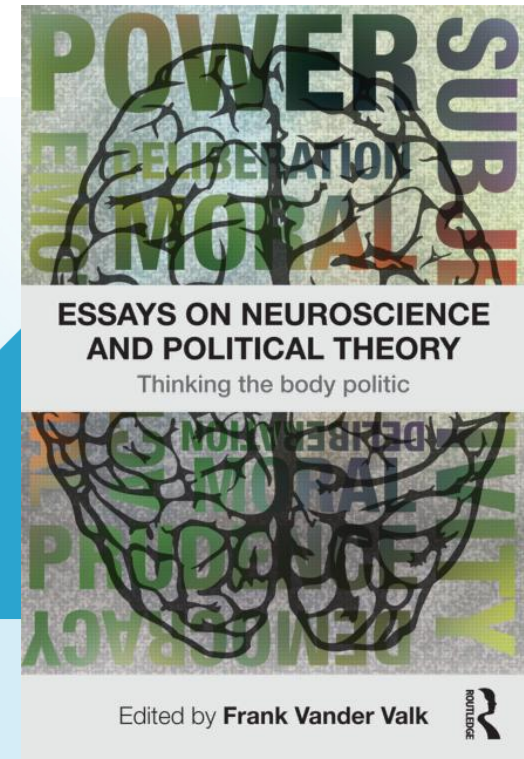


‘Neuropolitics’, ‘neuropolity’ and the complex alignment of neuroscientific and political theory perspectives



Machiel Keestra, Institute for Interdisciplinary Studies,
AIS Conference, October 13, 2012



Should we make room for neuro-politics or neuro-policy?

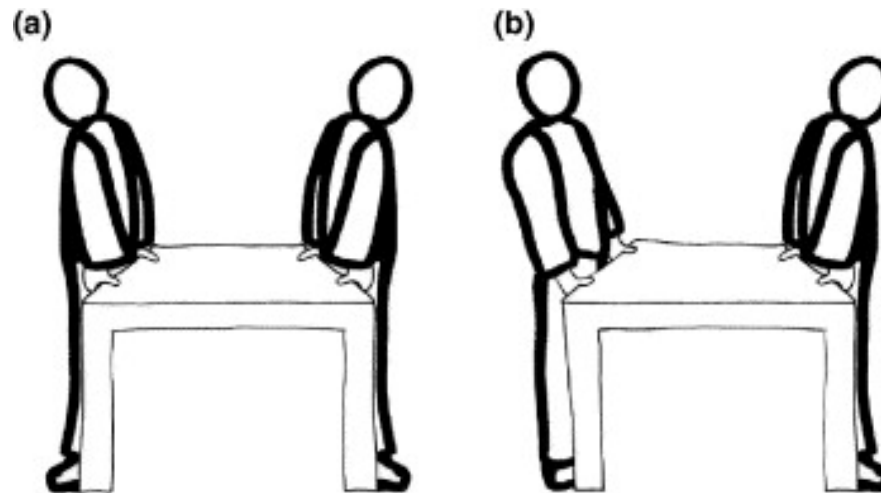
Cognitive (neuro-)scientific “insights should make a large “difference for the proper design of political institutions””

(Herbert A. Simon, 1985, p. 303)



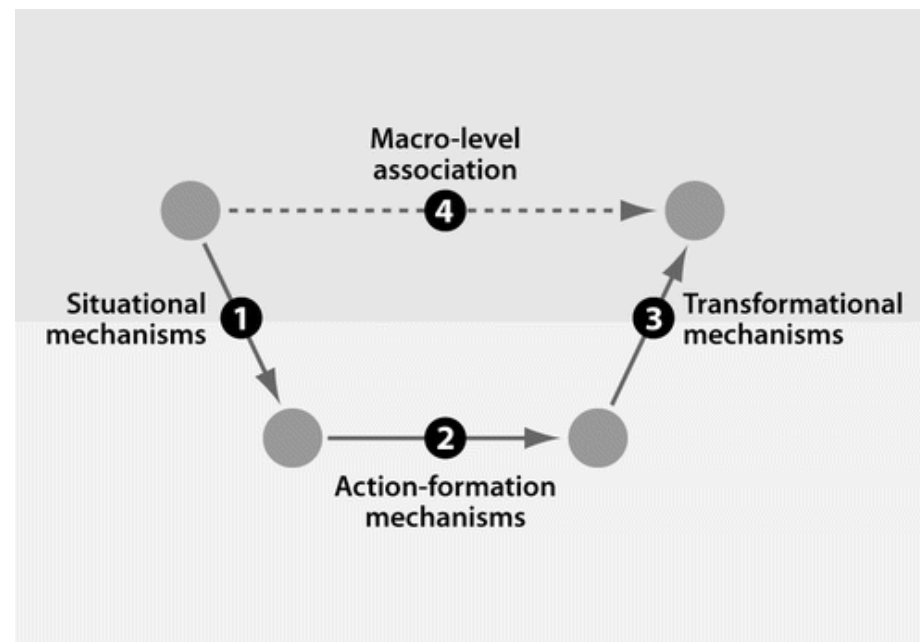
Joint & collective action: partial merger with another person's action plans


