# Done in 65 ms: Express visuomotor responses in upper limb muscles in Rhesus Macaques

**Running head: Express visuomotor responses in macaques**

Aaron L. Cecala[1,2], Rebecca A. Kozak[3], J. Andrew Pruszynski[1,2], Brian D. Corneil[1,2,4]

[1]Department of Physiology and Pharmacology, Western University, London, Ontario, Canada, N6A 5B7
[2]Robarts Research Institute, 1151 Richmond St. N, London, Ontario, Canada, N6A 5B7
[3]Graduate Program in Neuroscience, Western University, London, Ontario, Canada, N6A 5B7
[4]Department of Psychology, Western University, London, Ontario, Canada, N6A 5B7

**Corresponding Author:** Brian D. Corneil: Robarts Research Institute, 1151 Richmond Street North, Western University, London, ON, Canada, N6A 5B7; E-mail: bcorneil@uwo.ca

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**Abstract**

How rapidly can the brain transform vision into action? Work in humans has established that the transformation for visually-guided reaching can be remarkably rapid, with the first phase of upper limb muscle recruitment, the *express visuomotor response*, beginning within less than 100 ms of visual target presentation. Such short-latency responses limit the opportunities for extensive cortical processing, leading to the hypothesis that they are generated via the subcortical tectoreticulospinal pathway. Here, we examine if non-human primates (NHPs) exhibit express visuomotor responses. Two male macaques made visually-guided reaches in a behavioral paradigm known to elicit express visuomotor responses in humans, while we acquired intramuscular recordings from the deltoid muscle. Across several variants of this paradigm, express visuomotor responses began within 65 ms (range 48–91 ms) of target presentation. Although the timing of the express visuomotor response did not co-vary with reaction time, larger express visuomotor responses tended to precede shorter latency reaches. Finally, the magnitude of the express visuomotor response was muted on trials where NHPs withheld a reach to one stimulus in order to move to a stimulus appearing 34 ms later in the opposite direction. Overall, the response properties and contextual control of express visuomotor responses in NHPs resemble those in humans. Our results establish a new benchmark for visuomotor transformations underlying visually-guided reaches, setting the stage for experiments that can directly test the comparative role of cortical and subcortical areas in reaching when time is of the essence.

**Significance statement:**

Express visuomotor responses in upper limb muscles are brief periods of recruitment preceding visually-guided reaches. Such responses begin ~90 ms after visual target presentation in humans, and potentially arise from signaling along the tecto-reticulo-spinal pathway. Here, we show that express visuomotor responses in macaques upper limb muscles resemble those in humans, excepting that they evolve ~65 ms after target onset, consistent with shorter responses latencies in macaques versus humans. Our results clock the completion of the visuomotor transformation for rapid reaching, and set the stage for experiments to directly test the underlying substrates.

## Introduction

When required, the brain has a remarkable capacity to rapidly transform sensory input into motor output. Expedited responses can consist of eye movements to evaluate a potential threat, or mid-flight adjustments when reaching to a slipping cell phone. In some cases, the brain relies on subcortical circuits that provide a short-latency link between sensation and action, which are nested within broader fronto-parietal circuits mediating more deliberative actions. This appears to be the case for express saccades, which rely on the integrity of the midbrain superior colliculus (SC) and are potentiated by, but not critically reliant on, input from fronto-parietal circuits (Schiller et al., 1987; Edelman and Keller, 1996; Dorris et al., 1997; Dash et al., 2018, 2020). Although the SC has been implicated in mid-flight reach corrections (Day and Brown, 2001; Pruszynski et al., 2016; Reschechtko and Pruszynski, 2020; Suzuki et al., 2022) and interceptions of rapidly moving targets (Perfiliev et al., 2010), debates remain about the comparative role of subcortical versus cortical areas in expedited visually-guided reaching (Fautrelle et al., 2010; Gaveau et al., 2014; Novembre and Iannetti, 2021).

To better understand the neural mechanisms underlying expedited reaches, we and others have studied the timing and response properties of the first change of upper limb muscle recruitment elicited by visual stimulus onset. Doing so establishes the benchmark for how rapidly premotor circuits transform vision into action, and inferences can be drawn by comparing the timing and magnitude of muscle activity to response properties in candidate premotor areas. Such work has revealed that the first wave of upper limb muscle recruitment driven by stimulus presentation evolves within less than 100 ms in humans, regardless of the ensuing reaction time (Pruszynski et al., 2010; Wood et al., 2015; Gu et al., 2016; Kozak et al., 2019; Contemori et al., 2021a). This phenomenon has been termed the stimulus-locked response (Pruszynski et al., 2010) or fast or rapid visuomotor response (Glover and Baker, 2019; Kozak and Corneil, 2021), but lately we have adopted the term express visuomotor response (Contemori et al., 2021a, 2021b) to emphasize similarities with both express saccades and the timing and response properties of visual bursts on premotor cells in the motor layers of the SC (Corneil and Munoz, 2014). The timing and magnitude of such SC visual responses, express saccades, and express visuomotor responses on upper limb muscles are all potentiated by high-contrast, low spatial frequency stimuli (Marino et al., 2012,

2015; Wood et al., 2015; Chen et al., 2018; Kozak et al., 2019; Kozak and Corneil, 2021), and by a variety of cognitive processes promoting premotor preparation (Rohrer and Sparks, 1993; Paré and Munoz, 1996; Munoz et al., 2000; Edelman et al., 2007; Boehnke and Munoz, 2008; Li and Basso, 2008; Bibi and Edelman, 2009; Gu et al., 2018; Contemori et al., 2021b, 2022a).

Here we aim to establish whether express visuomotor responses can be observed in non-human primates (NHPs). We examine three response properties. First, express saccades and the related phenomenon of express neck muscle responses occur ~20 ms earlier in NHPs than humans (Fischer and Boch, 1983; Fischer and Ramsperger, 1984; Corneil et al., 2004; Goonetilleke et al., 2015). If evoked by a similar mechanism, express visuomotor responses in arm muscles in NHPs should evolve ~60-80 ms after stimulus onset. Second, although more time-locked to stimulus rather than movement onset, larger express visuomotor responses in humans consistently precede shorter reaction times (Pruszynski et al., 2010; Gu et al., 2016; Contemori et al., 2021a); we predict a similar inverse relationship between recruitment magnitude and reaction time in NHPs. Third, the magnitude of express visuomotor responses in humans is dampened if subjects know to move away from or occasionally not respond to the stimulus (Wood et al., 2015; Gu et al., 2016; Atsma et al., 2018; Kozak et al., 2020; Contemori et al., 2021b, 2022a). Such dampening is a signature of top-down cortical control of a subcortical circuit, and we predict that similar top-down control can be instantiated in NHPs. Overall, we find that NHPs readily generate express visuomotor responses consistent with all these properties, establishing the NHP as a suitable animal model to study underlying neural mechanisms.

## Methods

### *Subjects and Surgical Procedures*

Two male rhesus monkeys (*Macaca mulatta;* monkey G and monkey B), weighing 8.5 and 13.1 kg respectively, were used in these experiments. All training, surgical, and experimental procedures were in accordance with the Canadian Council on Animal Care policy on the use of laboratory animals (Olfert et al., 1993) and approved by the Western University Animal Use Subcommittee. We monitored the monkeys' weights daily and their health was under the close supervision of the university veterinarians.

Each animal underwent an aseptic procedure in which a head post was attached to the skull by way of a dental acrylic pedestal prior to behavioral training. During training and experimental sessions, animals were seated with the head-restrained in a customized primate chair that restricted movements of the left arm, torso and hips while permitting unrestricted movements of the right arm in a three-dimensional workspace. Testing was performed in a dimly illuminated room and the monkeys were monitored via a video camera. Visual stimuli, behavioral control, and data acquisition were controlled by MonkeyLogic (Hwang et al., 2019). All visual stimuli were presented on a 42-in. color touch-sensitive monitor (4202L Elo Touch Solutions, Inc., Milpitas, CA) positioned 33 cm in front of the monkeys. The monitor had a spatial resolution of 1920 × 1080 pixels and a refresh rate of 60 Hz.

