



# Agency, Bodily Perception, and the Self

*A “Rethinking Conscious  
Agency” workshop*

May 26 - 27, 2022

Hybrid (Barcelona & online)

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# SCHEDULE

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## MAY 26

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9.45 INTRODUCTION

**Chair: Joshua Shepherd**

10 - 10.55 ONLINE

### **AGENCY, CAUSATION, AND BODILY PERCEPTION**

Tom Schoonen  
(Centre for Advanced Studies in Humanities "Human Abilities", Berlin)

11 - 11.55 ONLINE

### **DEPERSONALISATION, BODY BLINDNESS, AND BODILY PHYSICAL PRESENCE**

Tony Cheng  
(National Chengchi University)

12 - 12.25 COFFEE BREAK\*

12.30 - 13.25

### **THE FUNCTIONAL ROLE OF CONSCIOUS SENSATION OF MOVEMENT**

Thor Grünbaum  
(University of Copenhagen)

13.30 - 15.30 LUNCH\*\*

**Chair: Chiara Brozzo**

15.30 - 16.25

### **NON-CONCEPTUAL KNOWLEDGE-HOW**

Peter Brössel & Eline Kuipers  
(Ruhr University Bochum)

16.30 - 16.55 COFFEE BREAK\*

17 - 17.55

### **PROTECTIVE AGENCY**

Frédérique de Vignemont  
(Institut Jean Nicod/ CNRS/ EHESS/ ENS/ PSL University)

CONFERENCE DINNER\*\*

## MAY 27

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**Chair: Carlota Serrahima**

10 - 10.55

### **PROPRIOCEPTION, KINAESTHESIS, AND THE MEREOTOPOLOGY OF BODILY AWARENESS**

Błażej Skrzypulec  
(Jagiellonian University)

11 - 11.55

### **DO ADDICTIVE CRAVINGS LEAD TO A LOSS OF CONTROL? AN ANALYSIS OF THE POSSIBILITY OF INTENTIONAL ACTION IN ADDICTION**

Rachel Frenette  
(Paris 1)

12 - 12.25 COFFEE BREAK\*

12.30 - 13.25

### **URGES**

Ashley Shaw  
(University College Dublin)

13.30 - 15.30 LUNCH\*\*

**Chair: Chiara Brozzo**

15.30 - 16.25

### **PAIN, ACTION, AND AGENCY**

Sabrina Coninx  
(Ruhr University Bochum)

16.30 - 16.55 COFFEE BREAK\*

17 - 17.55

### **AFFECTIVE AGENCY**

Matthew Fulkerson  
(University of California, San Diego)

All times are CEST; UTC+2

(\*) paid by UB

(\*\*) paid by UB for speakers and chairs

# ABSTRACTS MAY 26

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10 - 10.55

## AGENCY, PERCEPTION, AND BODILY CAUSATION

Tom Schoonen

(Centre for Advanced Studies in Humanities "Human Abilities", Berlin)

Causal knowledge is crucial for understanding agency, many philosophers of action suggest something like causal knowledge to be required for (intentional) action. In this paper, I will argue for an epistemology of this (basic) causal knowledge that is relevant for agency. Following the empirical data on causal learning, I suggest that in order to get causal knowledge (rather than merely causal judgements), we need to rely on bodily perception in the form of tactile perception and proprioception. That is, empirical data suggests that intervening and acting are crucial for causal learning. I argue that this means that we rely on bodily perception to gain knowledge of these causal relations.

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11 - 11.55

Tony Cheng

(National Chengchi University)

## DEPERSONALISATION, BODY BLINDNESS, AND BODILY PHYSICAL PRESENCE

"Bodily presence" refers to the idea that "one's body is perceived as being one object among others" (Vignemont, 2018, 44). It has two aspects: firstly, one's body is perceived as a physical object (bodily physical presence); secondly, one's body is perceived as an object among other objects within an objective space (bodily objective presence). Here we focus on the former: Does one perceive or is one aware of one's body as one physical object amongst others? A Strawsonian thesis has it that certain capacity for object cognition requires bodily physical presence (Strawson, 1959; Cheng, 2019). However, this line faces a putative empirical counterexample from depersonalisation (Bradshaw, 2016), and also a putative conceptual counterexample from body blindness (Aquila, 1979). The primary goal of this paper is to develop this Strawsonian argument in light of these two putative counterexamples.

