
Fields of Consciousness: The Ghost in the Machine

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Abstract

The aim of the article is to question the extent to which modern information technologies in photography and other media increasingly disseminate and determine both the material and intellectual formation of contemporary consciousness. The study questions the relationship of mind and mechanism in establishing neuro-aesthetic arguments of cultural consciousness, that is to say how the actual neuro-physiology of the brain is affected and shaped through the workings and continuous formation of cultural consciousness. The study, by concentrating on the sources and the works of the artist Warren Neidich, reveals a systematic pattern and artistic practice that expresses a commitment to developing our understanding of what is now commonly called neuro-aesthetics or the formation of a contemporary neuro-culture. By using historical source materials (most often photography and reproductive media), cast into the context of Neidich's contemporary exhibition and cultural investigations, observations are drawn in reference to the artistic practices of the artist as to the methods he adopts and their neuro-aesthetic outcomes that are suggested. The article therefore constitutes an overview of what is still a highly contentious area of social and cultural research. The outcome or conclusion(s) of the study does not proffer firm answers but extends and opens up further the debate around discourses of mind, consciousness, and perception, as to the genuine validity of neurological aesthetic argumentation.

Keywords: photography, cognition, perception
consciousness, neuro-aesthetics

The contentious debate as to an aesthetic relationship between mind–mechanism–representation has not gone away, that is in spite of scientific researches in physiology and neurophysiology that have recently dressed matters up in terms of mapping the brain and a causal biochemistry. Yet given a recent return of somatic dominance there nonetheless still remains much to be said about the mental

role of a creative culture in the living biochemistry of modern being. This is not to argue that nineteenth-century Drieschian-derived ideas of "vitalism" and its legacy can any longer offer a nonmaterialist hiding place for theories of mind and consciousness.¹ Theories of mind have largely been reduced today to two areas, namely the biological sciences and/or experimental cognitive psychology.² It is the discursive and interactive relationship between biological science and the different psychologies of consciousness that for the most part frames the current debate. In areas of cognitive consciousness, the emphasis is now firmly placed upon the "embodied," that is to say in living conditions of "being" that foments representation: to represent means quite literally an embodiment of signs that are brought to mind only in and through reflective consciousness as lived experience.³ The subjective Cartesian formation of the mind-body question, and its many subsequent philosophical interpretations, has been increasingly sidelined somewhat ironically (given Descartes's mechanistic view of the body), by an extension of materialist mechanisms (scanning machines), and the explications of neuroscience that accompanies their use.⁴

But the way that the brain works and the related questions born of how representation within consciousness takes place remain a vexatious territory that is still fundamentally unresolved. It is clear that the representation of the world through sign and symbols is a given and everyday reality, but to what extent can it be said that consciousness and its physiological component can be altered by the sensory experiences of the world through the changing conditions of cultural representation? It leaves open the question of whether consciousness is nothing more than an extension of structural physiology with a purely biological foundation (that is to say predetermined by brain chemistry), or whether there is a spectral or non-definable hermetic substance that changes the conditions

of consciousness through interactions with numerous sensory experiences in the world, something that shapes, sharpens, and thereafter alters the physiological arguments of pure mechanism. Put another way, does the visual language experience of representation (I use the word "language" advisedly) alter in any way the simple physiological processes of working consciousness? If it is the first question posed, this leaves aesthetics and discussions as to the aesthetics of consciousness in a perilous position. If it is the second, the representational aspects of aesthetics remain open and in a continual state of change and development. And as an aside, in simple historical terms, this also questions whether there could ever be a fixed "cultural canon" of those conventional but shifting representations through artistic experience, as either expressed or implied by continuous transformations of states of cultural consciousness.

In more conventional aesthetic terms, it touches upon one of the oldest of philosophical-aesthetic concerns, namely whether different material forms of representation take on the appearance of change (merely as a sort of repetitive cultural and pictorial mutation), or conversely, that cultural change is a continuous and changing condition of appearance as those successive temporal representations take place.⁵ In short, in what ways does living culture alter and/or expand upon the aesthetic aspects of our consciousness? How do representations through perceived experiences in and of the world effect an interaction between consciousness and the body? And, where do representations stand in regards to the return or "eternal recurrence" of images and ideas that daily saturate our lived experience? The artist Warren Neidich has long been concerned with these contentious issues, and has also written a related book of essays, emphasizing different cultural effects on neural networks as they relate particularly to experiences of film and photography.⁶ I intend

in this essay for the most part to concentrate on Niedich's photographic and film/video-based work, incorporating aspects and use of his different performance-experience-experimental contents that consistently appear within what is a challenging and diverse body of artworks.

It is quite clear that photography and film combine aspects of mind and mechanism. The camera has the status of a tool in terms of representation and visual language, a tool that has a use value that mediates representations through applications of mind as consciousness. But it is commensurate to argue that pictorial representation is a continuous visual language that sculpts and shapes our ongoing perception of the world. The bifocal aspects of the mind and mechanism are grounded as a necessary form of mutuality that are ineluctably manifested within lived experience. Neidich's work in recent years has concentrated on two *vital* concerns.⁷ The first I will discuss is a large and developing series of the artist's work, which he has called "Blanqui's Cosmology" (1997–2005), a work that investigates questions around issues of origin as

regards the modern subject in photography, and specifically ideas as it relates to repetition and recurrence. He asks what meanings are exposed (as simile) by repetition and recurrence. The second area of discussion will be Neidich's diverse series of conceptual works in different media that investigates the history of consciousness (1996–2010). Their analogous relationship is self-evident as both the inside and outside (perception and perceived) of mind and mechanism, cosmological projections of consciousness (consciousness fused with mechanism) on the one hand, and the internal assimilations that form a fluid creative state of sensory consciousness on the other. As applied to culture and the history of photography, mind and mechanism is always in a state of confrontation with resistance.⁸ Among the myriad aspects of cultural objects and their conditions of experience in the world, the state of their resistance to any singular assimilation or interpretation is well established. It becomes the basis for arguing that the conditions of consciousness are shaped by any number of provisional interactions.



Fig 1 Douglas, 1996, "Blanqui's Cosmology" 1994–2007, 20 × 24 in. silver print.

The role of the camera as mechanism in capturing the conditions of culture at a given moment is neither uniform nor singular, but always subject to the prevailing provisional and historical states of consciousness. This is not to say that they cannot be mapped, but at best used only to define a transitional state of apparent reality at a given period of time. The role of resistance in culture and the objects of culture (born of “intentionality” as origin) are encoded in such a way so as to make them take on the hidden visible (or, inferred contents) of photography. It is not surprising therefore that the corollary of the “negative” has been essential to the historical development of the photograph and of film, a mechanistic inversion that expresses itself through the obverse image.

