NERVOUS SYSTEMS

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Haus der Kulturen der Welt
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Spector Books

NERVOUS SYSTEMS

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THE PARADOXES OF NERVOUS SYSTEMS

In the past we had problems understanding the world, today we have problems living in the world that we have created. The paradoxes of knowledge have been transformed into the paradoxes of life, or more precisely: we have made them such.

How could this happen? The Haus der Kulturen der Welt's long-term projects, *Anthropocene* and *100 Years of Now*—of which *Nervous Systems* is a part—can be understood as an answer to this question.

With the classic paradoxes, contradictions in thought arise when we attempt to understand reality. This is the case with Zeno's paradox, who theoretically demonstrated that the fleet-footed Achilles was not even capable of overtaking a tortoise. Inviting his listeners to participate in a thought experiment in which the Greek hero gives his opponent a ten-meter head start, Zeno asks what happens when Achilles passes the tortoise's starting point. At this instant the tortoise will have already traveled a certain distance. And so it continues. Accordingly, Achilles can close the gap until it is infinitely small, but can never catch up with his opponent. However, at the same time, all the participants know from experience that Achilles effortlessly overtakes the tortoise.

In today's world we encounter paradoxes both in our thought and in our living environment, which is increasingly permeated by technologies which are themselves a product of our thought. Our environment is progressively shaped by materialized consciousness. This is especially the case with the mechanisms of the digital world, which have begun to fundamentally change our understanding of subject and society.

Initially, the recording of data and its algorithmic processing was designed to improve the lives of individuals and societies, making them easier to organize.

However, by feeding back into every area of life, these systems are now *de facto* shaping life itself. From a means designed to achieve a certain end, namely a better life, the means itself has now begun to dictate what the good life is.

A further transformation has occurred in the factual objectification of subjects. The system records past behavior as objectified data, which is reflected back to the subjects via algorithms to constitute their need worlds. However, because these objectified need worlds influence, in a complex manner, the decision-making processes of subjects, they determine their choices and thus increasingly limit their freedom. The objectified world of data replaces subjective decisions, which in the past were always defined by a certain degree of freedom.

The exhibition and publication project *Nervous Systems* aims to expose the categorical shifts of the digital world and the concomitant interventions into our self-understanding as subject and society by addressing the aforementioned paradoxes. It understands itself as a disruptive factor, scratching the aestheticized surfaces of the brave new digital world, whose role it is to mask the de-humanizing processes of the new world of technology. The goal is to unlearn the learnt in order to make our resocialization as subjects possible.

I would like to warmly thank the project curators: Stephanie Hankey, and Marek Tuszynski from the Tactical Technology Collective, and Anselm Franke, who through this exhibition have succeeded in critically illuminating and questioning the effects of the technological transformations on both our individual and social world by placing them in a broader historical context.

Bernd Scherer,
Director of the Haus der Kulturen der Welt

NERVOUS SYSTEMS: AN INTRODUCTION

Anselm Franke, Stephanie Hankey, Marek Tuszynski

Can our inner thoughts be transmitted by our eye movements? Can our future actions be predicted by our current behavior? These are the kind of questions explored in Julien Prévieux's film *Patterns of Life*, in which dancers enact the history of human-movement tracking, from early experiments in chronophotography, through activity-based intelligence in today's "war on terror." The answer to these questions is indeed that our movements are tracked, along with our habits, interests, and intentions, which can be measured, calculated, and predicted.

