

*The modality of emotions sens dessus de Sousa*

*Our runny nose, the cause of our sadness?  
Our Ronnie knows the cause of this madness.*

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**Abstract** The issue of the phenomenology of emotion is a conceptual mess. The phenomenology of emotion, and its so called “affectivity” in particular, are widely perceived to be key to the understanding of what emotions are, and yet they are very difficult to describe. In this paper, I embrace de Sousa’s optimist claim that we can enhance our understanding of emotional phenomenology with the help of the idea that there is an emotion ‘modality’. Following his path, I wish to argue for the following: Neither phenomenology nor relativity is incompatible with viewing emotions as importantly analogous to perceptions, in a way that supports at least a graduated claim to objectivity. (De Sousa 1987, 141). I show how difficult it is for current emotion theories to account for both the objectivity and the relativity characteristics of emotions. Emotion ‘modality’ does not seem to encompass both. And, while the modality of emotion seems to drive a wedge between emotion and perception, I argue that this is not the case. In my opinion, the modality of perception is distinct from the intentional content of perception, as well as from its phenomenology. Similarly, if the ‘modality’ of emotion is not part of the intentional content of emotion (i.e., if it is not what emotions are about or directed to), it is disconnected from emotional phenomenology. However, when the modality of emotion designates values, it is a good candidate to account for their phenomenal character. I claim that the same could be said for perceptual states.

## 1. Introduction

Ronnie de Sousa's contribution to the understanding of emotion is peerless. By showing how emotions and rationality are inherently related, *The Rationality of Emotion* not only revolutionized the topic, but also anticipated and responded to criticisms and objections to the view defended by de Sousa and those inspired by his work. De Sousa discusses, for instance, how the biological roots of emotions manifest themselves in our contemporary environments and proposes a perceptualist view that meets some requirements that Jamesian theories do not meet. In the process he opens new doors, asks new questions, and raises new problems. He explains emotion intentionality through a typology of emotion objects, explores the question of correctness and truth, the analogies and disanalogies between emotions and other mental states, as well as the difficulties raised by phenomenology and consciousness in relation to emotion. Nothing is left out; each sentence gives food for thought. In *The Rationality of Emotion*, de Sousa laid out the questions about emotions that have been asked for the past 35 years and he gave us enough to think and write about for at least 35 more.

My intention here is not to criticize or find gaps in de Sousa's work. I won't even comment on it. I will rather pick a delightfully appetizing piece of the *food* he provides: a specific claim that I will discuss throughout this paper in light of current debates about emotions. Here is the claim at stake:

Neither phenomenology nor relativity is incompatible with viewing emotions as importantly analogous to perceptions, in a way that supports at least a graduated claim to objectivity. (De Sousa 1987, 141).

In what follows I will consider the issues related to this claim that emotion researchers have been discussing ever since. Ronnie de Sousa saw them coming, so this paper is not an attempt to add, correct, or redirect his claim. My plan is rather to defend a similar claim from a new perspective. So, I shall focus on the difficulty to conciliate the characteristic

objectivity and relativity of emotions within current emotion theories. As we shall see, trying to reconcile objectivity and relativity seems to force upon us the conclusion that the phenomenologies of emotion and perception are of a different nature.

In *The Rationality of Emotion* and subsequent work, de Sousa has already raised questions related to this claim and offered satisfactory answers. My argument will relate to a conceptual struggle that has been at the center of some discussions since then. This struggle revolves around the notion of emotional ‘modality’ and its relationship with phenomenology.

The issue of the phenomenology of emotion is a conceptual mess. The phenomenology of emotion, and its so-called “affectivity” in particular, are widely perceived to be key to the understanding of what emotions are, and yet they are very difficult to describe. Perceptual phenomenology is at least partly captured by different perceptual modalities that can specify types of perceptual experiences. For example, seeing or hearing one and the same object has been said to give rise to different experiences because the former is processed by a visual modality and the latter by an auditory modality. Because there is no emotional organ(s), the emotional modality or modalities is (or are) supposed to be determined differently than the perceptual modality. Does this threaten their objectivity? Since de Sousa’s offered his own solution in terms of perceptualism, new complexities have been brought up, new problems have been raised, and new theories have been proposed. Emotions researchers have notably come with different accounts on the modality of emotions to account for emotion phenomenology, some of them rejecting perceptualism. In what follows, I wish to discuss the modality of emotion, that supposedly threatens the analogy between emotion and perception, and to reconcile it with perceptualism.

I start with perceptualism and its explanation of emotional phenomenology in terms of modality (2). I then consider how perceptualism threatens relativity (3). I examine the responses of attitudinalists and how their account is a threat to objectivity (4). Next, I review alternative accounts and discuss their struggle to characterize the emotion modality that satisfies both the relativity and the objectivity criteria (5). In this connection, I suggest

getting rid of the modality as part of the explanation of phenomenology, for both perception and emotion, which leads us to agree with de Sousa's claim. The resulting characterisation of emotional phenomenology is compatible with a parallel understanding of the phenomenology of perception. I conclude that the modality of emotion does not threaten its relativity, nor its objectivity (6).