### References

- Aquila, R. (1979). Personal identity and Kant's "refutation of idealism." *Kant-Studien*, 70, 257-278.  
Bradshaw, M. (2016). *A return to self: depersonalization and how to overcome it*. Seattle, WA: Amazon Services International.  
Cheng, T. (2019). *Sense, space, and self*. UCL Dissertation.  
Vignemont, F. (2018). *Mind the body: an exploration of bodily self-awareness*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.  
Strawson, P. F. (1959). *Individuals: an essay in descriptive metaphysics*. London: Routledge.

12.30 - 13.25

Thor Grünbaum  
(University of Copenhagen)

## THE FUNCTIONAL ROLE OF CONSCIOUS SENSATION OF MOVEMENT

It feels like something to move one's body. Despite a growing knowledge of the functional roles of proprioceptive signals in online motor control, cognitive neuroscience of motor action has been unable to tell a consistent story about the functional roles of the conscious sensations of movement. In this paper, I argue that this lack of progress is partly due to a fundamental lack of clarity about the functional nature of phenomenal consciousness.

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15.30 - 16.25

Peter Brössel & Eline Kuipers  
(Ruhr University Bochum)

## NON-CONCEPTUAL KNOWLEDGE-HOW

We offer a novel account for understanding knowledge-how based on a formal framework for capturing non-conceptual, sensorimotor representations. This account shares with intellectualist approaches that it depends purely on the agent's mental representations whether an agent possesses knowledge-how. It agrees with anti-intellectualist approaches that conceptual knowledge-that is no prerequisite for knowledge-how. We argue that the sensorimotor representation of one's body performing a skilled activity is adequately understood as a path through a proprioceptive space, a multi-dimensional phenomenal similarity space of the experiences of possible bodily parameters for action planning and execution. According to our account, knowledge-how of a bodily action requires remembering or predicting a path through the proprioceptive space, which is (in the right kind of circumstances) sufficient for that action. Furthermore, we claim that these sensorimotor representations should be understood as embodied mental representations because both their content and format depend on the agent's bodily anatomy and activities.

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17 - 17.55

Frédérique de Vignemont  
(Institut Jean Nicod/ CNRS/ EHESS/ ENS/ PSL University)

## PROTECTIVE AGENCY

The main measures of agency consist in asking participants to make pointing or reaching movements, or to merely raise the index finger. Surprisingly, however, they are rarely asked to perform protective movements like avoidance and withdrawal. Yet these movements are as important, possibly even more, than instrumental ones. One may reply that they involve the same type of abilities, and therefore, do not deserve to be specifically tested. But is it really the case? Here I propose distinguishing between two fundamental functions for one's agentive abilities, to exploit the world and to protect oneself from the world. To these two functions correspond two forms of agency, which I call instrumental and protective agency. I will argue that these two forms of agency bear a different relationship with bodily representations and bodily experiences.

# ABSTRACTS MAY 27

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10 - 10.55

Błażej Skrzypulec  
(Jagiellonian University)

## PROPRIOCEPTION, KINAESTHESIS, AND THE MEREOTOPOLOGY OF BODILY AWARENESS

There is strong intuition that bodily awareness presents the body as a topological and a mereological whole. Nevertheless, it is also well-recognized that bodily awareness is multimodal. In consequence, a question arises regarding what is the source of topological and mereological content of bodily awareness. I am interested in considering whether such content is provided by "bodily sense," i.e. sensory mechanisms which present the body "from the inside," or it is a product of "exteroceptive" elements of bodily awareness such as vision or propositional knowledge. I argue that bodily awareness presents the body as a topological whole in virtue of bodily sense. On the other hand, there are serious doubts whether the same is true about presenting the body as a mereological whole. While bodily sense may be the source of some mereological content, this content does not match the mereological structure presented in the bodily awareness.

