

Sunday, May 8, 2016

# Nervous Systems

Quantified Life and the Social Question

## Finissage-Lectures

3–5pm

NERVOUS MODELS

Welcome by Anselm Franke

Ana Teixeira Pinto

Feedback Forms: Behaviorism,  
Cybernetics, Autopoiesis

Seb Franklin

Figuring the Nerves of Economy

Q&A

Break

Moderated by Diana McCarty

5.30–8pm

THE GOOD, THE BAD,  
AND THE DATA

Evgeny Morozov

On Algorithmic Welfare:  
Silicon Valley as the Good Cop  
of Neoliberalism

Laboria Cuboniks

(represented by Patricia Reed  
and Diann Bauer)

Measuring Up

Franco “Bifo” Berardi

Chaosmic spasm

Q&A

Among other associations, the title *Nervous Systems* intends to invoke the fragility of large techno-social infrastructures, dreams of connectivity and immanence, but also the “nervosity” that haunts modern capitalist power and its ideological operations. This program of lectures brings together speakers from different fields to discuss forms of life and politics in emerging data environments. The first part of the afternoon engages with historical concepts and models that openly or tacitly inform contemporary conceptions and aesthetics of computation and behavior. The second part discusses political strategies and positions toward past- and present-day techno-utopian promises and their downsides.

### Ana Teixeira Pinto

#### Feedback Forms: Behaviorism, Cybernetics, Autopoiesis

Cybernetics, simply put, is the treatment of feedback as a conceptual abstraction, which defines itself by establishing an operational dichotomy between “system” and “environment.” This dichotomy, in turn, gives rise to the concept of “information” as that which the system extracts from its environment. The concept which Francisco Varela and Humberto Maturana came to name *autopoiesis* describes how a biological system can be, at once, operationally open and informationally closed. A frog’s visual system, for instance, registers the movement of jittering insects but fails to report on a conspicuously still human observer. There is no world “out there” being represented “in here,” rather the activity of the nervous system is determined by the nervous system itself. *Autopoiesis*, one could say, mirrors the main insight of structural linguistics: that language may be interpreted as a formal system of differential elements.

ANA TEIXEIRA PINTO is a writer and cultural theorist based in Berlin. She is currently a lecturer at the Universität der Künste Berlin. Her writings have appeared in publications and in journals such as *e-flux*, *art-agenda*, *Mousse*, *frieze d/e*, *Domus*, *Inaesthetics*, *Manifesta*, and *Texte zur Kunst*. She is the editor of *The Reluctant Narrator* (2014), and has recently contributed to *Alleys of Your Mind: Augmented Intelligence and Its Traumas* (Matteo Pasquinelli (ed.), 2015).

### Seb Franklin

#### Figuring the Nerves of Economy

Franklin takes the diagrammatic formulations of space, trauma, and networks presented and critiqued in Samuel Beckett’s 1981 television play *Quad* and Tom McCarthy’s 2005 novel *Remainder* as the occasion to sketch some elements of a methodology for critical analysis in the age of computational thinking. By locating in these aesthetic works traces of the material and imaginative conditions through which abstract diagrams come to shape concrete social conditions, the talk addresses the historical logic that connects certain modes of cultural analysis to recent political economy.

SEB FRANKLIN is lecturer in Contemporary Literature, Culture and Theory at King’s College London, where he co-convened the MA Program in Contemporary Literature, Culture and Theory. He is the author of *Control: Digitality as Cultural Logic* (2015).

### Evgeny Morozov

#### On Algorithmic Welfare: Silicon Valley as the Good Cop of Neoliberalism

Compared to predictions made thirty years ago, the ultimate neoliberal nightmare—the exclusion of the poor and the weak from access to education, health, and other public services—has not happened. Quite the contrary—rare is a Silicon Valley pundit who doesn’t celebrate the fact that, thanks to technology companies, there are many more ways for the poor to access connectivity, medicine, knowledge, loans (not to mention their recent advocacy of an unconditional basic income). This new form of social mobility, underpinned as it is by the wide and extensive collection and accumulation of data, presents Silicon Valley’s answer to the question of “what could and should

succeed the welfare state.” Paradoxically, if the previous regime—the social-democratic welfare state—implied surveillance after the distribution of benefits, the new algorithmic welfare regime presupposes universal and ubiquitous surveillance already, as a pre-condition to receiving any benefits. This talk will explore the multiple ways in which Silicon Valley—and the regime of data-accumulation that it enacts—has emerged as the ultimate (but, in the long run, impotent) savior of neoliberal capitalism.

EVGENY MOROZOV is the author of *The Net Delusion: The Dark Side of Internet Freedom* (2012) and *To Save Everything, Click Here: The Folly of Technological Solutionism* (2014). During 2010 to 2012 he was a visiting scholar at Stanford University and a Schwartz fellow at the New America Foundation. Prior to that he has held fellowships at Georgetown University and Open Society Foundations and was Director of New Media at Transitions Online. Morozov has written for *The New York Times*, *The New Yorker*, *London Review of Books*, *The Wall Street Journal*, *Financial Times*, and *FAZ*, among others.

