

Workshop announcement: Neuro-Reality Check (1-3, Dec. Berlin)

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Neuro-Reality Check. Scrutinizing the 'neuro-turn' in the humanities and natural sciences

A Workshop at the Max-Planck-Institute for the History of Science, Berlin.
1-3 December 2011

organized by Suparna Choudhury and [Max Stadler](#)

With contributions from Nima Bassiri, Stephen Casper, Roger Cooter, Steven Fuller, Sky Gross, Clement Levallois, Melissa Littlefield, Daniel Margulies, Paul Martin and Simon Williams, Constantina Papoulias and Felicity Callard, Martyn Pickersgill, Amir Raz, Mark Robinson, Julia Voss and Niklas Maak, and Allan Young.

The full programme can be found [here](#).

Today, few developments in the world of science and technology would seem to draw comparable degrees of attention, commentary and sheer excitement than the neurosciences. Within and beyond academia it has become routine to celebrate or alternatively, to castigate, the purportedly palpable effects and consequences – social, political, cultural and intellectual – of the recent expansions of the neurosciences. Whether we witness art historians finding fault with neuro-enthusiastic colleagues, linguists warning of a ‘new biologism’, ethicists, science policy strategists and anthropologists pondering the future impacts of neuroscience, literary critics and artists dabbling in mirror-neurons, or media-savvy neuroscientists forming a new kind of public intellectual, the neurosciences have, without question, inspired a great deal of scholarly and not-so-scholarly action. Indeed, so familiar have these discourses become, so seemingly self-evident their significance, that the problematisations of the neurosciences rarely appear to move beyond elaborations of the already familiar or, at best, partisan polemics.

More problematic, on closer inspection the majority of these diverse neuro-discourses would seem to operate on a very thin evidential basis. Claims being made about neuroscience’s societal impacts more often than not possess the same kind of impressionistic qualities as the growing alarmism on the part of Geisteswissenschaftler lamenting the neuro-induced loss of cultural capital and contracting research budgets. The conspicuous absence of a solid evidential basis in these matters is the working hypothesis of our upcoming workshop: Neuro-Reality Check.

The workshop brings together scholars from a diversity of disciplinary backgrounds with the aim of stepping back a little – and of probing deeper into the alleged effects and actual causes of the ongoing neurohype. Our aim, in other words, is to encourage a more de-centred kind of analysis than the one typically pursued: Why, for instance, is it that art historians or political theorists choose to eschew ‘theory’ in favour of neuroscientific wisdom? Which ideological sea-changes reside behind the frequently proclaimed ‘crisis’ in the humanities, and how do they resonate with the turn to the ‘neuro’? What are the interests and economic conditions driving the mushrooming of interdisciplinary neuro-X academic subfields in the contemporary academic landscape? Or again, is it really – empirically – the case that we are on the verge of a ‘neuro-revolution’, our life-worlds, language and habits already being subtly transformed?

Please contact us if you wish to attend (schoudhury AT mpiwg-berlin.mpg DOT de or mstadler AT mpiwg-berlin.mpg DOT de). Participation is open, but spaces are limited.

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