Perceptual Activity and Bodily Awareness

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Bodily awareness is a kind of perceptual awareness of the body that we do not usually count as a sense. I argue that there is an overlooked agential difference between bodily awareness and perception in the five familiar senses: a difference in what is involved in perceptual activity in sight, hearing, touch, taste and smell on the one hand, and bodily awareness on the other.

THE CRITERIA FOR DISTINGUISHING between the senses that H.P. Grice introduced in his ‘Some remarks about the senses’ have been much discussed. But the question with which he began that paper is this: how might we meet—which is to say, argue against—the claim that some creature has a sense, different to the familiar five. One way we might do this is to say that the creature’s faculty or capacity is one of the familiar senses, defending this claim by appealing to our favourite Gricean criteria or criterion. Another way to meet the claim would be to argue that the faculty or capacity is not a sense at all. To defend that claim we would need to appeal to some account not of how the senses differ from one another, but of how they differ from other faculties: those that are not senses.

At first glance, it might seem that all one needs to do to provide an account of the difference between senses and other faculties is to say what makes perception distinctive. After all, no non-perceptual faculty is a sense. It is not obvious, however, that all perceptual faculties are senses. Bodily awareness is, on the face of it, a perceptual faculty that is not a sense: we don’t usually count it as one, anyway. So maybe in order to give an account of how senses differ from other faculties, one will have to do more than just say what makes perception distinctive. This possibility is the background against which what follows should be understood.

I focus in this paper on the narrower question of how bodily awareness and sense-perception differ. The broader motivating question of whether, in virtue of these differences, bodily awareness does not count amongst the senses will remain in the background. I will argue that bodily awareness and perceiving with the senses differ in a particular and overlooked way, namely, agentially. There is something that we do with respect to, or contribute to perception in the case of the senses, that we do not do or
contribute in the case of bodily awareness.

The first two sections are devoted to preliminaries. I introduce the claim that bodily awareness is a perceptual faculty in §I and defend the very idea of perceptual activity in §II. In §III I discuss some varieties of perceptual activity, in order to pinpoint the kind of perceptual activity—perceptual monitoring—that differs between perception with the senses and bodily awareness. In §§4-5 I describe what I take to be distinctive about perceptual monitoring with the senses and in sections §§6-7 I defend the claim that this distinctive element is not to be found in perceptual monitoring in the bodily mode. In §8 I conclude, returning briefly to the question of whether bodily awareness, differing agentially from the five familiar senses, is a sense all the same.

1.

Bodily awareness. ‘Bodily awareness’ is a catch-all term.¹ It picks out bodily sensations as well as proprioceptive experiences. There is ample reason to think that bodily awareness is perceptual awareness of the body,² not least the fact that, when all goes well, your awareness of the pain in your foot, or the location of your hands, is awareness of a mind-independent object, as it is, at the time when you are aware of it. In this way, bodily awareness is just like seeing, hearing, touching, tasting or smelling something.

Nevertheless, bodily awareness differs from our stereotype of perception in a number of ways. This stereotype we get from thinking about perception in the five familiar modes that we usually think of as senses. Call this stereotypical sort of perception, sense-perception. Some differences between bodily awareness and sense-perception are, broadly speaking, representational: they are a matter of what we perceive. Arguably, in the bodily mode, one perceives only one object, one’s own body.³ In sense-perception, in contrast, one perceives various objects. Other differences are phenomenological: they are a matter of what experiences are like. At least part of what is meant by saying that bodily awareness is awareness of the body ‘from the inside’ is something phenomenological. One does not seem to be aware of one’s foot or hands ‘from’ anywhere, in contrast to the way in which one is aware of things that one sees, for instance, and roughly speaking, from the location of one’s eyes. I will argue that bodily

¹ See Smith 2006, p. 49 for representative use of ‘bodily awareness’.
² That bodily awareness is a form of perceptual awareness is defended in, for instance, Armstrong 1962 and Martin 1995.
³ For defence see Martin 1995. For the opposing view see Bermudez 1998, Chapter 6.
awareness differs from sense-perception in a third way, namely, agentially.⁴ There is a difference in what we do in sense-perception, and in bodily awareness. In the next section I make some brief remarks on the very idea of perceptual activity.

