

CALL FOR PAPERS

Special issue of *Subjectivity* on 'NEUROSCIENCE AND SUBJECTIVITY'

Edited by:
John Cromby
Tim Newton
Simon Williams

The 1990's 'decade of the brain' saw the beginning of a massive expansion of research into and publicity about neuroscience. New imaging techniques, capable of producing arresting pictorial images of patterns of brain activation, proliferated through the mass media, and evocatively named subdisciplines (social neuroscience, neuropsychanalysis) grabbed the attention of many scholars.

In response, some social scientists working within the ambit of science and technology studies launched programmes of research into the intimate workings of the new neurosciences. Others explored the linkages between neuroscience and emergent political and cultural formations, charting regimes of governance and power in relation to the politics of 'life itself'. Yet others have taken up elements of neuroscience in their own writings: in social theory, cultural studies, critical psychology, economics, politics and elsewhere, tropes and theories from contemporary neuroscience are now sometimes invoked to add weight, authority and grounding to arguments. But it nevertheless seems fair to say that, for the most part, social science and neuroscience continue to remain distinctively separate from, and often wary of, each other.

In this special issue, we invite contributors from both disciplines to explore the potentials of neuroscience with relation to the notion of subjectivity. Subjectivity is a term that potentially embraces the various phenomena indexed by terms such as consciousness, self and being. It refers to the way in which our being-in-the-world, our experience, our acquired ways of interpreting, feeling and acting, are already bound up with both the flux of social relations and the bodies that enact them.

Exploring the potentials of neuroscience with relation to subjectivity therefore means a joint emphasis on the body and the social, on the interpenetration and co-constitution of brain and culture. It is not that one can simply be the adjunct to the other, nor that one can always be subordinate or foundational to the other. Rather, what we seem to need is a nuanced exploration of the relative contribution of each in relation to the various moments, events and phenomena that constitute a life.

Subjectivity is a concept with a broad range of convenience and a presence in numerous disciplines, so we expect its coupling with relevant work in contemporary neuroscience to yield many interesting possibilities for scholarship. Such work will require potential contributors to consider very seriously just what it might mean to take theories and evidence from neuroscience and social science jointly together. With this in mind, and without being prescriptive, here are some questions that we feel contributors might usefully orient towards:

- To what extent do social science concepts and terminology that appear to bridge the divide between the body and the social (e.g. somatechnics, performativity) actually do so in this context?
- Conversely, how adequate are biological concepts (e.g. autopoiesis, lifelines) as the basis for a thorough integration of the social and the neural?
- Does work in neuroscience illustrate the possibility of applying similar, if not uniform, epistemological frameworks across the natural and social sciences? Or does it merely confirm the impossibility of such an exercise?
- In the kind of interdisciplinary moves that any integration between social science and neuroscience might rest upon, what gets lost? Which issues and questions get obscured or elided, and which, conversely, come to seem 'naturally' demanding of attention?
- What are the potentials of specific branches of neuroscience (e.g. social, affective) for our understandings of subjectivity?
- To what extent do findings within neuroscience qualify or undercut appeals to consciousness or intentionality as explanations of behaviour?
- What are the implications of contemporary neuroscientific findings for the theories and concepts of psychoanalysis?
- To what extent does recent work in affective neuroscience illuminate the putative 'turn to affect' in the social sciences? Conversely, in what ways might work within the 'turn to affect' extend neuroscientific understandings?
- What methodological challenges might be encountered, by both social science and neuroscience, in any attempt to jointly explore subjectivity?

We want to emphasise that these questions are meant to be neither obligatory nor exhaustive: we look forward to receiving papers addressing these or any other relevant topics.

Contributions

Contributions are welcome from any area of neuroscience and from any area of social science. We're especially interested to consider multi-authored collaborations across these disciplines, or single-authored papers that try to engage constructively with relevant aspects of both.

Potential contributors should email an abstract to us by 27th March 2009. Abstracts should be no more than 300 words in length, and contain a title and full contact details of authors. Once all of the abstracts have been received, we will select those for which we would like to consider a full-length submission. Authors will be notified by the end of May 2009.

This special issue of *Subjectivity* will be published in summer 2011, and finished papers must be received by 8th January 2010. Papers must be submitted using the journal's online manuscript system, and clearly marked for inclusion in this special issue. Go to:

<http://sub.msubmit.net/cgi-bin/main.plex>

Further information about the journal, including some free access, can be found at:

<http://www.palgrave-journals.com/sub/index.html>

Contact:

Dr. John Cromby, Loughborough UK: J.Cromby@lboro.ac.uk

Prof. Tim Newton, Exeter UK: t.j.newton@exeter.ac.uk

Prof. Simon Williams, Warwick UK: S.J.Williams@warwick.ac.uk