Data transmitted by our everyday communications and movements are captured endlessly by billions of sensors and then stored. Data that we willingly emit in return for efficiency and gain, and yet for what purpose we may not even question, as increasingly it becomes the raw material of a new "social physics."[1] The representative of a major firm of data-brokers prides himself with statements such as, "We know what your propensity is to buy a handbag. We know what your propensity is to go on vacation or use a loyalty card."[2] This vast business of behavioral forecasting means that whatever it is we are likely to do someone has already predicted, and placed a financial bet or a

1 Charged with the promise to reveal the natural laws of social behaviour, the term "social physics" was initially coined by Belgian sociologist and mathematician Adolphe Jacques Quetelet, who first introduced statistical methods to the social sciences in the early nineteenth century. Reviving the promise to reveal the iron laws of society, the new social physics as promoted by Alex Pentland at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) or Dirk Helbing at the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology (ETH) Zurich, relies on big data "to build a predictive, computational theory of human behaviour [so that] we can hope to engineer better social systems." See online http://socialphysics.media.mit.edu (accessed 02/20/2016). See also: Alex Pentland, *Social Physics: How Good Ideas Spread—The Lessons from a New Science*, New York 2014; and Dirk Helbing, *Thinking Ahead-Essays on Big Data, Digital Revolution, and Participatory Market Society*, Berlin 2015.

2 See online, https://www.democraticmedia.org/acxiom-every-consumer-we-have-more-5000-attributes-customer-data (accessed 02/20/2016).

categorized heading over our future actions. We are predictable insofar as we conform to the "rational-choice" consumer—the very model on which Cold War economics was built: engineered milieus, in which it is our nerves that act as extensions of data networks, not the other way around.[3] The same technologies are in use by the police and the military in an effort to predict crime and locate the proverbial "needle in the haystack." In the process, new statistical normativity is emerging, flattening and smoothing out our lifeworlds, and singling out any form of dissent. To anticipate and preempt become the guiding cultural logic.

The public debate and discourse on the rise of the data society and digital technologies tends to shift between the utopian and the dystopian, where either vision seems held as a tool of inevitable democratization and de-hierarchization,[4] or as a means for expanding the use of surveillance and deepening relations of exploitation. Nevertheless, shrouded in false myths, both the utopian and dystopian positions provide little by way of orientation. Either they naïvely position technologies and cybernetic thinking outside architectures of power or they are based on false and romantic assumptions of the integrity of the autonomous individual, as if there ever was a *human* that was not shaped, and even brought into being, through *inhuman* tools and machines. In creating the exhibition *Nervous Systems*, we attempt to capture a different and somewhat difficult, "third" ground, but not the one that sees technology as a "neutral" apparatus. Rather, it seems to us that our models of social-ness, and hence the principles on which our societies are built, may be fundamentally at odds with current technological developments. What happens if, the experience of in-

3 Philip Mirowski, *Machine Dreams: Economics Becomes a Cyborg Science*, Cambridge 2002.
4 Nicolas Negroponte from MIT's Media Lab predicted in 1999 that the internet will inevitably "flatten organisations, globalise society, decentralise control, and help harmonise people."

habiting the graph is jarring, or the algorithm is unable to live within the chaos?

We wanted this exhibition to distinguish itself from the wave of recent "Big Data" shows. *Nervous Systems* intends to bring to the foreground the tension between the ideologies and worldviews that are the basis for the current faith in data, and to contrast these with the sense of unease and unrest that emanates from the lived experience. We decided to focus less on quantification as a spectacle of the current information-based technological era and focus more on tracing the histories of certain ways of seeing: grand schemes of bureaucratization, governance of the masses, of the self, bound up with ideas of efficiency, insight, and progress. Our intention has been to acknowledge what has driven the evolution of directing, or piloting, through data. We seek to show how data-processing has not been motivated by advances in technology alone, but how political ideologies, moments in history, and desires for greater control also drove it; and that its realization, at different points during the last hundred years, holds up a mirror to the hopes and fears of that particular time. It is our hope that by reflecting on these grand schemes from different vantage points—the meeting room and the living room, the spreadsheet and the street—there lies the potential to reflect upon what happens when they collide. There is potential to move beyond the current coordinates of the field and to shift the kinds of choices and positions available for reflection.