Neidich’s reference to the writings of Louis Auguste Blanqui (1805–81), a nineteenth-century

French radical, a Republican socialist-activist, who spent much of his life incarcerated, may not seem immediately relevant to the task in hand. However, Blanqui’s text dealing with the cosmology of revolution, *L’Éternité par les astres*, makes it immediately relevant. Apart from his importance to historical political science, Blanqui’s text draws an analogy between the continuous cosmological contents of the universe, the formation of stars, novae and supernovas, the coming together and the cosmic dissolution of galaxies, to common mentalities within human consciousness that can be linked to photography.⁹ If physical laws (mechanism) govern the universe, they do so in a state of unending revolution: perpetually in being as light in darkness, as death in life and life in death. Repetition and cosmic recurrence form an undefined frame in which the variable possibilities of the universe remain infinite. The cosmos is in

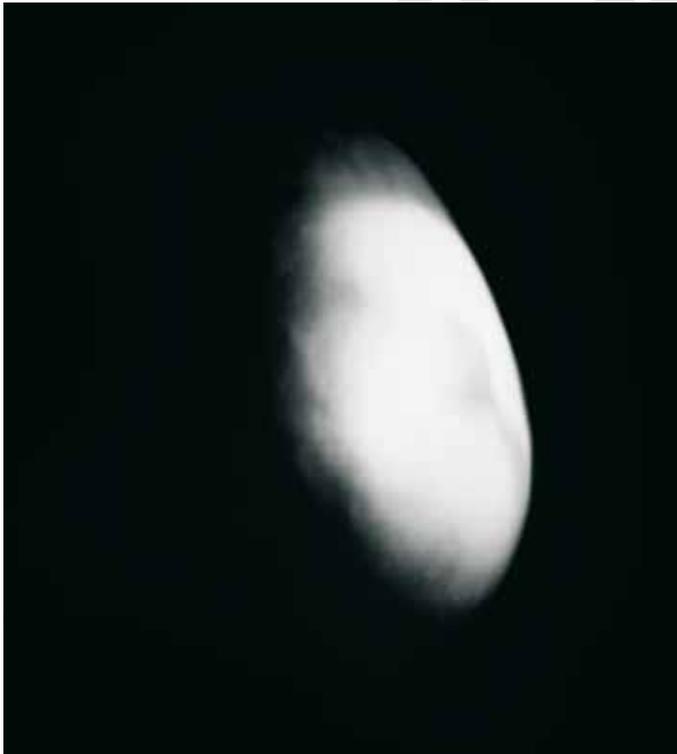


Fig 2 *Solar Eclipse*, 1998, “Blanqui’s Cosmology” 1994–2007, 20 × 24 in. silver print.

a state of eternal recurrence whose condition is that of revolutionary contentiousness. The same cosmological analogy of light in darkness can be said also to mark the material and psychological origins and practices of photography.

Blanqui's inference of eternal recurrence or repetition, preceding as it does Nietzsche's use of the term in *Daybreak* and *Thus Spake Zarathustra* a decade later, argues the idea of repetition as both an infinite and eternal variation.¹⁰ Photography and its instrument, the conventional camera (mechanism), similarly denies the possibility of a repeated temporal excision of an image (the same), but gives repetition to images through the use of reproductive copies. The camera is a mechanism that captures light through darkness; photography is therefore born of light.¹¹ All forms of sensory perception and assimilations of consciousness through representation also depend on light; the world around us is not a sheet of darkness. It was the same Blanqui idea of eternal repetition as infinite

variation and differentiation that later attracted the attention of Walter Benjamin (1892–1940). It attracted Benjamin for two reasons: the mechanistic, inasmuch as repeatable images can be derived or copied from a single negative; and a more complex sense of repetition, which he saw as an extenuated form of continuous alterity. For repetition or recurrence is never “the return of the same” but a movement within which something other has become inscribed within the same. Benjamin's interest in mechanical processes is well known, not least his texts on photography and mechanical reproduction.¹² However, his interest in eternal recurrence and Blanqui's text was part of his near encyclopedic but unfinished research investigations, called *The Arcades Project*. The project was Benjamin's attempt to encapsulate or frame the epistemology that generated and explained states of formed cultural and social consciousness operating in nineteenth-century Paris. A city traditionally associated with the foundation of photography, notwithstanding



Fig 3 *Super Nova*, 2001, “Blanqui's Cosmology” 1994–2007, 20 × 24 in. silver print.

the immediacy of developments in England. In what Benjamin calls the “ingenuous reflections of an autodidact” he quotes an extended paragraph from Blanqui’s *L’Éternité par les astres*:

So each heavenly body, whatever it might be, exists in infinite number in time and space, not only in the *one* of its aspects but as it is at each second of its existence, from birth to death ... The Earth is one of these heavenly bodies. Every human being is thus eternal at every second of his or her existence. What I write at this moment in a cell of the Fort du Taureau I have written and shall write throughout all eternity—at a table, with a pen, clothed as I am now, in circumstances like these. And thus it is for everyone ... the number of our doubles is infinite in time and space. One cannot in good conscience demand anything more. These doubles exist in flesh and bone—indeed, in trousers and jacket, in crinoline and chignon. They are by no means phantoms, they are the present eternalized. Here nonetheless lies a great drawback: there is no progress ... What we call “progress” is confined to each particular world, and vanishes with it ... the same drama the same setting, on the same narrow stage ... believing itself to be the universe, and living in its prison as though in some immense realm, only to founder at some early date along with its globe ...¹³

In his reading of the text Benjamin asserts a “phantasmagoria of a history,” a phantasm or imposed teleology and of imagined novelty and false consciousness. The German writer made great play of the fact that Blanqui’s cosmology was based on the “mechanistic general sciences,” and since materials and elements are finite, and if cosmic nature must repeat their combination ad infinitum, it follows that there is inevitably a perpetual aspect and necessary phenomenon of eternal recurrence. Benjamin went further and devoted a whole collated section of *The*

Arcades Project to “Boredom and Eternal Return,” quoting from many other passages of the Blanqui cosmological text. And, Benjamin throughout and in other writings extended the astral analogy of the stars as repetition and reproduction of light, an argument that becomes part of his thought as to the informing principle of photography as it developed. Benjamin’s argument was that “The universe in its entirety works like a gigantic photographic machine.”¹⁴ And, since all aspects of mind, consciousness, and mechanism are necessarily part of that cosmological universe, we can never be ultimately separated from it. In that respect they form the macrocosm that dwarfs the microcosm posed by the immediacy of mind–body question, and which in turn must become seen as no more than a system within a provisional and eventually self-exhausting solar and planetary system.

