

# Neuropower Up

## 1. Introduction

Warren Neidich's work as an artist, writer, educator, and theorist explores the potential of Neuroaesthetics, a field he began to formulate in the mid-1990s, as a paradigm capable of describing the complex conditions of the 'now'—a moment in which global technological networks and novel potentialities for subjectivity are coming into greater focus and correlation to each other. As knowledge becomes ever more commodified, and labor increasingly immaterial, our notions of art, work, and politics call for a 'redistribution of the sensible.' Theorist Jacques Rancière described 'the distribution of the sensible' as "...the system of division and boundaries that define, among other things, what is visible and audible within a particular aesthetico-political regime."<sup>1</sup> However, the condition of 'immaterial labor' itself (work as potential, not yet objectified, constituting labor as subjectivity) insinuates a high level of mutability, adaptability, and contingency that characterizes current cultural production, giving rise to new forms of intellectual coherence.

Neidich's decades-long project seeks to discern these simultaneous transformations, occurring in a seemingly endless and indiscernible feedback loop state, which impact both the cultural, social, and political realms and the networks of the brain, due to our distinctive neural plasticity. He has noted: "...the combination of new social definitions, the disembodied kinesthetic logics they engender, and the response in the fields of artistic and architectural production, for example, of 'trying to keep up' with these new compulsions brought about by revolutionary technologies, redefine our cultural context and call out to the brain's inherent dynamic architecture."<sup>2</sup> Historically, Neidich cites the transition that occurred at the turn of the last century as one of analog (extensive) to digital (intensive) culture, but also, taking cues from Fredric Jameson's *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, acknowledges that the subject formed by "the space of high modernism" lagged a bit behind, and did not previously possess the "perceptual equipment to match this new hyperspace," imagined long before its current full-blown actualization.<sup>3</sup> It seems a new equivalence is at hand, and the 'now' is about 'becoming.'

## 2. Power Up

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<sup>1</sup> Gabriel Rockhill, "Translator's Introduction: Jacques Rancière's Politics of Perception," Jacques Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics, The Distribution of the Sensible*, (London: Continuum, 2004): 1.

<sup>2</sup> Warren Neidich, "Neuropower," draft of essay to be published in *Atlantica* (forthcoming 2009).

<sup>3</sup> Fredric Jameson, "Culture," *Postmodernism, or The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 1991): 38-39.

*Power Up* is a phrase I first heard when Julie Ault, founding member of the New York art collective Group Material (1979–1996), organized an exhibition for the Wadsworth Athenaeum in Hartford, CT, entitled *Power Up: Sister Corita and Donald Moffett, Interlocking* (1997). This was the first time I became consciously aware of Corita's work (which I had often seen in the form of public works—a painting on a natural gas tank along the Southeast Expressway in Dorchester, MA, and her 1985 *Love* stamp for the US postal service). This pairing of two artists separated by generation but joined by their integration of popular culture, graphics, and art for the purpose of addressing social change, highlights the cultural affinities of the 60s and 90s, perhaps illuminating the critical junctures that preceded, and at which we arrived, roughly following each of these decades. Corita's use of the words "Power Up" in a 1965 serigraph, like many of her pop graphic slogans, utilized the vernacular of the day to motivate political action (the phrase was borrowed from a gasoline ad and paired with text concerning hunger and class disparity by poet and peace activist Daniel Berrigan). Moffett's work as an artist, cofounder of the design firm Bureau, and member of the collective Gran Fury, utilized various advertising strategies to bring messages concerning HIV/AIDS to large-scale public audiences. Although aesthetically different, both Corita and Moffett used the apparatuses, materials, and production skills of their day to reach audiences defined by specific perceptual habits, to instruct and disclose the conditions of power and their biopolitical import.

A borrowing between aesthetics and politics is perhaps characteristic of these two particular decades, the 60s and 90s. In observing movements that preceded each of them, it is interesting to note that certain prior developments also called for a more extensive engagement, reflected in the cultural realm. In this context, the field of culture can be understood as a viscous medium that supports political, social, economic, historical, and spiritual languages, and allows for a certain degree of interactivity. As such, these languages form an amalgam of shifting concepts and conditions in which we are immersed. The 60s and 90s are reflective of preceding compositions, but display important shifts. Like the conditions of 'the image of thought' to be discussed later, these shifts represent the projection of circumstances imagined by artists, for example, echoing the historical transition, which began in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, from an 'extensive' culture with its linear, hierarchical characteristics, to a non-linear, rhizomatic 'intensive' culture. This transition makes possible the elaboration of display tactics—the opportunity to imagine and create slogans and iconography representative of this new space.