### Laboria Cuboniks (represented by Patricia Reed and Diann Bauer)

#### Measuring Up

As we swirl about in the vertiginous technosphere, the translation of our world into a data-material complex, brings with it the promise (and threat) of the total measurability of life itself. While the debates rage, the leaks mount, and our world becomes parameterized *into*, and *by* probability patterns (a regime of risk management); our modes of governance remain largely trapped by anachronistic procedures that are incommensurable with twenty-first century reality. This talk addresses the need for, and speculates on post-Westphalian models that aim to measure up to the planetary demands of our entangled, collective, and technocondition—extraterritorial demands that are deeply at odds with the very concept of a border.

LABORIA CUBONIKS is a xenofeminist working group, spread across five countries and three continents. She seeks to dismantle gender, and do away with nature as a guarantor for inegalitarian politics. Her name is an anagram of “Nicolas Bourbaki,” a pseudonym for a group of largely French mathematicians who worked towards the affirmation of abstraction, generality/universality, and rigor in mathematics in the mid-twentieth century.

### Franco “Bifo” Berardi Chaosmic spasm

The explosion of the semiotic sphere, the utter intensification of semiotic stimulation has provoked simultaneously an enhancement of the horizon of possibility and a panic effect in the social neuro-system. Panic marks the inability of Reason to master the dissipating flow of events and enunciations both in the info-sphere and in the psychosphere. Schizophrenia may be defined as an over-inclusive mode of interpretation: schizophrenic thought appears to “over-include” various irrelevant objects and environmental cues in the interpretation of an enunciation; the schizo seems unable to limit attention to task-relevant stimuli, because of an excessive broadening of conceptual classes to incorporate stimuli falling beyond the boundaries defined by relevant cues. This is why Félix Guattari sees the schizo as the bearer of paradigmatic change (of chaosmosis, in Guattari’s parlance). The schizo in fact is the person who has lost the ability to perceive the limits of metaphoric enunciation and tends to take the metaphor as a description. The horizon of possibility marks the space of a chaotic field, the dimension in which a possible new order of meaning can emerge.

FRANCO “BIFO” BERARDI is a writer, media theorist, and media activist. He founded the magazine *A/traverso* (1975–81) and was part of Radio Alice, Italy’s first free pirate radio station (1976–78). During the 1970s, he fled to Paris where he worked with Félix Guattari in the field of schizoanalysis. He has contributed to magazines such as *Semiotext(e)*, *Chimeres*, *Metropoli*, and *Archipelago*. Currently he is writing for LINUS. He has published numerous books including *The Soul at Work: From Alienation to Autonomy* (2009), *The Uprising: On Poetry and Finance* (2012), *Heroes: Mass Murder and Suicide*, and *And: Phenomenology of the End* (both 2015). He has been lecturing internationally and is currently teaching Scuola di Nuove Tecnologie dell’Arte der Accademia di Belle Arti di Brera in Mailand.

### Q&A moderated by Diana McCarty

DIANA MCCARTY is editor of the award-winning radio station, reboot.fm. As a 1990’s cyberpunk in Budapest, she worked with netzkultur: Metaforum, faces, net.art, and nettime and continued with hacker spaces, MIKRO, and Prologue: New Feminism, New Europe in Berlin. Her work revolves around art, gender, politics, and technology. As a producer at Tactical Tech, she co-initiated the *Nervous Systems* exhibition.

The exhibition *Nervous Systems* explores how experience and understanding of the “self” and the “social” are changing. It looks at vast networked infrastructures and the way that abstract laws of the market and finance capitalism translate into subjective experience and embodied activity. It asks how the enormous amounts of data about human behavior affect and transform this behavior. This new belief in technological solutions fostered by data analysis, reality mining, pattern recognition, and forecasting increasingly dominates contemporary society and replaces political and hermeneutical processes.

The idea of a “nervous system” has become a chief motif to describe this proposed unification of life and technology, the organic, and the machinic. Today, the grand corporations speak of “smart nerves” and “synaptic real-time connections,” as solutions to managing everything from government and business to natural ecologies. The exhibition explores a different notion of “nervousness,” one that haunts the systems and data-driven rationalities and ideologies of today. Visual, historical, and practical materials by artists, technologists, theorists, and activists cast light on specific ideas of governance, power, and control that have emerged over the last 100 years and examine how these have influenced the formation of our new data-economies.

An exhibition by the Haus der Kulturen der Welt in collaboration with the Tactical Technology Collective, co-curated by Stephanie Hankey, Marek Tuszynski, and Anselm Franke.

[hkw.de/nervoussystems](http://hkw.de/nervoussystems)

[tacticaltech.org](http://tacticaltech.org)

Twitter: #NervousSystems



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