
The biomobile brain – on the pragmatics and politics of travelling between the neural and social sciences

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Abstract

Session: Biomobilities – travel, movement and relationality in the emergence of contemporary biological materials and knowledges (Dr Megan Clinch, Dr Des Fitzgerald, Dr Amy Hinterberger)

This paper argues that the mobility of neurobiological knowledge is one of the most important features of the new brain sciences. While there has been much attention recently to the potential ‘neurobiologization’ of the methods and approaches of the social sciences – with scholars arguing passionately both for and against such a move – this paper offers a new perspective on this debate, by focusing on *how* it is, in fact, that neurobiological knowledge may be so mobilized.

The paper is empirically rooted in an autoethnographic account of the author’s participation in an interdisciplinary brain-imaging experiment that worked to entangle sociological and neurobiological perspectives. Side-stepping arguments for and against such entanglement, the paper argues that what this experiment reveals, more than anything else, is (1) the sheer mobility of neurobiological methods and concepts, and (2) the pragmatics through which that mobility is achieved. But the paper uses this ground to analyze the epistemological politics threaded through such movement – as neurobiological knowledge becomes mobilized in ever-greater amounts of intellectual space.

In this panel, the term ‘biomobilities’ calls attention to the ways in which contemporary biologies may also be defined by their mobility. The term describes not only the physical journeys of biological material, but also the epistemic travels of biological explanation. This paper illuminates these dynamics through an analysis of the biomobility of neurobiological knowledge especially. At its heart is thus an argument that empirical attention to movement and mobility opens up an important new perspective for the social study of biology.

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