## 2. Emotion phenomenology as modality: from James to perceptualism

Perceptualism captures the phenomenology of emotions by drawing on their similarities with perception. Some perceptualist accounts are close to the Jamesian model, which has it that emotion feelings are the modality of emotion. According to James, emotions are feelings of bodily changes that result from our interactions with the environment (James 1884). Sadness amounts to feeling the body reacting a certain way. This *certain way* is considered a cause or a trigger of the emotion, and it is what explains the emotion's phenomenology: it is by being aware of bodily changes that I am sad, angry or scared. A Jamesian considers that what it feels like to have an emotion has to do with one's bodily feelings. Because emotions are the result of bodily reactions, there is nothing like a representational object outside of the bodily states or changes. Emotion phenomenology is not captured by a representational content to be found outside of the bodily feelings. We are sad *because* we cry; the feeling of sadness is the one of the body reacting sadly. The feeling component by constituting the modality of emotion, can thus distinguish emotions from other non affective states, such as perception. Merely hearing a remark differs from being angry at it because the remark is perceived only through an auditory modality in the former case, while it is perceived also through an emotional modality in the latter case.

This view creates an important difficulty for objectivity: one can grant that feelings have no 'object', but this is not the case for emotions. Emotions are (at least sometimes) intentional, they are directed at some object, they are 'about' things or states of affairs<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> See Teroni (2017) for another description of this same problem. His solution is to consider that there is a sense in which feelings are intentional. While I agree with this solution, I do not discuss it here, as it is not about the following problem.

They have objects of many kinds, notably particular objects—they are directed at, or triggered by, things, events; and formal objects—these are specific evaluative properties<sup>2</sup>. A certain occurrence of fear is about the dangerous aspect of falling. But feelings of the body that constitute emotions are not necessarily about anything, the trembling associated with the fear of falling is not about the fear of falling. The feeling of emotion (the body) is thus distinct from the representational object of emotion (the falling). So, if the feeling constitutes the modality of emotion, the modality of emotion (the bodily changes) is distinct from emotion intentional object (the falling). And indeed, emotions are not only a bodily way of relating to an object. The attribution of danger does not (only) come from one's body reacting in a fearful way, but from a dangerous object or situation, at least most of the time. Otherwise, emotions would have no correctness conditions; their rationality would be very much imperiled. A Jamesian view is a threat to the objectivity of emotion; the modality is not sufficient to account for it.

Ronnie de Sousa has assessed the rationality of emotions (1987) in terms of success, with the help of the revolutionary idea of 'paradigm scenarios'. Their formal objects make emotions into different types of evaluations, while the sorts of responses they elicit make them successful in terms of biology and culture (see de Sousa, 1987, chapter 7). So, there is more to determining the modality of emotions than the changes occurring in the body. This has led some to reconsider the identification of emotions with feelings. Formal objects seem to have a role to play in emotions, distinguishing not only emotions from perceptual states, but also specifying emotion types: the modality of anger is different from that of fear, or love, for instance. Some perceptualists have successfully reconciled this idea with Jamesian models.

According to Prinz notably (2004), the intentionality of emotion comes from one's perception of one's body (the feeling) which allows one to represent some state of affairs, given that the bodily changes are triggered by various events. The danger is the 'real content' of the emotion of fear, but it is represented only *indirectly*, in virtue of the feeling of bodily changes that are correlated with danger. Through evolution and learnt patterns,

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<sup>2</sup> See de Sousa, 1987, Chapter 5 who proposes a typology of emotion objects.

some situations trigger bodily responses that, once perceived, create a feeling (the emotion) that allows us to recognize the danger (Prinz, 2004, p.68). According to this view the modality of emotion is the feeling, and the emotion content is an intentional object that is distinct from the bodily changes<sup>3</sup>. By allowing that emotions have intentional objects that are distinct from bodily changes, this conception improves upon James's account. Thus, because the intentional object of an emotion is represented as having a value, the modality of emotion would be their feeling, but the emotional content would go beyond their modality. Most post-Jamesian theories of emotions thus consider that emotions encompass an evaluative component, whether a minimal appraisal or a cognitively demanding process (Moors et al. 2013). However, this raises the question of whether and how the ascription of a value is part of the explanation of emotion phenomenology.

Even if they disagree about the details of their accounts, perceptualists generally hold that emotions are similar to, or are a kind of, perceptual experience (De Sousa 1987; Döring 2007; Prinz 2004; 2006; Tappolet 2000; 2016). A prominent approach is to consider emotion intentionality as having an evaluative content<sup>4</sup>. This makes emotions a specific perceptual modality of ascribing values, which are considered both the content of emotion and part of the explanation of their phenomenology. The idea is that ascribing an offense explains what anger feels like.