*The Emerging Target Task*

Monkeys generated visually-guided reaches to stimuli presented within the context of an emerging target task (Kozak et al., 2020). The task involves a moving stimulus that temporarily disappears behind an occluder, and then emerges in motion at either the left or right outlet. This task was chosen as it engenders express visuomotor responses in most human subjects (Contemori et al., 2021a, 2021b; Kozak and Corneil, 2021; Kearsley et al., 2022).

Data was collected from three variants of the emerging target task (**Fig. 1**). All trials started with a red or green 'start position' stimulus that appeared at a central location below a gray rectangular occluder. The monkeys were required to touch and hold the location of this start position stimulus within a computer-defined window of 7 cm. Following this, a red or green 'target' stimulus that matched the color of the start position stimulus appeared above the occluder. Providing the monkey kept in contact with the start position stimulus for 500 ms, this target stimulus dropped vertically at a constant velocity of 20 cm/s, and then disappeared behind the occluder. After a fixed latency of 300 ms, a red target then emerged in motion below the occluder at either the right or left outlet. At the same time, the start position stimulus disappeared and a secondary visual stimulus that lay under a photodiode (and hence was unseen by the monkey) was presented for data alignment purposes. On double target trials, a green target emerged in motion at the other outlet 34 ms later. To obtain a reward, the monkeys had to maintain contact on the start position until target emergence below the barrier, and then reach to touch the colored target (within a 11 cm radius)

that matched the color of the stimuli presented at the start of the trial before it disappeared off the screen (i.e., reach to the red target on single target red (**Fig. 1A**) and double target red (**Fig. 1B**) trials, or to the green target on double target green trials **(Fig. 1C)**). Thus, correct performance on double target green trials required the monkeys to not reach towards the red target that emerged slightly (34 ms) earlier. The moving target that appeared below the barrier started 15 cm to the right or left of the start position stimulus, and then moved in an lateral-downward direction (45 deg below horizontal) at 20 cm/s. Trials where the monkey touched or moved toward the wrongly colored target were tabulated as incorrect reaches, and retained for further analysis.

Across different experimental sessions, some blocks of trials consisted of only single-target red trials, while other blocks of trials consisted of all task variants. Within a typical experimental day, we first collected data in a block of only single-target red trials, prioritizing such data as EMG recording electrodes occasionally were removed as animals performed the task. Within a block of trials, all trial conditions (defined by target location and, when used, task variant) were presented with equal frequency but randomly shuffled. Across all experimental sessions, we obtained muscle recordings from a minimum of 380 to a maximum of 1470 trials.

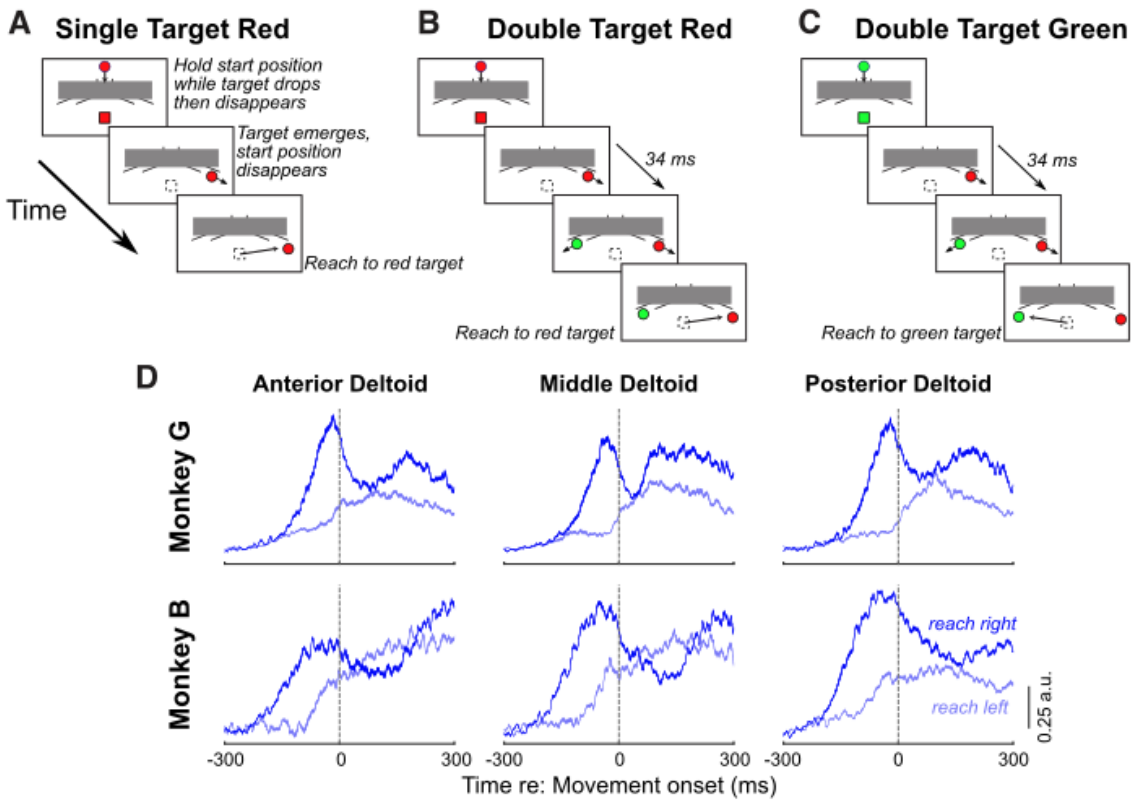


**Figure 1. A-C.** Emerging Target Task. At the start of each trial, either a red (**A, B**) or green (**C**) stimulus appears at the start position (red or green squares), below an occluder (gray box). The monkey touches and holds the screen at this start position. A target of the same color then appears above the occluder and moves down the chute before disappearing briefly behind the occluder for 300 ms. In Single Target Red trials (**A**), a single red target emerges in motion below the occluder at one of two outlets. In the Double Target Red (**B**) and Double Target Green (**C**) trials, appearance of the red target in one outlet was followed 34 ms later by appearance of a green target at the other outlet. The monkey was rewarded for reaching to the target that matched the color of the stimuli presented at the start of the trial. **D**. Movement-aligned activity for the anterior, middle, and posterior heads of deltoids for the two monkeys for single-target red trials, showing greater recruitment for rightward than leftward reaches. Data shows the average of the mean recruitment from each session, normalized to the peak movement-aligned activity from each session. Contours subtend the mean +/- stderr.