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11 - 11.55

Rachel Frenette  
(Paris 1)

## DO ADDICTIVE CRAVINGS LEAD TO A LOSS OF CONTROL? AN ANALYSIS OF THE POSSIBILITY OF INTENTIONAL ACTION IN ADDICTION

This presentation addresses the question of whether addictive cravings lead to loss of conscious and voluntary control, and consequently, whether they cause practical irrationality. I review Loewenstein's (1999) visceral account of addiction, which makes use of the concept of cravings. Briefly, his account states that control on decision-making is no longer possible when a person is fully addicted and hence a victim of his cravings, which justifies the claim that addiction stems from irrationality. While I agree with the fact that cravings can be conceptualized as visceral factors, I do not agree with Loewenstein's statement on irrationality. Two main reasons are put forward: first, there lies an ambiguity as to when, and how, a visceral factor becomes compelling; second, the underestimate of the intensity of visceral factors is not necessarily a proof of irrationality. A third argument is also explored, regarding the status of cravings as visceral factors.

### References

Loewenstein, G. (1999). A Visceral Account of Addiction. In J. Elster & O. G. Skog (eds.), *Getting Hooked: Rationality and Addiction* (235-264). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

12.30 - 13.25

Ashley Shaw  
(University College Dublin)

## URGES

Experiences of urges, impulses or inclinations are among the most basic elements in the practical life of conscious agents. Urges seem to be components of a vast number of physical and mental states. Take, for instance, the impulse to flee danger when in the grip of fear, or urges to eat and drink that form the core of appetitive states of hunger and thirst respectively. But what exactly is an urge? And how do we know about them? This paper develops and motivates an account of the metaphysics and epistemology of urges according to which we are in a position to know our urges on the basis of the control we exercise over our own mental and physical activity.

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15.30 - 16.25

Sabrina Coninx  
(Ruhr University Bochum)

## PAIN, ACTION, AND AGENCY

The aim of this investigation is to better understand the connection between pain, action, and the sense of agency. Five core theses are defended: (1) Pains elicit purposive actions: the connection between pain and action is neither deliberative nor reflex-like. (2) Acute pains elicit varying patterns of avoidance behavior that ground their primary biological function. (3) Chronic pains are characterized by the restriction of pain-related and increasingly non-pain-related behavior, profoundly affecting the quality of life of those concerned. (4) The transition from acute to chronic pain is strongly based on the prolonged exhibition and overgeneralization of avoidance behavior, facilitated by structures of modern societies. The substantial restriction of action is thus a cause as well as an effect of the persistence of pain. (5) There is an intimate reciprocal relationship between pain and agency, that is, the felt control over one's actions, applying to acute as well as chronic pain.

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17 - 17.55

Matthew Fulkerson  
(University of California, San Diego)

## AFFECTIVE AGENCY

We humans, and creatures like us, are agents: we act intentionally in the world. This talk will survey some of the ways in which our intentional actions, our agency, is influenced and constrained by affective processing. "Affect" is a term used in a variety of subtly different ways by different authors and in different disciplines, but as a general starting point I will use the term to apply to states, typically motivating, that we find pleasant and unpleasant. More specifically, my focus will be on sensory affect, the felt positive and negative elements of perceptual and emotional experiences, and the ways these affective elements influence our behaviors and intentional actions.

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## Venue

Sala Puig i Cadafalch,  
Institut d'Estudis Catalans.  
Carrer del Carme, 47,  
Barcelona

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## Online

For the link, please write to  
[rethinking.conscious.agency@gmail.com](mailto:rethinking.conscious.agency@gmail.com)



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757698. PI: Joshua Shepherd)*