Looking at the micropolitical events that shaped the characteristics of many waves of Modernism (Constructivism, Impressionism, Cubism, Abstract Expressionism, Pop Art, etc.) mitigates their repetition as eternal return (in which Color Field painting, for example, simulates early Constructivist painting) and instead suggests the actions of the

avant-garde are instituted upon the nature of subjectivity itself. In his discussion of postwar American and Latin American art of the 1950s, art historian Benjamin Buchloh explains: "These practices appear no longer to originate in the cultural matrix of the nation-state, or in the fictions of national identity as their ultimate social anchoring ground. [...] Their 'international style,' by contrast, seems to have shifted (perhaps already starting with Abstract Expressionism) toward a model of cultural production that is ultimately grounded in the economic structures of advanced global corporate capitalism that have definitively left those conditions of traditional identity formation behind."<sup>4</sup> Neidich elaborates that the conditions and contextual frameworks of the classic avant-garde and that of the neo-avant-garde are entirely different, making primary and secondary iterations unique. In his words, there is no reason to account for the eternal return as degenerate. His project as a whole points to the fact that this is not only a cultural and philosophical argument, but a neurobiological one as well.

"The avant-garde can never be understood in terms of reductive, empirical material paradigms because the nature of the avant-garde itself is always about the sublime conditions of the work of art, which are always beyond the recognition facilities the perceiving subject has on hand. As such, the avant-garde is essentially a future-oriented paradigm of what is not obvious in the deep substrate of meaning, what is 'yet to become' in the vast milieu of significance. Culture as it was in its social dreams, and as it will be in its future prognostication, constantly unwraps the possibilities that lay inherent in the history of the species itself, collaged as it is upon the matrix of evolving memory as it is positioned in artworks, buildings, urban and virtual spaces."<sup>5</sup>

While acknowledging the seemingly forward-looking nature of prior aesthetic movements (for example, abstraction in the 50s), an engagement with overt political realities was similarly absent in the 50s and in postmodernism of the 80s. For once again, in looking slightly backward and slightly forward, postmodern theory, in an attempt to level such categories as aesthetics and politics altogether, also may have missed the point. As Neidich has noted: "Perhaps the initial reception of [...] avant-garde excess proclaims a misrecognition; [further] postmodernism's misunderstanding of this misrecognition, in its attempt to understand the work of art in an expanded cultural and social field, led to its demise as a condition

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<sup>4</sup> Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, *Neo-Avantgarde and Culture Industry; Essays on European and American Art from 1955-1975*, (Cambridge, MA and London: October Books, MIT Press)

<sup>5</sup> Warren Neidich, correspondence with the author, January 2009.

of social change.”<sup>6</sup>

In his 1982 lecture, “Postmodernism and Consumer Society,” Fredric Jameson defined postmodernism as a “periodizing concept” that is characterized by “the erosion of the older distinction between high culture and so-called mass or popular culture,” and “whose function is to correlate the emergence of new formal features in culture with the emergence of a new type of social life and a new economic order—what is often euphemistically called modernization, postindustrial or consumer society, the society of the media or the spectacle, or multinational capitalism.”<sup>7</sup> In addition to the rejection of prior modernist values and forms that sought to embody truth, originality, and universality, he goes on to outline key features of postmodernism such as pastiche, mimicry, schizophrenia, and their reflection of a fragmented sense of space and time, characteristic of the postmodern moment. Doubt is cast, as well, in Jameson’s figuration of the individual postmodern subject: “[I]n the classic age of competitive capitalism, in the heyday of the nuclear family and the emergence of the bourgeoisie as the hegemonic social class, there was such a thing as individualism, as individual subjects. But today, in the age of corporate capitalism, [...] of bureaucracies in business as well as in the state, [...] that older bourgeois individual subject no longer exists.” He notes a poststructuralist position would add, “...not only is the bourgeois individual subject a thing of the past, it is also a myth; it *never* really existed in the first place; there have never been autonomous subjects of that type.”<sup>8</sup>

Jean-François Lyotard in his essay “What Is Postmodernism?” argues that postmodernism is merely and already “a part of the modern,” caught in a dialectical process whereby “...in an amazing acceleration, the generations precipitate themselves.”<sup>9</sup> This conflation is perhaps aptly demonstrated in the contradictory conservatism of the art world of the 1980s, characterized by an increasing over-valuation of media attention and the aggrandizement of wealth, which precipitated an elitism that postmodernism (and Pop Art before it) initially sought to remedy. Jameson ended his landmark lecture with a question: “We have seen that there is a way in which postmodernism replicates and reproduces—reinforces—the logic of consumer capitalism; the more significant question is whether there is also a way in which it

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<sup>6</sup> Warren Neidich, “Political Art of the Sixties was About Delineation, Political Art today is About Delineation,” artist’s description, 2008.

<sup>7</sup> Fredric Jameson, “Postmodernism and Consumer Society,” *The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays on Postmodern Culture*, ed. Hal Foster (Seattle: Bay Press, 1983): 112-113.

<sup>8</sup> Jameson: 115.

<sup>9</sup> Jean-François Lyotard, “What Is Postmodernism?” *Art and Its Significance: An Anthology of Aesthetic Theory*, ed. Stephen David Ross, (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994): 561-64.

resists that logic.”<sup>10</sup> To this question, Neidich’s work may propose: Neuropower Up.