II.

Perceptual activity. There is an important respect in which perceiving must be a passive phenomenon. If it is right to say that perception is a kind of ‘openness to the world’ then perception is passive in the respect that this notion of ‘openness’ implies. Furthermore, if perceptual experience is to play its epistemological role it must be responsive to how the world is, in a way that precludes its being something that we do. Things in the world, rather than we ourselves, must play the right role in determining how things seem to us in perception, if perceptual experience is to put us in a position to know about those things.⁵ This means that it is false to say that perceiving just is action.

Nevertheless, we clearly make some kind of (and perhaps more than one kind of) non-passive contribution to perception. The kind of perceptual activity I will be concerned with is that which we refer to using terms such as ‘looking’ and ‘listening’. Looking at the geese on campus at York is an activity of mine and so is listening to them honking. In vision and audition we have the vocabulary to distinguish our activity (looking, listening) from our passive experience (seeing, hearing). In touch, taste and smell the same words do double duty: touching/feeling, tasting and smelling can denote perceptual activities, like looking and listening, or passive perceiving, like seeing and hearing. We can also identify perceptual activities in the bodily mode, although again, we don’t have a special vocabulary to help us to do so. I do something analogous to looking at the goose when, for instance, I hold my attention fixed on the relative locations of my feet, perceived ‘from the inside’, in the bodily mode.

⁴ The view defended here is not without precedent. It is a consequence of John O’Dea’s account of that upon which we base our judgments about the sense modality of concurrent perceptual experience (O’Dea 2011, p. 297) that there is an agential difference between sense-perception and bodily awareness. (p. 308) Mohan Matthen offers an account of our folk ways of distinguishing between the senses that appeals to perceptual activities. However, on this account, bodily awareness will not be excluded from the senses. (Matthen 2015, especially p. 22 on the exploratory activities involved in pain perception)

⁵ As Brian O’Shaughnessy puts it, one might worry that perception ‘owing its existence to the will’ is inconsistent with perception giving us evidence for our beliefs about the world. His solution to this ‘antitheticality puzzle’ is in his 2002 (p. 207, p. 398). See also Baldwin 2003.
‘Activity’ (in ‘perceptual activity’) picks out something that one does. It is not something that merely happens to or in one, like the growth of hair. David Velleman (1996, p. 74) uses the term ‘activity’ in the way I intend it to be understood, to denote things that we can be said to do, but which do not meet all the conditions for ‘full-blooded’ intentional action, such as, if one agrees with Velleman, being under conscious control. On Harry Frankfurt’s view, guidance by the subject is what makes the difference between bodily movements that occur without one’s making them and those that are movements that the subject makes. Frankfurt denies that all movements made by the subject need be thought intentional actions, since this expression refers only to those doings of ours ‘which are undertaken more or less deliberately or self-consciously—that is, to actions which the agent intends to perform’ (1978, p. 159). By calling the perceptual doings in which I am interested ‘activities’, I mean, like Frankfurt and Velleman, to gesture at a middle-ground between mere happenings and intentional actions.

III.

**Perceptual monitoring.** As Thomas Crowther has argued, perceptual activity comes in more than one variety (Crowther 2010, §2). In vision and hearing we have familiar vocabulary that reflects this variety. We can be said to look for or listen for (or look out for or listen out for) something: performing instrumental perceptual activity that, when successful, brings about seeing or hearing something, as when I look out for the arrival of a wren in the garden and thus see it when it lands. Once I have seen the object I have been looking for or looking out for, the activity of looking for or looking out for it ceases. (Crowther 2010, pp. 175-6)

But we can also look at, watch or listen to something. Performing these non-instrumental perceptual activities does not bring about seeing or hearing an object since in order to look at, watch or listen to something, seeing or hearing it is presupposed. What I contribute in these cases is the maintenance rather than the bringing about of seeing and hearing: I agentially maintain perceptual awareness of an object rather than agentially initiating such awareness in the first place. I will borrow Crowther's term ‘perceptual monitoring’ to denote this activity of maintaining perceptual awareness of things (2009a), or conscious perceptual contact with them (2010).