Analogy between individual coordination & organization and joint action planning (Bratman, 2009)





How can a cognitive mechanism influence social mechanisms?



 Hedström P, Ylikoski P. 2010.
Annu. Rev. Sociol. 36:49–67



Optimism about neuro-politics

Mirror neurons considered a neuronal basis for sympathy, altruism, cooperation, etc.

- MNS = “capacity to constitute an implicit and directly shared we-centric space” (Gallese, 2006, p. 21).
- MNS: “the evolutionary process made us wired for empathy” (Marco Iacoboni, 2009, p. 666),



Pessimism about neuro-politics

Psychology & cognitive science demonstrates that humans have 2 processes of cognition:

- automatic ('cognitive monster'; Bargh, 1999)
- controlled



What fundamental political aspect could be at stake?

Group membership is indeed a fundamental issue in political processes, for: “the primary good that we distribute to one another is membership in some human community” (Walzer, 1983, p. 31)



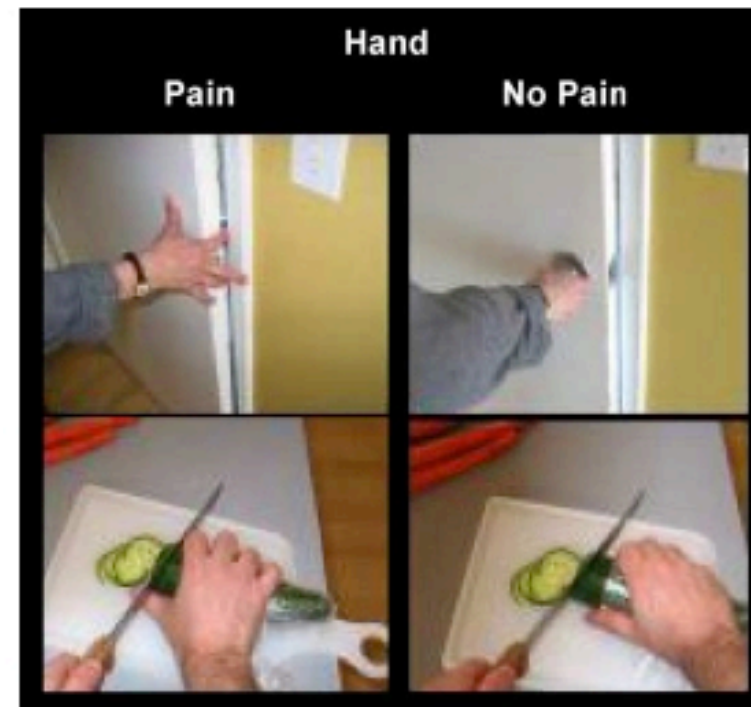
Group membership as a basis of political strife

“Every religious, moral, economic, ethical, or other antithesis transforms into a political one if it is sufficiently strong to group human beings effectively according to friend and enemy” (Schmitt, 1996, p. 37).