### 3. *Political Art of the Sixties was About Delineation, Political Art Today is About Differentiation*

One of Neidich’s recent drawings, *Political Art of the Sixties was About Delineation, Political Art today is About Differentiation* (2008), originally existed as a drawing on paper, constituting the left margin of a larger wall drawing of the same name, initially installed at IASPIS Studio in Stockholm. The right margin was fitted with a white neon sign that read: “If it looks like art it probably isn’t.” Later, the drawing resurfaced in a projected installation at Onomatopoe in Eindhoven under the rubric, *Lost Between the Extensivity/Intensivity Exchange*. Here, the larger handmade drawing was fragmented into a series of smaller drawings, photocopied on clear plastic, and distributed onto a number of overhead projectors dispersed throughout the space. Some of the drawings projected onto the walls of the space, others onto participants wearing white shirts, and some onto the white surfaces of pedestals borrowed from galleries and museums. Given the relative obsolescence of the equipment used (the overhead projector) and its institutional style, paired with the educational directness of a diagrammatic method of drawing, this immaterial mapping spelled out a complex historical transition. On the one hand, its initial inspiration was the psychogeographic mappings of the Situationists, and on the other, “the dynamic qualities of the signals of the brain during thinking, like a mental map, in which the present is recategorized in relationship to multiple memory maps distributed throughout the brain.”<sup>11</sup> Further, this combination of equipment and image elicited the relative speed with which we shift from past to present, also reminding the viewer that this knowledge is cumulative, as the past is not replaced or obliterated, but rather becomes folded into an understanding of the present.

*Political Art of the Sixties...* seeks to outline the implicit power relations that surrounded artistic production in the 60s, against which practitioners of conceptual art and institutional critique, for example, sought to delineate their work, as if they could somehow operate from outside this sphere of relations. However, as Andrea Fraser has recently noted, “Moving from a substantive understanding of ‘the institution’ as specific places, organizations, and individuals to a conception of it as a social field, the question of what is inside and what is outside becomes much more complex.”<sup>12</sup> This question of inside/outside has consistently beleaguered modernism, because it

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<sup>10</sup> Jameson, “Postmodernism and Consumer Society”: 125.

<sup>11</sup> Warren Neidich, email correspondence with the author, 2008.

<sup>12</sup> Andrea Fraser, “From the Critique of Institutions to an Institution of Critique,” *Artforum*, September 2005: 281.

is undermined by the very dialectic of extensivity/intensivity prompted by modernist thought. Dan Graham, in his "My Works for Magazine Pages: 'A History of Conceptual Art'," cites his early experience, in the mid-60s, as manager of the John Daniels Gallery in midtown New York, and his exposure to a group of artists, including Sol Lewitt, Donald Judd, and Robert Smithson, but particularly Dan Flavin, as instigation for his subsequent interest in "the possibility of dematerialized, noncommodified art forms and a more politically engaged role for the artist."<sup>13</sup> He noted: "The fall after the gallery failed, I began experimenting with art works that could be read as a reaction against the gallery experience, but also as a response to contradictions I discerned among gallery artists. While American Pop Art of the early 1960s referred to the surrounding media world of cultural information as a framework, Minimalist art works of the mid-to-late 1960s seemed to refer to the gallery interior cube as the ultimate contextual frame of reference or support for the work."<sup>14</sup>

However, these frameworks could not long maintain the structural transparency necessary to distinguish critical artworks within an economy that consistently sought to assimilate them, giving them value within the very structures they sought to critique. Perhaps due to the fact that Graham "...seems to have acknowledged that their original radicality in questioning the role of the artwork in its social context had been given up and that minimal works had been restored easily into the commodity status acquiring exchange value inasmuch as they gave up their context-bound idea of use value..."<sup>15</sup> he instead adopted a form that made "no claim for itself as 'Art'," selecting the "informational frame" of the magazine.<sup>16</sup> But information itself is the currency of intensive culture. Intensive culture is characterized by nonequivalence and difference. Whereas extensive culture produces the commodity as a form of equivalence, intensive culture is described best by the idea of the brand: "Products no longer circulate as identical objects, already fixed, static and discrete, determined by the intentions of their producers. Instead, cultural entities spin out of the control of their makers: in their circulation they move and change through transposition and translation, transformation and transmogrification. [...] In global culture industry, products move as much through accident as through design, as much by virtue of their unintended consequences as through planned design or intention."<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Brian Wallis, "Dan Graham's History Lessons," *Rock My Religion 1965-1990*, eds. Brian Wallis and Dan Graham, (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1994): viii.

<sup>14</sup> Dan Graham, "My Works for Magazine Pages: 'A History of Conceptual Art'," *Rock My Religion 1965-1990*: xviii.

<sup>15</sup> B.H.D. Buchloh, "Moments of History in the work of Dan Graham," *Dan Graham Articles*, (Eindhoven: Van Abbemuseum, 1978): 75.

<sup>16</sup> Dan Graham cited in Buchloh: 73.