We perform both instrumental perceptual activity and perceptual

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6 In this I follow Thomas Crowther: see, for example 2009a, p. 17, n. 18.
monitoring in the case of touch, taste and smell too, though in the absence of special vocabulary for making the distinction between these perceptual activity-types. The same goes for bodily awareness. In bodily awareness I can ‘feel out for’ my foot when it is temporarily anaesthetised and I can perceptually monitor my foot in the bodily mode as I can the goose when I look at it. The agential difference between bodily awareness and sense-perception is a difference in how one perceptually monitors, in the two cases. To see this, consider what perceptual monitoring, in general, involves.

In order for me to successfully perceptually monitor some object \( o \), over an interval of time, two conditions must be met during that interval: 7

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\begin{align*}
(1) & \text{ I perceive } o \\
(2) & \text{ I attend to } o
\end{align*}
\]

Why think that this is true? Firstly, because there is reason to think that this is what Crowther has in mind. 8 The ‘perceptual awareness’ or ‘conscious perceptual contact’ with an object that one maintains in perceptual monitoring involves not only perceiving an object, but noticing it. Secondly, because if perceptual monitoring is to capture such ordinary phenomena as looking at something then one cannot count as perceptually monitoring a thing if one is not, to any degree, attending to it.

In order for condition 2 to be met condition 1 must also, of course, be met. But the converse does not hold. When one attends to something one perceives, that thing is highlighted. 9 It is brought into the foreground of experience. That does not mean that one perceives nothing else but that which is foregrounded or highlighted. Quite the contrary: talk of the experiential foreground brings with it the idea of an experiential background. ‘Highlighting’ implies that something stands out from other things of which one is also, in some respect, aware. To say that attention is or involves highlighting or foregrounding is to say very little about it. But this is no objection here, where this little is all that needs to be said.

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7 Roughly. See Crowther 2009a for a qualification to this claim that arises from thinking about watching, specifically.

8 Though this is not made explicit in Crowther’s published discussions of perceptual activity it is implicit in, for example, the claim that listening to O is a process of ‘agentially maintaining perceptual contact with...O with the aim of knowing what sound O is producing’. (2001, p. 183) This aim could not be met by merely maintaining the perceptual relation one stands in to O, without also attending to it.

9 I use ‘attention’ to refer to a personal-level phenomenon. It is beyond the scope of this paper to say anything about how this phenomenon relates to those subpersonal phenomena that are also called ‘attention’.

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In perceptual monitoring, in any mode—sense-perceptual or bodily—one *agentially* keeps the things that one is monitoring in the foreground of experience. 2 obtains, then, because one agentially makes it so when \( o \) is being perceptually monitored. Because the obtaining of condition 2 depends on the obtaining of condition 1, one’s ensuring that 2 obtains requires that 1 obtains too: to keep \( o \) in the foreground I must perceive \( o \), which is to say, stand in a perceptual relation to \( o \). I will argue, in the rest of this paper, that in sense-perceptual monitoring (looking at things, for example, or listening to them) the perceptual relation *itself* is agentially maintained. One keeps \( o \) in the foreground partly by ensuring that one maintains the perceptual relation one stands in to \( o \). The same is not true in the case of bodily awareness. In perceptual monitoring in the bodily mode (‘bodily perceptual monitoring’) one agentially keeps, say, one’s feet in the foreground of experience, but the perceptual relation one stands in to them is maintained quite passively.

**iv.**

*Perceptual monitoring in sense-perception.* The idea of agentially maintaining the perceptual relation in sense-perceptual monitoring is not as obscure as it might sound. The basic idea is that (to again take vision as our easiest-to-talk-about example) when looking at something one keeps it in view or in sight. One does this in order to keep it highlighted or foregrounded. That this is something that we *can* do should not be in doubt. What may be more controversial, and which I will try to defend, is that one does this *whenever* one looks at something or otherwise sense-perceptually monitors it.