In the shadow of the Edward Snowden revelations over the past few years, we have seen the rise of data corporations to positions of power previously inconceivable. Along with this, the egalitarian vision of the Information Age and the allure of its alleged ability to empower the individual have come into question, yet with astonishingly limited consequences. That the fo-

cus of contemporary public critical debate has been firmly on privacy and state surveillance is partially down to a symptom of the absence of a reflexive language for these other dimensions, where the empowered subject may appear simultaneously as a disempowered object. For what does "privacy" really mean in a context where subjectivity itself occurs in a data-processing environment, where the infamous distinction between personal data and seemingly anonymous metadata is rendered increasingly obsolete? What does privacy mean as it becomes possible to identify someone as easily from "anonymous" data as from a fingerprint or identity card?[5] Through artworks, artifacts, and objects combined in specific constellations, we have tried to move beyond the somewhat restrictive narratives and illuminate aspects that often go unnoticed: the paradoxes and inversions that are part of the current reorganization of society through data-technologies.

Nervous Systems illuminates the degree to which we, as selves, as users, as a bundle of technology-aided identity-effects, come to embody the very paradoxes that the new data economies yield. The continuous recording of our "self," social life, and the issues that confront us in daily life are subjected to scrutiny and filtered into patterns, along with the glitches and the anomalies. In targeting potential threats and "unknowns," a process of far-reaching consequences is set in motion, generating effects we have only begun to grasp. In the process, both subjectivity and social relations change fundamentally, while concurrently existing normative patterns and dispositions are reinforced by big-data feedback and personalized "filter bubbles."[6] In targeting users, the system tends to

5 See for example, online http://bits.blogs.nytimes.com/2015/01/29/with-a-few-bits-of-data-researchers-identify-anonymous-people/?_r=0 (accessed 02/20/2016).

6 Eli Pariser, *The Filter Bubble: What the Internet Is Hiding from You*, New York 2011.

mirror existing preferences, while simultaneously and increasingly these identities become effects of technological assemblages. Individuals use these technologies to gain greater personal control and efficiency in their lives, and paradoxically, in the same moment, lose control. As a result, this self-empowerment contributes to a system in which every individual becomes a digit, a dot, a self-entered data point.

The most obvious paradox is that while the personalization of technology makes the world seemingly revolve around the self more and more, the self gets mediated back to us through entirely de-subjectified calculations and statistical medians. Today, individuals are less and less separated from the cumulative data that can be extrapolated from their existence. Thus, as subjects, we find ourselves pulled in two directions at once, both equally unlivable: either, both subjectivity and identity are liquefied and flexible, as in the consumer-producer of neo-liberalism, or identity becomes fixed and disambiguated. We might find ourselves forced to enact both illusions; of self-identity and integrity as well as the prospect that we can transform into anything we want (or that market forces demand of us).

This situates the "self" at a critical junction of conceptual nervosity: the "human" aspect of an increasingly interconnected world enabled by an inhuman communication matrix, and the aesthetics of humanization and animation, which persists on the commercial surfaces of user–machine interfaces, appearing as distractions from this gap. What appear as technologies of recognition, in fact, are technologies of what Kodwo Eshun termed "de-cognition," technologies that are able to frame our cognitive operations without having to engage in the labor of understanding and interpreting, or in engaging with causes, for that matter.

In creating *Nervous Systems*, we also wanted to include explicit aesthetic investigations in order to trace

the increasing opacity of authority and ideology, which puts social awareness and the possibility of lasting social mobilization and commitments into enduring crisis. The aesthetic dimension introduces not only the problematic of the type of experience and under what conditions it can be shared, but also tests discourses against sensuous experience in order to produce a mutual challenge, adding ambiguity, complexity, and resistance to the levels of form and language. This helps us to extrapolate alienation and incommensurability from an ideology of accessibility and availability. Furthermore, it is the aesthetic dimension, and sometimes the particulars of art history, that allow us a sort of archaeology of past experience, and hence an understanding of nonlinear historical developments, the vectorial inversions in human–machine interaction and the vast apparatus of quantification, identification, mapping, and standardization, which are at the core of both industrial capitalism and modern statecraft.