If one wants to defend de Sousa's claim – recall: 'Neither phenomenology nor relativity is incompatible with viewing emotions as importantly analogous to perceptions, in a way that supports at least a graduated claim to objectivity.' – it would be ideal to have the best of both worlds: 1. Relativity: an account that allows some objects to lead to different mental states and different emotions, compatible with Jamesians who hold that the feelings of emotion (the phenomenology) are the changes of the body, which explains variability among individuals and 2. Objectivity: a good candidate for a solid materialist explanation of the phenomenology, which seems to be promising through more recent perceptualism

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<sup>3</sup> Neo-jamesians never denied that emotions objects are part of the story. But they deny that they are part of the affective component. The important point for our purpose here is that according to these views, what one calls emotion refers to the feeling.

<sup>4</sup> For a recent clarifying approach, see Tappolet, 2016.

describing phenomenology as being captured by the intentional content: emotions depend on representations of objects, outside of one's bodily changes. If emotion phenomenology depends on a manner of relating to the world, how does it work? What is this modality? A parallel with theories of perception can shed light on these questions.

Intentionalism is generally a theory used to account for perception phenomenology in terms of representation or intentionality: what it is like to perceive (visually for example), comes from or 'supervenes on' the object and its properties. The phenomenology of seeing something differs from the one of hearing because they have two distinct modalities: the former is visual while the latter is auditory<sup>5</sup>. The phenomenology is explained in terms of a representation of external object or properties<sup>6</sup>. De Sousa has drawn the parallel with emotion. He explains that perception happens through "objective information conveyed by the sensory 'transducers' whose function is to convert physical quantities into representations." (p.150). For emotion, this would require particular objects and their value properties – their formal objects – to be 'converted into representations'. What it is like to be angry would be a modality that comes from evaluating that something is offensive. Emotion phenomenology would result from the ascription of values to emotion objects. And if that explanation of phenomenology of emotion succeeds, we seem to have a good preservation of the parallel between emotions and perception: what it is like to feel angry would be explained by the representation of an object – an offensive remark.

Now, can perceptualism also preserve relativity? How do we explain intersubjective differences so emotions can be relative to the emoter? I now consider this question, which has led to new theories of emotions that detach values from emotion intentionality.

### **3. Objections to perceptualism: the struggle with relativity**

*'Relativity* is the view that the properties attributed to the objects are really produced by relations between the object and the observer. (...) The perceptual qualities of objects come

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<sup>5</sup> See Crane 2003 for more details.

<sup>6</sup> For intentionalist accounts of perception, see (Byrne 2001; Crane 2003; Tye 2007).

into existence as a result of the interaction of subject and object' (de Sousa, 1987, p.146). In the case of perception, to understand these phenomenal qualities one can rely on both the perceived objects out there (or their properties) and the perceiver and her cognitive apparatus. The perceiver has what de Sousa was calling 'transducers', i.e. visual functions, perceptual abilities, and particularities, etc. that allow for the construction of object representations. It seems that most differences in phenomenology of perceiving one and the same object can be explained by biological or functional differences: the visual representation of a color is different between a color-blind person and a person with typical vision because of differences in eyes' cone cells, explained by genetic differences.

Now, in the case of emotions, it is not obvious that the same explanation of relativity can be given. As de Sousa explains, 'it seems pretty clear that emotions do not have organs or transducers' (1987, p.150). However, values differ interindividually; whether something is actually dangerous or offensive<sup>7</sup>, it might be evaluated as dangerous by me, offensive by you and lovable by someone else. To explain interindividual differences in emotions, something must happen on the subject side of the interaction, rather than solely on the object one: 'If Sharon's aloofness makes Jennifer angry and amuses Franz, it is quite reasonable to say that they relate in different ways to one and the same thing' (Deonna and Teroni, 2015, p.297). Their differences in affects do not seem to depend on the object of emotion, but on the relation of the individual with the object in question. If emotional feelings reflect perceptions of objects and their properties, as a perceptualist holds, how do we explain that the same object and its properties can trigger different emotions? In fact, intentionalism has it that the phenomenology supervenes on the content, so if values were part of emotion intentional content, they should not lead to different phenomenologies.

This is why most researchers on emotion cannot defend a pure form of intentionalism. According to 'pure intentionalism', the phenomenal character of a mental state is *entirely* determined by its intentional content (Byrne 2001; Crane 2009). The only pure

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<sup>7</sup> A solution to this problem would be to be a strong relativist about values and claim that nothing is actually dangerous or offensive outside of a cognizer's recognition of it. I do not provide an argument here, that would require another paper, but I take it that a minimal realism is a matter of consensus: some things are dangerous for oneself outside of one's perception of it.



intentionalist accounts of emotion consider emotion objects as having *sui generis* properties, where values are inherent to the intentional content (Mendelovici 2013). This account is very different from a perceptualist view, as it detaches the intentional content (the affective properties) from the particular object: in fact, affective properties are close to Chalmers's 'Edenic properties', i.e., 'familiar qualities we experience' but that are 'foreign to our scientific understanding of the world and we have no emotion-independent evidence for their instantiation' (p.144). Objects (a cliff, one's aloofness) would thus be dangerous or offensive when they are objects of emotion, but these properties would not be part of them: 'it is quite implausible that objects ever actually have Edenic affective properties' (p.144). That leaves open the question of affectivity: how is this compatible with a materialist account of emotions, or an 'objective' one in de Sousa's words? All these questions seem to lead to responses in terms of attitude, or modality. What is this modality then, if there are no emotion 'transducers'?