<sup>17</sup> Scott Lash and Celia Lury, "Introduction: Theory-Some Signposts," *Global Culture Industry: The Mediation of Things*, (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2007): 4-5.

Following in a long tradition that spans the disciplines of art, architecture, philosophy, linguistics, and science, Neidich has chosen the intensive logics of the diagram, a format laden as much with information as it is with shape, color, and line, to aid in the production of ideas. Like the pages of a journal, Neidich's drawings, mappings, and diagrams resist easy categorization within a given field, and can recall a range of references from Jacques Lacan's "Schema L" (1955) to Warhol's "Dance Diagram" (1962). Deploying this format toward future-oriented action reflective of the current cultural moment, Neidich points out in *Political Art Today...* "[art] must address the homogenizing effect on culture of Neo-liberal Global Capitalism, which through the creative industries, art market, branding, and advertising has created a crisis in the production of difference and variation. Art must resist this homogenizing condition. [...] Art is a condition of the future and must await parallel and commensurate changes in the social, psychological, spiritual, economic, and historical fabric before it can obtain full meaning."<sup>18</sup>

#### 4. Diagram as Thread or, *Conceptual Art as Neurobiological Praxis* and its Antecedents

My engagement with Neidich's project began around 1997, as a newly appointed curator at Thread Waxing Space, New York. In taking this job, I inherited a rather large box of unsolicited exhibition proposals to review. Known for exhibition projects that favored curatorial experimentation in an alternative, large-scale context, Thread Waxing Space's stash of proposals read like an archive of reiterations of what had come to be considered "pathetic art," a term made distinct by curator Ralph Rugoff in the early 90s. As art critic Irving Sandler noted:

"Art of the end of the 1980s took three diverse directions. The first extended available twentieth-century styles in personal ways, disregarding social issues. The second—which commanded the most art-world attention—dealt directly with newly urgent social problems, and the third was aptly labeled abject or pathetic art. [...] Ralph Rugoff wrote, [...] 'Bereft of irony's protective distance, pathetic art invites you to identify with the artist as someone [not] in control of his or her culture.... [...] Pathetic art knows it doesn't have the strength; its position of articulation is already disabled and impaired....' Rugoff concluded that pathetic art was a reflection of a society and a culture that were dysfunctional and out-of-gas and whose future did not seem to offer any improvement."<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Neidich, "Political Art of the Sixties was About Delineation, Political Art today is About Delineation."

<sup>19</sup> Irving Sandler, "Into the 1990s," *Art of the Postmodern Era: From the Late 1960s to the Early 1990s*, (Westview Press, 1996): 547-548.

Perhaps it was its optimism, or the marked difference between the strains of pathetic art and the sense of intellectual agency attributed by Neidich to artists and works, that drew me to his weirdly uncomplicated proposal, entitled *Conceptual Art as Neurobiological Praxis*. It also could have been the visual material included—not necessarily that of the artists in the exhibition—but diagrams roughly drawn by Neidich, illustrating neologisms drawn from concepts of neurobiology as they might correspond with historical and contemporary art. The exhibition was divided into three parts, according to the diagram: the Retinal-Cortical Axis (visual processing); the Word-Image Dialectic; and Global Chaosis (a term invented by Neidich referring to the operations of the entire brain, derived from both Gilles Deleuze's notions of chaosis and the rhizome, and Gerald Edelman and Jean-Pierre Changeux's 'global mapping' in relation to the development of the brain as it is shaped by experience). This category is the foundation of Neidich's more recent arguments concerning the ways in which intensive culture sculpts the brain.

The diagrams and proposal posited that conceptual art was/is not “a linear practice [but instead] emerges in the context of many streams of art practice including Lettrism and Situationism; philosophy including Structuralism and Phenomenology; Infomatics like Cybernetics; psychological discourses like psychoanalysis; as well as Marxism and political activism of the late 60s.”<sup>20</sup> In retrospect, *Conceptual Art as Neurobiological Praxis* seems to envision the advance of prior iterations of immaterial labor, including conceptual art, as inseparable from current understandings of art and its relationship to popular culture, media, politics—and the significance, for new generations of artists, of historical predecessors who imagined this hybrid state. As Neidich noted in relation to the exhibition project:

“For it is within this complexity [of folded structures] that other forms and other meanings hibernate, latent, remaining in a state of hypothermia and very slow metabolism, waiting for the proper set of conditions in which to emerge and once again ‘become,’ only slightly changed, especially in regard to interpretation. [...] Some would argue that an explanation of this phenomena can be found in the way that the social, political, historical, psychological, economic conditions of the late 90s and early 21<sup>st</sup> century share important qualities with those of the late 60s and early 70s, such that certain works [which have gained renewed interest] express key insights common to both eras.”<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Warren Neidich, “Conceptual Art as Neurobiological Praxis,” *The Alternative to What? Thread Waxing Space and the 90s*, (Foundation 20 21 and Participant Inc, forthcoming).

