased this sentence to read more clearly. The previous sentence was unnecessarily complex. The rephrased version explains the point more simply.

seamless transition from one's body being prepared for a certain action to the carrying out of that action.²²

Undoubtedly, the hybrid account will be subject to objections, but as an *outline* rather than a full-dress proposal, I won't be examining all possible objections and responses here. However, issues arise in the context of understanding the view's relation to the complex contents view that was critiqued in section 2. It might be asked whether we do best to understand felt action readiness along the lines of further experiential content, say as provided by *proprioception*, or whether we should opt for a non-representational account of this aspect of EMs. I remain neutral on this issue here, but let me say something about both options and note a potential issue for each.

On a content-view gloss of the hybrid account we might display the overall content of EMs as follows: <X is to-be- Φ -d> and <my body is *ready* to Φ >. However, arguably the connection between the relevant felt action readiness and the exteroceptive object as it is experienced in EMs is tighter than conjunction, such that we might describe the situation as one's body *feeling to be* motivated by the objects 'demands'. As such, a purely content-based construal would likely have to be specified more along the following lines: <my body is ready-to- Φ *because* X is to-be- Φ -d>. In that case, however, we commit to EMs presenting a *relation* between two objects; namely, the object of exteroceptive perception and one's body as given in proprioception (and maybe not merely a causal relation, but one of the relevant body potentiation being *appropriate* to its object, as a normative relation). While such a view is not deprived of a certain plausibility, it should be noted that the idea that our experiences involve the presentation of relations is not uncontroversial.

Concerning a non-representationalist take on felt-action readiness, one immediate problem is giving a substantive proposal that goes beyond a merely negative formulation of saying that we should think of such aspects as non-content based. One positive suggestion would be to tie the relevant felt action readiness to the 'mode' component of the experience rather than its content, as a putative form of *felt bodily engagement* with the external object that specifies the *way* we are engaged with it or are responding to it – namely a 'bodily way' – rather than as involving inwardly-directed interoceptive intentionality. Again, while not deprived of plausibility such a proposal would need to offer an informative characterisation of the relevant form of bodily awareness implicated in such experiences, as distinct from the kinds of bodily awareness we enjoy in interoceptive experiences which are more obviously characterised in terms of an awareness of

²² In pathological cases, subjects cannot suppress the actions which are potentiated. This phenomenon is called utilisation behaviour (see Brazzelli and Spinnler 1998 for the original study, for follow up studies see Cisek and Kalaska 2010).

a 'bodily object'. Perhaps appeal could be made to the phenomenologists' notion of the 'lived body', as a kind of 'pre-reflective' bodily awareness.²³ In any case, I save detailed discussion of such developments of the hybrid view for a separate occasion.

Section 4. The Non-Representationalist Challenge

In this final section, I consider a non-representationalist challenge to the hybrid account which takes issue with the three-fold distinction on which our discussion has been premised, namely between (i) non-soliciting affordances, (ii) non-motivating solicitations, and (iii) genuinely motivating solicitations, as EMs

Let me first outline the non-representationalist approach to affordances and solicitations in contrast to the hybrid view of EMs. As we have seen, the hybrid account posits soliciting contents – and so commits to objects *looking* not merely Φ -able, but *perceptually seeming to solicit* Φ -ing – and marries soliciting contents with bodily potentiations to account for EMs. However, the non-representationalist takes a different approach. First, they do not accept the idea that perceptual experiences have contents, and so reject the claim that the perception of a solicitation is a perception with a content we can approximate as $\langle X\text{-as-to-be-}\Phi\text{-d}\rangle$. Now, given this, they claim that there are only two types of cases to be distinguished – namely non-motivating affordances and solicitations, such that within their framework the conception of solicitation is introduced to account for those affordances that *do* motivate us to act.²⁴ As such, they would reject the three-fold distinction we have been operating with, more specifically denying that there are cases of *non-motivating* solicitations.