One possibility is to consider that the modality is simply the values that are ascribed: if the particular object is not affective, the formal object is. Anger is about offensiveness, offensiveness being the formal object of anger, it is anger's intentional content, and it explains the negative and intense feeling of anger. The ascription of values seems to be a useful way of distinguishing between emotion types and to give precisions on emotion objects. If these were indeed part of the emotion content, the modality of emotion would simply be a modality of value ascription, which is what perceptualists can defend. And the mystery of relativity would be solved if the phenomenology, e.g., the feeling of fear of falling, is explained by emotion intentional content, e.g., the dangerousness that one ascribes to falling, or the absence of this feeling for someone else, simply coincides with the absence of such ascription<sup>8</sup>.

However, theories that have emerged since de Sousa's account refute the claim that values are part of the intentional content (Dokic and Lemaire 2015; Kriegel 2002; 2017; Teroni and Deonna 2015). According to them, values are not what emotions are about. The easy

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<sup>8</sup> And ascriptions can be explained by individual history, personality traits, preferences, characteristics, etc.

way to illustrate this is to consider that anger is not about the offensive: I am angry at my sister's remark, not at its offensive aspect, I do not take offense to the offensiveness. In this view, values are the formal objects of emotions but they are not represented by the emotion. What makes emotions 'emotional' is their phenomenology, not their evaluative content. In fact, attitudinalists suggest that if perceptualists 'have been right to emphasize the rational aspects of emotions, they have gone much too far in disregarding their phenomenology' (Teroni, 2017, p.300). As such, the modality of emotion must be found in its phenomenology, but not in its evaluative content: 'Accounting for emotional modes in terms of beliefs or desires proves no more satisfying than doing so in terms of body-directed feelings' (Teroni, 2017, p.300). If this can be seen as a trivial disagreement—is the modality of emotions to be found in the intentional content or in the phenomenology?—it is a direct threat to intentionalism: the evaluative component of emotion is no longer part of emotion intentional content but is still inherent to phenomenology (what it is like to be angry has to do with the offensive in some way). The phenomenology would go beyond intentionality, and emotions would be 'distinct and basic psychological modes'(Teroni 2017, p.305).

But after all, do we need intentionalism to ensure objectivity? Can we not forget intentionalism and find another way to explain emotion phenomenology that is similar to the explanation of perception phenomenology? If so, we need to find a way to answer the following question. Objects of perception are part of their intentional content; when I see a red tomato my visual perception is directed at the red tomato. So how do we explain phenomenology of emotion, if formal objects of emotions are not part of their intentional content?

I now consider attitudinal views in more detail, and some objections to them in terms of objectivity.

#### **4. Attitudinal views and objections: the lack of objectivity**

According to attitudinal theories of emotions, during an emotion episode the particular object of the emotion (the remark, the person making it, the relationship one has with that person, etc.) and its evaluative properties (the offensiveness) are represented in the relevant ‘attitude’ (Deonna and Teroni 2015) (anger). The relevant attitude of anger is to feel one’s body as preparing to deal with the offense ‘in an actively hostile way’ (p.303). This feeling of action readiness associated with the evaluative property of the object (the offensiveness) makes one emotionally affected, e.g., relating to the offense through an angry attitude. If this is right, the phenomenology would be explained by both the content of emotion and its modality. Offensiveness, dangerousness, or the disgusting would come from particular objects that are apprehended through a certain type of emotion, through a specific emotional modality/attitude (an angry one, a scared one, a disgusted one).

According to this view, the value is the result of one’s emotion phenomenology: my anger is related to the offensive ‘in virtue of’ the way it feels. The modality determines the phenomenology, which explains the evaluation. As Dokic and Lemaire (2015) explain, according to attitudinal views ‘part of the phenomenology of the emotion is provided by the content of the emotion (...), while another part is provided by the emotional attitude itself over and above its content, i.e., by what is sometimes called its ‘intentional mode [modality]’, or ‘mode’ for short’.

The manner emotions represent the world would be part of their phenomenology, but not of their intentional content. If so, the same emotional content (particular object) could trigger different feelings depending on the modality through which it is apprehended. For instance, a given remark could be apprehended through the modality of anger, and in this sense be seen as offensive by someone, and apprehended through the modality of fear and be seen as threatening and dangerous by someone else. The phenomenology of these two experiences is incontestably different, and according to attitudinalism, it is because they are lived through distinct modalities of apprehension. The content –the remark—remains the same.

