

## **CRITICAL NEUROSCIENCE – ALTERNATIVES TO NEUROCENTRISM IN PHILOSOPHY AND PSYCHIATRY**

Workshop, Philipps-University Marburg, Germany, April 22-24, 2010  
Senatssitzungssaal, Biegenstraße 12, ground floor

Organized by the interdisciplinary Project “Neuroscience in Context”, funded by the Volkswagen-Foundation, in collaboration with the Institute of Cognitive Science, University of Osnabrück, and the Institute of Philosophy, Philipps-University Marburg.

Organizers: Jan Slaby (Marburg/Osnabrück), Christoph Demmerling (Marburg), Suparna Choudhury (Berlin), *Critical Neuroscience Group* ([www.critical-neuroscience.org](http://www.critical-neuroscience.org))

Invited Speakers: Felicity Callard (London), Suparna Choudhury (Berlin), Thomas Fuchs (Heidelberg), Lutz Fricke (Berlin), Martin Hartmann (Frankfurt/M.), Jan-Christoph Heilinger (Zürich), Philip Hogh (Frankfurt/M.), Anelis Kaiser (Basel), Laurence Kirmayer (Montreal), Julia König (Frankfurt/M.), Daniel Margulies (Berlin), Stephan Schleim (Groningen)

**Participation is restricted to 50 – please sign up by e-mail at [jslaby@uos.de](mailto:jslaby@uos.de).**

### **WORKSHOP DESCRIPTION**

The cognitive, affective and social neurosciences and the emerging “neurocultural” disciplines are increasingly amassing resources and attention. In the academic and popular literature we often find the conviction that quite soon scientific approaches to the human brain will transform or even supersede cultural, philosophical, literary or ‘folk’ explanations of human phenomena. The neurosciences are bringing upon the horizon new technologies that are being mobilized in the name of educational improvement, treatment, illness prevention and security: new pharmaceutical drugs, brain-based methods to boost intelligence, attention and happiness as well as screening devices with wide-ranging medical, civil and military uses. Programmes designed to screen for “biomarkers” in the areas of mental health, the law, and education rest on the hope that neuroscience will enable reliable early detection of “problematic” traits and conditions.

This raises several concerns. Vivid depictions of the new brain sciences in the media and popular writing, often in the form of a futuristic discourse of promise and progress, increasingly lead to the incorporation of neuroscientific language into laypeople’s self-understanding. There seems to be a ‘hunger’ for self-objectification that is not easy to explain. Often, neuroscientific claims and explanatory patterns are treated as authoritative, even with regard to important normative questions in the domains of morality, ethics and social policy. This happens despite the fact that many of the experimental results and their theoretical articulations are unstable and provisional at the current stage of development in the field. A related concern is the increasing push towards premature application of brain-based technologies, especially when these might affect important aspects of the personality.

*Critical Neuroscience* is a project that attempts to understand, explain, contextualize and, where called-for, critique these developments with the aim to create awareness of and the competencies needed to responsibly deal with these concerns in neuroscientific practitioners, policy makers and the public at large. Does neuroscience indeed have wide-ranging effects or are we collectively overestimating its impacts, at the expense of other important drivers of social and cultural change,

such as, for example, developments in the economy? Via what channels is neuroscience interacting with contemporary conceptions of selfhood, identity, and well-being? How is neuroscience institutionally and politically entangled with powerful agents such as pharmaceutical companies, funding agencies, policy makers?

A further dimension of the agenda is to make the results of these assessments relevant to the practice of cognitive neuroscience itself. What difference would it make to scientific practice if neuroscientists themselves were involved, from the outset, in the analysis of contextual factors, historical trajectories, conceptual difficulties and potential consequences in connection to their work?

The workshop explores selected problem domains in which neuroscience is (really or apparently) making an impact. One focus is on psychiatry: Are we witnessing the advent of “neurocentrism” in the understanding of mental illness? Will the neurochemical approach take over psychiatric treatment? What are patient’s responses to the focus on the brain in medical practice and popular imagination? Another focus is philosophy: What is the appeal of “neurocentrism” as an anthropological position (“you are your brain”)? What notion of “nature”, including subjective “inner nature”, do neuroscientists and neurophilosophers adopt? In how far is nature treated as a domain of *normative facticity* (M. Hartmann) that allows drawing conclusions about how humans *should* live or how society *should* be arranged based on alleged facts about human brain functioning?

Related further themes to be explored are controversies over neuroscientific methods (e.g. “voodoo correlations” in fMRI studies), the new discourse of *neurocapitalism* – the claim that increasingly, the brain sciences are in the process of adopting a neoliberal vision that treats all aspects of a personality as commodities to be invested in the marketplace (“mental capital”) – and “neurogenderings”, i.e. the new focus in some parts of neuroscience on sexual differences that are allegedly based in the brain.

## WORKSHOP SCHEDULE

*[All talks take place in the Senatssitzungssaal, Biegenstrasse 12, ground floor]*

### THURSDAY, APRIL 22

- 19.00** Christoph Demmerling (Marburg), *Welcome & Opening Remarks*
- 19.15** Opening Lecture: Laurence Kirmayer (Montreal) – “Locating culture in the brain: Neurophenomenology, Situated Practice, and the Politics of Alterity“
- 21.30** *Reception*

### FRIDAY, APRIL 23

- 9.00** Jan Slaby(Marburg)/Jan-Christoph Heilinger (Zürich), “Lost in Phenospace. Challenging the Hidden Anthropology of Neuroscience”

- 10.00** Martin Hartmann (Frankfurt/M.), “Outlines of Neurocapitalism – The Case of Trust“
- 11.00** *Coffee Break*
- 11.30** Suparna Choudhury / Lutz Fricke (Berlin), “What Should We Do with the Teenage Brain? Mental Capital, Cortical Plasticity and the Adolescent“
- 12.30** **Lunch Break**
- 14.00** Thomas Fuchs (Heidelberg), “Are Mental Illnesses Diseases of the Brain?“
- 15.00** Felicity Callard (London), “The Hunt for Biomarkers in Schizophrenia Research: What Do Patients and Family Members Think?“
- 16.00** *Coffee Break*
- 16.30** Stephan Schleim (Groningen), “Limitations of Individual Applications of Neurogenetic Findings in Psychiatry and Law“
- 17.30** Philip Hogh/Julia König (Frankfurt/M.), “Remembrance of Nature in the Subject. Towards a Critical Concept of Inner Nature“
- 20.00** *Dinner for Invited Speakers*

**SATURDAY, APRIL 24**

- 9.00** Anelis Kaiser (Basel), “Neurogenderings: Is there Really a Sexed Brain?“
- 10.00** Daniel Margulies (Berlin/Leipzig), “The Salmon of Doubt – Exploring a Recent Methodological Controversy in Social Neuroscience“
- 11.00** *Coffee Break*
- 11.30** Final Discussion/wrap up
- 12.30** ***End of Workshop***

Also see [www.critical-neuroscience.org](http://www.critical-neuroscience.org)