<sup>21</sup> Neidich, “Conceptual Art as Neurobiological Praxis.”

## 5. From Hybrid Dialectic to Dynamic Collage

Neidich has recently directed me to his videos as a fundamental framework for all his work, “slipping into the spaces between the lines as if they were an architectural edifice by Cedric Price,”<sup>22</sup> an architect driven by the goal of nurturing change. His goal was “enabling people to think the unthinkable. Through projects, drawings, and teaching, Price (1934-2003) overturned the notion of what architecture is by suggesting radical ideas of what it might be.”<sup>23</sup> Coincidentally, at the time of our initial meeting, I was involved in an exhibition project concerning architecture of the 60s, *Research Architecture: Selections from the FRAC Orleans Collection* (co-curated with Philippe Barriere and Bill Menking, organized by Thread Waxing Space in conjunction with Pratt Institute and the University of Kansas). The exhibition project was based on the premise that an engagement with the imaginations of the past, during moments when technological advances render increasingly tangible the theoretical experiments of prior generations, is reflected in contemporary practices—another aspect of catching up with a future imagined in the past.

*Research Architecture* posited that against the repressive forces concretized in institutional architecture of the 60s, for example, futurisms of the past and the visionary authors who imagined them existed—with or without the actual technological means to realize their dreams. The availability of tools that enable the rendering of widespread hallucinatory spectacle, global communications, etc., across real space and time doesn't necessarily make them better, or more real, than the speculative projects of the 60s by Archigram, Utopie Group, Superstudio, or Buckminster Fuller. These artists and groups integrated themes from popular culture and politics within radical intellectual frameworks to expand the fields of art and architecture, mainly through works made of paper and cardboard, and unaided by computers.

These predominantly ephemeral histories of utopian art and architecture run parallel to the still-persistent inheritance of modern rationalist methodologies—outlining that there were other, less tangible, societal dreams at play. Not always explicitly oppositional (although hostage-taking did occur at conferences involving Utopie, Archigram, Superstudio, and Archizoom), these projects were oriented toward a different future than the one we typically experience today, and they achieved this alien status by challenging the accepted links

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<sup>22</sup> Neidich, email correspondence with the author, 2008.

<sup>23</sup> Cedric Price, Architect (1934-2003), Design Museum, London, website, [designmuseum.org](http://designmuseum.org).

between artistic forms and representation—seeking, instead, to demystify the objects of art and architecture.

"Basically [Utopie] attempted to transcend architecture itself, as they transcended urban planning itself, like the Situationists could scrap the university milieu itself... Everyone found himself at ground zero of the destruction of his own discipline. There was a kind of dissolution by excess on which everyone could agree. [...] Within the framework of Utopie—and that's what Utopie was, too—we were searching for an intellectual center of gravity from where we could branch out to all the other disciplines."<sup>24</sup>

The potential for catching up from lag times, and the complex processes of recuperating from cyclical approaches toward perceived annihilation of prior understandings, are precisely what gave *Conceptual Art as Neurobiological Praxis* its unusual optimism. Rather than the failure or death of previous movements, Neidich's thesis pointed to the ways in which these repositories of knowledge and action fuel the present, as they are folded into any potential that art, architecture, etc. may still possess as productive forces. This potential, shared by a newly conceived 'multitude,' could be described as the neurobiological sublime: "The lack of register between new and old forms of spaces and the lack of computability of a mind adapted to the conditions of the architectural past produce a new form of the unconscious and uncanny."<sup>25</sup> In his discussion of the 'multitude,' philosopher Paolo Virno also addresses the 'uncanny' as a key element:

"Thus, there is nothing more shared and more common, and in a certain sense more *public*, than the feeling of 'not feeling at home.' No one is less isolated than the person who feels the fearful pressure of the indefinite world. [...] '[N]ot feeling at home' is in fact a distinctive trait of the concept of the multitude, while the separation of the 'inside' and the 'outside' [...] is what earmarked the [...] idea of people. [...] The multitude [...] is united by the risk which derives from 'not feeling at home,' from being exposed omnilaterally to the world."<sup>26</sup>

Accelerated circumstances, a lack of register between old and new, and an uncanny sense of the obsolescence of the present (such as Walter Benjamin's arcades—already replaced by department stores) were, perhaps, all foreshadowed in the landmark essay, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," in which new technological

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<sup>24</sup> Jean-Louis Violeau quoting Jean Baudrillard in, "Utopie: In Acts," *The Inflatable Moment: Pneumatics and Protest in '68* (Princeton Architectural Press and the Architectural League of New York, 1999): 53.

<sup>25</sup> Neidich, "Neuropower."