Warren Neidich’s “Blanqui’s Cosmology” is a contemporary mapping of what might be called a continuous presence through eternal recurrence. It departs from the reference to the early procedures of photography, namely time, light, and the modern subject. At the same time the long-exposure photographs attempt to map a sense of period consciousness, the hidden visible that photographs are able to reproduce, and the influence of photography in shaping a whole series of scientific, psychological, and parapsychological (formerly called psychical research) nineteenth-century discourses that emerged around the use of the camera as mechanism. Working with 1,200 shaved-headed portrait subjects over a protracted period of many years, both men and women, Neidich used a light pen drawing upon the head of each subject and developed the photograph through long exposure in a darkened space. Two elements were immediately foregrounded as important ideas by the artist: the choice of the head signifies the seat of consciousness, and the performance content, whereby he physically interacts with the sitter while making the light



Fig 4 "Blanqui's Cosmology" 1994–2007, installation at Magnus Mueller Gallery, 2008.

pen drawings. An aspect of performance and the free participation of subjects is a common feature in many of Neidich's photographic and video works. At the same time, the portraits refer visually, perhaps, to early ideas of photographic portraiture technology, the calotype and the daguerreotype—the first mechanical photographic systems of light exposure to darkness and which offered reproductive images.¹⁵ The cosmological metaphor of light and dark exposed and expressed through the early procedures of the camera as an extended form of representation.

At the same time, "Blanqui's Cosmology" reveals embedded and extended references to the uses and discursive applications that early procedures in photography provoked. The most

obvious was that of physiognomy, through the early use of photography in cranium studies and cerebral localization,¹⁶ and indirectly thereafter to the pseudoscience of phrenology.¹⁷ By the second half of the nineteenth century, the photographic images of heads and skulls served also as primary illustrations to studies in eugenics,¹⁸ and were even more rapidly expanded in their use following Galton's naming of the science in 1883, allied to further photographic advances in technology.¹⁹ Peripherally, early photography was extended into numerous other areas: pathological psychiatry (then called alienism) through images of congenital idiotism, cretinism, the nineteenth-century science of anthropological degeneracy, and as the founding illustrative pictorial documents of criminal anthropology.²⁰



Fig 5 *Mutant I*, 2005, "Blanqui's Cosmology" 1994–2007, 20 × 24 in. silver print.

The creative performance aspects integral to the creation of Neidich's photographic images also evoke something of the photographs of pseudo-performances of hysterics at Charcot's Salpêtrière,²¹ presentation experiments that were later discredited by showing through theatrical repetition that they were increasingly the product of psychological suggestibility.²² The use of photography in experiments of animal magnetism (later called hypnotism) was also extensive throughout much of the nineteenth century.²³

Early photographic uses in physiology were also common, particularly in myology, where electrodes and electric shocks were tested on mental patients to establish how muscle systems worked.²⁴ Texts on physiognomy were frequently dedicated for the use of artists. Just as common was photography's nosological use in asylums to pictorialize largely imagined categories of mental illness. Boundaries between science and what later became seen as mere pseudoscience were not clearly delineated.²⁵ Positivist experimentation (facts and images) were misguidedly seen and largely taken as a truth equivalent, following on from an old physiognomic idea that outward appearance must accord in some way as a truth to an interior reality.²⁶ Applications in astronomy (the universe as the primary source of light and dark) had some practical use and photographic validity, at least in an abstract sense, since any physical sense of provable material verification was low. But photographic applications and manipulations in areas of Spiritualism and other areas of psychical research, such as photographs of ectoplasmic events, ghost appearances, and other strange kinetic phenomena are plainly nonsensical when seen in retrospect.²⁷ This said, however, Spiritualism and psychical research (parapsychology) bore intimate proximity with the early parallel developments of dynamic psychology, and by extension with increasingly numerous investigations into the workings of unconscious and conscious mental mechanisms. And, at the same time, Neidich's "Blanqui's

Cosmology" also bears intimate pictorial relation to the implied physical interiority of the body, something that was expressed by Röntgen's development and use of X-rays (electromagnetic radiation) from the mid-1890s.²⁸

Neidich's evocation in "Blanqui's Cosmology" has a deliberately intended intellectual elasticity, the word "elasticity" suggesting both actions of expansion and contraction as resistance. Hence the repetition or recurrence of discursive tropes of history are not intended by the artist to be read or to serve a didactic purpose, but rather to express the necessary role of resistance itself; it follows from a supposition that resistance leads to changes of functional field within cultural and mental consciousness. If we remember that Blanqui's ideas of astral cosmology were primarily written and framed in terms of political activism, and that he pursued revolution and the overthrow of the aristocratic and bourgeois order of his day as a necessary end in itself. It was a revolution that was to be simultaneously materialist as well as one that transformed human consciousness.²⁹ It is the reason, perhaps, why the Marxist Benjamin frequently linked Blanqui to Nietzsche in his writings, though it is patently evident they come from totally different traditions of intellectual-political thought.³⁰ Thus encoded within issues of recurring consciousness, when "Blanqui's Cosmology" was installed by Neidich in an exhibition, it followed the same pictorial convention of light in a darkened space and was installed in a manner that seemed redolent of an installation mediating the space between art and science, between comparative taxonomy and a grid-like conceptual minimalism. Also, given that there are 1,200 component photographs, the work offers enormous possibilities of interchangeable installation, and as a result the work intentionally repeats the cosmological potential of Blanqui's original thesis. A repetition that does not "return as the same" but as a recurrence within which the subtle movement of the other has been inscribed.