Agentially maintaining the perceptual relation in sense-perception involves ensuring that certain disabling conditions for perceiving things don’t obtain.10 A disabling condition for perception of some object, in some modality, is a state of affairs such that if it obtains, perception of that object, in that modality, does not occur. There are many disabling conditions for perceiving objects in sense-perception and in bodily awareness. For instance, if my visual receptors are badly damaged, I will not see the goose in front of me. Similarly, if certain receptors in my hand are damaged badly enough, I will not perceive my hand, in the bodily mode.

Though there are disabling conditions for both sense-perception and bodily awareness, only sense-perception has disabling conditions of the

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10 Or that certain enabling conditions are met: I don’t think it matters if we say that instead.
kind that I will call *Strawsonian* and these are the conditions that we ensure do not obtain in sense-perceptual monitoring. The just-mentioned disabling conditions are not, as will become clear, Strawsonian. But they share some features with them, one of which is that they are *canonical* disabling conditions for perceiving objects in a modality. For instance, it might be that on some occasion, the world is such that I will not see the goose if my hand is behind my back. This is not a canonical disabling condition for seeing the goose. It is the outcome of a particular and peculiar circumstance. In contrast, having badly damaged visual receptors is a canonical disabling condition for visual perception of the goose.

Another feature that the two disabling conditions mentioned at the start of this section share with Strawsonian disabling conditions is that they are *total*. They are conditions the obtaining of which means that one does not perceive the object in question, at all. Some conditions, in contrast, disable just the perception of a property of an object, in the way that certain kinds of lighting might disable perception of an object’s colour. And some conditions disable only optimal perception of an object, in the way that being intoxicated or tired, might. Having badly damaged visual receptors is a total disabling condition for visual perception of the goose.\(^{11}\)

As I have said, Strawsonian disabling conditions too are canonical and total. But the disabling conditions just mentioned are not Strawsonian. What is distinctive about Strawsonian disabling conditions for perceiving something is that they are all further specifications of what it is for it be in the wrong place for one to perceive it, in some modality, specifically because it is either *out of range*, or *masked/obscured*.\(^{12}\) Strawsonian disabling conditions for perceiving objects differ across the five familiar senses. If something is behind me, or behind an opaque object in front-lit conditions, I won’t see it. I might still hear it, but if it is very far away (and not of a certain loudness) I won’t. Unless an odour, or the odour of something, is *in* my nose, I won’t smell it—the odour or its source. If something is not *on*, which is to say, in contact with, my tactually sensitive surfaces, even indirectly, I will not perceive it by touch. And similarly, not being in contact with the appropriate surfaces of my mouth disables taste (or gustatory) perception of something. In sense-perceptual monitoring one agentially maintains the perceptual relation in that one ensures that certain, and now we can say more specifically, *Strawsonian*, disabling

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\(^{11}\) Total disabling conditions, note, need not prevent perception in some modality *totally*. When I am too far away from the goose to see it I am still able to see, and will (usually) actually see other things at that time.

\(^{12}\) I call these conditions ‘Strawsonian’ because (see also §7) P. F. Strawson gives them a special place in his account of perception and our concept of perception. See Strawson 1974, p. 79.
conditions don’t obtain.

v.

Agentially maintaining the perceptual relation in sense-perception. Sense-perceptual monitoring—looking, listening and so on—requires agential maintenance of the perceptual relation partly because Strawsonian disabling conditions can all too easily obtain. We perceivers move about a lot, and other things can move about a lot too, both the things we are perceiving, or might want to perceive, and other things that can get in the way. Amongst all this moving about, if I am for example looking at the goose, I move around to make sure that the disabling conditions for seeing it do not obtain. If I am looking at it, I move myself or my head or eyes so that things don’t obscure it, from my point of view, and so that it doesn’t go out of range. This ensures that the perceptual relation is maintained.