*EMG electrode insertion and data collection*

Prior to a data collection session, monkeys were lightly sedated before intramuscular, fine-wire EMG electrodes were acutely inserted into the posterior, medial, and anterior heads of the deltoid muscle. Sedation followed an established procedure (Corneil et al., 2012), involving induction with a low-dose of medetomidine, and reversal after electrode insertion with atipamazole. After reversal, monkeys were given ~20 minutes to recover prior to beginning data collection. For each intramuscular recording, we inserted two electrodes into the muscle belly staggered by ~1 cm to enable bipolar recordings of bulk muscle activity. Each electrode was fabricated in-house by threading PFA-coated 7-strand stainless steel wire (Type 316, A-M Systems, Sequim, WA) into a

27 gauge cannula, and then stripping the final ~3 mm of insulation. Anatomically, the different heads of the deltoid were identified by manually palpating the head of the humerus. A ground electrode was positioned on the dorsal neck approximately between the scapulae. Intramuscular EMG activity was differentially amplified and recorded with a Myopac Junior system (Run Technologies, low-pass filter modified to 2 kHz) and digitized at a rate of 1,000 Hz onto a Plexon Omniplex system, which also received the photodiode signal. Off-line, any DC offset was removed and EMG data were full-wave rectified and smoothed with a 7-point running average. Our sampling frequency was limited to 1,000 Hz, which undersamples intramuscular signals. We confirmed that such undersampling had only a minor influence on our results by collecting data from one additional session on a Ripple Grapevine system that sampled EMG data at 30,000 Hz. This allowed us to compare results obtained from 3 simultaneously recorded muscles processed offline by either downsampling the EMG signal to 1,000 Hz versus that obtained by first full-wave rectifying the 30 kHz signal followed by integration into 1 ms bins (Loeb and Gans, 1986; Elsley et al., 2007). For all three muscles recorded at 30 kHz, these different processing steps changed the discrimination latency of the express visuomotor response by only 1 ms. Thus, while our undersampled data would not be appropriate for identifying single motor-unit action potentials, it does accurately capture the timing of changes in multi-unit recruitment after visual target presentation.

*Data Analysis*

All data analyses were conducted in MATLAB® (R2021a; Natick, MA, USA). We rejected trials where the monkey either did not respond or failed to respond within 500 ms, as well as trials where movements began within less than 80 ms of target emergence below the barrier. Reach RT was calculated as the time from target emergence below the barrier (indicated by the photo-diode signal) to the time point where the monkey's hand was either no longer in contact with the touchscreen at the start position, or when the monkey's hand started deviating toward the emerging target. Offline, we further inspected all trials within a graphical user interface, allowing us to adjust the movement onset mark at a resolution of 1 kHz, and flag trials where the initial movement was in the opposite direction of the correct response. Monkey G moved more rapidly and tended to remain in contact with the screen during the reach (i.e., 'smearing' their hand across the screen), whereas Monkey B moved more slowly and had a greater tendency to lift their finger off the screen

222 when reaching. Thus, incorrect reaches in Monkey G included trials where the monkey first moved
223 in the incorrect direction before correcting their reach in mid-flight. In contrast, incorrect reaches
224 in Monkey B were sometimes only identified when the monkey touched the wrong location. On
225 other occasions, an incorrect reach in Monkey B was identified by a deflection in the horizontal
226 touch screen position in the wrong direction, as identified in the user interface.
227
228 The different heads of the deltoid muscle are known to have different preferred reaching directions
229 in the rhesus macaque (Kurtzer et al., 2006). Note however that the reaching task in this study
230 required that the monkeys reach forward and maintain contact with the touchscreen at the start
231 point, and then upon target emergence move their arm to the right or left to obtain a reward. In the
232 context of this bidirectional task, as shown in **Fig. 1D**, all heads of deltoid exhibited greater
233 recruitment before rightward versus leftward reaches on the touchscreen. Therefore, for the
234 purpose of analyzing the express visuomotor response, the rightward direction was deemed to be
235 the preferred direction of all muscles.
236
237 As with previous work (Pruszynski et al., 2010; Gu et al., 2016; Contemori et al., 2021a), we used
238 a time-series receiver-operating characteristic (ROC) analysis to define the presence and latency
239 of the express visuomotor response. Data recorded from each muscle was treated as an independent
240 sample, and data was segregated by side of target emergence and task variant. For blocks with
241 multiple interleaved task variants, separate time-series ROCs were run on data for each task
242 variant, comparing EMG activity after left or right target emergence. The ROC value (i.e., the area
243 under the ROC curve) was calculated and plotted at every time sample (1 ms) from 100 ms before
244 to 500 ms after target emergence (e.g., **Fig. 2C**); this value indicates the likelihood of
245 discriminating the side of target emergence based on EMG activity alone. A ROC value of 0.5
246 indicates chance discrimination, whereas values of 1 or 0 indicate perfectly correct or incorrect
247 discrimination, respectively. Although time-series ROCs often fluctuated around 0.5 in the 100 ms
248 surrounding target emergence, we often noted the presence of linear trends in this interval as well
249 as a high degree of variance on task variants with fewer overall trials. These precluded the use of
250 fixed thresholds to determine the latency of any express response. Accordingly, we first detrended
251 the time-series ROC based on a linear regression run on the time-series ROC over a baseline
252 interval spanning from 100 ms before to 45 ms after target emergence. We then set a discrimination

threshold to be the first of 8 of 10 points where the time-series ROC exceeded 3 standard deviations above the mean of the detrended baseline time-series ROC. If this time was between 45 to 100 ms after target emergence, then the muscle was deemed to be exhibiting an express visuomotor response, and the latency was taken to be the discrimination time. The magnitude of the express visuomotor response was determined by the integral of EMG activity measured over the next 30 ms. All EMG data is reported in source microvolts, and was not subjected to any normalization unless otherwise noted.

*Experimental design and statistical analyses*

All statistical analyses were performed in MATLAB® (R2021a; Natick, MA, USA). Comparisons of the magnitude and latencies of express visuomotor responses and of reaction times across the various trial types were performed via *t*-tests or one-way ANOVAs, using repeated measures where appropriate. Post-hoc comparisons relied on the Tukey–Kramer critical value, as well as paired and unpaired *t*-tests when appropriate. Correlational analyses were performed on latency, magnitude, and RT measures, as described below. Comparisons of error rates across different task variants were performed using a chi-squared test.

## Results

Two rhesus macaques reached to red or green targets presented in the context of the emerging target task (**Fig. 1A-C**). This task readily elicits express visuomotor responses in humans (Kozak et al., 2020; Contemori et al., 2021a; Kozak and Corneil, 2021). Our goal was to establish the phenomenon of express visuomotor responses in monkey, by: i) describing the response latencies and consistency of such responses both within and across experimental sessions, ii) investigating the relationships with ensuring reach reaction times (RTs), and iii) establishing whether the express visuomotor response to the red stimulus would be decreased when monkeys were instructed to reach in the opposite direction to a delayed emerging green stimulus. Our dataset consists of EMG recordings made in 8 sessions in monkey G (7, 8, and 7 successful recordings from anterior, medial, and posterior deltoid respectively) and 10 sessions in monkey B (9, 8, and 8 from anterior, medial, and posterior deltoid respectively). As all muscles exhibited greater recruitment for rightward vs leftward reaches on the touchscreen (**Fig. 1D**), and since we noted no differences in

283 the express visuomotor responses from the three heads of deltoid, we treated each recording as an
284 independent sample of multiple motor units, and pooled data within a given monkey.
285
286 *Stimulus emergence evokes short-latency express visuomotor responses*
287 We begin by describing the behavior and patterns of muscle recruitment immediately following
288 target emergence in single target red trials. On such trials, Monkey G reached within 179 +/- 61
289 ms and Monkey B reached within 223 +/- 47 ms (**Fig. 2A**). Both animals made some reaching
290 errors when only a single red target emerged (6% for Monkey G, 5% for Monkey B), but more
291 commonly anticipated target emergence (8.6% for Monkey G, 12.1% for Monkey B).
292 Representative examples of EMG data recorded from each monkey are shown in **Fig. 2B** and **C**.
293 As animals held their arm against gravity in order to touch the central starting position, there was
294 a modest level of recruitment prior to and immediately after target emergence. Very soon after
295 target emergence, muscle recruitment increased or decreased following target emergence to the
296 right or left, respectively. Such lateralization is a hallmark of express visuomotor responses in
297 humans (Pruszynski et al., 2010; Wood et al., 2015), and emphasizes that express visuomotor
298 responses are tuned to stimulus location rather than being a generic startle or preparatory response
299 (Gu et al., 2019; Selen et al., 2019). Another defining feature of express visuomotor responses in
300 humans is the trial-by-trial consistency in which this initial change in muscle recruitment is more
301 locked to target emergence rather than movement onset. This indeed was the case in the
302 representative examples shown in **Fig. 2B** (see red rectangles): note how this initial lateralized
303 change in muscle activity occurred ~60-70 ms after target emergence, well before the hand moved
304 or lifted away from the starting location. Following the express visuomotor response, rightward
305 reaches were preceded by a gradually increasing level of recruitment that peaked just before reach
306 initiation, whereas muscle recruitment before leftward reaches persisted near or below the baseline
307 level of activity prior to target emergence. The data shown for Monkey B exhibited a second target-
308 locked decrease in muscle activity ~130-140 ms after left target emergence, resembling reports of
309 oscillations in muscle recruitment initiated by a visual stimulus in humans (Wood et al., 2015).
310 Such double-dips were seen in about half of the recordings in Monkey B but were not observed in
311 Monkey G. We suspect this is because monkey G had generally shorter RTs, so that the recruitment
312 aligned with reach onset overlapped with any subsequent activity following the express
313 visuomotor response.

