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Interpreting the Brain in Society: Cultural Reflections on Neuroscientific Practices

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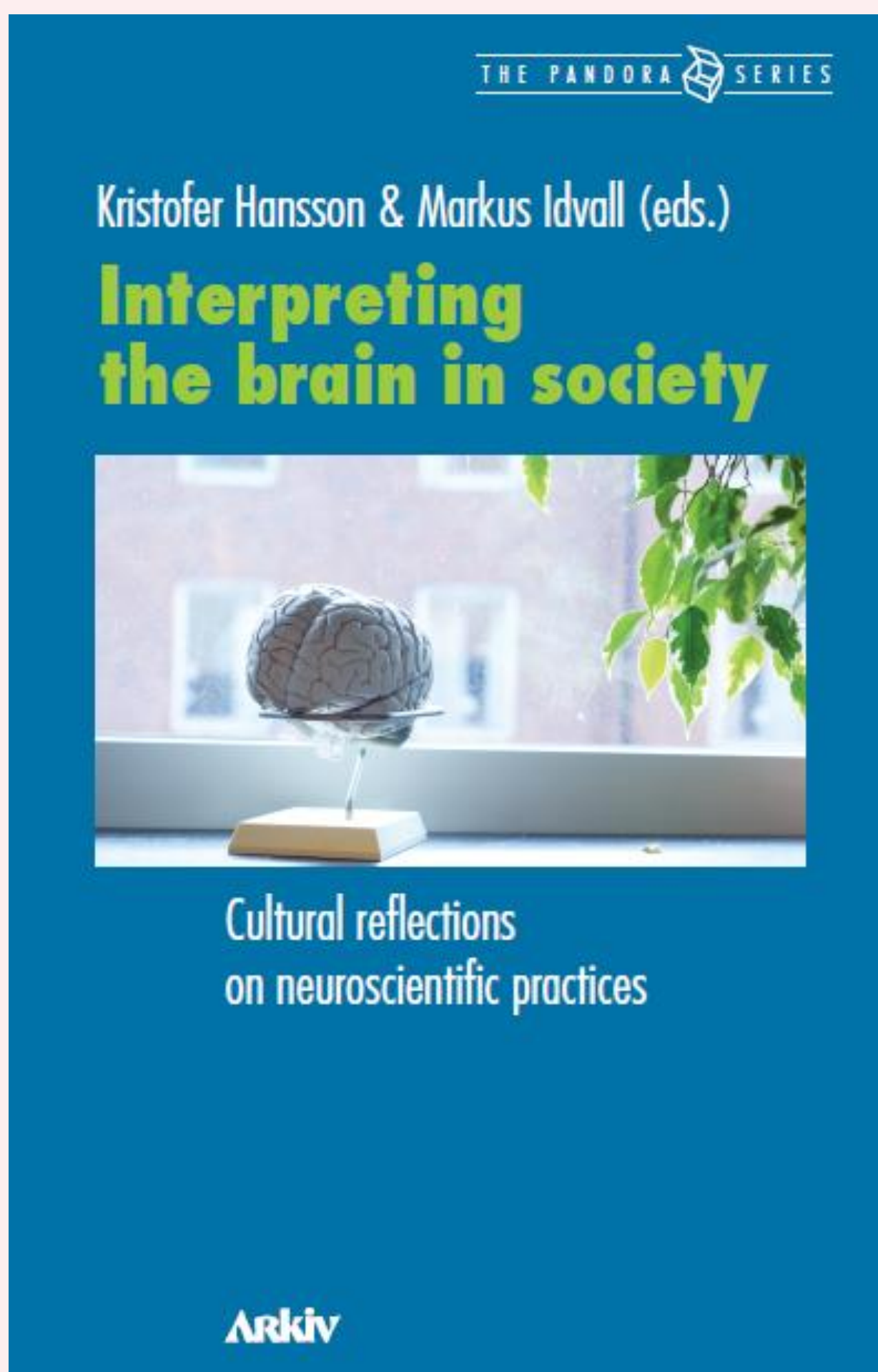
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Interpreting the Brain in Society

Cultural Reflections on Neuroscientific Practices



Society today seems obsessed with the human brain. It has become a crucial component in our culture, for people's attitudes to themselves and others, and for how they should plan their lives. Modern neuroscience has a great impact on society, not only on medical treatments but also on existential questions such as how human consciousness can be defined, where feelings arise, when life ends and death occurs. Such cultural and existential questions are addressed in this anthology. Its authors suggest perspectives and concepts to understand neuroscience, and critically scrutinize its various manifestations in society. *Interpreting the brain in society. Cultural reflections on neuroscientific practices* is written by scholars from art history, visual studies, and ethnology involved in a research collaboration with medical and natural scientists.

In this anthology, we reflect on the emerging knowledge about the brain – how it is understood by scientists and laymen, interpreted in media, and represented in the public domain. We link to previous studies of an expanding neurosciences but add a concern for how participation is expressed, made difficult – or possible – in interactions involving the sciences of the brain. In common is an ambition to interpret, understand and problematise neuroscientific practices and their impact on human interaction and culture. We analyse the negotiations that occur when 'spheres' that are apparently different – such as the scientific community and the public – interact with each other. What happens when society becomes oriented towards cerebral issues, with a culture that has an increasing element of 'neuro' in its expression and contents?

To conclude, within the humanities and social sciences, it has become common to speak about the development of a new neuroscience, which involves other ways of thinking about the brain than the ways we have been used to. Therefore, neuroscience and its knowledge is not only something that belongs to scientists; instead it has become an integrated part in our everyday lives. Not least, the new scientific knowledge about the brain, its diseases and possible cures has in recent decades transformed into existential questions about subjectivity, the individual brain and our self. By problematising our knowledge about the brain and interpreting it in a cultural context, we may also find new public space for engagement in the developments of a variety of neuroscientific practices.

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