
Books Forum Introduction

Neuro, Neuro, Neuro

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The social studies of neuroscience have become a terribly crowded field and the Books Forum has covered many of the monographs it produced. More than once have I heard colleagues express a sense of fatigue with this line of research. But scholarly stamina pays off. Only now, after years and years of in-depth inquiry of particular aspects of brain research and its public reception, does a more synoptic picture of both the neurosciences and their social scientific investigation begin to emerge. Considering that both the United States and Europe have just decided to launch multi-billion dollar (or euro) brain research programs, a review of this body of literature appears to be more timely than ever.

In his discussion of two edited volumes, Martyn Pickersgill and Ira Van Keulen's *Sociological Reflections on the Neurosciences* and Melissa Littlefield and Jenell Johnson's *The Neuroscientific Turn*, the German philosopher and psychologist Stephan Schleim wonders whether this turn is socially all that consequential at the end of the day. For example, nowhere did the denial of free will by philosophically oriented neuroscientists and neuroscientifically oriented philosophers lead to any judicial reforms. "There is the possibility that society at large takes the topics of our inquiry much less seriously than we do", concludes Schleim.

The American neuroscientist Daniel Margulies welcomes the fact that the essays in Francisco Ortega and Fernando Vidal's *Neurocultures* deflate the hype around all things neuro. But he also worries that the 'conclave' assembled in this volume holds a monologue among the rising 'counter-neuroculture' instead of including self-critical brain researchers in the conversation.

Even though quite a few social researchers who have studied the neurosciences in the past decade are in the process of changing tracks, the reviewed publications only present an interim report. In 2023, the Human Brain Project of the European Union and the BRAIN Initiative of the United States will both be completed. For the social studies of neuroscience, that will be a good moment to take stock again.

Nicolas Langlitz is Assistant Professor at The New School for Social Research in New York. He is the author of *Neuropsychadelia: The Revival of Hallucinogen Research since the Decade of the Brain* and currently studies the epistemic culture of neurophilosophy and the culture controversy in primatology.