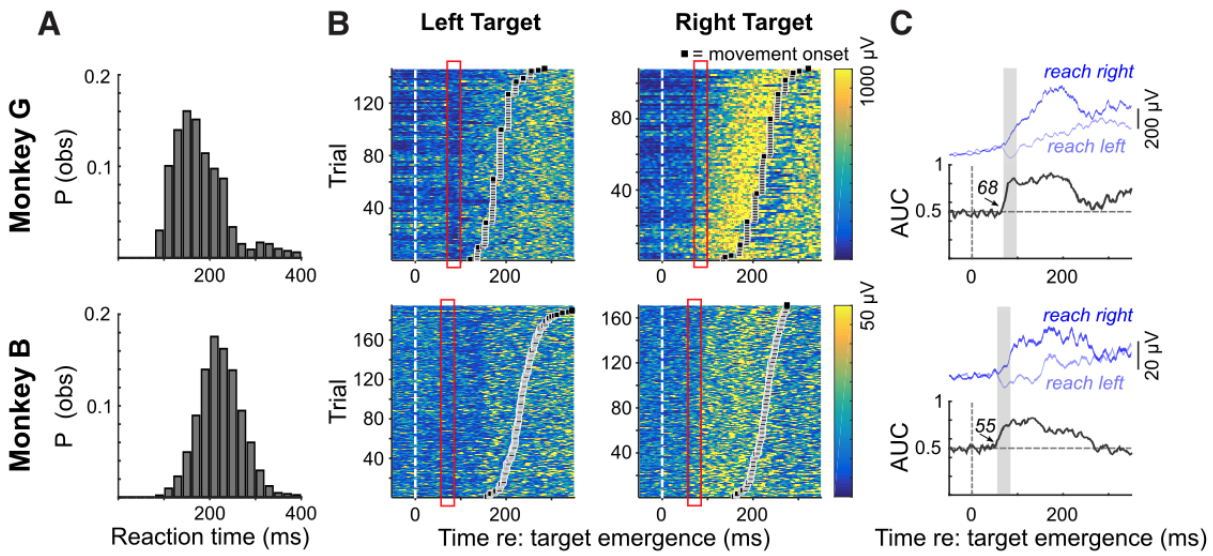


**Figure 2. A.** Frequncy histograms of reaction times (20 ms bins) for Monkey G (top row, n = 1303 trials) and Monkey B (bottom row, n = 2648 trials) across all experimental sessions. **B.** Representative examples of express visuomotor responses in Monkey G (top row) and Monkey B (bottom row), depicting trial-by-trial EMG recruitment aligned to target emergence to the left or right. In these plots, trials are sorted by movement onset (black squares), and the color conveys the magnitude of recruitment. **C**. For each monkey, the top row depicts mean EMG activity subtended by the standard error for left (light blue) and right (dark blue) reaches, and bottom row shows the time-series ROC (AUC = area under curve). The red rectangles in **B** and grey rectangles in **C** show the 30 ms interval following the detection of the express visuomotor response.

To analyze the timing of express visuomotor responses, we performed a time-series receiver operating characteristics (ROC) analysis. This analysis determines the timing at which information following leftward or rightward target emergence influenced muscle recruitment. For the examples shown in **Fig. 2C**, the express visuomotor response began 68 ms (Monkey G) or 55 ms (Monkey B) after target emergence. In both examples, the time-series ROC rose quickly after this discrimination time, and remained elevated from the next ~200 ms.

We repeated this analysis across our sample of deltoid recordings. Across our sample, an express visuomotor response, which was defined as occurring within 45-100 ms, was detected in 77% (17 of 22) recordings in monkey G and in all 25 recordings in monkey B. When present, express visuomotor responses began very soon after stimulus emergence, with discrimination latencies being 65 +/- 8 ms (range: 52 to 81 ms) for monkey G and 64 +/- 11 ms (range: 48 to 91 ms for monkey B; **Fig. 3A**; no difference between monkeys, *t*-test, $t(40) = 0.34$, $p = 0.72$). A potential concern about these short discrimination latencies is that they may arise only because of recruitment associated with short-RT reaches. We therefore repeated the time-series ROC analysis

across our sample only on the slower half or all trials. Excluding the shorter-than-average RT trials in each session increased reach reaction times by ~25 ms to 205 +/- 63 ms for Monkey G and 253 +/- 37 ms for Monkey B. Express visuomotor responses persisted in 72% (16 of 22) of recordings in monkey G and in all 25 recordings in monkey B, with average discrimination latencies being at 69 +/- 7 ms for monkey G and 68 +/- 12 ms for monkey B (**Fig. 3A**). Although significant in both monkeys (paired *t*-test, monkey G: *t*-test, $t(15) = -6.9$, $p < 10^{-5}$; monkey B: $t(24) = -3.10$, $p = 0.005$), the ~4 ms increase in discrimination latency after excluding shorter-than-average RTs was less than the ~25 ms increase in mean RT. We suspect that slightly longer discrimination latencies reflects lower magnitude express visuomotor responses associated with longer RT trials (see next section), as reported previously (Contemori et al., 2021a, 2021b).

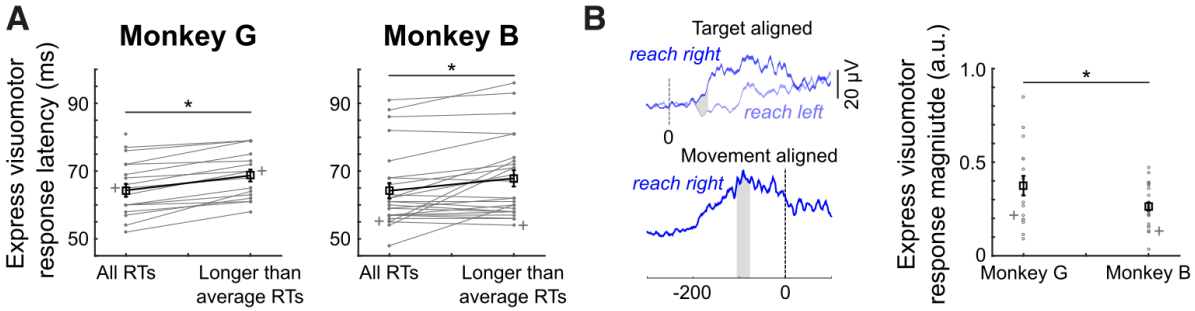


**Figure 3.** Properties of express visuomotor responses. **A.** Latencies of express visuomotor responses for both monkeys, showing latencies when all trials are considered regardless of reaction time, and after including only the longer-than-average reaction times. Grey lines connect observations from the same muscle from a given experimental day (grey + marks denote representative data shown in Fig. 2). Black lines and squares show mean +/- standard error. Asterisks show significant differences of paired t-test ($p < 0.05$). **B.** Calculation of the proportional magnitude of the express visuomotor response, using the representative data from Monkey B. We integrate the difference in the mean EMG curve for right versus left responses over the 30 ms after the onset of the express visuomotor responses, and divide this by the integral of the 30 ms interval surrounding peak EMG activity aligned to right reach onset. Same general format as **A;** asterisk showing significant results of a student's t-test ($p < 0.05$).

