

The Department of French Studies and the Centre for Research in the Visual Cultures of the French-Speaking World (CRIVCOF) are pleased to welcome you to a lecture by:

Professor Étienne Jollet
(Université Paris 1 Panthéon Sorbonne):

Causalities and Temporalities in the Visual Arts

**23 April, 5.00-6.30 pm, in Room A102
(Samuel Alexander)**

The lecture will be followed by a wine reception in W.3.13

Abstract:

I would like to suggest that the academic study of works of visual art implies a series of causalities, even when, in the modernist tradition, the approach is thought of as immanent: causality is what structure brings to our understanding of the work of art. In the context of what I would call “figurative poetics”, I would like to stress the fact that causality exists, as far the early modern period of art is concerned, within the work of art as well as outside it; in other words, we cannot consider it as the passive object of our causal investigation; rather there is an interplay between inner and outer causalities.

I would like to consider as problematic the mere fact of finding something causal in a work of art: to do so, I will refer to the notion of “motivation”, as opposed to “neutralization”. The former notion describes the case in which a motif (considered as the smallest identifiable element of representation) is felt as having a reason (i.e. a “motive”) to be represented (for example: the usually “neutralized” lower limit of a bust is “motivated” when a cloth goes further than this limit and falls on the plinth).

Through this investigation of causality a process takes place – an external temporality – which interacts with the inner temporality (which is so important in early modern visual arts, thanks to the value given to action); or rather, “inner temporalities”, because what has yet to be added to previous studies is the sense of the plurality of temporalities. But such an investigation leads us back to the core of the mystery of our relation to works of art: which motivation for the appearance of temporality? Which cause?

Étienne Jollet’s publications include: *Jean et François Clouet* (1997); *Figures de la pesanteur. Fragonard, Newton et les plaisirs de l’escarpolette* (1998); *La nature morte et la place des choses. L’objet et son lieu dans l’art occidental* (2008).

Professor Jollet will lead a workshop on the same subject on 24 April, 5.00-6.30 pm, in Room 4.3 (Roscoe Building).