

The brain, the person, and the social. Probing neuroscientific ideas and practices from STS & history of science perspectives.

**Work in Progress Workshop for Postgraduates
Zurich, Switzerland, June 23-25 2011**

Looking in any daily newspaper of the (Western) world, we will see shiny images of active brains, showing “red spots of greed”, the differences between Democrat and Republican brains or the a for love and lust. Neurochemical substrates for attachment as well as for prejudices are presented to a broader public. We learn that reason is eliminated during shopping and that helping others might activate the brain’s reward system. Gender differences, deception, voting and shopping behaviour, sexual preferences, peer pressure, video games, meditation – the list of topics on which neuroscience claims to have a say is endless. Research formerly dominated by social sciences or humanities (marketing, pedagogy, psychology, philosophy, art history etc.) is increasingly studied by neuroscience and thus disciplinary boundaries are getting blurred. Particularly important for explaining human behaviour are the imaging devices used in neuroscientific research such as fMRI and EEG. Up-to-date imaging techniques produce compelling pictures, which are readily published in popular media on account of their efficacy. Not least, media coverage and the spillover of neuroscientifically-produced accountability into court proceedings are changing the social relationships.

This workshop aims to look behind these well-known neuro-stories by investigating what is behind the media-hype about neuro-knowledge, focusing on (but not limiting to) the following questions:

Research Practice: An often-neglected question is what is actually happening within these sciences. Despite the “brain hype” in the public, research in the new neuro-disciplines might be more cautious, both regarding the explanatory power of images and the applicability of their findings. We encourage submissions dealing with the dynamics of research programs in neuroscience on an empirical basis.

Perception of Neuro-Knowledge: Another important question is what people actually do with the neuro-knowledge presented in the media or how their notion of selfhood is reconstituted respectively. Are the neurosciences (especially by techniques such as neurofeedback) redefining the person entirely or is it just another self-centered discussion of a Western, educated middle class? We encourage submissions dealing with the perception of neuro-knowledge by lay people and its adoption into everyday knowledge and self-perception.

Application: Plenty of research has been done in fields relevant for practice (for instance law, economics, education, policy making, psychiatry). Yet, it has to be investigated whether there are any examples of how neuro-knowledge was implemented into practice so far. And if so, is this actually new knowledge or simply a new label? We encourage submissions dealing with the transfer of neuro-knowledge from theory into practice.

Imaging: Much critical work has been done on neuroimaging, especially on brain mapping and the suggestive nature of visualizations created by functional imaging. However, epistemologies and imaging practices are constantly changing due to new approaches to the function of the brain and new technical devices. We encourage submissions dealing with diverse aspects of neuroimaging practices (technical aspects, mediality of images, historical accounts of visualizing the brain) and their role in the constitution of the (sciences of the) brain.

Relationship between Neurosciences and Humanities/Social Sciences: What are the implications for thinking about gender (or sex?), life stages, the social or 'human nature' in general? Does social science have to fear its overcoming or redefinition in terms of a neuro-sociality? Do the issues studied remain the same when studied under the scope of neuroscience? Can these disciplines speak a common language? How can social sciences deal with neuroscience: criticism, cooperation, or even collaboration? We encourage submissions dealing with the relationship between humanities and social sciences on the one hand and neurosciences on the other.

The work in progress-workshop is designed to watch both sides of the coin: the production of neuroscientific knowledge and its impact in and on different disciplines as well as the public by engaging with current developments in neuroscience from a Social Studies of Science and Technology (STS) as well as a history of science perspective. The goal is to get a preferably integral picture of up-to-date neuroscience research by combining analyses with different foci: new readings of sociality based on neurobiological findings, the production and use of neuroscientific findings for economics and marketing research, the historical developments of neuroscientific research in the light of its current mainstream as well as the technical and medial prerequisites of neuroscientific research. Discussing different aspects and their inter-relations we hope to get important insights prolific for each single project.

We invite PhD students and postdocs from science and technology studies, history of science and related areas to present and discuss their work on contemporary neurosciences. We will have a small and informal working meeting with space for intense discussion. Discussions will be based on pre-circulated papers (about 10 pages) and presentations (30 min.). Please indicate at what stage you are in your project. Please indicate your interest by submitting an abstract (not exceeding 500 words) outlining your paper.

Admission to the workshop is free subject to a successful application. Unfortunately we cannot cover travel expenses and accommodation in Zurich but pre-booked rooms will be available.

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Deadline for Application: February 28 2011

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