Previous work in humans has shown that express visuomotor responses observed in the emerging target task can be quite large in magnitude, occasionally equalling if not exceeded 'voluntary' recruitment magnitude achieved when recruitment is aligned to reach onset reach onset (Contemori et al., 2021a; Kozak and Corneil, 2021). To establish the proportional magnitude of the express visuomotor response, we expressed it relative to a 30 ms interval surrounding the peak magnitude of movement-aligned recruitment (**Fig. 3B**). Expressed in this fashion, the express visuomotor response reached 0.37 +/- 0.21 (range: 0.09 to 0.85) for monkey G and 0.26 +/- 0.10 (range: 0.03 to 0.47) for monkey B (proportional magnitudes were significantly larger in monkey G than monkey B; *t*-test, $t(40) = 2.2$, $p = 0.03$). Thus, on average, the recruitment magnitude of the express

visuomotor response was about one quarter to one third of the magnitude of reach-related recruitment.

*Express visuomotor response magnitude inversely correlates with RT*

Although the express visuomotor response may be modest in magnitude, previous work shows that larger express visuomotor responses tend to precede short RTs (Pruszynski et al., 2010; Gu et al., 2016; Contemori et al., 2021a). To investigate whether a similar inverse correlation is seen in NHPs, we calculated the trial-by-trial magnitude of EMG recruitment during an express visuomotor response window (integrated over 30 ms after the express visuomotor response was detected), and plotted it as a function of RT. **Figure 4** shows these plots for the representative data from monkey G (**Fig. 4A**) and monkey B (**Fig. 4B**), and both show the inverse correlation between magnitude and RT expected from previous studies (Monkey G: $r = -0.57$, $p < 10^{-10}$; Monkey B: $r = -0.40$, $p < 10^{-7}$). We repeated this analysis for every session in our sample, and for both monkeys, observed the expected negative correlation (**Fig. 4C**; Monkey G: mean $r = -0.48$ +/- 0.26. Monkey B: mean $r = -0.31$ +/- 0.17). The distributions for both monkeys lay significantly below zero (*t*-test; Monkey G: $t(16) = -7.7$, $p < 10^{-6}$. Monkey B: $t(24) = -9.2$, $p < 10^{-8}$), and they were significantly different from each other (*t*-test, $t(40) = -2.61$, $p = 0.01$).

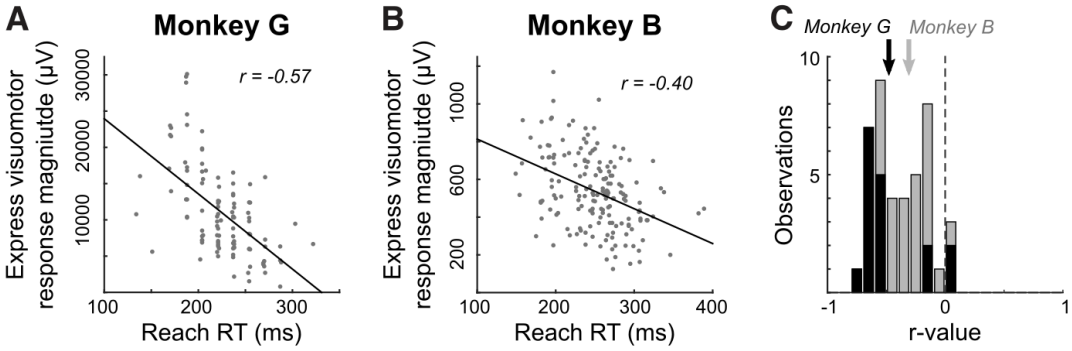


**Figure 4.** Larger express visuomotor responses tended to precede shorter reach reation times (RTs). **A, B**. Representative data plotting magnitude of express visuomotor response as a function of reach reaction time, from the representative sessions shown in Figure 2. Each data point represents a single trial, and the black diagonal line shows the linear regression. The correlation coefficient (*r*) is shown in the top-right of each subplot. **C.** Histogram of correlation coefficients across all sessions in which an express visuomotor response was detected. Vertical dash line indicates 0. Solid or grey lines or bins denote data for Monkey G or B, respectively. Vertical arrows show mean *r*-values.

*Contextual control influences the magnitude but not timing of the express visuomotor response*

Having established that macaque upper limb muscle recruitment following the emergence of a single target resembles that observed in humans, we now turn to data recorded when two targets

emerged below the barrier. The sequence of target emergence was the exact same on double-target trials; the red stimulus always appeared 500 ms after the initial descending stimulus disappeared behind the barrier, and the red stimulus always appeared 32 ms before the green stimulus. Monkeys reached to the emerging stimulus that matched the color of the central hold stimulus and dropping stimulus (**Fig. 1B,C**). Double target green trials therefore required monkeys to not reach to the red emerging stimulus in order to reach to the green stimulus that subsequently emerged on the opposite side. Thus, monkeys had to exert a different degree of contextual control in how they responded to the red emerging stimulus on double target red than double target green trials.

We first compared reaching behavior on double target red vs double target green trials. As expected, the RTs for correct responses (timed to the emergence of the red stimulus) were longer for double target green trials than double target red trials (**Fig. 5A**, Monkey G: double target red = 188 +/- 70 ms, n = 572; double target green = 209 +/- 97 ms, n = 206; $t(776) = -3.36$, $p < 0.001$. Monkey B: double target red = 235 +/- 50 ms, n = 1607; double target green = 255 +/- 49 ms, n = 962; $t(2579) = -9.63$, $p < 10^{-10}$). Both monkeys made reaching errors at a significantly higher rate on double target green than double target red trials (Monkey G: chi square-test, $X^2$ (1) = 33.9, $p <$ 10-8; Monkey B: $X^2$ (1) = 11.25; $p < 10^{-3}$). When generated, such errors started earlier than correct responses (Monkey G: error RTs on double target green = 172 +/- 45 ms, n = 207; *t*-test against RTs of correct responses on double target green trials $t(411) = 5.01$, $p < 10^{-7}$; Monkey B: error RTs on double target green = 186 +/- 50 ms, n = 409; $t(1376) = 23.38$, $p < 10^{-10}$). While Monkey G made a higher proportion of errors on double target green trials than Monkey B (chi-square-test, $X^2$ (1) = 5.21; $p = 0.02$), an analysis of hand trajectories showed that Monkey G often moved initially toward the red stimulus before rapidly reversing reach direction to reach toward the green stimulus (**Fig. 5B**). Overall, these behavioral patterns are consistent with the animals trying, and occasionally failing, to exert more contextual control on double target green trials.