This attitudinalist approach to emotions corresponds to ‘impure’ intentionalism about perception, according to which the phenomenal character of an experience is fixed both by

the content *and the intentional modality* of perceptual states<sup>9</sup>. This is what Crane proposes about perception. According to him, the representational modality of perception is not part of the representational content:

The phenomenal character of a visual experience of an aeroplane flying overhead is given by giving its content—the aeroplane, its shape and size and so on—and by giving the experience’s intentional mode: seeing. The phenomenal difference between seeing an aeroplane overhead and hearing one is partly a matter of the content—*what* is experienced—but also a matter of the mode of apprehending this content, the intentional mode in Searle’s sense. (Crane 2003, 21)

Crane thinks that the same idea can be applied to emotions, that the modality is what differentiates emotions from perceptions. As he explains: “the difference between feeling and seeing (...) is a difference in what Searle and I call mode, and what others would call ‘attitude’” (Crane 2009, 480). Emotion phenomenology would be explained partly by the ascription of a value (offense) to a particular object (an insulting remark), and partly by the modality of anger that makes one apprehend it ‘angrily’. Emotions would feel the way they feel because of the manner they represent the world, for example through an ‘angry mode’. And what it is like to hear a remark would be explained by the remark that is apprehended through the modality of hearing.

But now the question of the differences in phenomenology becomes a question about differences in modalities: why does someone interpret the remark as offensive, or through an angry modality, while someone else does it through a scary one? Where does the offensive aspect come from, beyond the particular object?

These questions are not about explaining the occurrence of one specific modality over another, i.e., interpersonal differences: there are valid reasons that can explain why some people are more prone to feel anger than others, depending on their ‘cares and concerns’

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<sup>9</sup> This is also in accordance with ‘non-reductionist intentionalism’ according to which the phenomenal character cannot be reduced to the representation of the objects or their properties without appeal to feelings (Langsam 2020).

(Roberts 2003), among others characteristic traits. The relevant question here concerns the occurrence of emotion modality, i.e., of the emotional attitude that is not just a characteristic of the particular object: where is the offensiveness if not in the emotional content? These missing links between phenomenology and emotional objects have been noticed by Dokic and Lemaire who write: ‘the defender of the Attitudinal View owes us an explanation of how emotions appear as evaluative attitudes although their content is non-evaluative.’ (Dokic and Lemaire 2015). How is the feeling of being angry or scared elicited if not from an evaluative content, i.e., from the subject’s apprehension of the offensive or the dangerous? If values are not part of the intentional content of emotions, as attitudinal theorists claim, where do they come from? According to Deonna and Teroni, the explanation lies in the modality. But, as we saw they claim that the modality of emotions is basic and distinct from perceptual modalities, so it is not explanatory of the link between phenomenology and intentional content. To ensure objectivity of emotion we need to understand how emotion feelings are connected to emotion content, or, in other words, what explains the modality of emotion.

One can bite the bullet, accepting that the link between the feeling and the emotional content cannot be found, and that de Sousa’s criterion of objectivity is hopeless. It amounts to recognizing and accepting the mystery of emotion modality or phenomenology. Crane even seems to reserve the explanation in terms of modality for emotion exclusively for cases that cannot make sense in terms of intentional content. He writes about affectivity that ‘objects can seem loveable, valuable, in need of care, frightening or nauseating. This can be, depending on the case in question, an aspect of their content or an aspect of their intentional mode.’ (Crane 2009, 490). Note here that it also loosens the potential parallel with perception that was not yet threatened by these views<sup>10</sup>.

At this point, it seems that we must choose between relativity and objectivity, i.e., between 1. accepting that affectivity is relative for mysterious reasons, or 2. defending that (inter and intra) individual differences in feelings follow differences in objects. Number one is obviously not satisfying. And number two is difficult to maintain: if nothing such as qualia

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<sup>10</sup> However, attitudinal theorists do not need to pursue this parallel, as they are not perceptualists.

or sense data explain phenomenology of emotion, what can account for interindividual differences, or for differences between emotions and beliefs or judgments?

As de Sousa fans, we should have it all. And ideally, we would find a response that does not threaten the parallel between emotion and perception.

So, can objectivity only be ensured at the price of relativity of affect, or can emotion take the direction of perception towards a materialist account of phenomenology? Before defending the latter, let me consider further alternatives.

### **5. Alternatives and objections: the difficulty of explaining phenomenology**

We saw that Jamesians rely on the body. To some extent, attitudinalists do the same<sup>11</sup>. But the body alone is a poor candidate to isolate the emotional modalities from other types of sensations. It is also a poor candidate to isolate them from other types of representations: as several authors have noticed, one is not necessarily noticing one's body or even oneself as being moved while having an emotion<sup>12</sup>. Noticing this lacuna, Mitchell explains: 'when emotion experientially presents its particular object as fearsome or beautiful, there is paradigmatically no (explicit) self-reference in the content of the experience' (Mitchell 2020, 18).