Mirror neurons and intersubjectivity

- Empathy = pain-activation patterns when observing the pain of others



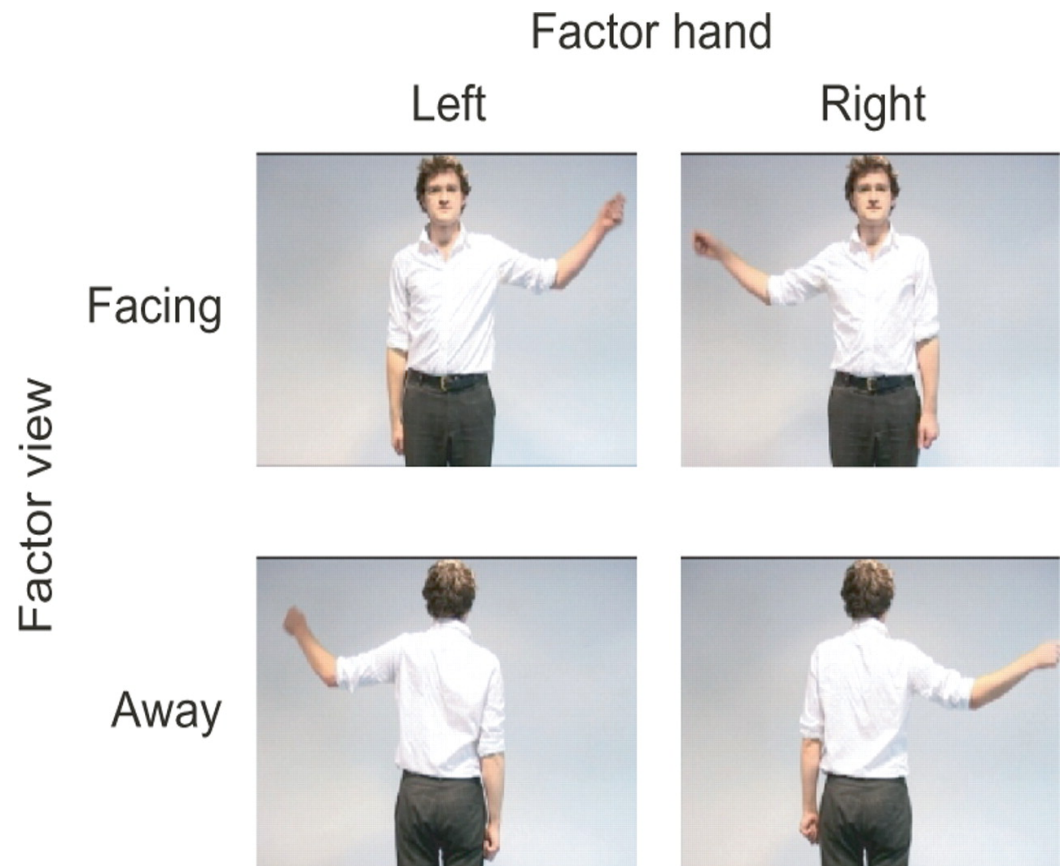
Machiel Keestra - Neuropolitics -
AIS conference 13/10/2012



Modulation of MNS 1: Social relevance

- Facing forward/backward
- Hand position

(Kilner e.a. 2006)





Modulation of MNS 2: Knowledge about agency

Belief in the animacy of the gloved hand modulates activations

(Liepelt & Brass, 2010)

