

When researchers in 1998 presented stem cells produced from embryos this led to heated debates in the US. Should taxpayers' money fund this research or should it remain within the private sector? While most studies have focused on the disputes, Morten Sager's doctoral dissertation starts off in the usually neglected common ground between the proponents and the opponents of federally funded research on human embryonic stem cells.

Inspired by actor-network theory (ANT) Sager presents an analytic model where the crucial question concerns – not the disputes about embryos – but how a particular public representation of human embryonic stem cells came about. It is a representation that includes the possibility and necessity of transplantation therapies, the existence of thousands of "spare embryos", and ultimately the taxonomic definition and hierarchization of various stem cells' biological capacities.

Going backwards along the historical traces of reproductive technologies and practices, experiments and debates on aborted fetal tissue, and earlier non-embryonic stem cell research Sager finds excluded alternatives and hidden uncertainties. For this purpose he uses a wide range of empirical material from Congressional hearings, official panels and reports, media surveillance, scientific journals, personal conference attendance and meetings with key persons in the stem cell field. It is the first book-length study of how the mutual reinforcement and intertwinement of several developments – dating at least as far back as Roe vs. Wade – helped shape the public and political "realities" of human embryonic stem cells in the 1998-2001 debates. In addition, Sager uses the case as an opportunity to invite the reader to reflect on the possible uses and problems of the ANT approach.



Pluripotent circulations is based on Morten Sager's doctoral dissertation in Theory of Science. It fills a lacuna in the historical understanding of the stem cell debates in the USA and sheds analytic light on the prospects and limits of ANT. He is now an Assistant Professor at the Department of History of Ideas and Theory of Science at Göteborg University.

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Pluripotent Circulations

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Putting Actor-Network Theory to Work on
Stem Cells in the USA, prior to 2001

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