We chose to work with the metaphor of the *Nervous System* to give historical, vertical depth to the picture we have of the present. The advantage of this metaphor is that it can always be read in at least two ways, and hence never pretends to offer a stable object or set of facts. This is of great importance for exhibitions in particular, because only when the matter-of-factness of a subject, theme, or thing is *disputed* and *destabilized* can the exhibition become a space of thought that allows art/artifacts to enter into a thematic dialogue, without reducing the former to illustration. The metaphor of the nervous system, because of its ambiguity, forces us to think and seek a position, in order to engage actively in the processes that construct the currently dominant rationality and its evidences.

On the one hand, "nervousness" relates to the insecurity, perhaps even panic, at the heart of the current control framework, of today's "system," the totality of institutions and ideologies that make up the modern nation-state and market. It is a pervasive nervousness: will our systems remain stable? Will they allow us to come to terms with, to control, to contain the forces of chaos, disorder, and the unknown, the ubiquitous real, or imagined, threats? The consequence: paranoia, where "in the eyes of authority—and maybe rightly so—nothing looks more like a terrorist than the ordinary man."[7] "Nervousness" also invokes the possible resistance—of individual bodies, material, and collective realities—to the systems of registration and capture they are subject to, and also signifies any situation in which signifier and signified are out of joint.[8] From within the centered rationality of systems of order, it is the possibility of "re-volution"—the turning-upside-down of relations—that permanently feeds both the nervousness and the often-paranoid logic that these systems employ at their borders—internal and external. The concept also extrapolates the nervousness at the heart of modern classificatory, disciplinary knowledge, the non-identity of social order and practice, of social power and the body, the hysterical epistemic blindness produced by systems of oppression—a nervousness about systemic questions, legitimacy, rationality, that the neoliberal ideology of "smartness" has sought hard to exorcise. Today, this nervousness is most visible in relation to key themes of our time: national security and terrorism, migration and sovereignty, the economy and the financial sector, and food-, energy-, and climate-related security. *Nervous Systems* examines this sense of nervousness and

7 Giorgio Agamben, *What is an Apparatus? And Other Essays*, Stanford, CA 2009.
8 See: Franco Berardi, *The Soul at Work: From Alienation to Autonomy*, tr. Francesca Cadel and Giuseppina Mecchia, Los Angeles, CA 2009.

its relationship to data collection, analysis, and its use, illuminating aspects of its historical development through the past hundred years. Many of these significant developments can be counted together with moments of violence: warfare and the fear of war; or can be bound together with times of crisis and catastrophe, with change sometimes visibly groundbreaking or minute yet accumulative.

On the other hand, the metaphor of the nervous system has been a leitmotiv of progress in the technological era, tracing a genealogy of entanglement between humans and machines. The emergence of a ubiquitous control-framework, which we are seeing today with the "nervous nets" of big data, has its roots, ultimately, in the years during and immediately following World War Two. While the dominant paradigm before then was energy and electricity, after, it was the flow of information in bodies, systems, and circuits. This concept allowed for the creation of analogies between technological networks and biological systems, and implied that biological life and thought were computable and translatable into the same binary operations found in neural networks. It also raised the key problem of control and the nature of the organs of social control, questioning how to separate noise from signal and chaos from order. At the heart of this, was the fundamental belief that uncertainty is an informational problem, that prediction and anticipation could enable the process of governing. While the rhetoric has changed significantly since the era of nuclear stand-offs, the rationalities offered in response to the same challenges have not. When large tech-corporations (i.e. IBM, Hewlett-Packard, and Microsoft) propagate a "smart" future built on their next-generation big-data solutions and networks, projected on a planetary scale, then this is done explicitly to suggest that analysis of networked and real-time data will help to

keep chaos, upheaval, and unrest under control, while also sustaining increased corporate profit margins.