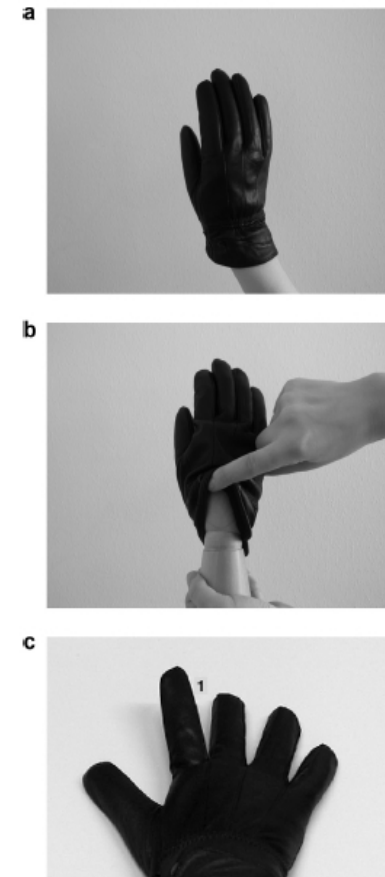


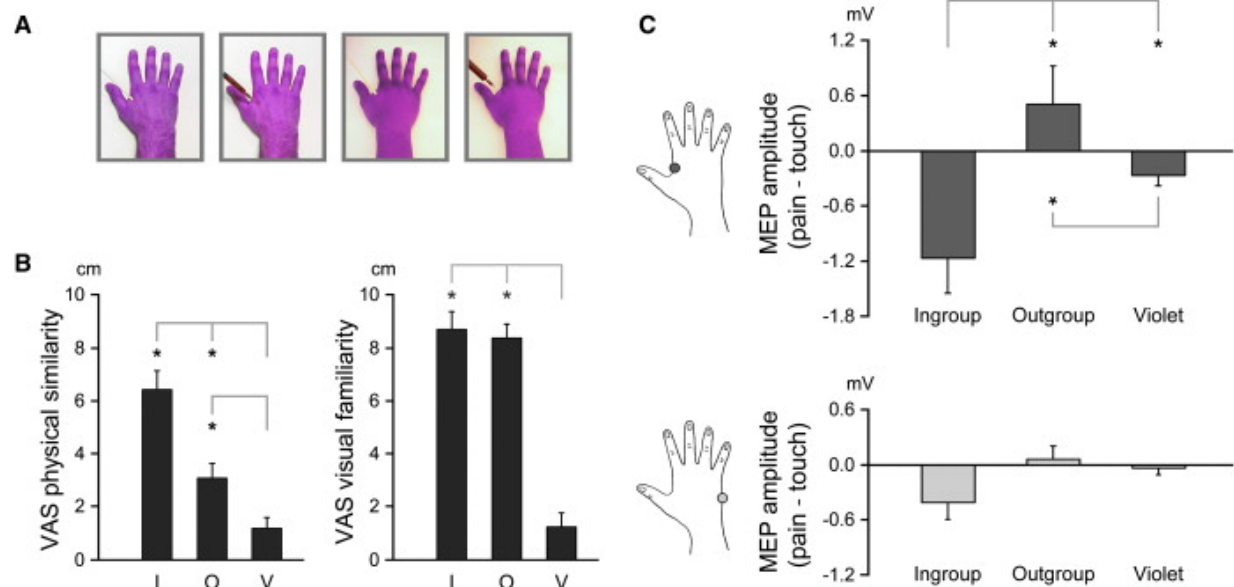
Figure 1. The figures show illustrations of (a) a human-hand model, (b) a wooden-hand model used to manipulate participants' belief, and (c) the stimulus display, a leather-hand movement in a congruent condition of the present experiment.



Indeed: group membership filters or gates the information-stream to MNS

- More resonance with unnatural violet hands than with out-group hands

(Avenanti e.a. 2010)



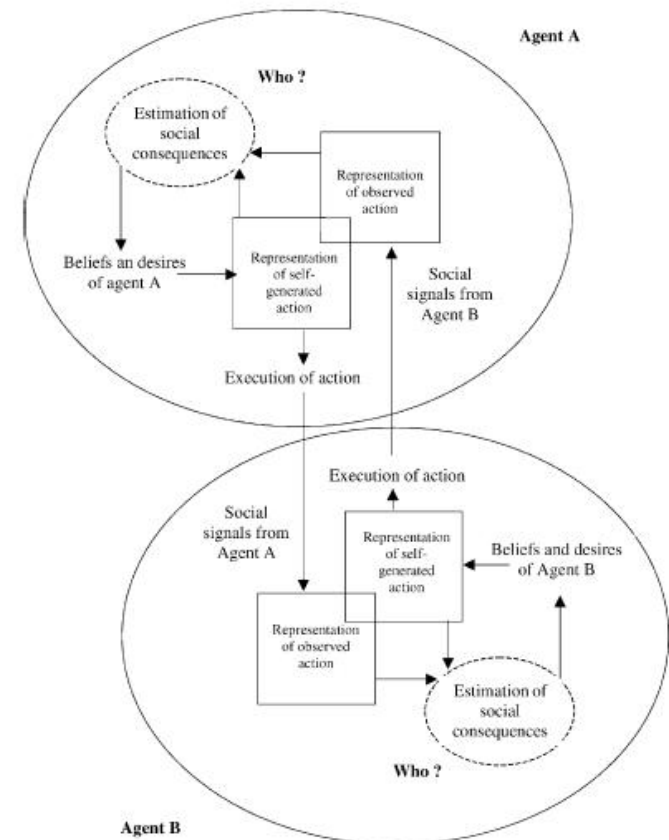


How to save or secure 'shared representations' for joint action?

Joint action requires intertwining 2 persons' representations of motor action & intentionality

(Jeannerod, 2006)

M. Jeannerod / Behavioural Brain Research 142 (2005) 1–15





Cognitive strategies to foster MN activation

- priming with disliked in-group members & v.v.
- preliminary self-categorization
- counterfactual reasoning
- implementation intentions



A modest plea for neuro-politics

- individual counter-measures:
 - education
 - awareness

- collective counter-measures:
 - procedures
 - physical interactions between gov't & citizens