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## The Rise of the Neural Subject

(abstract for the Interdisciplinary Approaches to Consciousness Workshop)

How did we come to think of the self not as soul, psyche, or mind but as brain and nervous system? Though much talked about in recent popular-science books such as V. S. Ramachandran's *The Tell-Tale Brain: A Neuroscientist's Quest for What Makes Us Human*, Patricia Churchland's *Touching a Nerve: The Self as Brain*, and Joseph LeDoux's *The Synaptic Self*, the idea is hardly recent. An understanding of its history may help us to better understand its present and future.

After sketching a broad history of the formation of this conception of the self, this talk will pay particular attention to cultural transformations in Western Europe and the United States in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century. Concentrating on the period around 1870, we will find that works of art (such as Richard Wagner's operas, Émile Zola's novels, and the emergence of Victorian "sensation drama") combined with neurological research (by Hermann von Helmholtz, Julius Bernstein, and George Miller Beard) to inspire a new conception of consciousness and personhood—a conception we may call the neural subject.