<sup>26</sup> Paolo Virno, "Beyond the coupling of the terms fear/anguish," *A Grammar of the Multitude*, (Los Angeles and New York: Semiotext[e], 2004): 34.

conditions of reproduction or “post-production” were received with optimism. For Benjamin, the mediums of photography and film promised a democratized, participatory audience, necessarily operating in “an immense and unexpected field of action.”<sup>27</sup> The significance of cinema and early cinematic devices in Neidich’s work has taken various forms, including his video investigations such as *Brainwash* (1999), in which audience and actor view the turning of a black and white striped drum. Neidich’s interest in this instrument emanates from its twofold purpose, as both an early cinematic zoetrope and a diagnostic neurological tool. On one hand, it is a device used by artists to create another kind of reality, and on the other, it is a device used by doctors to document and diagnose conditions of the brain. The video presents these two functions, with their distinct histories—one presumably subjective and the other objective—as inseparable. He has noted in relation to this work: “The body is part of the world and that world is to a certain extent formed by new technologies. These new technologies, especially as they affect time and space, affect the production of subjectivity. [...] The drum represents the effect of a new sublime condition brought about by cinema in the early 20th century; a condition that is related to the perceptual and cognitive systems of time and space.”<sup>28</sup> Marcel Duchamp, fascinated by the congruencies of art, cinema, technology and science, exemplifies the link between transgressive artistic gestures and the positivistic advance of technology, moving toward a reorientation of the conditions of knowledge. Neidich’s work emphasizes, as well, that art can and does investigate areas most notably relegated to science, like perception, and arrives at radically alternative paradigms.

In his discussion of Gilles Deleuze’s concepts of cinematic time, philosopher John Rajchman makes reference to Duchamp’s cinema books as a means to introduce a “new psycho-mechanics, a new way of affecting our nervous systems. [...] At the heart of Deleuze’s analysis of cinematic images and their dispositifs, we find the problem of a determination of a time no longer defined by succession (past, present, future); of a space no longer defined by simultaneity (distinct elements in closed or framed space); and of a permanence no longer based in eternity (instead given as form of a complex variation).”<sup>29</sup> By overlapping creative technologies with those of a scientific nature, Neidich proposed a new assemblage, which he refers to as ‘hybrid dialectic,’ a new strain of the history of thought based on a novel set of perceptual conditions. In his video works *Kiss*

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<sup>27</sup> Walter Benjamin, “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction,” *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken Books, 1968): 236.

<sup>28</sup> Warren Neidich, *Brainwash*, project description, 1999.

<sup>29</sup> John Rajchman, “Deleuze’s Time or How the Cinematic Changes Our Idea of Art,” *Art and the Moving Image, A Critical Reader*, ed. Tanya Leighton (Tate Publishing and Afterall, 2008): 310.

(2000), *360 degrees* (2000), and *Taos, Pueblo, Looping* (2000), which all involve pointing with a cane designed for the visually impaired, Neidich's investigation is based on infirmity and disability. He chooses medical instruments used to diagnose maladjusted perceptual systems in order to conduct artistic research in direct opposition to modernist requirements of perfect coordinates. Similarly, more recent works attempt to combine overlapping subjectivities, reminiscent of cinematic consciousness.

Neidich's *Earthling* series of photographs and videos of improvised performances by amateur actors taking place in cafes (2006) makes reference to the role of media (newspapers, magazines) in "producing new subjectivities in the context of evolving global identities."<sup>30</sup> After collecting an archive of images sampled from newsstands, café tables, etc., around the world for about a year, Neidich began to frequent cafes, asking strangers if they would perform in his work. When someone agreed, he or she was given a choice from the collection of magazines and newspapers Neidich carried with him. Each had an image of the face of a notable person and a headline. Neidich then measured the size of the participant's eye or the distance between the eyes, in order to match holes cut out of the magazine or newspaper image—aligning the optical axis of the actor with that of the image on the page. The actor then improvised a performance, looking from behind the newspaper or magazine as if it were a mask. The photographs and videos that resulted are called 'dynamic collages,' drawing attention to the fact that the inanimate newspaper was superimposed upon a living human being. Although sharing similar intentions with, for example, the political collages of John Heartfield or Hannah Hoch, Neidich's political images and videos look very different. Like Corita and Moffett previously mentioned, these artists have used similar methodologies to describe extremely different times.

The photographs and videos that comprise *Earthling*, like other serialized projects by Neidich, insinuate the connections between "the history of apparatus, the history of the images they create, the history of the 'thought image' which results, as a way of the mind making sense of the new landscape of images that make up visual culture. That history has become condensed in the new logics of global media in which the nation state has been replaced by global culture and the apparatus to administer those new conditions has changed as well."<sup>31</sup> If postmodern thought rendered impossible any sense of progress or transgressive individual agency, signaling a form of 'apocalyptic pessimism' described in Jameson's conclusion as symptomatic of late capitalism, and thematized as a disappearance of history, perhaps it was best exemplified by the news: "One is tempted to say that the very function of the news media is to relegate such

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<sup>30</sup> Warren Neidich, *Earthling*, project description, 2006.

