

Illusions of self-consciousness: An interdisciplinary workshop on bodily agency and ownership

Description

The workshop will comprise two sessions, one dedicated to the sense of ownership and one dedicated to the sense of agency. Each will be opened by an empirical researcher followed by two speakers with philosophical views on the session's subject matter. The overall aims of the workshop are to explore issues involved in (a) determining the nature of the experiences of agency and ownership, and (b) finding appropriate measures of purported illusory forms of such experiences.

Date and location

21st of May, CFS, 25-5-11, Copenhagen University, Amager Campus

Registration

All are welcome, but space is limited, so participation is by registration only. Register with Adrian Alsmith by emailing this address: asmith@hum.ku.dk. Please use the subject line 'ISC workshop registration'.

Program

	Start	End
Longo	09:30	10:30
Coffee	10:30	10:45
Alsmith	10:45	11:45
de Vignemont	11:45	12:45
Lunch	12:45	14:00
Gentsch	14:00	15:00
Break	15:00	15:10
Grünbaum	15:10	16:10
Briscoe	16:10	17:10

Abstracts

Matt Longo (Birkbeck): What is it like to have a body?

Few issues in psychology are as fundamental or as elusive as the sense of one's own body. Despite widespread recognition of the link between body and self, psychology has only recently developed methods for the scientific study of bodily awareness. Experimental manipulations of embodiment in healthy volunteers have allowed for important advances in knowledge. Synchronous multisensory inputs from different modalities play a fundamental role in producing *body ownership*: the feeling that my body is "mine." Indeed, appropriate multisensory stimulation can induce a sense of ownership over external objects, virtual avatars, and even other people's bodies. I argue that bodily experience is not monolithic, but rather has measurable internal structure and components that can be identified psychometrically and psychophysically, which suggests that the apparent phenomenal unity of self-consciousness may be illusory.

Adrian Alsmith (Copenhagen): Imagine that's yours

In the right circumstances people may report experiences of owning a rubber hand, a third hand, an invisible hand, a virtual hand, a robotic device, or even the entire body of a mannequin or an avatar. According to the dominant phenomenal account of the sense of ownership, such experiences are essentially non-cognitive in that they do not necessarily require one to think about anything as one's own. According to a cognitive account of the sense of ownership, such experiences necessarily require thinking about something as one's own. I argue that the various kinds of report mentioned above are best explained as sincere but elliptical reports of imaginative perceptual experiences. This explanation is a matter of course for a cognitive account, but seems ad hoc for a phenomenal account. I conclude that, in such circumstances, one only experiences something as one's own if one thinks about it as one's own.

Frédérique de Vignemont (Jean Nicod): The affective quality of bodily awareness

Is the sense of bodily ownership exhausted by bodily experiences or is there a distinctive awareness that goes beyond bodily experiences? And if the latter case, what is the nature of the awareness of one's body as one's? I will argue against a sensory conception and in favour of an affective conception of bodily self-awareness. In a nutshell, what it means to be aware of one's body as one's own is that one cares about it. I will then consider two objections that can be put forward against the care model. First, according to what I call the Dualist objection, one may claim that we do not care for our body and only care for the self. Secondly, according to what I call the Altruistic objection, we care for other bodies in addition to ours. By answering to these objections, I shall be able to describe in more details the notion of bodily care that is relevant for the sense of ownership.

Antje Gentsch (UCL): The affective dimension of agency

There are several clear affective dimensions to the sense of agency, that is, the ability to generate and control one's own actions and relevant events in the external world. This makes it surprising that the emotion factor has been largely neglected in the field of agency research. Current empirical investigations of the sense of agency mainly focus on different sensorimotor signals (i.e., efference copy) and cognitive cues (i.e., intentions, beliefs) and on how they are integrated. I argue that this picture is not sufficient to explain agency experience, since agency and emotions constantly interact in our daily life by several ways. Reviewing first recent empirical evidence, I will show that self-action perception is in fact modulated by the affective valence of outcomes already at the sensorimotor level. Additional evidence can be drawn from research on the phenomena of self-serving biases in action awareness. Finally, I will hypothesize that the "affective coding" between agency and action outcomes might be differentially altered in various neuropsychiatric diseases.

Thor Grünbaum (Copenhagen): Intentions, sense of agency, and comparator mechanisms

A dominant view in contemporary cognitive neuroscience and philosophy is that low-level, comparator-based mechanisms of motor control are associated with a distinctive experience often called the feeling of agency (the FoA-hypothesis). An opposing view is that comparator-based motor control is largely non-conscious and not associated with any particular type of distinctive phenomenology. In this paper, I critically evaluate the nature of the empirical evidence researchers commonly take to support FoA-hypothesis. One aim of this paper is to discuss whether the evidence can be said to support the FoA-hypothesis.

Robert Briscoe (Ohio): Conscious vision in action

Conscious visual experience is a source of fine-grained and highly accurate information about the spatial properties of nearby objects. It is thus natural to assume that the spatial information present in visual experience is often used for purposes of intentional, object-directed visuomotor control. Yet this assumption, which I here call the Control Thesis, has been criticized on empirical grounds by proponents of the Two Visual Systems Hypothesis (TVSH) [Clark 2007, 2009; Goodale & Milner 1992, 2004a, 2008; Milner & Goodale 1995/2006]. According to the latter, visuomotor control is the responsibility of a "zombie" processing stream in the primate brain whose sources of bottom-up spatial information are entirely non-conscious. In standard formulations of TVSH, conscious vision does contribute to our motor engagements with the surrounding world, but its role is surprisingly indirect: it is limited, as Andy Clark puts it, to "recognizing objects, selecting targets for action, and determining what kinds of action, broadly speaking, to perform" (2007, p. 570). My aim is to show that the evidence put forward by proponents of TVSH – even when taken at face value – not only fails to support this view, but actually supports instead the commonsense conception of the role of conscious vision in action encapsulated by the Control Thesis.