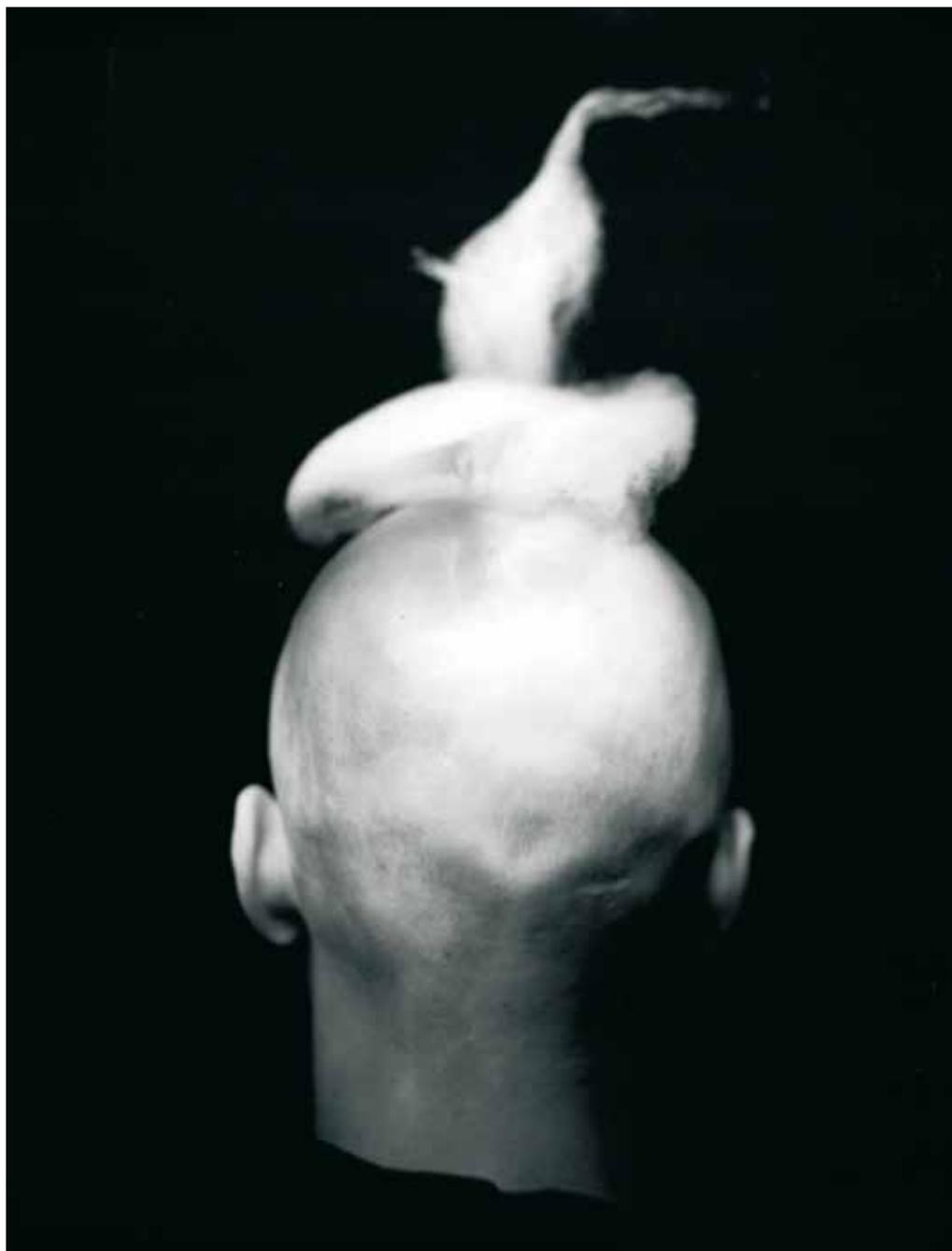


Fig 6 *Ectoplasmic Release*, 1996, "Blanqui's Cosmology" 1994–2007, 20 × 24 in. silver print.

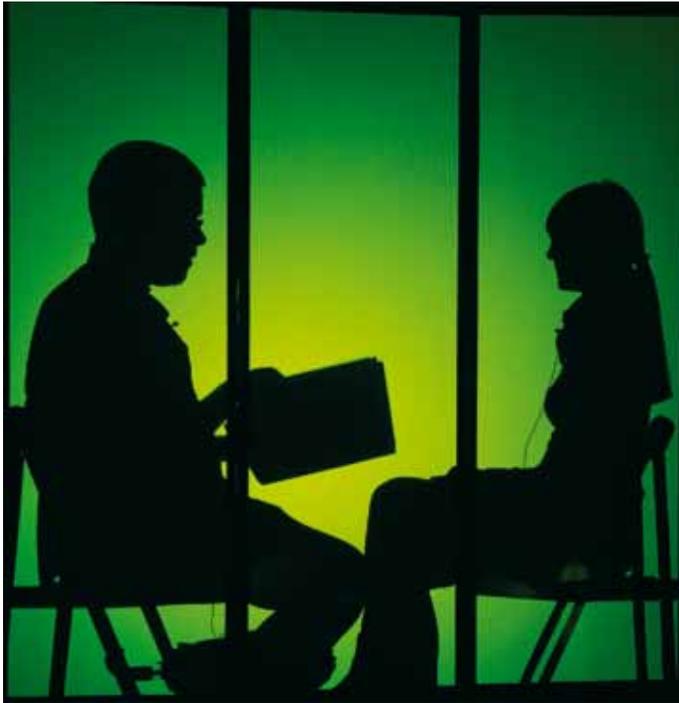


Fig 7 *In the Mind's I*, "The Noologist's Handbook," 2011, performance still, Emily Harvey Foundation, NYC.

Issues of mind, mechanism, and cultural consciousness are similarly encapsulated in many different ways in the series of works that Neidich has called "The History of Consciousness." They constitute a large number of projects that have preoccupied him over the last fifteen years. While the ideas and their material realization are never uniform, they almost always involve aspects of cultural interaction. The works engage with an either/or of elements forming a sense of interactive physical-conceptual consciousness, and often require different types of direct participation and/or performance. A recent project has been *In the Mind's I* (2009–10), a series of interactive performances between Neidich and an artist or critic in a staged setting.³¹ Seen only in silhouette in a darkened space set against different and changing color monochrome backgrounds, the artist asks his fellow participants to bring along personal objects and thereafter

imagine them within the context of a proposed exhibition. The personal objects chosen by the participants are unknown to Neidich prior to the meeting. In the form of an interview, better described as a shared performance, a discussion of the objects' personal meaning and their motivated contents is revealed. In one respect it follows the idea of memory as restaging a set of former conditions of personal consciousness and identity; that is, as they originally and currently relate to the objects. Yet on another level it constitutes a form of projection, drawing upon a particular exhibition space setting, in a setting as imagined, described, and projected through the participant's own choosing.

The purpose was to create an exhibition of the mind, conceived solely in the mind's eye without a material or commercial manifestation. No exhibition was to actually exist save that of the purely imagined exhibition, and the only



Fig 8 Assorted objects for performance of “The Noologist’s Handbook,” 2011, performance still, Emily Harvey Foundation, NYC.

supposed contents or objects that remained were those referring to the exhibition’s existence through the videoed performance and the film-documented discussions of the two participants and audience attendees at the performance. The film-staged setting, framed as it is in terms of a imagined visual presentation, allowed the viewer to share only in what might have been, and the artist participant retained his integrity over that which he personally imagined, thereby challenging the conventional idea of a materialized art exhibit. However, since the objects used were not immediately identifiable other than to the direct participants, the viewer has to project the exhibition simultaneously within his or her own imagination. But not only does this idea question issues of potential authorship in a non-delineated boundary between the maker

and the viewer—where, in real terms, does the actual exhibition reside?—but it also raised fundamental questions as to where the boundary between art and the artist exists, that is to say in the idea of the exhibition or in its realization, and further still who might be in a position to realize it? In terms of conceptual strategies, there have been many creative ideas of origin, but in the light of appropriation, other conceptual strategists have realized them; one might think of the recent instance of the development of Facebook. The question of “origins” and the source of ideas become problematized as a result. In certain respects, the work not only references Neidich, earlier associations, and familiarity with *Art & Language*,³² but also recalls and extends several issues of “dematerialization” common to conceptual art in the 1960s and 1970s.³³

What distinguishes Neidich's approach, however, is that he creates the grounds of a continuously shifting consciousness from maker to making, from making to made, from made to reception, back into immaterial memory as recollection; there is a sort of intellectual and cosmic circularity about what has taken place. If art can never be free of itself in being art, it can at least be free of a singular subjectivity that limits its cultural parameters to the maker and thing made. That Neidich often does this through the uses of film and photography owes as much to his familiarity with the facilities of mechanism as it does to any separately operating system of imagined consciousness. The view that mechanism and consciousness are mutually interactive and constitute a "forming" relationship that is subject

to cultural experiences, is an intellectual and axiomatic position for the artist.