"Nervous systems," promising the management of life on both a global and ecological scale, is a solution being built and propagated everywhere, by corporations and public bodies alike.[9] To connect, to communicate, and to make complex networks "smart": there seems to be an overwhelming consensus in the established culture and industry that this is where "progress" lies today. Behind the "smart" slogan lies the integration of humans and machines; the vision of the organic and the technological in mutually enhancing circuits, stabilized by adaptive algorithms. This is the continuation of capitalist modernity's project of "unlimited rationalization," now transformed into a vast project built on seeing our societies and their citizens as systems with feedback loops; worlds that "just need to be better organized," according to Google founder Larry Page. There is a renewed and widespread belief that big data will eventually, finally(!), reveal the laws of human behavior, make political crisis, revolutions, and other forms of political and economic instability predictable, exactly as physics and chemistry predict natural processes. There is a particular rationality at work here, one that operates through correlations and patterns, rather than through cause-and-effect and semantic interpretation.

Today, the framework of control amounts to a vast program designed to redesign our lifeworlds—from the shopping mall to entire cities to our private lives. In a loosening embrace with neoliberal ideology, this framework has transformed economic life and sovereignty, and this changes how, both collectively and individually, we navigate and make sense of the world,

9 See for example online: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Watson_%28computer%29; https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/CeNSE; http://www.coss.ethz.ch/research/nervousnet.html (all accessed 02/20/2016).

how we experience others and ourselves. In a certain sense, it does bring the world it is modeling into being. Yet, the prophesy is seldom self-fulfilling: the internet-driven "Long Boom," propagated prominently on the cover of *Wired* magazine in 1997,[10] did not bring about global prosperity in the techno-utopistic and libertarian image of Silicon Valley, any more than the "harmonious society" envisaged by Singapore and China,[11] aided by "smart" data-collecting technologies and "total information awareness," is likely to do. Instead, when China announces that it assigns every citizen with a real-time "citizen credit score,"[12] which drops when people or their friends post unauthorized political comments or buy certain goods, the government as caring management (Big Mama) turns straight back into the Orwellian universe.

The data-driven predictions of today are different from the modernist future that was conceived as a planned utopia. These planning utopias were simulations haunted by the specters of authoritarianism and unilateral action, operating on too rough a resolution, and failing to provide the possibility of replying to the structures of which one is part, which is so crucial to self-empowerment and the ecology of social practice. It is as if the perceived enormous currency held by concepts such as "feedback" in the age of cybernetics, and still held for some today, had designs to heal the ills of modernity. As Orit Halpern has pointed out, there is a "strange irony" that in "the martial environments of the World War II laboratory, the critique of modernity—and its horrors—became literally realized as a technical possibility."[13] Today, we increasingly re-

10 Peter Schwartz and Peter Leyden, "The Long Boom: A History of the Future, 1980–2020," *Wired*, 07/01/1997, online http://www.wired. com/1997/07/longboom/ (accessed 02/20/2016).
11 Shane Harris, "The Social Laboratory," *Foreign Policy*, 07/29/2014, online http://foreignpolicy.com/2014/07/29/the-social-laboratory/ (accessed 02/20/2016).
12 See online http://www.computerworld.com/article/2990203/security/aclu-orwellian-citizen-score-chinas-credit-score-system-is-a-warning-for-americans.html (accessed 02/20/2016).
13 Orit Halpern, *Beautiful Data: A History of Vision and Reason since 1945*, Durham, NC 2015, 59.

alize that the "smart" networks, too, are haunted, not by the "old" disciplinary reductionism but also by their own de-politized nature, which allows them to grow unobstructed. In doing so, they create a vast integrated web of technologies designed to integrate humans and machines more and more, and to extract wealth from the most innocuous activity, even, or especially, the "free" time of today's users. We realize that the reduction of democracy to markets, conceived as a permanent referendum, is undermining the public sphere, the nation-state and, in the end, democracy.