Not all maintenance of the perceptual relation involves bodily movement. Sometimes I don’t need to move in order to maintain the perceptual relation to something. Suppose I am sat by a window and look out at a tree on a windless day. I don’t move at all, yet I am still looking at the tree. There are two ways in which I might still be maintaining the perceptual relation I stand in to the tree. First, I might ensure that Strawsonian disabling conditions are met not by moving, but by staying: keeping my body, or parts of it, where they are. If the tree stays still, as trees are wont to do, and there’s nothing else around, I’m best off staying where I am, if I want to keep seeing it. Staying still might, in a sense, not be doing very much. But it’s not, in this case, doing nothing.

Second, to the extent that I am really looking at the tree, even to the slightest degree, I am prepared or disposed to make the bodily movements or stayings that may be necessary in order to ensure that the tree doesn’t get out of range or become obscured. The disposition may fail to manifest itself for a number of reasons: perhaps because I am not very interested in the tree, or I’m supposed to be doing something else, or I’m listening to the radio which is close by and don’t want to get too far away from it. It is consistent with being disposed to ensure that a Strawsonian disabling conditions doesn’t obtain that the circumstances are such that that disposition is very unlikely to manifest itself. Nevertheless, I agentially maintain the perceptual relation I stand in to something to the extent that I have this disposition. Put another perhaps more accurate way: there is an agential difference between having the disposition, and not having the disposition. If I don’t have this disposition at all, then I do not count as looking at the tree.
Note that I don’t want to deny that the perceptual relation is sometimes maintained passively, in sense-perception. For example, this might be the case when presented with a stimulus that is continuous, intense and distracting. And perhaps, as Crowther puts it, in a ‘state of extreme perceptual reverie’ (2010: p.224), the perceptual relation one stands in to the objects in one’s vicinity is maintained wholly passively. However, in such cases, one is not looking at or listening to anything, or at least not in the sense in which implies that one is doing something. Perhaps there is a sense of ‘looking’ on which one looks even if one is merely awake with one’s eyes open. If so, this is not the sense of ‘looking’ with which I am concerned.

vi.

Perceptual monitoring in bodily awareness. We cannot maintain the perceptual relation that we stand in to our bodies in bodily awareness by ensuring that Strawsonian disabling conditions do not obtain, because bodily awareness has no Strawsonian disabling conditions. Your body cannot be out of range or obscured, to bodily awareness, as the goose can be, to vision. Apparent counterexamples to this claim can be met by showing that purported Strawsonian disabling conditions for bodily awareness are not canonical or total, or that they do not involve the body being out of range or obscured, perhaps by showing that they are analogous to non-Strawsonian sense-perceptual disabling conditions.

For example, suppose that in a cold room, having sat still for a time, I can no longer feel my foot in its current location. Its being in its current location is a disabling condition for perceiving it and it is true to say that my foot is currently in the wrong place for me to perceive it, in the bodily mode. Why is this not a Strawsonian disabling condition for perceiving my foot in the bodily mode? For several reasons. Strawsonian disabling conditions are, recall, canonical. This, however, is a non-canonical disabling condition in that it is an outcome of a particular and peculiar circumstance, involving my having sat still for a time in a cold room. Furthermore, my foot’s being in the wrong place to be perceived, in this case, is not a way for my foot to be out of range or masked/obscured to bodily awareness. Strawsonian disabling conditions for perceiving things are specifications of what it is for something to be in the wrong place for one to perceive it, in some modality, because it is either out of range, or masked/obscured.

We can also see that this is a non-Strawsonian disabling condition for bodily awareness because analogous sense-perceptual disabling condi-
tions are not Strawsonian disabling conditions. This disabling condition is analogous to, for example, olfactory fatigue, the temporary inability to perceive a particular odour, due to sensory adaptation. Prolonged exposure to an odour is a non-Strawsonian disabling condition for perceiving it. If this condition obtains, one can reinstate normal receptivity by, for instance, sniffing coffee beans. Moving one’s foot to a new location in the cold room is not like bringing it back into range. It is like sniffing coffee beans.