<sup>31</sup> Neidich, *Earthling*.

recent historical experiences as rapidly as possible into the past. The informational function of the media would thus be to help us forget, to serve as the very agents and mechanisms for our historical amnesia.”<sup>32</sup>

In Neidich’s once again somewhat optimistic figuration, the postmodern aesthetic of ahistoricism seems almost old-fashioned, and nothing is forgotten. If news images are the lens through which we understand the world and our place in it, amidst today’s maelstrom of information-images streaming past us, disappearing as quickly as they appear—a major transformation must be occurring. With *Earthling*, Neidich expands upon the ‘hybrid dialectic,’ with “the objective dispositif of the newspaper now directly linked to the organic body mind in a collaged interface.”<sup>33</sup>

“By collapsing the historical dimensions of time—recollection of time past and projection of the future—into an empty play of euphoric instants, post-modernism runs the risk of eclipsing the potential of human experience for *liberation*. It risks cultivating the ecstasy of self-annihilation by precluding the possibility of self-expression. And it risks abandoning the emancipatory practice of imagining alternative horizons of existence (remembered or anticipated) by renouncing the legitimacy of narrative coherence or identity. [...] The danger stalking the post-modern labyrinth is *nothingness*. The empty tomb. The paralyzing fear that there is nothing *after* post-modernism.”<sup>34</sup>

## 6. Neuropower

Perhaps it is in Neidich’s diagrammatic drawings that novel possibilities for the subject most freely float. Outlining in-depth studies, new orders, rhizomatic processes, “the diagram is indeed a chaos, a catastrophe, but it is also a germ of order or rhythm.”<sup>35</sup> It is here that branching histories and concepts of art, work, and politics play into mappings that suggest expansive potentialities, tracing past intellectual actions with arrows pointing to a future. As Neidich notes: “This goes to the very heart of Neuropower, as the site of control has now moved into the very brain centers that form our goal-directed habits and that influence the decisions we make before we even encounter the streaming conditions of the world that, in the

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<sup>32</sup> Jameson: 125.

<sup>33</sup> Neidich, *Earthling*.

<sup>34</sup> Richard Kearney, “The Crisis of the Post-modern Image,” *Modern French Philosophy*, ed. A. Philips-Griffiths (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987): 120.

<sup>35</sup> Gilles Deleuze, “The Diagram,” *Francis Bacon: The Logic of Sensation* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003): 83.

end, we sample according to these internally generated conditions.”<sup>36</sup>

In his forward to Paolo Virno’s *A Grammar of the Multitude*, Sylvère Lotringer describes the important historical context from which the ideas of abstract intelligence and immaterial labor were born, in Italian ‘workerism’ (operaismo) or the Autonomia movement of the 70s. Linking labor, politics, and intellect, Autonomia sought, through researched activism, pirate radio, and direct actions, to develop alternative theories concerning the self-organization of labor. They articulated a diverse series of experiences based on a fundamental refusal of labor in the traditional sense. A sharp assessment of capitalist society, its powers, and its protagonists, Autonomia outlined new forms of communication and knowledge beyond the social relations dictated by waged labor. Based particularly on the conditions of factory workers, workerism maintained that workers’ knowledge of the productive cycle resulted in the possibility to stop, to sabotage, to withdraw. Further, the absence of work becomes a time of communication, exchange, and social knowledge. Their theories grew away from the traditional Marxist notion of ‘the people,’ with its implication of a separation between inside/outside, and instead viewed the expanded field of social intelligence as the new labor force.

“The multitude is a new category in political thought. [...] It is, Virno suggests, open to plural experiences and searching for non-representative political forms, but ‘calmly and realistically,’ not from a marginal position. In a sense the multitude would finally fulfill Autonomia’s motto—‘the margins at the center’—through its active participation in socialized knowledge. [...] Everything has become ‘performative.’ Virno brilliantly develops here his major thesis, an analogy between virtuosity (art, work, speech) and politics. They all are political because they all need an audience, a publicly organized space, which Marx calls ‘social cooperation,’ and a common language in which to communicate. And they all are performance because they find in themselves, and not in any end product, their own fulfillment.”<sup>37</sup>

In Neidich’s performative lecture, *Some cursory comments on the nature of my diagrammatic drawing*, (first presented in the studio at IASPIS in which his wall drawings were made in 2008), the artist is blindfolded. With the aid of an assistant, Neidich is spun around, but left facing one of the walls. Pointing, he walks toward the wall and lands on a word at random, which the assistant calls out. Turning toward the audience, Neidich then recites from memory all of the interwoven connections, definitions, and significations mapped out in the drawing for the duration of about one hour and a half. As Peggy Phelan has noted: “Performance’s only life is in the present.

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<sup>36</sup> Neidich, *Neuropower*.

<sup>37</sup> Sylvère Lotringer, “Foreword: We, the Multitude,” in Paolo Virno, *A Grammar of the Multitude* (Los Angeles and New York: Semiotext[e], 2004): 13.