The exhibition assembles works by over twenty-five artists, displaying both contemporary and historical pieces. Installed in an architectural "grid," a system of squares is generated by use of metal poles. The reference here is both to today's data-centers, or computer architectures, and to their historical template—the Cartesian grid as an image for the rationalization, abstraction, and reorganization of modern life. Perhaps, in the vein of geographer Derek Gregory, one could perceive the "grid" as the quintessential modern ontological battlefield, as the template for abstraction and factorization, leading to the "weaponized time-geography" of the present day.[14] The "grid" in the exhibition invokes the vast technological "apparatus" in the modern quantified society. According to the philosopher Giorgio Agamben, "subjectivity" is the result of an encounter between "living beings" and the "apparatus"—which he defines, following Michel Foucault, as technologies that possess the power "to capture, orient, determine, intercept, model, control, or secure the gestures, behaviours, opinions, or discourses of living beings."[15] Art, according to the approach of *Nervous Systems*, possesses in turn the power to *release*

14 Derek Gregory, "From a View to a Kill: Drones and Late Modern War," *Theory, Culture & Society*, 28 (2011): 188–215.
15 Agamben, *What is an Apparatus?*, 14.

life from these apparatuses of capture—even if only for moments and in the imagination—thus undoing the current drift toward ever-greater systemic closure. It is in this realm that we can begin to assemble the fragments of lived experience historically, in order to observe the transformations of "the social" in the present, and the frontiers of its subsumption.

By focusing on the entangled construction of bodies, machines, and subjectivities, we looked for artworks that explore the processes of embodiment and the history of the senses and sensemaking; artwork that engages us with what it means and feels like to be a subject within certain systemic parameters. We sought works that employ a stereoscopic view of technology and the human subject, that trace and allegorize the relationship between humans and machines in the production process of capital, and map the advances of capitalism into ever-deeper strata of our social existences. The works in the "grid" oscillate between embodiment and abstraction, between system and subject, between the individual and the "dividual," moving back and forth from systemic backgrounds to human figures. It is in this movement that our understanding opens up to the dimensions of a social, bodily, technological, and political unconscious—exposing yet other dimensions of "nervousness" by strategically displacing signs from what they signify, destabilizing the fiction of a world submerged in the *datum*.

In order to break out of the prevailing, fear-induced sense of systemic closure, it seems to us crucial to posit the body and subjectivity as objects of construction and design, inscribed into emerging socio-technical super-systems. At the same time, however, it seems critical to insist that the language of these super-systems themselves is the product of a dialectics of power and of social struggles. In a constellation of intentionally fragmentary historical narratives and

works of art that resist certain desires for representation, we tried to imagine and project a consciousness able to contest the frameworks that condition our choices, and hence our processes of identity-formation today, and instead open up a series of questions. How does the terror of abstraction and quintessentially inhuman quantifications take on visible form again in today's economy of visible selves?[16] How are we to understand the effects of inversions, such as when "abstraction" has transformed the "nature of concretion itself"?[17] What if it is no longer a case of machines built in the image of humans, but rather humans self-adapting to machines; what if humans give in to the mimicry of the normative and the framework that promises recognition?

The exhibition begins with historical references that seek to invoke this crisis within the history of the modern canon: Paul Klee's studies of "individuals" and "dividuals," his leveling of figure into ground and ground into figure, which anticipates the individual as statistical aggregate, less and less separable from cumulative behavioral data; Douglas Huebler's installation, which invited exhibition visitors to trade highly personal secrets with other visitors, made for the 1970's *Software* exhibition; or On Kawara's self-quantifications, in the form of the telegrams he sent to friends stating when he got up, or simply that he was still alive. In the "grid," the legacy of Conceptualism is tested and perhaps re-signified: for was Conceptualism's concern with pure and a-subjective, non-signifying systems of ordering and quantification not an act of critical mimicry of the "totally administered" world and its inhuman quantifications?[18] The collection of historical works hence calls

16 See also: Sven Lütticken, "Inside Abstraction," *e-flux*, 38, 20 (2012), online http://www.e-flux.com/journal/inside-abstraction/ (accessed 02/20/2016).
17 Idem.
18 Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, "Conceptual Art 1962–1969: From the Aesthetic of Administration to the Critique of Institutions," *October*, 55 (Winter, 1990): 105–43.

for a reinterpretation of early Conceptual art's concern with quantification, its "aesthetics of bureaucracy," and the deconstruction of the self in light of current data collection and self-quantification. It also reflects on the ambiguous use of the grid that is common to both high Modernism and Conceptual art: the grid as the ultimate a-subjective, depersonalized "system." Charles Gaines' experiments with the grid at the limits of representation, on the paradoxes of signification and the *impossibility* of a non-subjective, non-expressive aesthetics, today, seems equally to invoke the shifting frontiers between human interpretation and "objective systems." But how does history itself re-signify works of art? Could it be that in retrospect, these works could be seen to *uphold* the very difference between the "known" of the data-map in relation to the "unknown" of an always-contingent reality?

