(Against) Neuralgia: Care of the Brain in Times of Cognitive Capitalism

Open! COOP Academy Publishing Class 2016–2017

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The seven major fibre bundles of the human brain; these tracks are created using DSI Studio and rendered in TrackVis. Image: Sudhir Pathak

The brain is a work, and we do not know it. We are its subjects, authors and producers at once – and we do not know it.
—Catherine Malabou

(Against) Neuralgia: Care of the Brain in Times of Cognitive Capitalism is a new series of artists' publications resulting from the 2016–2017 *Open!* COOP Academy Publishing Class at the Dutch Art Institute (DAI). DAI is an internationally orientated MA Art Praxis focusing on art, but explicitly granting attention to the crossings and interactions with other domains, disciplines and knowledges. As a partner of DAI, *Open!* conducts thematical research and publishes projects with a group of MA students using the *Open!* platform as the overarching discursive framework and site for experimentation and presentation. You can find links to the results of the previous year below.

This year our study group questioned the state of the mind and brain under conditions of cognitive capitalism. Mainly from the perspective of the humanities and political aesthetics, we focused on current notions of the brain in our global capitalist societies. We

asked after how far the brain can be ideologically infiltrated or resist that infiltration. From the assumption that culture and brain form complex systems of influence, control and resistance, and that language, memory and imagination are more and more performed by machines and automated algorithmic procedures, we looked at some of the implications of 'cognitive automation' in terms of our subjectivity, identity and free will. We learned how neuro-scientific conceptions of the brain can be appropriated by cognitive capitalism and charted possibilities to subvert the instrumentalization of our brains.

Through seminars and in conversation with generous guest tutors and by studying texts and other resources, we entered the brain. We were very much inspired by philosopher Catherine Malabou's questioning of 'what we should do so that consciousness of the brain does not purely and simply coincide with the spirit of capitalism'. Malabou wants to instigate consciousness of the 'plasticity' of the brain – that is the brain's ability to change and adapt as a result of experience – at the service of an emancipatory political understanding. We also closely looked at the 'neuroplastic dilemma' as described by theorist and activist Franco 'Bifo' Berardi who asserts that neuroplasticity can be the condition for the reactivation of empathy and political solidarity's necessary conditions for a process of self-organization of the general intellect driven by ethical and aesthetic sensibilities rather than by the an-ethical impulse of economic competition.

Artist-theorist Warren Neidich introduced us to the fields of neuro-aesthetics, neuro-ethics and concepts such as the neurobiological sublime, the brain without organs and noology. Art historian Antonia Majaca conducted a brainy seminar about the use of technology and the potential to generate non-paranoid imagination and agency in the age of algorithmic governmentality. Bifo passionately spoke about the Guattarian concept of 'chaosmose' and about 'chaosmique spasm'. He urged us to find a new rhythm between the relation of the brain and the chaos of the infosphere. Art historian Amelia Groom focused on 'viscosity with a will' and went into the ways in which soft invertebrates and brainless slimes invite new ways of understanding intelligence, embodiment and collectivity. Finally researcher and lecturer Willem van Weelden tried to critically compare Malabou's recent definition of trauma (brain trauma and psychic trauma), based on the advances made in neurobiology and new senses of materiality (plasticity), with Jean-François Lyotard's investigation of time and matter – as demonstrated in the eighties by his manifestation 'Les Immatériaux' and his philosophy of the Inhuman.

Alongside all this the ***Open!*** COOP Academy participants developed their individual (image)essays and experimental writings, guided by the ***Open!*** team and the guest tutors. As a collaborative exercise in thinking and writing they also created a playful image-text lexicon in relation to the overarching subject matter and the issues at stake, so as to break open concepts and create new relationships among them.[1]

Contributions

- *Lexicon (Against) Neuralgia. Care of the Brain in Times of Cognitive Capitalism* *[onlineopen.org/against-neuralgia]*
- Agata Cieślak, *In Search of the Miraculous* *[onlineopen.org/in-search-of-the-miraculous]*
- Areumnari Ee, *Commuters, Thy Name* *[onlineopen.org/commuters-thy-name]*
- Maya Watanabe, *Next Year at Marienbad* *[onlineopen.org/next-year-at-marienbad]*
- Pitchaya Ngamcharoen, *Peep Peeps = ___* *[onlineopen.org/peep-peeps]*
- Katja Dendulk, *The Narrowing Scope of the Recursive Image* *[onlineopen.org/the-narrowing-scope-of-the-recursive-image]*
- Mónica Lacerda, *Never-Ending-Nerve-Ending-Now* *[onlineopen.org/never-ending-nerve-ending-now]*
- Wilfred Vlad Tomescu, *The ____ Between Us Lines* *[onlineopen.org/the-between-us-lines]*
- Malcolm Kratz, *Intergenerational Knowledge and its Distractions* *[onlineopen.org/intergenerational-knowledge-and-its-distractions]*

Jorinde Seijdel is an independent writer, editor and lecturer on subjects concerning art and media in our changing society and the public sphere. She is editor-in-chief of *Open! Platform for Art, Culture & the Public Domain* (formerly known as *Open. Cahier on Art & the Public Domain*). In 2010 she published *De waarde van de amateur* [The Value of the Amateur] (Fonds BKVB, Amsterdam), about the rise of the amateur in digital culture and the notion of amateurism in contemporary art and culture. Currently, she is theory tutor at the Gerrit Rietveld Academie and Head of the Studium Generale Rietveld Academie in Amsterdam. With Open!, she is a partner of the Dutch Art Institute MA Art Praxis in Arnhem.

Florian Göttke is a visual artist based in Amsterdam. Since 2006 he is teaching at the Dutch Art Institute (DAI), Arnhem, about topics related to art and public issues. In his recent works he investigates the functioning of public images, and their relationship to social memory and politics. His lecture and book Toppled (Post Edition, Rotterdam, 2010), about the fallen statues of Saddam Hussein, is a critical study of image practices of appropriation and manipulation in our contemporary media society. Toppled was nominated for the Dutch Doc Award for documentary photography in 2011. Currently he is working on his PhD in Artistic Research "Burning Images – Genealogy of a Hybrid and Global Cultural and Political Practice" at the University of Amsterdam and the Dutch Art Institute, about the practice of hanging and burning effigies in political protests. See further: www.floriangoettke.com.

Credits: **Lead tutor** *Open!* (Jorinde Seijdel i.c.w. Niels Schrader and Janine Armin); **Associate researcher** Florian Göttke; **Students** Agata Cieślak, Areumnari Ee, Benedicte Clementsen, Katja Dendulk, Kim Forni, Malcolm Kratz, Maya Watanabe, Mira Adoumier, Mónica Lacerda, Pitchaya Ngamcharoen, Wilfred Tomescu; **Guest tutors** Warren Neidich, Antonia Majaca, Franco Berardi, Amelia Groom, Willem van Weelden.

Footnotes

1. Another practice in writing and reflecting resulted from a collaboration between Open! COOP Academy with art critic and editor Federica Bueti on the live coverage of part of the public programme of the Van Abbemuseum in Eindhoven's caucus Becoming More. The Open! COOP Academy students-participants formed an editorial team on the spot, working and thinking collectively and trying out collaborative forms of critical writing. Their live reports were published directly on the Open! blog.

Crosslinks

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