

More on cross-modal binding and singular propositions

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Last time we were talking about the pressure put on intramodal intentionalism by cases of cross-modal binding. These are cases in which, intuitively, we perceptually represent, with distinct senses, an object as being F and as being G , *and* in which it perceptually seems to us that a single object is both F and G . Then it seems that there is a proposition, namely the proposition that

$$\exists x \text{ } x \text{ is both } F \text{ and } G$$

which is the content of my overall perceptual experience, but is not the content of my visual experience, or my auditory experience, or

One can of course deny that there are such cases of ‘experienced togetherness’, as Tye puts it. But as usual we can take our intuitions about what would count as an illusory experience – a case of perceptual misrepresentation – as a rough guide to the contents of our experience. And there do seem to be cases in which we would be inclined to take our experience to be illusory if something turned out to be F , and something else turned out to be G .

This indicates that one of the following two things is true: (i) in addition to visually representing, etc., we also, in addition to these ‘modal’ representational states, simply perceptually represent some things which are not represented in any sense modality; or (ii) talk about visual representation etc. is just talk about an aspect of what we perceptually represent. The worry was that (ii) seems difficult for the intramodal intentionalist to accept, since it seems to involve giving up what Tye calls ‘separatism’ about sense experiences, and that (i) seems weird.

Last time we considered the possibility that the intramodal intentionalist could respond by taking the contents of the relevant experiences to be not existentially quantified contents (as above), but rather singular propositions which predicate the relevant properties of particular objects. So in the sort of case above the perceiver might have a visual experience with the singular content

$$o \text{ is } F.$$

and an auditory experience with the singular content

o is G .

If the experiences had these contents, this would explain, in an intramodal-friendly way, the fact that we would count an experience as illusory when the F -thing is distinct from the G -thing. But there are two problems with this way of handling the cases:

- It does not account for the intuition that we experientially represent the relevant object as both F and G , unless we endorse some sort of closure principle for perceptual representation. But this sort of closure principle does not seem obvious; aren't their cases in which we can perceptually represent one object as F and that object as G but without representing any object as both F and G ?
- A related concern is that this view arguably can't really explain the relevant illusory cases. Suppose we have a case in which the object o which seems to be F is really distinct from the object o^* which seems to be G . In this sort of case won't the visual experience have the content that o is F , but the auditory experience have the content that o^* is G ? But both these propositions could be true; hence we would not have a false perceptually represented proposition to explain the illusion that the experience is illusory.

Now, the choice between intra- and intermodal intentionalism is not an all-or-nothing thing. One could be a local intermodal intentionalist, and say that any two perceptual experiences with the same overall content must also have the same overall perceptual phenomenology, without saying the same thing about the content and phenomenal character of someone's perceptual-cum-attentional state, for instance.

But the cross-modal cases can also be used to put some pressure on this sort of local intentionalism, because it seems that we can come up with cases of cross-modal binding in which the relevant modalities are not modalities of perceptual experience at all. Consider a case where you see yourself being stabbed. Intuitively, don't you perceptually represent the knife as located in a certain spot and as causing the pain you feel? But you surely can't visually represent pains, right? The obvious response is that we should take one's 'overall perceptual experience' to include pain sensations (and indeed all bodily sensations, since this sort of 'binding' argument generalizes).

Does this sort of argument show that a local intentionalism limited to perceptual experiences is inherently unstable?