In our selection of contemporary artworks, we avoided *representing* "data," by refraining from *visualizing* its abstract operations as if it were an "object" that one could observe objectively from a safe, external, vantage point. Instead, we wanted to ask how it is possible to grasp the transformations of lived experience in the shifting terrain of human–machine interaction, and its processing of the "known" and the "unknown." We have tried to avoid what we perceived as the *flatness* of the usual representations and visualizations of data; the positivist matter-of-factness that they impose on us. In doing so, we sought artworks that may serve to *re-socialize* these "post-social" rationalities.

Julien Prévieux's film *Patterns of Life* is a central piece in the exhibition: a literal (perhaps "mediumistic") re-translation of abstractions into embodied, concrete, lived, and always-imperfect form. It is a choreographed experiment in embodying the history of quantifying and tracking human movement, extracting objectified patterns that can be recycled to reorganize

everything from factory work to shopping malls to counter-terrorism. A choreographic enactment of history such as this brings into view the degree to which, today, the social and the subjective are mapped out as "patterned interaction," rather than through processes of negotiated symbolic meaning. This shift is reflected in the ideology of corporations like Google/Alphabet, which never tire of emphasizing that they are not interested in the content of any online search, but merely in the abstract statistical patterns and the correlations that the searches reveal. *Resocializing*, in this case, means to make the patterns and scripts that we enact and to which we adhere in our everyday lives, explicit—to expose and narrate them so that we may even begin to imagine what resisting subjection might look like.

Like *Patterns of Life*, various other artworks arranged in the "grid" engage with the way the quantification of behavior re-creates our sense of social-ness and transforms our environment, increasingly transforming these into echo chambers. It is by enacting such displacements—as when filmmaker Deborah Stratman superimposes two scenes of paranoiac enactment in *Hacked Circuit*, bringing together psychosis, cinematic construction, and government surveillance—that the works themselves can be seen to perform or represent shifts and glitches in today's cognitive maps. Circumventing the reconciliatory language of "smartness," "real-time feedback," and "sustainability," this insistence on a crisis of cognition brought on by capitalist globalization is, at the same time, an insistence on the non-identity of "map" and "territory," pointing to the ideological character of this reconciliatory rhetoric. As Harun Farocki made painfully clear in his Brechtian depiction of the neoliberal turn in a post-traumatic German society, *How to Live in the FRG*, it is no longer possible to articulate a cri-

tique based on a "life" that lies (or is imagined to lie) as-of-yet outside capture. Today, it is no longer possible to speak of "a core of resistance to cultural domestication"[19] or of the body and the senses, somehow, outside acculturation and historical modulation.

Is it even possible to imagine resistance, when the very system that is to be resisted is enacted and embodied by ourselves? This question is at the center of Melanie Gilligan's sci-fi mini-series *The Common Sense*, which takes us into a near future where people wear a prosthesis attached to the roof of the mouth through which emotions and sensations can be felt and monitored by others. This technological enhancement of the "self" amounts to a cybernetic realization of the critique of a (Cartesian) modernity. It exploits the fact that we are constituted, as subjects, through inter-subjective relations and processes of symbolic and emotional "feedback." But the technology development imagined in the film does not lead to emancipation; rather it results in a different form of labor, one that displaces the "social question" while intensifying relations of (self)exploitation. Yet in this imagined future, as in today and yesterday, the social question refers to the system's production of an artificial scarcity and its reliance on disenfranchisement.