Other counterexamples to the claim that bodily awareness lacks Strawsonian disabling conditions can be met similarly. Grant then, that bodily awareness lacks Strawsonian disabling conditions, so we cannot maintain the perceptual relation we stand in to our bodies by ensuring that such conditions don’t obtain. This is not yet enough to establish that bodily perceptual monitoring does not involve maintaining the perceptual relation we stand in to our bodies. For we might maintain it in some other way, by ensuring that some other kind of disabling condition does not obtain.

vii.

Exploiting a grasp of non-Strawsonian disabling conditions in sense-perception and bodily awareness. The purpose of this section is to argue that bodily perceptual monitoring does not involve maintaining the perceptual relation to our bodies by ensuring that non-Strawsonian disabling conditions for perceiving our bodies do not obtain. However, I argue for this conclusion alongside considering whether sense-perceptual monitoring also involves ensuring that non-Strawsonian disabling conditions do not obtain. If sense-perceptual monitoring involves ensuring that non-Strawsonian disabling conditions do not obtain then, contrary to what I have said so far, Strawsonian disabling conditions have no special involvement in sense-perceptual monitoring. Furthermore, reasons for thinking that we do not ensure that these conditions do not obtain in sense-perceptual monitoring and bodily perceptual monitoring are the same, so it is profitable to consider both together.

Since we are concerned to know whether bodily perceptual monitoring involves maintaining the perceptual relation to our bodies, the non-Strawsonian disabling conditions that are relevant to us in this section are those that are total, in the sense described above. Total disabling conditions are, recall, those that disable perception in a modality of some object totally. They do not merely disable the perception of some property of an object, or its optimal perception. In what follows, ‘non-Strawsonian
disabling conditions’ should be read as ‘non-Strawsonian total disabling conditions’. Representative examples of non-Strawsonian disabling conditions for bodily awareness are:

(a) Removal of one’s finger
(b) Appropriate receptors in one’s fingers not working

Representative examples of non-Strawsonian disabling conditions for visual perception of an object, in this case the goose again, are:

(a\textsuperscript{1}) Destruction of the goose
(b\textsuperscript{1}) Appropriate receptors in one’s eye not working

The first argument for the claim that we do not ensure that conditions like a, b, a\textsuperscript{1} and b\textsuperscript{1} do not obtain in perceptual monitoring is just that it is implausible that we do. We can imagine some scenarios in which it is true to say that looking at the goose or perceptually monitoring one’s finger in the bodily mode requires that one is ensuring that one of these conditions does not obtain. For example, if the goose is both very vicious and of a very rare breed, and I have been tasked with destroying it, I might, for a period of time, hold off from doing so in order to have a good look at it. Similarly, one can (I think) imagine deliberately not lopping of one’s finger precisely so that one can attend to it for a while. But it does not seem at all plausible that I am always ensuring that condition a\textsuperscript{1} does not obtain whenever I look at a goose, or anything else, and the same goes for a, b and b\textsuperscript{1}. We would not be at all inclined to say that someone is not perceptually monitoring (the goose or their finger) if they did not appear to be making any effort to ensure that conditions a, b, a\textsuperscript{1} or b\textsuperscript{1} (as appropriate) do not obtain.

This quick argument from implausibility is tempting because the reason that sense-perceptual monitoring requires that one ensures that Strawsonian disabling conditions do not obtain (see §5) does not apply to non-Strawsonian disabling conditions. Strawsonian disabling conditions for sense-perception can all too easily obtain due to the fact that we and other objects are prone to move about in relation to one another a great deal. That’s why sense-perceptual monitoring requires ensuring that Strawsonian disabling conditions don’t obtain. We might but in fact do not live in a world in which the objects of perception are always threatened with destruction and our receptors are in constant danger of not working any more.

The argument, however, is too quick. As we have seen, perceptual monitoring in sense-perception does not always involve moving one’s body around in ways that will ensure that the perceptual relation is main-
tained. Nevertheless, I have said, one is only sense-perceptually monitoring something if one is disposed to ensure that appropriate Strawsonian disabling conditions don’t obtain. It might be objected that the fact that we are in a world in which we are not often required to ensure that non-Strawsonian conditions don’t obtain, and so rarely appear to be making an effort to do so, is consistent with our being disposed to ensure that these conditions are not met, too. The only difference, it might said, between our dispositions with respect to non-Strawsonian disabling conditions (for both bodily awareness and sense-perception) and Strawsonian disabling conditions (for sense-perception alone) is that the former are much less likely to manifest themselves. So we need another argument for the claim that we do not ensure that conditions like a, b, a₁ and b₁ don’t obtain in perceptual monitoring.