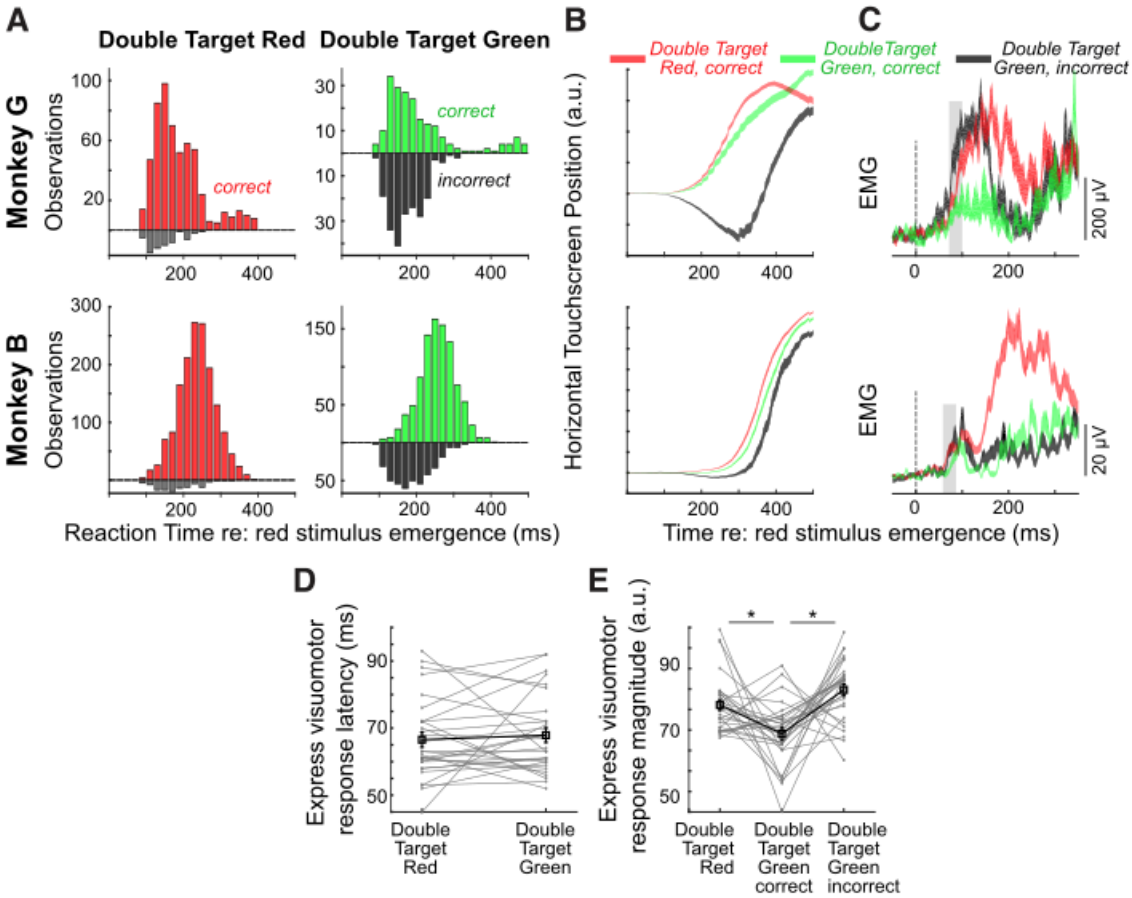


**Figure 5.** Contextual control on Double Target trials. **A.** Histograms across all sessions of reaction times (20 ms bins) relative to the emergence of the red stimulus for Monkey G (top row) and Monkey B (bottom row), for Double Target Red trials (left column, Monkey G: 632 trials, error rate = 9.4%; Monkey B: 1788 trials, error rate = 9.8%) or Double Target Green trials (right column, Monkey G: 413 trials, error rate = 50.1%; Monkey B: 1378 trials, error rate = 29.6%). Upward/downward histograms represent correct/incorrect responses. **B.** Trajectory of horizontal touchscreen position averaged across all trials for when the monkey should have reached right on correct Double Target Red trials (red contours), correct Double Target Green trials (green contours) and incorrect Double Target Green trials (black contours). Contours denote mean +/- stderr. **C.** Depiction of mean EMG activity +/- stderr for when the red stimulus emerged to the right. Grey rectangles denote the 30 ms interval following the express visuomotor response, over which magnitude was calculated. **D,E.** The latency (**D**) or magnitude (**E**) of the express visuomotor response, by trial type and/or performance, across 29 occurrences where an express visuomotor response could be detected on both Double Target Red and Double Target Green trials. Grey lines connect observations from the same muscle from a given experimental day. Black lines and squares show mean +/- standard error. Asterisks show significant differences of Bonferroni corrected paired t-test ($p < 0.05$).

We next asked the degree to which contextual control influenced the express visuomotor response to the red stimulus. In humans, express visuomotor responses evolve at the same time but are dampened in magnitude when subjects humans move away from rather than toward a peripheral stimulus (Gu et al., 2016; Kozak et al., 2020), or exert some other degree of contextual control (Wood et al., 2015; Atsma et al., 2018; Contemori et al., 2021b). **Figure 5C** shows the mean +/- stderr representations of EMG activity from the same representative sessions as shown in **Figure**

404 **2**, depicting right middle deltoid recruitment when the red stimulus appeared to right. The monkeys
405 reached to the right on double target red trials (red contours in **Fig. 5C**), and the express visuomotor
406 response resembled that seen on the single target red trials (**Fig. 2B,C**). On double target green
407 trials, the correct response was to withhold the rightward reach, and reach to the left. When the
408 animals did this correctly, the initial express visuomotor response to the red stimulus was muted
409 (green contours in **Fig. 5C**). In contrast, when the monkeys incorrectly reached to the red stimulus
410 on double target green trials, initial muscle recruitment during the express response interval
411 resembled that on double target red trials (compare black and red contours in **Fig. 5C**), whereas
412 later phases of recruitment resembled correctly performed double target green trials, as the animal
413 corrected their reach. Thus, for these examples, the express visuomotor response to the earlier
414 appearing red stimulus depended both on the context of the trial (double target red vs double target
415 green), and on performance on double target green trials.
416
417 Across our sample, we found that contextual control influenced the magnitude but not timing of
418 the express visuomotor response to the red stimulus. To quantify this, we first compared the timing
419 of the express visuomotor response, when such a response was detected on both double-target red
420 and double-target green trials. We found no influence of context on express visuomotor response
421 latency, with the latency being unchanged across double-target red trials and double-target green
422 trials (**Fig. 5D**. Monkey G: double-target red = 66 +/- 9 ms; double-target green = 70 +/- 14 ms;
423 paired *t*-test; $t(9) = -0.75$, $p = 0.46$; Monkey B: double-target red = 67 +/- 13 ms; double-target
424 green = 67 +/- 10 ms; $t(18) = 0.02$, $p = 0.98$). We then calculated the magnitude of the express
425 visuomotor response over the next 30 ms on double target red or double target green trials,
426 subdividing the latter based on whether monkeys correctly reached to the green stimulus or
427 incorrectly reached to the red stimulus. To do this, we normalized all express visuomotor response
428 magnitudes to the red stimulus to the average value across all double target trials. A one-way
429 repeated-measures ANOVA showed that the express visuomotor response magnitude to the red
430 stimulus varied as a function of instruction and performance (**Fig. 5E**, one-way repeated-measures
431 ANOVA, $F_{2,56} = 10.15$, $p < 0.0005$). Post-hoc analyses revealed significantly larger responses on
432 double target red versus correct double target green trials (paired *t*-test, $t(28) = 2.90$, $p = 0.01$), and
433 significantly larger responses on incorrect vs correct double target green trials ($t(28) = 4.22$, $p <$
434 $0.001$). Thus, as in humans, the magnitude but not latency of the express visuomotor response

