

## OBITUARY

### Yvonne Duplessis, 1912–2017

Born in Jauchand in 1912, Yvonne Tuchmann-Duplessis died the 21<sup>st</sup> of September, 2017, in Paris, at the incredible age of 105. She was a prominent figure in French metapsychics during the second half of the Twentieth Century. Her work was at the crossroads of surrealism, perception, and extra-perception.

She began with a Licence of Letters at the Sorbonne, and then received a philosophy diploma on “The coloration of non visual sensations” (1938) that anticipated her future research. Then, at the University of Montpellier, she prepared a Ph.D. on the “surrealist literary movement” (1945) and published it, after which it became the standard popular book on this topic since 1950 (Duplessis 2003). With its 18 reprints and its translations into 10 different languages, this work led her to become a respected scholar on surrealism.

By chance, following a suggestion at one of her home literary meetings, she went to the experimental meetings conducted by the chemist René Warcollier, every Saturday at the Institut Métapsychique International (IMI). In the mid-1950s, he was one of the most famous researchers on telepathy. At his side, Duplessis became both a participant and a qualified researcher in all areas of metapsychics. She tested PK through famous subjects like Uri Geller (Duplessis & Bardot 1973) and his French avatar, Jean-Pierre Girard, but also teenage “mini-Gellers” (Duplessis & Bailly 1978, 1979–1980), and foreign subjects (e.g., Duplessis & Larcher 1973). She also tested ESP in various conditions: with blind people (Duplessis 1966a, 1968, 1972), and with synesthetes (Duplessis 1966b, 1968), and with new sets of symbolic colored cards (Duplessis & Olivyer 1971–1972).

She also took on institutional responsibilities inside the IMI, both as a Vice-President (1987–1995) and as the president of the Society of Friends of IMI (a sister association). She was dismissed in 1995 when a new board of directors tried to break with the historical orientation of this foundation (Evrard 2016:Chapter 11). But, actually, she retained an indefatigable interest in parapsychological activities, and I remember her active presence in December 2012 during a roundtable that I animated at the IMI around the exhibition “Mediums’ entrance: Spiritism and Art from Hugo to Breton” (Audinet et al. 2012). She continued to read and comment on the issues of the *Bulletin Métapsychique* even after a century of her life.

### **Dermo-Optics**

Duplessis' name is also associated with the history of dermo-optical perception (Brugger & Weiss 2008). In 1956, she began experiments on the interactions between the organism (mainly the skin on the hands) and visible and non-visible colors. This controversial topic was previously introduced in France by Jules Romains (pen name: Louis Farigoule, 1885–1972) under the name “paroptic vision” but was rejected by the same scientific circles that rejected ectoplasmy (Lapicque 1923, Piéron 1923). Duplessis was in contact with both Romains and foreign researchers in the USA and the USSR, as was Professor Novomeysky with whom she corresponded between 1975 and 1990. This phenomena of “vision without eyes,” also known as “extra-retinian vision,” also attracted strong interest in surrealist circles (e.g., René Daumal's ‘Great game’).

She received a grant from the Parapsychology Foundation which helped her to publish her works in English (Duplessis 1975, 1985) and allowed her to set up a laboratory in her basement, a now mythical place (MacWilliam 2009). I still remember how, on my first visit in March 2008, after I was immediately conducted into this underground laboratory, to my eternal astonishment I was able to distinguish colored goblets without the help of the eyes. As she explained in some of her publications (Duplessis 1974, 1996), this phenomenon is not to be confused with ESP because some of its properties seem to favor a non-paranormal physical explanation.

Later in her life, she was still exploring this life interest in visible and non-visible colors and their conscious and unconscious impact on behaviors (Duplessis 1984). In 1997, she became the president of the *Center of Information on Color* (“Centre d'information sur la couleur”) and contributed to the journal *Couleur*.

### **Surrealism and the Paranormal**

Because of her double expertise, Duplessis is a pioneer in the exploration of the “paranormal” side of surrealism (Bauduin 2014). It's well-known that the Surrealists made numerous references to the imagination and practice of spiritism (Clair 2003), but the influence of French metapsychics was always quite confused with it (Méheust 2004). André Breton found the psychological approach of spiritism quite “sterile” and tried to break down the barriers between the psychological automatism of Pierre Janet and the marvelous (Bacopoulos-Viau 2012). But this goal was very close to the one of metapsychics—the scientific study of ostensibly paranormal phenomena, now called “parapsychology”—which may be understood as a “surrealist science” (Evrard & Méheust 2012). They both searched

to develop a new kind of “lucid” trance different from the one of spiritist mediums (Méheust 1999). Breton recognized his having been inspired by Myers, Flournoy, Richet, and Sudre (Breton 1934). He had several direct interactions with Duplessis and other members of the IMI. One example is the experiment of 7 January 1927, when Breton was the target of the clairvoyant Pascal Forthuny during a public séance. He chose randomly to sit on a chair, which had previously been the target of a blind precognitive divination attempt, through a sophisticated protocol called “experiment of the void chair” developed by the IMI’s director, the physician Eugène Osty. What Forthuny revealed to Breton put him in a crazy state—Osty even had to call the police to remove him and his friends from the IMI—and can be directly linked with his difficult relationship with “Nadja” during that same period (unknown to quite everyone, but which can be retraced now through their published correspondence) (Evrard 2016:Chapter 8). Duplessis had no role in this experiment, but as a IMI member in the next generation, she had many contacts with Breton and shared this legacy of difficult relationships between surrealists and metapsychists.

Outside this anecdotal event, the relationship between Surrealists and metapsychics is marked by what Vivianne Barry (2000) has called “an unsustainable possibility to believe.” It was very difficult for them to handle similar scientific efforts to really promote a new view of human nature. Daumal’s experiments in dermo-optics and telepathy is a good example of this hesitation about collaboration among spirituality, literature, and science (Besterman 1929), which could also characterize, to a lesser extent, Duplessis’ works.