A second argument—to be spelled out in more detail below—is that any grasp of disabling conditions exploited in perceptual monitoring must be implicit. However, cases of ensuring that non-Strawsonian disabling conditions are not met, when one perceptually monitors, involve exploiting an explicit grasp of those conditions. So these cases do not give us reason to think that perceptual monitoring in the bodily mode involves maintaining the perceptual relation we stand in to our bodies. The first step of the argument is the observation that any account of what perceptual monitoring involves must be true of (for example) looking in any creature who can look, in the relevant sense of ‘looking’. The second step is the claim that, for this reason, no account of perceptual monitoring can involve exploiting an explicit grasp of disabling conditions for perception. To defend this claim, I will say a bit more about what is meant by exploiting an explicit grasp of a disabling condition. Then I’ll explain why we should think that this is not something that young children—who can nevertheless look at things—can do.

One has an explicit grasp of disabling conditions for perceiving things if one can give appropriate explanations of why one perceived what one did—or did not—on some occasion. (Campbell 1995) If the grasp one has of the disabling conditions for seeing something, say, is explicit then one might exploit that grasp in order to maintain the perceptual relation one stands in to an object by engaging in practical reasoning about how to do so that employs the disabling condition as a premise. Exploiting an explicit grasp of a₁, for example, so as to maintain the perceptual relation with the goose, might involve reasoning thus: ‘I want to keep seeing the goose, in order to do so I must not destroy the goose thus I will not destroy the goose.’

Very young children do not have an explicit grasp of Strawsonian or
any other disabling conditions. Evidence for this comes from the fact that three year olds, for example, are much less able than older children to give explanations of what others have perceived. They can answer ‘Can Ernie see the duck?’ when the duck is behind a wall correctly, but they cannot say why Ernie cannot see the duck. (Yaniv and Shatz 1988). Children under the age of four have a more general inability to say how they acquired an item of knowledge, for example, by seeing, feeling, or even by being told. O’Neill and Chong (2001) found that this is so even when children are given the opportunity to show experimenters how they found something out, rather than telling them.

What this shows is that if perceptual monitoring involves maintaining the perceptual relation by exploiting one’s grasp of any disabling conditions, that grasp must be implicit. Exploiting an implicit grasp of perceptual disabling conditions for perceiving o, we can understand just as a matter of doing the right things, and not doing the wrong things, in order to perceive or keep perceiving o. There is evidence that even very young children have an implicit grasp of Strawsonian disabling conditions. For instance, in Yaniv and Shatz’s experiments, the youngest children tested—three year olds—demonstrated that they understood ‘the differential effects of occlusion on hearing versus touching’, i.e., that something can be heard, but not felt through a barrier, and ‘assessed correctly the effects of distance on hearing and seeing versus touching’ (1988: p. 100). Furthermore, one might take it to be obvious that even young infants can look at and listen to the things around them.

What makes it reasonable to think that we ever exploit any kind of grasp of non-Strawsonian disabling conditions in order to maintain the perceptual relation (to our body or other objects) is that we can think up examples of doing so. Two things are notable about the examples that one thus thinks up. First, one imagines cases of exploiting an explicit grasp of the non-Strawsonian disabling conditions. When I decide to hold off from destroying the goose, briefly, in order to look at it for a bit longer, I engage in practical reasoning that employs as a premise the fact that if I destroy the goose I will no longer be able to see it. So, I suggest, at least in advance of further argument or evidence, we should not think that we exploit what grasp we have of non-Strawsonian disabling conditions in the right kind of way for it to be plausible that this characterises all perceptual monitoring.