Adverbialism provides an alternative way to characterise the modalities of both emotion and perception. This solution also ensures the parallel between these two types of experiences. According to adverbialism, perceptions are closer to sensations than to objective representations. The object of perception is an attribute that modifies one's mental state: perceiving a red tomato is perceiving redly, roundly, etc. (C.J. Ducasse 1942, 1951). Similarly, emotions would be closer to sensations, understood as mental states or events that create a certain experience by modifying the world, making it appear a certain way. Emotions, like perceptions, would be types of conscious states or events. Sartre

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<sup>11</sup> See Teroni (2017) for more details.

<sup>12</sup> On this, see Poellner (2016, 273), Pendoley and Arnaud (2020), and Mitchell (2017). Note that this issue is more complex and still open for debate, and much more has to be said about the role of the body in emotion, but these discussions are beyond the scope of this paper.

considered emotions as ways of solving difficulties through a transformation of consciousness (Sartre, 1939, p.63) –that allows one to consider the world and its object in a different fashion, to ‘transform it’ (p.64) (Sartre 1939). Similarly, an adverbialist account of emotions has it that emotions make one be in the world angrily, scarily, or lovingly<sup>13</sup>; thus giving a transformative shift of perspective.

While such an account reflects well on the relativity, it also leads to a problem of circularity: the phenomenology is only explainable in terms of states of consciousness, in other words, in terms of feelings. The phenomenology of anger, its intense and negative aspect for example, would be explained by the way the world appears to one, i.e., angrily. But the phenomenology is already in the modality: ‘angrily’ is explained by the way one is representing the world, which is explained by the way the world feels to one, which is exactly what we want to explain. The feeling is both part of the explanans and the explanandum. The explanation is circular, and we are lacking the criteria of objectivity. Explaining the phenomenology in terms of the body with Jamesians or attitudinalists was at least a way to avoid this circularity<sup>14</sup>. Adverbialism might make us regress and return to the mysteries of Sartre’s account, far from finding a satisfactory materialist account of emotions.

A third possible response is the one offered by Mitchell, who recently proposed to consider emotion modality as a feeling of the *valence* of the attitude (Mitchell 2020). The attitude would itself be valenced (one would favor or disfavor the object or its properties) and this valence would be *felt* and would result in emotion phenomenology. The feeling of the valence would represent the evaluation of the object. In the case of anger, Mitchell explains: ‘the experience includes felt disfavour, which affectively represents the disvalue of the offensive remark’ (p.20). These attitudes would be the modalities or the ‘vehicles’ for the evaluation. But Mitchell also recognizes that ‘the *of* in ‘feelings of favour and disfavour’ is one of specification (specifying the relevant attitude), rather than

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<sup>13</sup> For an adverbialist account of emotions, see Berninger (2016).

<sup>14</sup> I thank Fabrice Teroni for this remark. Note that with these solutions though, the criterion of objectivity is not met (see preceding section).

intentionality’ (p.20). According to him, attitudes are not evaluative properties, they are not part of the intentional content. In agreement with attitudinalists, he considers that emotions cannot be *about* or *directed at* the manner or the way they represent the world. So whatever an emotional modality is—an attitude that evaluates, a feeling that is associated with this attitude—it is not part of the emotion’s intentional content. These manners or ways are the modalities through which emotions represent the world and they still need an explanation. And if ‘they are arguably an essential part of the phenomenal character of emotional experience’ (p.21), as Mitchell suggests, this view implies rejecting intentionalism and getting closer to a *sui generis* affective intentionality proposed by Mendelovici.

With Deonna and Teroni (2015), Mitchell acknowledges that the attitude cannot be part of the intentional content of emotion but still determines the phenomenal character. As such, these theories have the advantage to not be ‘relational’: they do not explain the phenomenology as a property that supervenes on the relation between the emoter and the object<sup>15</sup>. But even if they are non-relational (contrary to most theories of emotions that are trying to explain phenomenology<sup>16</sup>), they have it that a part of the phenomenal character depends on some feeling unexplained by emotion content.

I now wish to suggest that the parallel between emotion and perception is still valid. Not by considering that there is an emotion modality that goes beyond evaluations—as we still do not know what that would be—but because the modality of perception is not needed in the explanation of perception phenomenology.

## **6. Getting rid of the modality: relativity and objectivity of emotion and perception**

I now consider a way to avoid the threats against both relativity and objectivity of emotion phenomenology through the formulation of a negative hypothesis. I suggest that the modality is not only absent from the intentionality of emotion, but also non-necessary to explain its phenomenology. I also suggest that this does not threaten the parallel with

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<sup>15</sup> I take it that a supervenience claim is a threat to objectivity.

<sup>16</sup> See (Aydede & Fulkerson, 2014; Lutz, 2015; Mendelovici, 2013; Montague, 2009).



perception. In fact, contrary to what is generally assumed, I wish to argue here that the modality of perception is neither what perception is about, nor what explains what a perceptual experience feels like.

Take Crane's example of the aeroplane. What is the difference between seeing and hearing an aeroplane overhead? What is it like to have each of these experiences?