Drawing on some of the materials offered by the hybrid account, the non-representationalist might pose the following challenge. They might argue that the notion of *bodily potentiation*, introduced in section 3 to account for EMs, is *all we need* to make the distinctions between the cases discussed in section 1. As one proponent of this view puts it, 'one does not just see what the situation allows one to do without actually arousing one's action readiness, but, rather, one gets *bodily ready* to act'.²⁵ So the thought goes, we simply *don't need* the relevant soliciting content posited by the hybrid account, since appeal to felt action readiness in terms of its presence (solicitations) or absence (non-motivating affordances) is enough to mark out what they (the non-representationalist) claim are the only two types of cases that need distinguishing. And they might further note that they are able to recognise the idea that some affordances are 'more

²³ See Merleau-Ponty 1962: 120-123 (for discussion see Dreyfus and Kelly 2007).

²⁴ See Rietveld 2008; 2015; Rietveld and Kiverstein 2015; Kelly 2006; Dreyfus 2002.

²⁵ See Rietveld 2012: 212-3. Rietveld has gone on to develop a non-representationalist view of affordances and solicitations in detail (see Rietveld and Kiverstein 2014; Rietveld and Dijk 2018).

forceful' than others (as 'mandates' or 'demands'), with reference to the idea of the varying strength of solicitations *qua* action-readiness.²⁶

What can be said in response to this non-representationalist challenge? First, one might argue that the three-fold distinction we have been operating with is in fact reasonably intuitive. We can motivate this claim by asking whether we ever experience *objects in our environment* as somehow suggesting action more forcefully than providing the mere opportunity for action even though we are not motivated to act. If we think it intuitive to answer in the affirmative, then we might thereby come to recognise a distinction between soliciting and motivational phenomenology. Put otherwise, we might think it legitimate to recognise, as we have done, an intermediate set of cases, in which the experience of solicitation and motivation come apart, such that the *object seems to solicit the subject to action* and does so in a way seemingly more forcefully than merely 'suggesting a possible course of action' (that would be a non-motivating affordance), but nonetheless the subject is *not* motivated to act (no felt action readiness). Note, so framed, the idea is not merely that some affordances are experienced as more forceful than others – as seen above, the non-representationalist potentially has a way of respecting that idea with reference to different degrees of action-readiness – but that we can experience a difference between an object suggesting a mere possibility for action and more strongly soliciting an action even when in both instances we enjoy *no motivational pull*. So, the idea of recognising the 'varying seeming forcefulness' of the way objects present is being applied to contexts in which we are already accepting that there is (putatively) no motivational phenomenology in play. This would be the intuitive case for the three-fold distinction we have been operating with.²⁷

What might the non-representationalist say in response to the above (and more specifically, the distinction between solicitation and motivation)? The most obvious response will be to insist that the above reasoning surreptitiously turns on accepting certain representationalist or content-view starting points. Now, it should be noted that our ability to recognise the distinction between solicitation and motivation as intuitive indeed requires (as was seen above) that one is prepared

Commented [MOU6]: AE said: I also note that the discussion of 'dissonance' of pp 13-14 might be of some use here as a means of teasing out when felt action readiness is or is not present, and whether it is present in all cases of 'solicitation' (as the non-representationalist view would predict).

Au response: see footnote 27.

²⁶ See e.g., Rietveld and Kiverstein 2014; Bruineberg and Rietveld 2014.

²⁷ Note, and drawing on our previous comments on experiential dissonance across the cases we have been considering, the non-representationalist would predict the presence of experiential dissonance in *all* cases of solicitation, insofar as they always including felt action readiness, where we go on *not* to perform the relevant solicited action, and so *resist* the relevant felt action readiness. Yet, if we think it intuitively plausible that one at least can, even if it might be relatively rare, undergo an experience in which an object *solicits* one to action, and yet feel no pull to act, also experiencing no dissonance in 'rejecting the invitation', then one might think the non-representationalist makes an overly strong, and potentially counter-intuitive prediction (i.e., *rejecting* solicitations necessarily leads to experiential dissonance). Nonetheless, more needs to be said on this complex issue.

to grant that we can recognise differences between the way *the objects of experience seem* in cases where there is no motivational phenomenology in play. Yet, on the face of it, this doesn't obviously depend on content-view presuppositions. Although, interestingly, one might think reflection on such a possibility might lead one to theorise the experiences as having different experiential contents (as indeed we have done in the discussion here).