The second and related notable thing about cases in which one exploits a grasp of non-Strawsonian disabling conditions in maintaining the

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13 See Colombo 2001, especially pp. 351-55, for a brief review of endogenous visual attention in infants as young as 3 months old.
perceptual relation, is that in such cases, one ensures that such conditions don’t obtain intentionally. If you were to ask me, as I hold off from destroying the goose, what I am doing, I would say ‘I’m holding off from destroying it so that I can look at it (or see it) for a bit longer’. In perceptual monitoring, one does not maintain the perceptual relation or ensure that disabling conditions are not met intentionally, although any movements one makes in doing so will be intentional under some description. If I am asked, when looking at the goose in the normal case, what I am doing, I will say something like ‘trying to work out what that goose is up to’ or maybe just ‘watching the goose’.

Since cases of exploiting a grasp of non-Strawsonian disabling conditions in maintaining the perceptual relation involve doing so intentionally, the imaginability of such cases does not support the claim that perceptual monitoring involves maintaining the perceptual relation by ensuring that these kinds of disabling conditions are not met. That is because in perceptual monitoring, one does not ensure that disabling conditions are not met intentionally. That should already be clear. For one, we have said that maintaining the perceptual relation in perceptual monitoring is not a full-blooded action. But also, plausibly, if perceptual monitoring involved intentionally maintaining the perceptual relation it would also involve exploiting an explicit grasp of disabling conditions and I have argued, in this section, that perceptual monitoring cannot involve exploiting an explicit grasp of disabling conditions. That’s not to say that there are not cases in which one does intentionally maintain a sense-perceptual relation to something by exploiting an explicit grasp even of Strawsonian disabling conditions. An arachnophobe undergoing aversion therapy might quite deliberately stay near enough to the spider to look at it/see it. But the arachnophobe is putting her explicit grasp of visual, Strawsonian disabling conditions to quite specific and unusual use here: she is trying to look at the spider, or trying to get herself to look at it. She does not simply maintain the perceptual relation to the spider in perceptually monitoring it.

I have argued that bodily awareness and sense-perception differ agentially. It will not have escaped notice that part of the reason for this agential difference is the presence in the one case, and absence in the other, of sense organs, understood in a certain way. According to Strawson, ‘the naïve concept of perception…includes that of a perspective or view from a certain point of view determined by the position and orientation of the appropriate organs of sense.’ It’s from this aspect of perceiving that what I have called Strawsonian disabling conditions, according to Strawson, ‘flow’. (1974: p. 79) But the lack of agential maintenance of the perceptual relation in perceptual monitoring in the bodily mode is also the result of
our not having the right kind of grasp of non-Strawsonian disabling conditions to be able to exploit them as we do Strawsonian disabling conditions in sense-perceptual monitoring.

viii.

Conclusion: If what I have argued here is right then bodily awareness differs from sense-perception not only phenomenologically and representationally, but also agentially. When we sense-perceptually monitor things, we make a distinctive contribution to our mental lives: we agentially maintain the perceptual relation we stand in to the objects we perceive. The same is not true of bodily awareness. There are interesting relationships to be explored between the phenomenological, representational and agential differences between sense-perception and bodily awareness. And there is much that might be said about how the agential difference between sense-perception and bodily awareness allows the latter to play some important roles that it has for us, for example, in preventing harm to our bodies and in the guidance of action. All this will have to wait for another occasion.

As stated at the outset, my interest in these differences is motivated by wanting to explore whether what makes a faculty a sense is something over and above its being a perceptual faculty. I end with one remark on that background issue. If bodily awareness is not a sense in part or in whole because it differs from sense-perception agentially, then bodily awareness is not a sense only contingently. As we have seen, bodily awareness and sense-perception differ agentially partly because sense-perception has Strawsonian disabling conditions and we live in a world in which the movement of objects relative to us is always a possibility. If we want to find out about those objects, particularly if we want to find out the kinds of things that can only be known via observation over a period of time, we have to do something to keep them in view. There are no other factors (in the extra-bodily world, in our perceptual equipment) that mean that finding out about our bodies requires such vigilance. There might have been though, in which case, if this is part of the truth about what makes a faculty a sense, bodily awareness might have been a sense, too.

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