A fascination with the history of photographic apparatuses and technologies has always been an ever-present aspect of Neidich's artwork. This was evident in an exhibition installation called *The Mutated Observer Part I* (2001) in Los Angeles, in which the apparatuses of early photography were placed in relation to the discursive contents which brought about and enlarged the artist's view as to the newly triangulated environment of mechanism (brain), mind, and eye.³⁴ The installation included some early photographic elements of the then ongoing project "Blanqui's Cosmology." A particular emphasis was placed, in the exhibit, on understanding the history of photography in the context of Lyotardian "postmodernism," namely



Fig 9 *Mutated Observer Part I*, 2002, installation view, California Museum of Photography.



Fig 10 *Shot Reverse Shot* (detail), 2002. Twenty type-C prints, 16 × 20 in.

the idea that: “A work can become modern only if it is first postmodern. Postmodernism thus understood is not modernism at its end but in the nascent state, and this state is constant.”³⁵ Called “hybrid dialectics,” Neidich posed the question of whether the advent of photography had altered the eye to mind relationship to that of consciousness. Installed in vitrines as if an “art and science” intervention, the exhibit introduced a complete reshuffling and destabilizing of nineteenth-century epistemological categories, generating a new set of relations that included conversation maps, painted and drawn elements, as well as suggesting a necessary reconfiguration of what might be understood by media history.

The recursive approach which appeared to define the function, but which expressed an infinite condition by using finite components, was the key to understanding the problematizing

aspects of Neidich’s installation. Since recursion is itself a form of semantic repetition inherent to photographic reproduction, and repetition is an incomplete recurrence, it is embedded in the use of language and by extension in visual language.³⁶

A history of consciousness is not necessarily a history of recorded thought but rather a history of sensory thinking, that is to say a mapping of various behavioral tendencies within the processes of thinking; it stresses the fact that all thought is embodied and in consequence inevitably performative. In *Mutated Observer Part 2* (2002), installed at the same museum one year later; Neidich extended the question of the idea of mechanism as apparatus (the camera) to its operative realities in the social space, and in a series of video and photographic installed elements entitled *Remapping 1–6*, *Blind Man’s Buff* (dream sequence video image projected from



Fig 11 *Mutated Observer Part II*, 2002, installation view, California Museum of Photography.

a screen to the top of a person's head), and in *Shot Reverse Shot and Beyond the Vanishing Point*.³⁷ The idea of diagrammatic cultural and aesthetic mapping (often by means of wall drawings) is another continuing feature of this artist's works. It is frequently related to ideas of the performance-lecture, as in Neidich's performance presentation at the Temporäre Kunsthalle, Berlin, in 2009—a lecture that was developed in some respects from a Stockholm audio performance-lecture during an IASPIS residence in Stockholm in 2009, which also included a large-scale wall drawing. Yet the desire to delineate and survey the conditions of continuously dynamic consciousness is tied closely to the artist's concern with sustaining sensory thinking rather than the mere production of thought; sensory thinking is closely allied to aesthetic intuition rather than deterministic rational thought. It picks up on the immediacy

of embodied experience as against distilled and prolonged conceptual reflection. Notions of the dynamic (the speed of synapses in contemporary life) and the constantly shifting grounds of our contemporary perception are, for the artist, directly analogous to our contemporary understandings of brain function. In this respect, Neidich might be said to dislike certain aspects of stasis, because not only does it reflect for him the tendencies of earlier forms of consciousness, but carries or at least implies the inhibition of entropy.

In the film and photographic mediated world of today, performance as acting and cultural role-playing exists in all our lives; there are no neutral spaces where we are free of continuous role play. The expanded nature of cultural role play is the price paid to participate in our increasingly mediated world. In consequence, it has opened up far-reaching issues around the discursive

problems of identity in contemporary life. Warren Neidich embraces the idea of role play and performance and its temporal-transitional documentation, since he believes it is essential to his view as to creating the ability of verifying the existence of cultural neuro-aesthetics; those arguments that the neural networks of the brain are subject to adaptation in relation to mediated cultural experiences.³⁸ In a work he called *Earthling* (2006), he adopted a very simple but provocative approach by using the conventions of mass media, newspapers, video film, and photographic reproduction. Clearly, Neidich's intention was to show that, as he puts it,

New forms of temporality and spatiality become embedded in architecture, design, fashion, design, and aesthetic practice and as such create a new kind of network, for instance in the visual cultural field. These new network relations in the real world, which might be called the real-imaginary-virtual interface, can reconfigure neural networks in the brain. These networks are dynamic: and as they reconfigure the matter of the brain they produce new possibilities for the imagination and creativity ...³⁹

Photographed in a series of cafes across Europe and America, the artist asked the cafes' customers if they would hide their faces behind headline images in national and international newspapers and magazines. The artist then cut out the eye sockets of the famous or at least newsworthy faces and/or symbolic-iconic images presented photographically on the newspaper's or magazine's front pages. Aligning the eye or eyes of the anonymous cafe customer (the temporary actor of role play) behind the headline images, the customers were then photographed. On the face of it, we might assume that the different newspaper and magazine media were chosen to reveal the subject interests of each customer, and as a consequence organs of social appropriation and identity in some way associated

with the person hidden behind them. But Neidich disavowed this stereotypical and, he thought, bland idea that the participants were to be determined simply by what they read and consumed, since the newspapers and magazines were collected and provided by the artist. The site of the cafes evokes complex dialectical relations to the history of culture as both familiar places and non-places, a transitory location of self-presentation deeply embedded in culture conventions and often associated with personal locality, but just as conversely with touristic transience. It cannot be ignored that in terms of cafe culture, art and artists have had a long association with such places.⁴⁰ But Neidich's intention was to excise precise moments of shifting temporality, to convene and parody the sometimes farcical sound bites and oversimplifications that contemporary newspapers and magazine headlines always present. Concerns with how consciousness assimilates the pseudo-texts of popular media, its tendency to alienate and reduce the reality of images to one-dimensionality, echoes (as Marcuse long ago observed) a measure of the ever increasing forms of hidden social and political control through repetition and homogenized information formulae.⁴¹ This offers a political framework and understanding for much of Neidich's art, that is to say inasmuch as it touches directly upon the forming and manipulation of personal subjectivity within consciousness. At the same time, *Earthling*, with its humorous science-fiction comic-book redolence, also reveals the ever more complex strategies adopted by contemporary psychology in manipulative presentation, its superficiality (formulae), its theatricality (body-face-pose), its disembodiment and substitution (its "faux" suggestion of time and place that strips it of any substantial or contextual meaning), its ubiquity (everywhere and nowhere), its indigestibility (sound bites and headlines to be swallowed whole), its games of genealogical pretence (for it denies the actual contents of a meaningful subject) as regards establishing a



Fig 12 *The Guardian*, New York, "Earthling," 2004, type-C print, 30 × 40 in.

sense of the development of an individual identity and/or picturing the true nature of a society, and so on into a future of seemingly endless disembodied synchronicity.⁴² It is repetition and return that arguably serves no purpose other than the economics of expanded consumption.

