

Seminar IRH-ICUB

Consciousness and Cognition: An Interdisciplinary Approach

<https://irhunibuc.wordpress.com/2016/04/05/new-seminar-consciousness-in-philosophy-and-neuroscience/>

convenor Dr. Diana Stanciu

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Date: Thursday, 31 May 2018, 17h

Place: IRH-ICUB (1 D. Brandza Str.), conference room

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Sigrid Leyssen is a postdoctoral researcher in the history of science and media studies at the *Centre Alexandre Koyré - Histoire des sciences et des techniques – CNRS – EHESS* in Paris and currently an ICUB-fellow at the *Institute for Research in the Humanities (IRH-ICUB)* at the University of Bucharest. She benefitted from various research stays in Cambridge (MA), Basel, Würzburg, Paris, Regensburg, Berlin, and Oxford. She recently defended her PhD (2017): *Perception in Movement. Moving Images in Albert Michotte's Experimental Psychology (1881-1965)*. She works on experimental images in the history of psychology and, through these, on ways of studying perception throughout history. Some recent publications of hers are: *Images of Animate Movement / Bilder Animierter Bewegung*, hg. mit P. Rathgeber, Paderborn 2013; "La phénoménologie expérimentale d'Albert Michotte: un problème de traduction", *Philosophia Scientiae*, Vol. 19, No. 3, 2015: 45-71; "Postkarten aus dem Psychologischen Labor. Fotografische Lichtlinien als Visuelle Synthesen." *Fotogeschichte* ("Psychologie und Fotografie") Vol. 36, No. 140, 2016: 25-36. Email: sigrid.leyssen@ehess.fr

Images of Agency in the Psychological Laboratory

The experimental psychologist Albert Michotte (1881-1965) is well-known especially for his work on the perception of relations of causality, which he started in 1939 and continued until shortly before his death. Here he experimentally investigated what constitutes, on the perceptual level, the impression of causality. For complex movements situations, he studied what factors were responsible for evoking an impression of agency or passivity: of who is acting and who is acted upon. During the present talk, I will show my re-animations of the images with which Michotte studied different impressions of causality, made with original instruments and objects. Michotte's images were part of a long tradition of rotating-disc-generated images in the study of perception, yet these abstract images were also akin to the visual language of the soon to come computer animations. The images remain familiar to current-day psychologists through the digital re-mediations Michotte's images have received in psychological research in recent years. In order to understand these images and their role in the experiments and in contemporary psychology, I show how this work on phenomenal causality connects to Michotte's

earlier work on voluntary choice (before the First World War), and on the form of motor reactions (1920s and 1930s). I also contextualise his work by placing it in the Neo-Scholastic context in which Michotte had been educated and worked. For his entire career, Michotte had his experimental laboratory at the *Institut Supérieur de Philosophie* in Louvain, a major Neo-Scholastic institution founded by Désiré-Joseph Mercier. Michotte never presented himself as a Neo-Scholastic psychologist, but the influence of his old teacher Mercier can be found on several levels throughout his work and he continued to interact with his colleagues at the institute, who were scholars in Neo-Scholastic philosophy and phenomenology. Neo-Scholastic psychology has often been presented as a marginal strand of 20th-century scientific psychology. The question I would like to discuss at the seminar is the sort of influence the Neo-Scholastic and Aristotelian legacy could have in mainstream psychology through the work (and images) of psychologists such as Albert Michotte.