There might not be a straightforward response to these questions. But let me consider them in turn. Take the first one: what is the difference between seeing and hearing an aeroplane overhead? The representation of an aeroplane overhead is a complex one, even at the level of one modality. First, seeing an aeroplane does not amount to representing each of its properties visually and assembling them together. In fact, what we take as a visual representation of an aeroplane has good chances to depend not only on sensory stimuli that directly impact vision, but also on other conscious or unconscious representations. Some will be attached to other modalities, such as the sound of the aeroplane, and others will not be attached to any modality, such as the occluded parts of the aeroplane that are represented without any direct sensory stimulation; a process called 'amodal completion' (for more detail, see Nanay (2018)).

I won't go into the details of the mechanisms underlying visual perception but what is important for our purpose is that seeing an aeroplane overhead is not only the result of the neurophysiology of visual perception processing the complex assemblage of all the properties of an aeroplane. As such, this experience must be understood as encompassing more than one modality (seeing) on the one side, and the object (the aeroplane) on the other. As a result, the difference between seeing and hearing an aeroplane overhead does not seem to be captured by the modalities. The difference between what it feels like to see and to hear an aeroplane is much more complex than the difference between hearing and seeing.

What if one considers more specific properties of the aeroplane, such as its size or its shape? One might be able to consider modalities for each of them and distinguish between seeing and hearing different properties or the very same properties. But this won't establish the difference between seeing and hearing an aeroplane; it will only establish a list of

different properties, some of them being perceivable only through one modality (like the noise of its engine), others through several, which won't do justice to the difference between seeing and hearing.

And it is not only difficult to associate one modality of perception to one property, but it is even more improbable to be able to distinguish between sensory modalities for the very same property. It is not only shape and size that can be represented—these are obviously related to vision, or potentially touch—not only its sound either—same with audition—but many additional properties, such as the aeroplane's power, its speed, and its direction, which are not specifically given by one modality of perception. I can represent its power through a relation between the (visually seen) speed and the (heard) sound of its turbine engine, or its speed through a combination of visual clues intertwined with my knowledge of average speed of aeroplanes, or with the memory of my previous experience of an aeroplane. The visual perception of the speed itself is made of many other representations, some being perception represented by the senses, some by my imagination or other cognitive processes. The difference in the phenomenal character of these perceptual experiences does not depend on their specific modalities. It can also depend on one's position towards the object, knowledge, interest, curiosity about aeroplanes, etc. Relying on perceptual modalities does not explain differences in phenomenology. Differences in seeing and hearing an object are differences in the properties of this object that are represented by different senses, and differences in their relations that one makes and represents also through different modalities.

Similarly for emotion, relying on the 'modality' of anger versus that of fear does not provide any clues on what it feels like to be angry, as compared to being scared for example. On the contrary, it seems that to describe this difference relying on objects and attribution of some properties has a greater chance of succeeding. Let us see if perception can help us to find a way there.

Now let us consider the second question: what is it like to see or hear an aeroplane overhead? The answer might depend on the perceiver, but I suggest that there are two ways of considering the question and none of these ways requires reference to the modality of the experience to explain the phenomenal character. 1. The first way is to consider the

question to be about the object: what it is like to see an aeroplane can be described in terms of properties most often accessed through vision (shape, size, etc). And what it is like to hear one, in terms of properties most often accessed through audition (the sound of the engine, etc.). Differences in the experience are explainable by differences in content. When I see it I represent the shape, and when I hear it, the sound. But one could object that this is not capturing exactly the phenomenal character. It is not really what *it is like* to see or hear an aeroplane. 2. So the second way is to consider what the object or these properties *do to the perceiver*: what it is like to see an aeroplane would have to do with the impressions its properties make on her. And these ‘impressions’ are likely to be described in terms of evaluations, or attitudes<sup>1718</sup>. Here is why.

Try to ask a friend what it is like to see or hear an aeroplane. If she describes its shape or sound (considering the question through the first way (1)), try to insist on her telling you what this sound or shape really *does to her*, so she considers the question in the second way (2). I bet your friend will give you an evaluation : ‘I do not like it’, ‘it is too loud’, ‘it is exhilarating’, or an action tendency, motivation or attitude that can only be described as an affect: ‘I want to get away’, ‘it makes me want to fly one’, ‘I feel excited about my next trip’, ‘I am curious about who is inside’<sup>19</sup>. The perception is still directed at the object ‘aeroplane’ and its properties<sup>20</sup>. What it feels like for her is not captured by the modality, but by some properties of aeroplanes that are salient to her, and by some values that she attributes to the aeroplane. If she does not feel anything about the aeroplane or its properties, the honest answer to (2) will be that it does ‘nothing’, she is ‘neutral’, she ‘does not care’, she does not really know what to tell you. In other words, what it feels like for her to see it or hear it will be neutrally valenced<sup>21</sup>. So the phenomenal character can be understood as being the representation of properties of objects, including evaluative ones. I am not arguing (here) that this is all there is about phenomenology (though it might well

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<sup>17</sup> This makes a clear parallel with emotion.