I began this essay by speaking of the brain, mind, and consciousness in relation to contemporary modes of representation as they are presented by the use of photographic images; the simile between photography, the cosmos, and consciousness. The raw and literal presentation of modern media gives no better example than the direction in which modern forms of photographic representation (photography, film, Internet) are

being driven. They have at times a complete lack of self-reflexivity and value structure, and mirror in many respects recent invasive political attempts at getting mediated photographic images under control (particularly on the Internet). Warren Niedich's thesis that these tools of media monopoly constitute, at the same time, instruments which form the various states of consciousness and as a result alter the neural networks of the brain's biochemistry. If this is the case, it supposes many challenges in terms of the political, social, and cultural field, and suggests an ever increasing form of cultural mind control on an enormous scale. Niedich has taken matters further over the last decade, for if consciousness



Fig 13 *Infinite Regress*, installation view, Magnus Mueller Gallery, Berlin, 2008. Steel, electronic sliding doors, and colored glass, 10 × 10 × 10 ft.

is of brain and mind it also has to be considered as having a spatial aspect that might just as easily be subject to manipulation.

In works like *Infinite Regress* (2008), Neidich addressed ideas of perception and consciousness in space with a transparent, three-sided pavilion installation. In this instance, sensor-operated doors in the three primary colors opened and closed as viewers passed by, in or through the pavilion.⁴³ Once triggered and in order to heighten

awareness, the doors continued to open and close for two and a half minutes. At one level, it recalled and exaggerated such phenomena in the transitional spaces of public access, stations, airports, department stores, etc., highlighting social phenomena that operate upon consciousness, but which are rarely scrutinized. While it draws on Light Art traditions of artists such as Turrell and Irwin, it avoided their ephemeral sense of conceptual transparency and expanded upon

it, asserting itself as an object.⁴⁴ Given the sensor mechanism as the doors continued their opening and closing, the three primary colors used were in a state of continuous overlapping, and in consequence generated a visual blending and dissolving of the colors as they interacted with one another. The work can be said to have operated in the visual and intellectual space between Light Art and Dan Graham's phenomenological spatial constructions.⁴⁵

An interest in chromatic perception also lay behind *Rainbow Brushes* (2007–2011) recently exhibited in his one-person exhibition "Acceptable Differences: Pluripotentiality and Painting" at Belgrade Cultural Center, where a series of large paintbrushes, more often used as "paste" brushes in the hanging of wallpaper, were adapted to present the rainbow colors found in Rubens's famous *Het Steen* painting, *Landscape with a Rainbow* (1636), which is in the Wallace Collection in London. The colors were arranged on paper and the brushes pulled across it, leaving a series of rainbow-colored after-traces that constituted the painting that accompanied each brush as installed in the exhibition. In appearance, though in a different scale, they were not unlike Morris Lewis's earlier vertical poured presentations. However, Neidich's more conceptual orientation showed his long interest in the foundations of color perception, and was an attempt to illustrate that color owes as much to historical artistic practices in the shaping of our cultural consciousness as it does to the "physical" prismatic principles argued by Newton's *Optics*. Of course, color is also linked closely to theories of light, for without light there can be no color. The mass or volume of an object generally remains constant, but its colored appearance is always modulated in relation to light. The point Neidich made related specifically to how artistic practices and experimentations with color have changed radically the status and perception of color, and as a result changed understanding

in terms of our cultural comprehension of a color consciousness.⁴⁶ From Isaac Newton's color "physical" wavelength *Optics*, to Goethe's psychological theories of color in "Farbenlehre," Chevreul's chemical theories of colors, Runge and Romantic philosophy, and theosophical and spiritual connotations in *Blaue Reiter*, historical consciousness has been in a continual state of flux as regards the interpreting and meaning of the colors of the rainbow.⁴⁷ Color is continuously determined by prevailing historical periods that have redefined it in relation to contemporary perception and consciousness. Neidich's installation, presented through altered color configurations, was a direct challenge to the determined mechanistic "normative" approaches of Newtonian science. The symbolic role of the rainbow has, in the post-Romantic age, largely been subjected to the aesthetics of the sublime. However, originally, in earlier times, the "rainbow" was always connected to the aesthetics of wonder and rare experiences through curiosity and poetic bafflement, and frequently evoked in relation to cosmological analogies.⁴⁸ Color theory and brain function are among the most complex areas of contemporary cognitive studies of consciousness, where many contemporary cognitive neurologists speak of the phantoms of the brain.⁴⁹ Scientific evidence of neural pathways adapting and remapping themselves to changing physical and environmental conditions is increasingly prolific. Warren Neidich would assert that this research, and *prima facie* historical evidence that cultural consciousness reshapes our perceptions, gives tangible reality to adaptations within the biochemistry of actual being. He suggests that since mind today is shaped by culture, rather than nature, "as such the history of the representation of the rainbow might be looked at as an ontology of mindedness. Their historical trajectory can be considered a projected image of the condition of the mind itself."⁵⁰ It also further implies the idea that while the subject of "rainbow-mindedness," like other



Fig 14 *Rainbow Brushes*, 2008–2010. Left image: acrylic paint on horse hair brush, 13 × 5 in.; right image: acrylic paint on paper, 9 × 3 ft.

returning phenomena inevitably reappears over time, it is never quite the same—some other aspect or mind configuration has also been newly inscribed within the ongoing conditions that are continually shaping our cultural consciousness.

It may appear as if I have underplayed the role of sensory perception in this essay. But perception as mechanism (as optics) finds their meaning in the workings of mind and consciousness; sensory perception is the purveyor of experiences of our world. Perception receives, collects, takes possession, and apprehends, but what one perceives is commonly an interplay between past experiences, often tied specifically to particular cultures, and to the general interpretations existing around the perceived. A history of perception is not the same as a history of consciousness: perception is the mirror that is ultimately shaped by mind through consciousness. In the contemporary moment it is the neural field of mind and mechanism that largely grounds our present-day understanding of the issues; if Neidich is right, it is possible to foresee that this may not always be the case so simply answered. If the universe is in a state of eternal recurrence and repetition, it suggests that in the future there may well be shades of quite another color:

Notes

- 1 Hans Adolf Eduard Driesch (1867–1941), a biologist and embryologist-philosopher who founded “Neo-Vitalism,” largely argued through an updated adaptation of Aristotle’s theory of “entelechy.” The notion of “entelechy” being the “potentiality” at work in areas of motion, causality, physiology, and human ethics, as distinct from their actuality in the working system whereby phenomena take on reality.
- 2 In recent philosophy of biology (1970s to the early 1990s), the primary debate about reduction has focused on the question of whether (and in what sense) classical genetics can be reduced to molecular biology. Another less prominent strand of discussion concerns whether evolutionary theory is inherently anti-reductionist because of the principle of natural selection. See <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/reduction-biology/>.
- 3 Francisco Varela, Evan Thompson, and Eleanor Rosch, *The Embodied Mind: Cognitive Science and Human Experience* (Cambridge, MA and London: MIT Press, [1993] 2000).
- 4 It is ironic because Rene Descartes (1596–1650) in the 1640s defined the body as a *machine*, distinguishing it from *mind*, which he saw as the seat of consciousness, and thereby founding his philosophy of mind–body dualism. Modern research scanning machines for brain-mapping argue an increasingly integrated relationship.

