Talk at GNOSIS, 21th of December 2012

Title: *Neuroscience is bad. Are theories of plasticity any better?*

The title is telling: I will argue first that ‘traditional’ cognitive neuroscience is conceptually flawed and secondly – as an open question – inquire whether theories of brain plasticity are scientifically more sound and more apt to enter into collaboration with the social sciences.

The ascriptions of ‘agency’ or ‘intentionality’ to the brain has long been regarded with suspicion from social scientists and philosophers. In the talk, I argue that this suspicion is perfectly legitimate and that the standard response from the defenders of cognitive neuroscience is illegitimate – namely the response that such talk is technical (Ullmann), merely ‘metaphorical’(Blakemore) or a flaw of ordinary language (the Churchlands).

Conversely, theories of brain plasticity has been more welcomingly greeted by social scientists, because theories of plasticity do not seem to treat the brain as an *isolated* and deterministic system, thus promising a collaborative effort where the relations between the brain and its social setting could be more freely investigated. I will treat this as an open question, but will argue that the hope of such a collaborative effort is bleak, based on two points: (a) it is unclear what plasticity entails as a scientific hypothesis and (b) the inconsistencies between social science and theories of plasticity are (still) to grave.

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