Performance cannot be saved, recorded, documented, or otherwise participate in the circulation of representations *of* representations: once it does so, it becomes something other than performance. To the degree that performance attempts to enter the economy of reproduction it betrays and lessens the promise of its own ontology. Performance's being, like the ontology of subjectivity proposed here, becomes itself through disappearance."<sup>38</sup>

Much like Autonomia's notion of immaterial labor, Phelan's concept of performance as non-reproductive insinuates a new form of subjectivity, liberated from the "machinery of reproductive representation necessary to the circulation of capital. [...] Without a copy, live performance [...] disappears into memory, into the realm of invisibility and the unconscious where it eludes regulation and control."<sup>39</sup> Neidich's project takes these ideas into the area of Neuropower, which he defines as the means through which a constantly transforming cultural milieu sculpts the differences inherent in the nascent neurobiological potential of the brain, a process mostly occurring right after birth, but also continuing throughout life. "Neural Plasticity's potential as a field of differences can be molded according to the new conditions of post-Fordist deregulation, acting upon the conditions of the matter of the brain itself. I would like to suggest that this reconfiguration is actually the site of performative gestures, the non-reproductive labor of communicative virtuosos."<sup>40</sup>

Perhaps it is only when we move from the individual to the audience that these two theoretical frameworks, Phelan's concept of performance and Virno's notion of the virtuoso, merge. As a population of singularities, the audience of the multitude is a heterogeneous sampling machine. As such, the summated condition of an unstable fluid social mind, the resultant of the combined dispositions of its individual members, is the true site of action of the virtuoso performance, which is now about the stabilization of anarchic dispositions in moments of synchronous appreciation. This, for Neidich, is the true condition of intensive culture that now acts to synchronize thought and consciousness. It is only in the last century with the emergence of intensive culture, computer and Internet technology, social networks and social orders, and the production of the multitude that new forms of biopower and administrative techniques have emerged.

## 7. Conclusion, Redistribution of the Sensible

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<sup>38</sup> Peggy Phelan, "The ontology of performance: representation without reproduction, *Unmarked, the politics of performance* (London and New York: Routledge, 1993): 146.

<sup>39</sup> Phelan: 148-149.

<sup>40</sup> Neidich, "Neuropower."

If the now is about becoming, then the artist's task is "...concerned with aesthetic acts as configurations of experience that create new modes of sense perception and induce novel forms of political subjectivity."<sup>41</sup> Neidich's work, perhaps, reinforces the fact that artists have always created their own distributions of the sensible. Taking this as its curatorial subject, Neidich's recent exhibition project, *The Re-distribution of the Sensible* (Gallery Magus Muller, Berlin, 2007), reminiscent of Michael Hardt and Tony Negri's 'society of control,' deals with the issue of sovereignty: "Sovereignty, utilizing the methods of the global marketplace with the help of scientific research on perception and cognition, has conspired in creating complex networks of attention, which allow for the manufacture of explicit 'connectedness' that today defines the distribution of the sensible. [...] These networks form a hegemonic cultural syntax, which is inscribed on society as a whole, producing new forms of subjectivity and, in the case of a world tuned into global media, a bounded multitude."<sup>42</sup> Artists, as well, utilizing their own historical referents, materials, processes, and performances, create "complex assemblages that together compete with institutional arrangements for the attention of the mind."<sup>43</sup> Again, this work is optimistic, concerned with an imagined future, not destined to be a repetition of the past.

"[T]he essence of *politics* consists in interrupting the distribution of the sensible by supplementing it with those who have no part in the perceptual coordinates of the community, thereby modifying the very aesthetic-political field of possibility. [...] Those who have no name, who remain invisible and inaudible, can only penetrate the police order via a mode of *subjectivization* that transforms the aesthetic coordinates of the community by implementing the universal presupposition of politics: we are all equal. *Democracy* itself is defined by these intermittent acts of political subjectivization that reconfigure the communal distribution of the sensible."<sup>44</sup>

This is central to the argument of Neidich's *Neuropower*. In the end, the brain and its collaborator, the mind, are the products of a multiplicity of culturally formed congruencies to which they are coupled. On one extreme is the institutional understanding that produces 'people' as a homogenous entity, easily controlled and manipulated within the confines of the historic nation state. On the

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<sup>41</sup> Jacques Rancière, "Foreword," *The Politics of Aesthetics*: 9.

<sup>42</sup> *The Re-distribution of the Sensible*, press release, Gallery Magus Muller, Berlin, 2007.

<sup>43</sup> *The Re-distribution of the Sensible*

<sup>44</sup> Rockhill, "Translator's Introduction: Jacques Rancière's Politics of Perception," : 3.

other extreme are the conditions of aesthetic production itself, which produces another distribution according to its own rules, manufactured by alternative methods. Both extremes and all that falls in between function to form the conditions of the brain/mind interface. The power of art operates through this redistribution of the sensible, in spite of the institutional tendency to co-opt. Redistributed sensibilities, produced by aesthetically driven systems, sculpt new forms of neural networks, attempting to make sense of a newly configured distribution. Potentials locked in older configurations are released. This newly organized neural substrate, as it is modeled upon the new conditions of culture itself, creates new possibilities for creativity and imagination, elaborating new forms of the image of thought.