

Call for Participation:

Mercator Spring School "Interventions: What it means to be human in 21st century life sciences", in cooperation with Soraya de Chadarevian, UCLA (USA) and Edna Suarez-Diaz, UNAM (Mexico), Bochum, 18.-22.3.2013

The Mercator Spring School at Bochum hosted by the Mercator Research Group "Spaces of anthropological knowledge" brings together international experts from science and media studies, history of science, sociology and anthropology of knowledge, literary studies and philosophy to discuss their work with Ph.D. students and advanced Master students on the topic "Interventions: What it means to be human in 21st century life sciences". Our aim is to foster an interdisciplinary and cross-cultural analysis of the production and circulation of recent research in the life sciences and neurosciences. We want students to become familiar with and participate in current debates in these fields and to be able to adopt an interdisciplinary approach to their research projects. The title "interventions" not only refers to manipulative and intervening approaches found in recent life sciences, it also includes work done in the past decades in science studies, literary and media studies, history of science and other approaches engaging critically with the sciences by exploring material, technological and cultural structures and processes of knowledge production and knowledge circulation.

The Mercator Spring School invites applications from doctoral candidates in science studies, history of science, philosophy, cultural, literary and media studies as well as related fields such as art history, politics, medicine and film studies. Participants will receive a Spring School reader with texts and materials.

The Spring School will take place in the Beckmanns Hof at the Ruhr-University Bochum. During the morning sessions various experts will give talks on the topic and in the afternoon there will be in-depth discussions on each day's focus in relation to the doctoral projects.

The Spring School will be directed by Christina Brandt, Estrid Sørensen, Anna Tuschling, Yvonne Wübben (Bochum) in cooperation with Soraya de Chadarevian (Los Angeles) and Edna Suarez-Diaz (Mexico). The faculty will further include: Sen Cheng (Bochum), Thorsten Heinemann (Frankfurt), Erich Hörl (Bochum), Klaus Lindgaard Høyer (Copenhagen), Markus Krajewski (Weimar), Thomas Lemke (Frankfurt), Veronika Lipphardt (Berlin), Astrid Deuber-Mankowsky (Bochum), Andreas Mayer (Berlin), Monique David Ménard (Paris), Annemarie Mol (Amsterdam), Nicolas Rose (London), John Tresch (Philadelphia), Staffan Müller-Wille (Exeter).

Topic

At the beginning of the 21st century both the individual and the social life are strongly bound to bio- and neuroscientific knowledge. Our understanding of the individual and the social conditions of humans is seen to be inextricably interwoven with developments in corresponding theories and technologies. The very notion of "human nature" is challenged by new approaches to bioengineering organisms which have the potential of reshaping the individual human body. This new emphasis on the 'plasticity' of human nature, and especially of the brain, that is found in both utopian views of 'posthumanism' and in concrete biomedical and neuroscientific approaches, changes the

complex historical boundaries of 'nature' and 'culture' and creates a new relationship between the two: 'nature' no longer has the connotation of a deterministic category, but turns into something more flexible against which the domain of 'culture' may even be seen as remaining the more permanent part. Ideas of cultural identity and human diversity are also affected by research in genomics. Brain research and Human Genome Projects basically reconfigure longstanding questions about cultural/natural diversity across human populations and challenge our ideas of personhood. Furthermore, research on reproduction and embryo research, accompanied by high expectations of the medical application of stem cells and cloning techniques, provide new and ethically controversial technologies which will affect the relation of bodies and societies in a new way. New definitions of 'kinship' are only some of the results of developments in reproductive medicine. Moreover, the interrelation of scientific and economic interests that has developed its own dynamics during recent decades in the research fields of the life sciences is turning parts of the living human body into valuable commodities. The aim of the Spring School is to increase our understanding of these developments by bringing together international experts in the fields of research mentioned above. We want to encourage a comprehensive discussion that will consider studies that are more often explored separately by different science studies communities. We will focus on historical shifts in basic concepts and discourses, as well as on the analysis of knowledge generating practices, such as specific experimental systems, media technologies or visual representations. Furthermore, there are important questions raised concerning the places at which these transformations have been taking place. These range from the laboratory to the clinic in different cultural settings, and also include spaces of knowledge production such as literary modes of writing or forums of public debate alongside everyday practice. The following interrelated topics provide a structure that will frame the discussions during the 5-day spring school:

Interventions I: Neurons, plasticity and concepts of the human in neuroscience

Contact: yvonne.wuebben@rub.de

Interventions II: Concepts of the living and media technologies

Contact: anna.tuschling@rub.de

Interventions III: Bodies and Societies

Contact: estrid.sorensen@rub.de

Interventions IV: Cells, Genomes, Organisms

Contact: christina.brandt@rub.de

A combination of lectures, seminar discussions and student presentations will encompass both exemplary cases and concrete case studies and projects.

How to apply

External PhD students are very welcome. If you want to participate, please submit your application to the Mercator Spring School electronically, including:

- Letter of Intent with an abstract of your research project, explaining your interest in the topic and indicating how you would like to contribute (including a presentation of your own project or attendance) (1-1,5 pages)
- Curriculum Vitae

All application materials must be submitted by January 11, 2013 to mrg2@rub.de.

All Applicants who have been accepted will be notified by mid-January 2013.

A limited sum of accommodation funding will be available upon application.

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