Nevertheless, even if we were to grant the non-representationalist that recognising our three-fold distinction (and so also the distinction between solicitation and motivation) in some sense depends on a content-view of experience, it should be noted that the operative notion of content is in significant respects more minimal and less controversial than cognate notions associated with stronger forms of representationalism. The notion of experiential content that we have been operating with is *the object experientially presented as being a certain way*. To note relevant features of experiential content in this context, it is clearly not a subpersonal notion linked to information-carrying and doesn't imply an implausible version of propositionalism about what is manifest in experience.²⁸ In addition, this notion of content doesn't imply that the relevant contents are *experience*-mediators, as something which 'gets in the way' of one's direct contact with objects. Given these points, this notion of experiential content could be acceptable to moderate forms of non-representationalist and relationalist strands of thinking on direct perception. So, given what we have said so far, the burden is arguably on the non-representationalist to further explain what it is in this minimal notion of experiential content which they find objectionable such that the distinction between solicitation and motivation remains (for them) incoherent.

Let me now say a final word on the relevant distinctions and how the hybrid account requires more than just action readiness. If we recognise a distinction between solicitation and motivation, then it is plausible to think that non-motivating experiences of solicitation must *lack* something that EMs, as *genuinely motivating* experiences of solicitation, possess, and that would be the relevant felt bodily potentiation in the latter cases. Now, there is still (it is being argued) a distinction between the way the object seems in these non-motivating experiences of solicitation and non-motivating affordances, where the latter suggest *mere opportunities for action*. And it seems a legitimate move in that case to claim that in the absence of a possible appeal to motivational phenomenology (variability in which we are claiming marks out the difference between non-motivating soliciting affordances and EMs) we can appeal to a *difference in experiential content*, such that non-motivating experiences of solicitation involve an experience of the relevant object as *perceptually seeming to solicit* Φ -ing (which we can approximately display in the form $\langle X$ as to-be-

²⁸ This notion of content might therefore be broadly consonant with the different notion of 'information' as introduced to account for direct perception by those working in the non-representational ecological tradition (see fn.6 for references; also see McDowell 1994: 202-3 for discussion).

Φ-d>). On this taxonomy of the relevant states, EMs also possess soliciting content, but as *genuinely motivating* experiences also involve the relevant felt action readiness. Put simply: having both felt-action readiness and soliciting content in play (as present or absent across the three different cases) allows us to theoretically reflect the three-fold distinction we have been operating with.

Finally, with these points in mind, consider the intentionality possessed by the skilled agent engaged who perceives a certain situation as drawing them into action, as those cases which are often highlighted by non-representationalist accounts of affordances and solicitations.²⁹ Take the expert chess player who sees a particular positioning of pieces on the board as immediately calling for a certain response. Could such a case be understood *exclusively* in terms of the presence of the relevant felt action-readiness? Plausibly, the grandmaster must still (phenomenally) *see the chessboard as being a certain way*, with certain spatial organisations of pieces in specific positions, and as such, it seems plausible to ascribe their visual experience an experiential soliciting content in which that content is precisely *the way the board is manifest to their experience*, say approximately displayed in terms of a certain position as 'to-be-defended-against'. Note, it is of course plausible that the chessboard would not 'show up' for the expert chess player as *calling for* the relevant bodily responses in the absence of the relevant background skills and concerns, but to admit that is not to deny their experience can have the kind of soliciting content *and* felt-action-readiness that I have characterised EMs as having.

Conclusion

This paper has discussed a distinctive class of perceptual experiences which include a sensitivity to action-properties, namely EMs. As we saw, the most developed version of the complex contents view of these experiences encounters problems. The hybrid account fares better, appealing to a distinctive kind of felt action readiness in terms of bodily potentiation, as tied to soliciting contents. While more needs to be said in explication and defence of the hybrid account and different ways of developing it, it is a plausible alternative to accounts that build all the distinctiveness of EMs into their perceptual content while charting a path that is distinct from a wholesale non-representationalist approach to affordances and solicitations.

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²⁹ See Dreyfus 2002 and Kelly 2006, and Kiverstein and Rietveld 2015.

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