

Scientific Progress Cento

with lines from Microglia states and nomenclature: A field at its crossroads

we humans instinctively tend to name things
biologists are no exception:

categorizing the natural world
as a way of understanding

research has advanced considerably in recent decades
yet has been constrained by

dualistic classification
forcing us to fit our observations into

dichotomic good versus bad
detrimental or beneficial

but we must never forget
the main purpose of biology

we do not know
we do not know

the apparent contradiction
from the evidence available so far

we do not know
what we mean

when we talk about
the most dynamic cells of the healthy mature brain

these observations raise the question
a burning question that surely requires further investigation

how to
offer clarity instead of confusion

biology is seldom black and white
but rather an extended continuum of grey

new strategies are currently being developed
evolving with

the striking morphological transformation of
scientific
research

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The Science

In this poem, I wanted to explore the phases of a scientific field and how scientists themselves change their minds. At the beginning of my PhD research career, a paper was published attempting to shift the way scientists view and talk about the subject of my research: microglia, the immune cells of the brain. This massive paper ("Microglia states and nomenclature: A field at its crossroads") had 98 authors and their words make up this cento poem. Centos, sometimes called patchwork or collage poems, are composed of lines usually from other poems. I chose this paper because of the influence it has had on me and other microglial biologists. Microglia are massively important to brain function, both in health and disease, and were largely understood to exist in one of two states: resting/normal/good or activated/abnormal/bad. We now recognize that microglia are dynamic cells that constantly shift states depending on their context. This paper emphasizes that research itself must also shift as we gather more evidence, both the language we use to describe our findings and the questions we focus on.