

Opening Give me a Brain!

Studium Generale Festival Cinem Clash Continuum

31 March 2011

Good afternoon! **Welcome** to this fourth day in the Cinema Clash Continuum Studium Generale Festival. I would like to thank Gabrielle Schleijsen, Bert Taken and Marika Wanders for the wonderful invitation to curate this day. Also thanks to the students for their interest and input, their creative ideas and practical help in making this day a combined effort.

“Give me a Brain!” takes the work of a contemporary of Godard, **Alain Resnais**, as a starting point. While Godard’s cinema of the 1960s was a cinema that gives us bodies: posing, gesturing, fighting, bumping into each other or caught in an accident (think of *A bout de Souffle*, *Vivre sa Vie* or *Le Mepris*), Resnais’ cinema considered the film screen as an exploration of the workings of the brain, showing his character’s in films such as *Hiroshima mon Amour* and *Last Year in Marienbad* caught in mental landscapes of history, memory and forgetting, giving us a brain. In homage to this cinema of the brain of the Nouvelle Vague, **the program today will explore the relationship between brains and creative expression in a variety of ways.** And before introducing our first guest today, I would like to give you a very **quick tour** through the program, comment on some of its underlying thoughts and different aspects that have guided the curatorial choices.

First the basic idea of this program which was to transform the Rietveld building into a **giant brain space**, where we can explore different aspects of the brain (different brain chambers) in connection to art in general, and to cinema in particular. Thinking of the brain there are **three general principles** that are worthwhile mentioning upfront. They concern the **body and the brain, the conscious and unconscious**, and the mixing of disciplines.

1. Although the raising of Godard’s cinema of the body and Resnais’ cinema of the brain may give the impression that the body and the brain are indeed opposed entities (as in the **classical distinction between the rational brain and the irrational or emotional body**), this is not what contemporary neuroscience, nor philosophical and artistic discourse show us. There is **thought in the body** as much as there is emotion in the brain. Body and brain are **parallel systems** that function in variegating interactions. Very often our body “knows” before we know, and an important subfield in neuroscience is the study of emotions and feelings in affective neuroscience. So we will not forget about the body today, as will become clear in the lectures, performances here and in the brain chambers.

2. Another general principle that you will recognize in the programming is the sometimes **mysterious** difference between the **conscious and the unconscious** brain. Some of the lectures and brain chambers refer to consciousness

and even altered or heightened forms of consciousness. Other parts of the program address our fascination for the unconscious parts of our brain, especially as argued by three psychologists avant-la-lettre of the 19th and beginning of 20th century: Franz Anton Mesmer, Carl Gustav Jung and Sigmund Freud. I will return to these different conceptions of the unconscious later today, when I will introduce the second part of this program.

3. The final general remark that I need to make is that obviously the brain is much more complex than the simple division in certain chambers the program will offer you. Therefore there is no scientific truth to be looked for here, even if the perspectives from science, philosophy/film theory and art practice are **not brought together randomly** but in the hope to **provoke productive encounters, inspiring thoughts and memorable experiences.**

We are now in the **Frontal Cortex Theatre**, where all plenary (and more or less 'frontal') lectures and events will take place (both addressing conscious and unconscious aspects of the brain). On the **ground floor**, you will find two spaces where the brain is addressed from 'the outside': in the **brain food lounge** you can admire, smell, taste, some brain food experiments and digest some of the things that happen in the brain chambers. In the adjacent room on the ground floor you will find an **installation by Joachim Rotteveel**, a 3-D print of his own head with projections from white matter fluids in the brain, taken from an fMRI-scan, referring to new image technologies that give us new perspectives on the brain (we will hear more about this soon by our second speaker today).

Then between 3.30 and 5, we move to the **first floor** where we really enter different brain chambers: the **occipital cortex** deals with the visual centre in the brain; here filmmaker Gert de Graaff will demonstrate some of the visual illusions that he used in his film *The Sea that Thinks*, and the kind of questions about perception he has asked in his film. The **amygdala** brings us to the fear chamber. Here Krien Clevis shows her artistic work to the investigation of the use of different audio-visual stimuli in the evocation of fear. The **hippocampus** is (among others) important for transferring short term memory into long term memory and this chamber is made in honor of Alain Resnais. Our **neurotransmitters** are changed by the influence of drugs, as is shown in Henry Michaux's mescaline drawings. Jay Hetrick will say more about this in the psychedelic room. The exact workings of psychosis is still heavily debated (is it a "anomaly" in the **thalamus** or **hippocampus**, or has it to do with an **overload of stimuli and connections between different parts of the brain**; how psychosis simulators work and how the kind of images transfer the experience of and discourse on psychosis will be explained by Bregt Lameris and Jennifer Canary Nikolova in three different ways in the psychosis room. Two of the chambers upstairs are dedicated to visions on the **unconscious parts of the brain**: the 'mesmerized' brain under **hypnosis** (first brought under public attention by Franz Mesmer) is photographed by Abel Minnee; and the brain's relation to collective

consciousness as theorized by Carl Gustav Jung find their artistic translations in the music videos of Tool and the anima drawings of Alex Gray, brought together by Niels Tubbing. You will see that in each room there is a connection to cinema, and to creative investigations into the operation of the brain.