435 changed with the context of the task (REFS). Furthermore, as with anti-reaches (Gu et al., 2016),
436 larger express visuomotor responses preceded incorrect responses.
437
438 **Discussion**
439 We focused on the initial recruitment of upper limb muscles in monkeys reaching towards
440 emerging targets, using a paradigm which readily elicits express visuomotor responses in humans
441 (Kozak et al., 2020). Express visuomotor responses in monkeys exhibited the response properties
442 known in humans: its timing is more time-locked to target emergence than movement onset, and
443 its magnitude is both inversely related to RT and liable to dampening via contextual control. Our
444 results establish how rapidly the visual-to-motor is completed in the rhesus macaque brain, place
445 constraints on the timing of premotor events, and set the stage for neurophysiological experiments
446 that can directly compare the characteristics of such premotor events to those seen in the motor
447 periphery.
448
449 *Comparisons of express responses in humans and monkeys*
450 Rhesus macaques offer an excellent animal model for understanding rapid visual-to-motor
451 transformations, due to the many homologies in foveate vision, implicated brain networks, and the
452 musculoskeletal anatomy of the eyes, neck, and upper limb. Humans and macaques generate a
453 variety of expedited visuomotor responses in the lab, including express saccades (Fischer and
454 Weber, 1993), microsaccades (Hafed and Ignashchenkova, 2013; Tian et al., 2016), express
455 visuomotor responses in neck muscle (Goonetilleke et al., 2015), reaches to rapidly moving stimuli
456 (Perfiliev et al., 2010), and ocular following responses (Miles et al., 1986; Gellman et al., 1990).
457 A common finding is that such responses evolve ~20-30 ms earlier in macaques than humans,
458 which is broadly consistent with the 3/5th rule (Schroeder et al., 2004) for quicker sensory
459 processing in macaques versus humans. Consistent with this, express visuomotor responses in
460 macaques started at ~65 ms, compared to 80-100 ms in humans.
461
462 A notable exception for earlier responses in macaques vs. humans is when subjects adjust reaching
463 trajectories in mid-flight to a displaced visual target. Humans can initiate such on-line corrections
464 within ~150-200 ms (Gaveau et al., 2014), even without conscious perception (Goodale et al.,
465 1986). The response latencies for on-line corrections in macaques are generally longer than in

466 humans, ranging between 200-250 ms (Georgopoulos et al., 1983; Archambault et al., 2009, 2011;
467 Pastor-Bernier et al., 2012; Dickey et al., 2013), although latencies comparable with humans have
468 been reported (Ames et al., 2019). The generally slower responses in macaques likely arises due
469 to an task-imposed emphasis of accuracy over speed, so that animals were not responding as
470 quickly as possible. Work by Perfiliev and colleagues (2010) compared 'interceptive' reaching
471 responses to rapidly moving targets of humans, monkeys, and cats, and clearly showed that all
472 three species can initiate reaches in less than 150 ms, with limb muscle recruitment in humans
473 starting at 90-100 ms. Such recruitment onsets are within the range of express visuomotor
474 responses in humans, but Perfiliev and colleagues did not record EMG in cats or monkeys.
475
476 *Methodological considerations*
477 A study by Lara and colleagues (Lara et al., 2018) recorded upper limb muscle activity in monkeys
478 in a 'quasi-automatic' task, where monkeys intercepted a target moving radially on a touch screen.
479 This task expedited RTs to ~200 ms on average, which is similar to the reaction times we observed.
480 As with the emerging target paradigm, the quasi-automatic task features a suddenly appearing
481 moving visual target. Lara and colleagues recorded from multiple heads of deltoid in addition to
482 other upper limb muscles, reporting the earliest changes in average muscle recruitment at ~100
483 ms, with single-trial onsets as low as 90 ms. Although these response latencies are short, they are
484 still ~25-35 ms longer than those reported here. The failure for the quasi-automatic task to elicit
485 express visuomotor responses may be due to a lack of precise temporal certainty about target
486 presentation or the absence of implied motion, both of which are critical in the emerging target
487 task (Kozak et al., 2020; Contemori et al., 2021a; Kozak and Corneil, 2021). The quasi-automatic
488 task in the Lara study was also intermingled with other trial types that engender longer RTs, which
489 may also lower the probability of express visuomotor responses.
490 Caution is always required when comparing responses latencies across different laboratories.
491 Stimulus luminance and spatio-temporal frequency impact the latencies of on-line reach
492 corrections (Veerman et al., 2008; Kozak et al., 2019), the timing and magnitude of express muscle
493 responses (Wood et al., 2015; Kozak et al., 2019; Kozak and Corneil, 2021), and on the timing and
494 vigor of sensorimotor responses in the superior colliculus (SC) (Li and Basso, 2008; Marino et al.,
495 2012; Chen et al., 2018). Determining whether limb muscle recruitment meets an "express"
496 criterion should involve an assessment of trial-by-trial muscle recruitment over a range of RTs,

497 lest averaged recruitment profiles be biased by trials with the shortest RTs. The trial-by-trial
498 representations of EMG activity presented in the Lara study did not show consistently short
499 recruitment latencies across trials, strengthening our contention that express visuomotor responses
500 were not consistently elicited in their quasi-automatic task.
501
502 The emerging target paradigm provides a framework in which to study the most rapid visual-to-
503 motor transformations for reaching, and our results show that the underlying phenomenon is
504 distributed to many deltoid motor units in the macaque. The magnitudes of express responses
505 compared to later waves of activity are more modest in monkeys than in humans. This may be
506 because the deltoid muscles targeted here may not be prime movers when monkeys interact with
507 a touchscreen. Future work recording from more muscles of the upper limb may also find stronger
508 express visuomotor responses, and experimental setups with a robotic manipulandum will allow
509 loading of selected muscle, as done routinely in humans. Work in NHPs may also benefit from
510 various endogenous or exogenous cueing strategies that potentiate the phenomenon of express arm
511 responses in the human arm (Contemori et al., 2021b, 2022a) or neck (Corneil et al., 2008). While
512 the express visuomotor responses we recorded in NHPs are modest, similarly-sized express
513 visuomotor responses induce force transients or small movements toward the stimulus (Wood et
514 al., 2015; Gu et al., 2016; Atsma et al., 2018). We did observe small movements of the hand toward
515 the earlier appearing red target in Monkey G on double target green trials, which we surmise arose
516 from both the express visuomotor responses and subsequent periods of recruitment. The
517 assessment of limb motion via the touchscreen is coarse, hence setups using robotic manipulanda
518 or motor tracking will permit more precise assessment of the kinematic consequences of express
519 visuomotor responses in monkeys.
520
521 *Implications of our results*
522 Express visuomotor responses are thought to arise from a subcortical tecto-reticulo-spinal circuit
523 that runs in parallel with corticospinal circuits (Boehnke and Munoz, 2008; Pruszynski et al., 2010;
524 Corneil and Munoz, 2014; Contemori et al., 2022b). This hypothesis has never been directly tested
525 in monkeys, as the lone reaching study inactivating the SC during a reaching task (Song et al.,
526 2011) did not record limb EMG and used a delayed response task that would not engender express
527 visuomotor responses. Considerable circumstantial evidence implicates the visual response within

528 the intermediate and deep layers of the superior colliculus (dSC) as being key in driving express
529 responses. The timing and vigor of the visual response, when summed with pre-existing
530 preparatory activity, drives express saccades (Edelman and Keller, 1996; Dorris et al., 1997;
531 Sparks et al., 2000; Dash et al., 2018). Visual responses in the dSC are also correlated with the
532 magnitude of express visuomotor responses in the neck, leading such responses by an appropriate
533 efferent lag (Rezvani and Corneil, 2008). Reach-related neurons in the dSC display short-latency
534 visual responses (Werner et al., 1997a, 1997b) and correlate with upper limb muscle activity
535 (Werner et al., 1997a; Stuphorn et al., 1999), although the properties of visual responses in reach-
536 related neurons have not been systematically investigated. Our speculation of a subcortical route
537 initiating visually-guided reaches to a punctate target is consistent with recent stimulation results
538 in humans (Divakar et al., 2022), and parallels a growing appreciation for the role of subcortical
539 pathways in manual following responses to whole-field motion (Saijo et al., 2005) or flashes
540 (Nakajima et al., 2021).
541
542 While we acknowledge the shortcomings in comparing results across laboratories and
543 experimental tasks, the express visuomotor responses reported here on arm muscles occur at an
544 interval when neural activity in the primary motor cortex is thought to be in a null space that is not
545 tied to motor output (Lara et al., 2018). Indeed, one of the main conclusions for the Lara study
546 mentioned above is that a mandatory transition of neural activity within motor cortex from a null-
547 space to a movement-potent subspace precedes motor output by ~20-30 ms. Our results present
548 two alternatives which can frame future experiments.
549
550 First, if our hypothesis is correct, a subcortical route through the dSC can drive express visuomotor
551 responses when M1 is in a null space. An intriguing corollary to this alternative, given ascending
552 connections from the SC to thalamic areas that themselves project to motor cortices (Benevento
553 and Fallon, 1975; Matelli and Luppino, 1996), is that it is signaling from the SC to the motor cortex
554 that drives the transition of cortical activity from null to movement potent subspaces (Ames et al.,
555 2019), which presumably could allow cortical activity to drive subsequent muscle recruitment that
556 is informed by the consequences of the preceding express visuomotor response. Ascending signals
557 from the SC through the thalamus have been long established as being critical for relaying
558 efference copy signals for eye movements (Sommer and Wurtz, 2002), and implicated in