<sup>18</sup> One could also answer that these impressions are likely to be bodily impressions. I have no objection for that: if anything, the same is defended for emotion by Jamesian and attitudinal theories.

<sup>19</sup> Or ‘my heart is pounding’, ‘my body is vibrating’, ‘my ears hurt’.

<sup>20</sup> Or at her body, which becomes the object of her own perception.

<sup>21</sup> One could object that a neutral valence is an absence or valence, but then, why should we still consider that there is a phenomenal character of this visual perception of the aeroplane, and more importantly a difference with the phenomenal character of the auditory perception of it?

be), but that accounting for the sensory modalities of perception does not add to the explanation of its phenomenology. It does not mean the sensory modalities are not part of the explanation of perception: there might be properties that can be either seen, touched or heard; but their representation does not only differ in virtue of the difference in sensory modality, they also differ in virtue of their properties. For example, seeing or hearing the turbine engine are two distinct experiences because they are about distinct properties (the aspect (size, shape, colours) for the former, and the noise (pitch, volume, and timbre) for the latter).

With alternative theories to perceptualism we saw that the modality of emotion was threatening the objectivity criteria. In other words, the fact that modality was not part of emotional intentional content was lowering the explanatory power of emotion phenomenology; and with adverbialism, it only provided a circular explanation. With perceptualism two problems were identified: the first was to draw a parallel with the phenomenology of perception, if perception is explained by sensory modality, when emotions do not have 'transducers'. The second was about the criteria of relativity: how to give an account of differences in phenomenology when one and the same object leads to different emotions?

About the first problem, the development and conclusions drawn here on the modality of perception show that the parallel between emotion and perception phenomenology is no longer threatened: sensory modalities are not explanatory of the phenomenology of perception. About the second problem, much more needs to be done. However, an intentionalist account of the phenomenal character of both emotion and perception could now be considered: in perception, we saw that the phenomenal character can be captured by the representation of properties of objects, and the representations of values, which account for the valence of the representation. That seems very similar to a perceptualist account of emotion which considers that the phenomenal character could be captured by the representation of values. Values are properties of objects: I am angry at an offensive remark. The offensiveness is a property of the remark. And this could be sufficient to trigger a valence, as it is the case for perception. As a more speculative ending point, differences in phenomenology when apprehending one and the same object could be the

result of differences in properties of these objects, and this could open the door to a characterisation of the phenomenology of emotion. If that remark is offensive and you are not angry at it, you might not be representing the offensive remark, but another property of that same remark (its lack of coherence with the discussion for example). Thus, the fact that I am angry at it while you are amused depends on the properties (the values) that are perceived or represented, not on a modality of anger or amusement. This is compatible with both perceptualism and pure intentionalism.

### **Conclusion**

If I am right, the modality of perception is neither what perception is about, nor what explains what a perceptual experience feels like. Similarly, if the modality of emotion is not what emotions are about, it has no explanatory power for emotion phenomenology.

The modality can be understood in two ways: according to the first, it is a ‘manner’, a ‘vehicle’ that remains unspecified for emotion. If so, the modality of emotion and perception is not part of their intentional content: the emotion is not about the way one is acting towards an object, it is about the object one is angry at. Likewise, the visual perception is not directed at the way something is seen, it is about the object seen. According to a second understanding, the modality is a value attributed to objects. It is then one of its properties: the value specifies the content of emotion, it transforms it, and creates an evaluated object. As such, values are part of emotional content and explain their phenomenology. According to this understanding, the modality of perception would not be the seeing or the hearing, but the characteristics one ascribes to the object: the loudness, the curious aspect, etc.

This view has implications about the understanding of phenomenology, opening the door to a pure intentionalist account of emotion. According to pure intentionalism, there is nothing beyond the representation of an object or its properties that can explain what it is like to see it, feel it, or emote it. Pure intentionalism is generally rejected for emotion. My view suggests that a pure intentionalist view of emotion is still on the table, because the

vehicles or modalities are *not a part of the phenomenal character*, neither for emotion nor for perception. If they are, they also are part of the intentional content.

Affectivity remains to be explained. But the phenomenology of both emotion and perception do not have to rely on specific modalities. Affectivity is present for perception too and seems to constitute its phenomenology. So phenomenology does not threaten perceptualism of emotion. Objectivity can still be ensured, and relativity could be found if one were to specify emotion objects. Mental states can have more than one object (Crane 2009). If it is the case, there is no need for modalities. We just need to be more specific about the object the mental state is directed at. And de Sousa's typology of objects is the way to go for this further investigation, starting with the fact that formal objects result from relativity. To close this paper, who else better than Ronnie himself?

*'Phenomenology* does not preclude correspondence to a real property. Indeed, it usually indicates such correspondence. (...) [A] measure of *relativity* is just what we would expect from taking seriously the analogy of perception. If the world is real, it will look different as we move around.'

 (p.201).

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