In the attempt to account for these inversions, and in order to re-narrate the shifting terrain of quantification and humans and machines, we have added to the artworks on display a further layer of what we called "triangulations"; contributions by media historians and writers. These authors, in response to our invitation to develop a historical sketch from three or more disparate exhibits, have provided us with annotated narra-

19 Susan Buck-Morss, "Aesthetics and Anaesthetics: Walter Benjamin's Artwork Essay Reconsidered," *October*, 62 (Autumn, 1992): 3–41.

tives illuminating a particular aspect of today's "nervous systems," addressing issues such as pattern recognition, the genealogy of quantification, anomaly detection, cartography, and the epistemology of the "nervous" network. These "triangulations," of historical and contemporary documents and reference materials, enter into a direct dialogue with both the contemporary and historical artworks in the "grid." The "triangulations" stage historical and contemporary reference points such that they add up to a scenography of entangled frontiers. Their contributions are reproduced in this publication in full.

Next to "the grid," the exhibition features a second section that brings to life many of these core themes, placing them in the everyday and the recognizable within a live installation by the Tactical Technology Collective, entitled *The White Room*. *The White Room* is an inversion of a major company's sales and training facility, and just as one encounters experts there, equally in the *The White Room* trained experts are on hand. Yet what they have "in store" is not the polished, corporate image that seeks to seduce customers into an Aquarian universe of self-design. Rather, it is a practical yet excavation-based encounter with our everyday devices, with our digital shadows and data aggregates. It is a space in which we learn to de-familiarize ourselves with our familiar technological environment, in which we learn to look beyond the "black mirror" and the way it reflects our "self." The objects, books, artifacts, gadgets, and artworks gathered here offer a rather awkward contemplation on the void of "autonomy" as a disappearing *modus operandi* of political action. It recognizes the autonomous subject within a series of entangled processes of mediation, of "programs" of action, which are as much anticipated as scripted. It is in this realm of mediation and its "programming" in the form of technology, then,

where we can also discern the outlines of a crisis of consciousness brought about by capitalist globalization, "algorithmic governmentality," and our participation within it. Ultimately, *The White Room*'s aim is to act as a platform for a discussion on the technology-enhanced "political body," where the way that "faith in data" is currently transforming power and our very understanding of the "political," can be explored. The last section of this publication is devoted to the contents of *The White Room*.

As a collection, the artworks, artifacts, and objects across the "grid" and *The White Room* touch upon a collection of interrelated themes, together reflecting a certain nervosity of both the system and the lived experience within it. The exhibition proposes that there is a certain need for *re-socializing*; meaning, here, the need to work against a blind "faith in data" in favor of a more complex understanding of social mediation and the historical forces that shape subjectivity. The objective is to reflect on the historical role of mass media as phantasmatic screens that paradoxically show what they suppress and hide, as several works in the exhibition make manifest. It means to trace how, according to Jean Baudrillard, "the social" itself, in the transition to a consumer society has disappeared, and "imploded into media."[20] *Re-socialization* could also mean that we have to attempt to undo this disappearance, to insist on bringing the "social question" back into the field of vision, to reflect on the radical forms of exclusion that underpin global capitalism, and the mechanisms by which its symptoms are being imputed and objectified. Cast against the post-social relations generated by data-interfaces, *re-socialization* brings us to a point of re-narration, or re-embodiment. Above

20 See http://networkcultures.org/geert/2015/09/17/interview-with-geert-lovink-on-social-media-the arts/?utm_content=buffer940c1&utm_medium=social&utm_source=facebook.com&utm_campaign=buffer (accessed 02/20/2016).

all, it invites us to undo the paradoxical eclipse of mediation that occurs in data-evidence and its hallucinatory facticity; it allows us to insist on the mediated nature of reality, and question the absence of transparency in mediation, its asymmetries, and the role of power in keeping its anarchic dimensions in check. *Re-socializing* can then assume the form of an archaeology of lived experience, of the transformative encounter with technology. It can force us to test and probe these abstractions for their livability, by engaging in an act of reflexive mimicry.