

International Conference

NeuroCultures – NeuroGenderings II

13 -15 Sept. 2012, University of Vienna

In March 2010, participants of the international and transdisciplinary conference “NeuroGenderings” put together an expert group to critically examine research on the sexed brain. Scientists from Europe, the US, Canada and Australia from different disciplines such as neuroscience, neurocultures, the humanities, social and cultural studies, gender studies, feminist science studies, and science and technology studies, launched this network to improve reflective analysis within/of the neurosciences and to initiate dialogue across disciplinary borders. The aim of this group is to elaborate innovative theoretical and empirical approaches to address the question of sex and gender in the brain; to analyze the social and political underpinnings of the ongoing “cerebralization” of human life and especially of gender; to evaluate the current state of neuroscientific methods, evidence, and interpretations regarding sex/gender in the brain, and to discuss the impacts of neuroscientific gender research in socio-political and cultural fields. Some of these approaches can already be read in a special issue of *Neuroethics*, “Neuroethics and Gender” (papers published online first available at: <http://www.springerlink.com/content/120989/?Content+Status=Accepted>; the final issue will be available in late 2012).

In co-operation with the network NeuroGenderings, the Gender Research Office at the University of Vienna will launch a three-day Conference entitled “NeuroCultures – NeuroGenderings II” (13 - 15 September 2012).

We aim to expand the network and invite scholars and students who engage with neuroscientific research as neuroscientists and/or brain science studies scholars with insights from the social and cultural studies of science, technology, and medicine, as well as from feminist and queer theory to discuss current developments in the field of neurocultures and gender.

Call for Papers

The aim of the conference “NeuroCultures – NeuroGenderings II” is to improve reflective scientific approaches concerned with sex/gender and the brain, and to gain particular insight into the transformation or persistence of gendered norms and values that accompany the mutual entanglements between brain research, various disciplines and public discourse. With the expansion of the domains of neuroscientific knowledge, today we are witnessing an abundance of emerging neurocultures (such as neuropedagogy, neuroeconomics, neuromarketing, neurotheology, neuroaesthetics, among others) in which bio-socio-cultural relations are (re-) negotiated within research, neuro-(technological)applications, and public discourses. We use the notion of the “cerebral subject” – the cultural figure of the human according to which all we need to be ourselves is our brains (Ortega & Vidal 2007) – to describe how thought, behaviour, subjectivity and identity are collapsed with the brain’s biology in these neurocultural fields. The cerebral subject is a specific kind of subject; the brain vocabulary produces a culturally and historically specific version of the human and, as such, impacts individual, social, cultural and political spheres.

Gender aspects have to be seriously taken into account within these endeavours on various levels: their empirical significance, the close entanglement of neuroscientific research with society, the impacts of neurofacts and neurotechnologies (in the broadest sense) on socio-cultural gender symbolisms and gendered power relations. Additionally, the hybrid

conceptions of neurocultures have to be questioned in terms of their potentials for disrupting nature-culture dichotomies on both material and epistemological levels.

Contributions to these discussions are welcome in the following thematic strands:

- I. **Empirical NeuroGenderings:** Empirical research on aspects of gendering the brain including biological and socio-cultural aspects; analyses on methodological aspects and biases in the construction of sex/gender in brain research; research on the constructive processes in brain imaging, their relevance in knowledge production and in the transgression of brain concepts and findings into popular discourse; approaches from feminist and queer neuroscience in relevant fields.
- II. **NeuroCultures and Brain Plasticity:** Analyses of empirical research on brain plasticity, including a critical discussion of the concept itself and its impact on gender-related aspects in society; discourses on current forms of neurobiological determinism that frame all processes of thought and action explainable and predictable in terms of the brain's structures and functions, irrespective of whether these structures and functions are innate or formed by experience.
- III. **Image and Politics of the Cerebral Subject:** Social movements' uses of brain arguments on gender and sexuality for progressive or conservative agendas; re-politicizations of critical analyses of the cerebral subject and gender; questioning the lack of societal, political and economic situatedness and reflections of gender and intersectional categories; the cultural appeal of using the brain to account for gender and sexuality; social and political uses of brain-based arguments on sex, gender, sexuality, but also class, race, age.
- IV. **Power und Politics of NeuroCultures/NeuroGenderings:** Emergence of a neurogovernmentality with its technologies of power and the market economy, as these are implemented into technologies of the self, where the individual brain functions as the target of control, repair and manipulation; gender dimensions of social neurosciences, neuroeconomy, neuropedagogy, neurotechnologies in general, and particularly in neuroenhancement technologies where these converge with notions of convertibility and modifiability of the brain, and are embedded in paradigms of individual optimization within modern meritocracy.
- V. **Transdisciplinary and NeuroGenderings:** Studies on gendered brain narratives from the perspectives of history, sociology, philosophy, cultural studies, and arts; analyses of popular culture's accounts of brain and gender.
- VI. **Theory and Epistemology of NeuroGenderings:** Theoretical and epistemological discussions about concepts as feminist materialism; approaches from gender, feminist & queer technoscience that address the fragmentations of the border between nature-culture-technology, the relations between sex, gender, and brain; other important notions/critical tools that are developed in feminist and queer scholarship.
- VII. **Other gender relevant fields of research.**

Contributions to this conference can be submitted for oral presentation (20 min) or for a poster presentation. For paper submissions, please use the online tool on our conference site: <http://neurocultures2012.univie.ac.at> and indicate the strand in which you aim to present your paper/poster. Abstracts for papers/posters should not exceed 3000 characters (including spaces).

Deadline for proposal submission: 25 March 2012.

The papers will be selected within a short time frame and confirmed by mid-May 2012.

On behalf of the Gender Research Office and the NeuroGenderings Network

Prof. Dr. Sigrid Schmitz