prioritizing spatial locations for target selection for reaching (Song et al., 2011) and for higher order processing (Lovejoy and Krauzlis, 2010; Bogadhi et al., 2021; Peysakhovich et al., 2023).

Alternatively, could the transition of neural activity from a null to movement potent subspace in M1 simply occur earlier in the emerging target paradigm? This line of reasoning surmises that signaling along a cortico-spinal or cortico-reticulo-spinal route drives express visuomotor responses. If so, visually-related activity would have to evolve in motor cortex ~10-20 ms earlier than the express visuomotor responses we report, so at around 50 ms. There are reports of visual responses in the macaque primary motor cortex at such latencies (Murphy et al., 1982; Lamarre et al., 1983; Crammond and Kalaska, 1994; Riehle et al., 1997; Cisek and Kalaska, 2005; Ames et al., 2019), but comparisons to these reports are again hindered by the use of tasks or visual stimuli that in retrospect may not have been optimized to elicit express responses, and various filtering settings or analysis schemes that complicate timing comparisons. Examination of the rasters of single-unit data from such reports, when available, also do not always reveal the trial-by-trial consistency that we observed in the motor periphery. One intriguing exception comes from the work of Reimer and colleagues (Reimer and Hatsopoulos, 2010), who studied motor cortical activity while NHPs adjusted the trajectory of ongoing limb movements to jumped visual targets. When one accounts for an acknowledged timing error, motor cortex activity changed consistently ~50 ms after the target jump. While this theoretically shows that signaling related to visual signal onset could arrive in time within motor cortices, we note that express visuomotor responses in humans evolve ~10-15 ms earlier (and hence ~80 ms or less) when evoked when the arm is already in motion (Kozak et al., 2019), presumably due to disengagement of a control policy for postural stability (Cluff and Scott, 2016).

583 **Figure Legends**

584

585 **Figure 1. A-C.** Emerging Target Task. At the start of each trial, either a red (**A, B**) or green (**C**)
586 stimulus appears at the start position (red or green squares), below an occluder (gray box). The
587 monkey touches and holds the screen at this start position. A target of the same color then appears
588 above the occluder and moves down the chute before disappearing briefly behind the occluder for
589 300 ms. In Single Target Red trials (**A**), a single red target emerges in motion below the occluder
590 at one of two outlets. In the Double Target Red (**B**) and Double Target Green (**C**) trials, appearance
591 of the red target in one outlet was followed 34 ms later by appearance of a green target at the other
592 outlet. The monkey was rewarded for reaching to the target that matched the color of the stimuli
593 presented at the start of the trial. **D.** Movement-aligned activity for the anterior, middle, and
594 posterior heads of deltoids for the two monkeys for single-target red trials, showing greater
595 recruitment for rightward than leftward reaches. Data shows the average of the mean recruitment
596 from each session, normalized to the peak movement-aligned activity from each session. Contours
597 subtend the mean +/- stderr.

598

599 **Figure 2. A.** Frequency histograms of reaction times (20 ms bins) for Monkey G (top row, n =
600 1303 trials) and Monkey B (bottom row, n = 2648 trials) across all experimental sessions. **B.**
601 Representative examples of express visuomotor responses in Monkey G (top row) and Monkey B
602 (bottom row), depicting trial-by-trial EMG recruitment aligned to target emergence to the left or
603 right. In these plots, trials are sorted by movement onset (black squares), and the color conveys
604 the magnitude of recruitment. **C**. For each monkey, the top row depicts mean EMG activity
605 subtended by the standard error for left (light blue) and right (dark blue) reaches, and bottom row
606 shows the time-series ROC (AUC = area under curve). The red rectangles in **B** and grey rectangles
607 in **C** show the 30 ms interval following the detection of the express visuomotor response.

608

609 **Figure 3.** Properties of express visuomotor responses. **A.** Latencies of express visuomotor
610 responses for both monkeys, showing latencies when all trials are considered regardless of reaction
611 time, and after including only the longer-than-average reaction times. Grey lines connect
612 observations from the same muscle from a given experimental day (grey + marks denote
613 representative data shown in Fig. 2). Black lines and squares show mean +/- standard error.

614 Asterisks show significant differences of paired t-test ($p < 0.05$). **B**. Calculation of the proportional
615 magnitude of the express visuomotor response, using the representative data from Monkey B. We
616 integrate the difference in the mean EMG curve for right versus left responses over the 30 ms after
617 the onset of the express visuomotor responses, and divide this by the integral of the 30 ms interval
618 surrounding peak EMG activity aligned to right reach onset. Same general format as **A**; asterisk
619 showing significant results of a student's t-test ($p < 0.05$).
620
621 **Figure 4.** Larger express visuomotor responses tended to precede shorter reach reaction times
622 (RTs). **A, B**. Representative data plotting magnitude of express visuomotor response as a function
623 of reach reaction time, from the representative sessions shown in Figure 2. Each data point
624 represents a single trial, and the black diagonal line shows the linear regression. The correlation
625 coefficient (r) is shown in the top-right of each subplot. **C**. Histogram of correlation coefficients
626 across all sessions in which an express visuomotor response was detected. Vertical dash line
627 indicates 0. Solid or grey lines or bins denote data for Monkey G or B, respectively. Vertical arrows
628 show mean r-values.
629
630 **Figure 5.** Contextual control on Double Target trials. **A.** Histograms across all sessions of reaction
631 times (20 ms bins) relative to the emergence of the red stimulus for Monkey G (top row) and
632 Monkey B (bottom row), for Double Target Red trials (left column, Monkey G: 632 trials, error
633 rate = 9.4%; Monkey B: 1788 trials, error rate = 9.8%) or Double Target Green trials (right column,
634 Monkey G: 413 trials, error rate = 50.1%; Monkey B: 1378 trials, error rate = 29.6%).
635 Upward/downward histograms represent correct/incorrect responses. **B**. Trajectory of horizontal
636 touchscreen position averaged across all trials for when the monkey should have reached right on
637 correct Double Target Red trials (red contours), correct Double Target Green trials (green
638 contours) and incorrect Double Target Green trials (black contours). Contours denote mean +/-
639 stderr. **C.** Depiction of mean EMG activity +/- stderr for when the red stimulus emerged to the
640 right. Grey rectangles denote the 30 ms interval following the express visuomotor response, over
641 which magnitude was calculated. **D,E**. The latency (**D**) or magnitude (**E**) of the express visuomotor
642 response, by trial type and/or performance, across 29 occurrences where an express visuomotor
643 response could be detected on both Double Target Red and Double Target Green trials. Grey lines
644 connect observations from the same muscle from a given experimental day. Black lines and

645 squares show mean +/- standard error. Asterisks show significant differences of Bonferroni
646 corrected paired t-test ($p < 0.05$).
647
648

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