After WWII, Breton was close with the IMI and developed several collaborations with its members. He even used the expression “daily magic” from an article in the journal published by the IMI (Bruno 1954, Breton 1955). Duplessis is the author of a classic book on “the experimental part of surrealism” and its links to metapsychics (Duplessis 1998, 2002). Thanks to this work, some of the interactions between surrealism and metapsychics have now been analyzed and can be put together to give another original look at these experiments conducted during the Roaring Twenties.

#### **RENAUD EVRARD**

Assistant Professor of Psychology, University of Lorraine

Co-founder of the Center for Information, Research, and Counseling on Exceptional Experiences

#### **References Cited**

- Audinet, G., Godeau, J., Viau, A., Evrard, R., & Méheust, B. (2012). *Entrée des médiums: Spiritisme et art de Hugo à Breton*. Paris: Maison de Victor Hugo, Paris-Musées.

- Bauduin, T. M. (Editor) (2014). *Surrealism and the Occult. Occultism and Western Esotericism in the Work and Movement of André Breton*. Amsterdam, NL: Amsterdam University Press.
- Bacopoulos-Viau, A. (2012). Automatism, surrealism and the making of French psychopathology: The case of Pierre Janet. *History of Psychiatry*, 23(3):259–276.
- Barry, V. (2000). Matérialisme et/ou paranormal chez les surréalistes et le Grand Jeu, ou l'insoutenable (?) possibilité de croire. *Mélusine*, 20:285–295.
- Besterman, T. (1929). René Daumal, Paris. *Proceedings of the Society for Psychical Research*, 38:476–479.
- Breton, A. (1934). Le Message automatique. *Point du jour*. Paris: Gallimard, pp. 164–189.
- Breton, A. (1955). Magie quotidienne. *La Tour Saint-Jacques*, 1:19–31.
- Brugger, P., & Weiss, P. H. (2008). Dermo-optical perception: The non-synesthetic “palpability of colors”: A comment on Lerner (2006). *Journal of the History of the Neurosciences*, 17(2):253–255.
- Bruno, J. (1954). André Breton et la magie quotidienne. *Revue Métapsychique*, 97–121.
- Clair, J. (2003). *Du surréalisme considéré dans son rapport au totalitarisme et aux tables tournantes. Contributions à une histoire de l'insensé*. Paris: Editions Mille et une nuits.
- Duplessis, Y. (1966a). Télésthésie et cécité. *Revue Métapsychique*, 19–26.
- Duplessis, Y. (1966b). Synesthésie et télépathie. *Revue Métapsychique*, 45–54.
- Duplessis, Y. (1968). Synesthésie et cécité. *Revue Métapsychique*, 49–54.
- Duplessis, Y. (1972). “Telepathic” Experiments with the Blind. *Proceedings of the 1970 Parapsychological Association Annual Convention*, 7, Durham, NC: Duke Station.
- Duplessis, Y. (1974). *La vision parapsychologique des couleurs*. Paris: Epi.
- Duplessis, Y. (1975). *The Paranormal Perception of Color*. New York: Parapsychology Foundation.
- Duplessis, Y. (1984). *Les couleurs visibles et non-visibles*. Monaco: Editions du Rocher.
- Duplessis, Y. (1985). Dermo-optical sensitivity and perception: Its influence on human behavior. *Biosocial Research*, 7:76–93.
- Duplessis, Y. (1996). *Une science nouvelle, la dermo-optique*. Monaco: Editions du Rocher.
- Duplessis, Y. (1998). *L'aspect expérimental du surréalisme*. Agnières: JMG.
- Duplessis, Y. (2002). *Surréalisme et paranormal. L'aspect expérimental du surréalisme*. Agnières: JMG.
- Duplessis, Y. (2003). *Le surréalisme (18<sup>e</sup> ed.)*. Paris: PUF.
- Duplessis, Y., & Bailly, J.-P. (1978, 1979–1980). Pour une psychokinèse sur éprouvettes métalliques. *Revue Métapsychique*, 25:23–33; 26–27:35–47.
- Duplessis, Y., & Bardot, P. (1973). Rencontre avec Uri Geller. *Revue Métapsychique–Parapsychologie*, 18.
- Duplessis, Y., & Larcher, H. (1973). Visite à Robert et Jana Pavlita. *Revue Métapsychique*, 17:57–62.
- Duplessis, Y., & Olivyer, L. (1971–1972). Corrélations entre les modes d'émission et les résultats d'un test quantitatif de télépathie. *Revue Métapsychique–Parapsychologie*, 17.
- Evrard, R. (2016). *La légende de l'esprit: enquête sur 150 ans de parapsychologie*. Paris: Trajectoire.
- Evrard, R., & Méheust, B. (2012). La métapsychique, une science surréaliste? Éléments d'histoire. *Catalogue de l'exposition “Entrée des médiums. Spiritisme et Art de Hugo à Breton”*, Paris: Maison Victor Hugo-Paris-Musées, pp. 93–102.
- Lapicque, L. (1923). Sur une prétendue vision extra-rétinienne. *L'année psychologique*, 24:449–452.
- MacWilliam, S. (2009). *Remote Viewing*. London: Black Dog Publishing.
- Méheust, B. (1999). *Somnambulisme et médiumnité, 2 vol.* Paris: Les Empêcheurs de Penser en Rond.
- Méheust, B. (2004). *Devenez savants, découvrez les sorciers*. Paris: Dervy.
- Piéron, H. (1923). Compte rendu rédigé après la démonstration du 10 décembre 1920. *L'Année Psychologique*, 24:452–453.