- 5 In Presocratic philosophy, Parmenides of Elea (fifth century BCE) argued that nothing changes, only the appearance of things change, and that the everyday perception of reality and its different forms was a mistake—the underlying principle being one immutable whole or truth (*aletheia*). Its more contemporary relevance can be linked to Heidegger's essay on Parmenides (1942–43), but equally relevant to his "The Origins of a Work of Art," in Martin Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought* (New York: Harper, 1971). Conversely, Heraclitus of Ephesus (c.535–c.475 BCE) claimed that everything changes and is constantly in a state of flow, in a perpetual state of transformation. Heidegger again addressed this subject in his Heraclitus Seminar (1966–67).
- 6 Warren Neidich, *Blow-Up: Photography, Cinema and the Brain* (New York: D.A.P. Publishers, 2003).
- 7 I emphasise the word "vital" not in its Drieschian "spiritual" sense of a separate internal perfecting principle, but its literal meaning of belonging to and relating to life, its energy and function; contributing to life, containing life: living. But also necessarily as capable of life, in terms of a contemporary meaning of entelechy as mind and consciousness: a unity of mind and mechanism that realizes or makes actual what is otherwise merely potential.
- 8 Vilém Flusser, "The Gesture of Photography," in *Towards a Philosophy of Photography* (London: Reaktion Books, 2000), p. 33: "The acts of resistance on the part of culture, the cultural conditionality of things, can be seen in the act of photography, and this can, in theory, be read off from the photographs themselves."
- 9 Louis August Blanqui, *L'Éternité par les astres* (Paris, 1872).
- 10 Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche (1844–1900), *Daybreak: Thoughts on the Prejudices of Morality* [*Morgenröte. Gedanken über die moralischen Vorurteile*] (Cambridge and London: Cambridge University Press, [1881] 1982); and *Thus Spoke Zarathustra: A Book of All and None* [*Also sprach Zarathustra: Ein Buch für Alle und Keinen*] (Harmondsworth: Penguin, [1883–85] 1961).
- 11 Eduardo Cadava, *Words of Light; Theses on the Photography of History* (Princeton and London: Princeton University Press, 1997).
- 12 Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," in *Illuminations* (London: Fontana, [1973] 1992), pp. 211–42; and "A Short History of Photography," in *One Way Street and Other Writings* (London: Verso, 1985), pp. 240–57.
- 13 Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project* (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 1999), pp. 25–6. "Men of the nineteenth century, the hour of our apparitions is fixed forever, and always brings us back to the very same ones."
- 14 Cadava, op. cit., p. 33.
- 15 Traditionally, 1839 is set as the historical moment that initiates photography (though not without earlier experimentation), its founders being the Frenchmen Louis Daguerre (1767–1851) and Joseph Niépce (1765–1833), and the Englishman William Henry Fox-Talbot (1800–77). Recently, several artists including Chuck Close and Adam Fuss, among others, have reintroduced the daguerrotype process into their artworks.
- 16 Franz Joseph Gall (1758–1828), neuro-anatomist and physiologist, was the first scientist to develop and publish theories of brain localization. Around 1800, he developed a system in Paris called cranioscopy, a method to determine the personality and development of mental and moral faculties on the basis of the external shape of the skull. It was later given the name of phrenology, and it is important to stress that Gall was a serious scientist who was not responsible for turning the system into the pseudo-parlour game that it subsequently became.
- 17 Johann Gaspar Spurzheim (1776–1832) coined the term "phrenology" and was a great popularizer of the movement after he arrived in Paris in 1807. He died of typhoid in Boston in 1832, where his skull, brain, and heart were preserved, and was so celebrated that the Bostonians gave him a public funeral and commissioned a cemetery monument for him at Mount Auburn, Cambridge, Massachusetts.
- 18 Anne Maxwell, *Picture Imperfect: Photography and Eugenics, 1870–1940* (Brighton: Sussex Academic Press, 2008).
- 19 Francis Gall (1822–1911). The term "eugenics" was first coined in Gall's *Inquiries into Human Faculty and its Development* (London: Macmillan, 1883), p. 199.

- 20 For a pictorial overview, see *L'âme au corps: arts et sciences 1793–1993* (Paris: Grand Palais, Paris, Réunion des Musées Nationaux, Gallimard/Electra, 1993) and *Wunderblock: Eine Geschichte der modernen Seele* (Vienna: Messepalast, 1989).
- 21 Jean Martin Charcot (1825–93), known as the founder of modern neurology, and whose students included Sigmund Freud, Joseph Babinski, Pierre Janet, William James, Pierre Marie, Alfred Binet, Georges Gilles de la Tourette, and numerous others who form the founding figures of modern dynamic psychology and psychoanalysis. He is most known, however, for the photographed “hysterical” performances that were later debunked. See J. Bogousslavsky (ed.), *Following Charcot: A Forgotten History of Neurology and Psychiatry (Frontiers of Neurology and Neuroscience)* (Basel: Karger Pub., 2010).
- 22 Hippolyte Bernheim (1840–1914), Head of the Nancy School of Psychiatry and Neurology, was an influential figure who developed psychological theories of suggestibility, and was a critic of Charcot and his methods. See *Suggestive Therapeutics: A Treatise on the Nature and Uses of Hypnotism [De la Suggestion et de son Application à la Thérapeutique]* (New York: G. P. Putnam’s Sons, [1883] 1889), and *New Studies in Hypnotism [Hypnotisme, Suggestion, Psychothérapie: Études Nouvelles]* (New York: International University’s Press, [1891] 1980).
- 23 Dr. James Braid (1795–1860) first coined the term “hypnotism” for what was formerly called animal magnetism in his lectures of 1841–42, and is seen as the founder of hypnotherapy. The word “hypnotism” means, literally, “nervous sleep” (sleep of the nerves).
- 24 Guillaume-Benjamin-Amand Duchenne (de Boulogne) (1806–75), *De l’Électrisation localisée et de son application à la physiologie, à la pathologie et à la thérapeutique* (Paris, 1855); *Mécanisme de la physionomie humaine, ou Analyse électro-physiologique de l’expression des passions applicable à la pratique des arts plastiques* (Paris, 1862); and *Physiologie des mouvements démontrée à l’aide de l’expérimentation électrique et de l’observation clinique, et applicable à l’étude des paralysies et des déformations* (Paris, 1867).
- 25 Dr. Jules Baillarger (1809–90) was probably one of the first to make portraits of the mentally ill in the early 1840s in Paris, immediately following the founding of photography. But the best-known early portraits were taken by Dr. Hugh Welch Diamond (1809–86) at the Surrey Asylum in England in 1848–58. Diamond was an amateur photographer who began photographing three months after Fox Talbot unveiled his new calotype photographic system, and was the first Secretary of the Photographic Society (founded 1853) and the editor of its journal. See Sander L. Gilman, *The Face of Madness: Hugh W. Diamond and the Origin of Psychiatric Photography* (New York: Citadel Press, 1986).
- 26 Cesare Lombroso (1835–1909) was the founder of criminal anthropology and his theories stated that criminality was inherited, and that someone who was a “born criminal” could be identified by physical defects which confirmed a criminal, as in a savage or atavistic being; the measurement system he developed was called anthropometry. Lombroso was among the most famous men in Europe in the second half of the nineteenth century, and his Research Institute still exists in Turin. The subject of criminal degeneracy and subsequently Social Darwinism was a huge area of research in the years following Benedict Augustin Morel’s (1809–73) coining of the term “degeneracy” in 1857 (*Traité des dégénérescences physiques, intellectuelles et morales de l’espèce humaine et des causes qui produisent ces variétés maladives*), as it related to progressive mental degeneration. He was also the alienist who coined the term “dementia praecox” (1860), later renamed “schizophrenia” by Eugen Bleuler (1911).
- 27 Societies of Psychical Research and their publications were founded across Europe and the USA in the 1880s and 1890s (London, 1882). G. W. H. Myers, and the philosophers William James and Henri Bergson, were all members. The distinction between dynamic psychology and psychical research (now called parapsychology) was not clearly established. For photographic examples of the research, and so-called ectoplasm photography, see *Im Reich der Phantome: Fotografie des Unsichtbaren*, ex. cat. (Mönchengladbach: Städtisches Museum Abteiberg, 1998).
- 28 Wilhelm Conrad Röntgen’s (1845–1923) first developed X-ray was of his wife’s hand on December 22, 1895, and the first public presentation was in a lecture on January 23, 1896.

