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Institute of European Ethnology,
Humboldt University of Berlin

Transdisciplinary International Workshop

‘Distributed Selves’.

Humboldt University of Berlin, June or July 2008

Although the efforts on overcoming dualisms such as subject – object, nature – culture, mind – body are very old, one can observe a booming of relational and network-based approaches in different scientific fields after the 80’s. Theories of distributed cognition, of non-human agents and of actor-networks offer radical alternatives to the dominant notion of the human subject in the humanities and social sciences. At the same time, complexity theory, ecological approaches and theories of biological networks establish a relational understanding of research objects in the sciences. One could refer to examples such as the field of interactome modeling, the study of metabolic networks, network approaches in epidemiology, the ecological approach to visual perception, the notion of “body multiple”, the study of human-computer interaction and of flexible virtual environments in education – to name only a few fields of recent debates.

While some of these approaches try to increase theoretical certainty and *represent* reality more adequately via using network-like mappings other approaches examine the dynamic and unpredictable aspects of network-like interactions (including these between scientific practices of representation and emerging realities) and emphasize uncertainty. The question arises how a relational-processual ontology can be translated into innovative methodological approaches and observational practices. One question for instance might be, what kind of databases could provide entrance points for innovative interpretations of ongoing human and non-human interaction and intra-activity.

Our transdisciplinary international workshop aims at bringing together experts of the fields of study of a) distributed cognition, b) actor-network theory and c) biological networks in examining the epistemological, anthropological and practice-related aspects and implications of the relational way of thinking and its variations. Drawing on the research materials of the Research Cluster ‘Preventive Self’ we suggest the use of the field of prevention of obesity, where techno-scientific practices, cultural representations, individual strategies and corporeal phenomena merge into each other, as an empirical reference for this investigation.

We want to invite the experts of different disciplines in bringing together their approaches and beginning a dialogue which overcomes the disciplinary boundaries of social and life-sciences.

The Workshop will take place in June or July 2008 in Berlin and be hosted by the Research Cluster Preventive Self, Collaboratory Social Anthropology and Life-sciences of the Humboldt University of Berlin.

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