

2017 Report on the ICLA Research Committee on Literature and Neuroscience

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Chair, Suzanne Nalbantian

Committee Members (additional members are invited annually according to changing topics):

From Comparative Literature: Suzanne Nalbantian, Long Island University; New York; Donald Wehrs Auburn University, Alabama; John Burt Foster, George Mason University, Washington, D.C.; Peter Schneck, Osnabrück University, Germany

From Neuroscience: Jean-Pierre Changeux, Kavli Institute (USCD) and Pasteur Institute (Paris); Paul Matthews, Imperial College, London; Robert Stickgold, Harvard University, MA

At the very time of the July 2017 meeting in Utrecht two of this ICLA Research Committee's projects are under way. As described below, I'm in the midst of putting together the nineteen chapters for the forthcoming OUP volume on creativity, due by the end of the summer. Also, I'm directing a lecture on the topic of memory at Southampton Hospital, Long Island, NY, on July 8, which is part of the ongoing agenda for the interdisciplinary research that this ICLA committee has been undertaking. The speaker for this July event is neuroscientist Paul Matthews, one of the permanent members of this committee. Any travel on my part at this time would conflict with this work.

Over the past year, the ICLA Research Committee on Literature and Neuroscience has been heavily involved in work on two major books. The first is the interdisciplinary volume on creativity with nineteen original essays from both humanists and neuroscientists. This volume, which I am coediting with the committee member neuroscientist Paul Matthews, is approaching completion. It is contracted with Oxford University Press and will present cutting-edge theories on the creative process across the disciplinary divide. It is the product of a previous symposium that I organized in 2014 under the auspices of the ICLA Research Committee and Cold Spring Harbor Laboratory on Long Island, New York. Among the topics treated are scientific theories and mechanisms of creativity, literary enactments of creativity, and aesthetics as demonstrated in the creation of literature, music and art. Permanent members of the research committee are writing chapters for this volume, including Donald Wehrs, Peter Schneck and John Burt Foster on the literary side, and Jean-Pierre Changeux, Paul Matthews and Robert Stickgold for neuroscience. Other comparatist critics are also contributors. All involved have been making conscious efforts to incorporate into their work concepts or information from outside their specializations, whether humanist or scientific. For this volume, along with my own chapter, I'm working on an introduction that will draw together the findings from both the arts and the sciences. Secondly, I've been assembling a Table of Contents and proposal for another volume, this one on Cultural Memory. This book will stem from the sessions on cultural memory that I directed at the 2016 Vienna ICLA Congress. From that seed group which explored this vast topic from multiple fresh perspectives, I expanded the number of contributors to twenty, which now includes more neuroscientists and scholars in literary and cultural studies. Comparatists like Sirkka Knuuttilla, Peter Hanenberg, and Donald Wehrs will contribute chapters. I'm currently seeking an appropriate publisher for this next book. Contributors to both volumes are fulfilling the goal of this research committee which is to provide unique new research on seminal brain/mind topics based on true interdisciplinary exchange--what the discipline of comparative literature fosters. In addition, I am taking steps toward the creation of an interdisciplinary brain/mind institute under my direction, which could use some of this committee's resources and participants.