- See Bettyann Holtzmann Kevles, *Naked to the Bone: Medical Imaging in the Twentieth Century* (Camden, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1996).
- 29 Blanqui took part in the armed insurrection in Paris in 1839 (May 12–13), and was a leading member of the Société des Saisons; as a result he was sentenced to death in 1840, later commuted to life imprisonment. The oath of allegiance to the Société stated that members were to kill the aristocracy of birth and the bourgeois aristocracy of money that had replaced it.
- 30 In this we need not be surprised, since Benito Mussolini (1883–1945), Italy's fascist dictator, was profoundly influenced by both Blanqui and Nietzsche, and an epigraph of Blanqui adorned *Il Popolo d'Italia*, the Italian fascist newspaper.
- 31 The participant-performances took place at Maison Gregoire, Brussels, December 5, 2009; Kunsthalle Athena, Athens, May 2010; and at LAXART, Los Angeles, July 30–31, 2010.
- 32 For an overview perspective on art and language, see Charles Harrison, *Essays on Art & Language* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2003).
- 33 See *Live in Your Head: Concept and Experiment in Britain 1965–75*, ex. cat. (London: Whitechapel Gallery, 2000).
- 34 It took place at the California Museum of Photography, Riverside, 2001. The use of the term "mutated" was significant since it is generally seen as a value-free, non-teleological premise. Mutation means simply to change shape or form, usually argued as the process of natural selection, and it emphasizes a process, as distinct from evolution, which argues differentiation and gradual development.
- 35 Jean-François Lyotard, "Answering the Question: What is Postmodernism?," in *The Postmodern Condition: A Report in Knowledge* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, [1979] 1984), pp. 71–82; quote on p. 79.
- 36 Rene Cori, Daniel Lascar and Donald H. Pelletier, *Recursion Theory, Gödel's Theorems, Set Theory, Model Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).
- 37 Op. cit. The same works were later extended and installed in New York, in "Storefront for Art and Architecture," 2002.
- 38 Deborah Hauptmann and Warren Neidich, *Cognitive Architecture: From Biopolitics to Noopolitics: Architecture & Mind in the Age of Communication and Information* (Rotterdam: 010 Publishers, 2010).
- 39 "Warren Neidich in Conversation with Hans Ulrich Obrist," in *Earthing* (New York: Painted Leaf Press, 2005), pp. 13–21, quote on p. 14.
- 40 Less common today, artistic culture and cafes largely belong to an earlier "flaneur" time period, where the supposition of a continuous temporality was more secure. See Marc Augé, "From Places to Non-Places," in *Non-Places: Introduction to An Anthropology of Supermodernity* (London: Verso, 1995), pp. 75–120.
- 41 Herbert Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man* (Boston: Beacon, 1964). He argues that the ideology of advanced industrial society produces false needs, false consciousness, and one-dimensional mass consciousness. This was extended to society in the online essay "One-Dimensional Society": "A comfortable, smooth, reasonable, democratic unfreedom prevails in advanced industrial civilization, a token of technical progress. Indeed, what could be more rational than the suppression of individuality in the mechanization of socially necessary but painful performances; the concentration of individual enterprises in more effective, more productive corporations; the regulation of free competition among unequally equipped economic subjects; the curtailment of prerogatives and national sovereignties which impede the international organization of resources." Available online: <http://igw.tuwien.ac.at/christian/marcuse/odm1.html>.
- 42 Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (London: Tavistock Publications, 1970). An important discursive argument (though now largely assimilated) that opened up the discourse on the history and shifts that take place in the history of scientific consciousness.
- 43 The installation and exhibition took place at Magnus Müller Gallery, Berlin, 2008.
- 44 Peter Weibel and Gregor Jansen (eds), *Light Art from Artificial Light: Light as a Medium in the Art of the 20th and 21st Centuries* (Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz, 2006).

- 45 Bennett Simpson and Chrissie Iles (eds), *Dan Graham: Beyond* (Cambridge, MA and London: MIT Press, 2009). (Warren Neidich in collaboration with local artists and experts, Cultural Center of Belgrade Art Gallery, January 12–30, 2011), p. 15.
- 46 John Gage, *Colour and Culture: Practice and Meaning from Antiquity to Abstraction* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1993).
- 47 John Gage, *Colour and Meaning, Art, Science and Symbolism* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1999).
- 48 Philip Fisher; "The Rainbow and Cartesian Wonder (The Aesthetics of the Rainbow)," in *Wonder, the Rainbow, and the Aesthetics of Rare Experiences* (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 1998). "In the aesthetics of experience the rainbow stands alongside many other candidates for wonder; for example, the night sky filled with stars" (p. 33).
- 49 Vilayanur S. Ramachandran, *The Emerging Mind (Reith Lectures)* (London: Profile Books, 2003); see also Vilayanur S. Ramachandran, Sandra Blakeslee and Oliver Sacks, *Phantoms in the Brain: Human Nature and the Architecture of the Mind* (London: Fourth Estate, 1999). Ramachandran's recent neurological studies of synesthesia argues the cross-activation of different sensory functions in the brain.
- 50 Warren Neidich, *Acceptable Differences: Pluripotentiality and Painting*, exhibition catalogue

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