On the hand-out you find the details of each of the rooms in the parallel program. The **artists or composers of the rooms** are present in each of the rooms, so please feel free to ask questions. In some rooms there are at two specific moments short **introductions** about the particular area of the brain and the corresponding philosophical and artistic questions. You can **recognize the artists and student crew** members who can help you out by their brain-tag.

After the parallel program we return here, as I already said, before we go for dinner we dive into some more unconscious parts of the brain. Fernando Flores will give a demonstration that is **inspired by the film *Inception* by bringing some volunteers of the audience under hypnosis**. So we will move in this theater too, to the mysteries of the unconscious. After that demonstration the afternoon program will end with several short dream films from the amateur psychoanalytic film club of Coney Island. These films, made between 1926 and 1972 by ordinary people who filmed their dreams and then explained them, will take us to the dinner break. During dinner some chambers will be open again and we will screen here in the Frontal Theatre Alain Resnais curious film *My American Uncle/Last Year in Marienbad*. Finally, then, after dinner, we will listen to a lecture by Warren Neidich, who as an artist and street philosopher is deeply concerned with the ways in which art can operate directly on our brain screens and provide resistance to what he calls **neuropower** in contemporary culture. We will end the day with a short panel discussion centered around the question: what shall we do with the brain - particularly as an artist. VJ???

We will start this afternoon with two lectures that can give us a **map to understanding the brain, or in understanding what we can know by the images and ideas we have of the brain**. Our first guest speaker today is **Frans Verstraten** who will start mapping the brain. Frans Verstraten is a neuropsychologist, professor of experimental psychology at the Helmholtz Institute of the University of Utrecht. He is well known for his book *Het Brein te Kijk* and for his participation in popular scientific television program. Frans is mostly known for his work on motion perception, adaptation, attention and binocular vision. Today he will guide us through the brain from camera obscura to obscure chambers. Please join me in welcoming Frans Verstraten.

Sarah de Rijcke is assistant professor at the Centre for Science and Technology Studies (CWTS) at Leiden University. She was a post-doc for the Virtual Knowledge Studio and her work is concerned with investigating different visual ways of knowing the brain and image based knowledge production. She will talk about the tactile screen and the digitization of the brain in art and science.

Fernando Flores

In the 19th century hypnosis was a very common stage practice and frequently used tool in scientific practice. Charcot, for instance, brought his patients under hypnosis to study hysteria. Also watching a film has been frequently compared to being under hypnosis; and vice versa hypnosis is often compared to watching a film. Today we want to bring this into practice and have invited Fernando Flores. Fernando Flores is a hypnotherapist and stage hypnotist who worked with Abel Minnee to put his models under hypnosis as you could see in the photo's upstairs. But you might also know him from television shows such as the Next Uri Geller. Today he is giving us an experiment that is inspired by the film *Inception*, reaching unconscious parts of our dreams.

Coney Island Dream Films

In 1909 Freud visited New York and went to Dreamland in Coney Island. To celebrate the centennial of this visit artist **Zoe Beloff** was asked to make a show for the Coney Island Museum. By accident she found on a flea market some a film with the curious title **The Lonely Chicken Dream made by Beverly d'Angelo**, a housewife in the 1950s who came from an old Coney Island family. The film shows her loneliness as a suburban housewife, and her suspicion of her husband having an affair. After further investigations and some luck she found the whole archive of what appeared to be the amateur psychoanalytic circle of Coney Island that existed from 1926 until 1972. Members of this circle were asked to film their dreams. The club had an annual award event for the best dream film. Zoe Beloff has conserved and transferred these films, and constructed an exhibition around them, based on the dream note book by Albert Grass, the first director of the circle. The complete exhibition will be presented in Haarlem in Het Dolhuys at the end of May. But tonight we can show the films here to you.

All films are a few minutes long, they move in chronological order from the 1920s until 1972. One of the films will be *The Lonely Chicken Dream*, and, as Zoe Beloff writes in her catalogue, Beverly d'Angelo actually did not shoot the film herself but she subversively cut up her husband's home movies and made it her own.

As with hypnosis, cinema has often been compared to a dream situation, so these literal transpositions of dreams into films is quite a significant aspect of cinema. Freud has been used to explain many filmic phenomena – with more or less successful or productive outcomes. There was a point where every classical Hollywood film was explained according to the Freudian wish fulfillment scenario of Oedipal desires of forbidden desires, castrating fears and symbolic or real murders of 'father figures'. But the Freudian interpretation of dreams as condensation and displacements of ideas and wishes, is still interesting today.

In any case the films you are about to see offer a remarkable record of the hopes, fears, and fantasies of ordinary New Yorkers and are as such not just individual stories but also very telling about their social contexts. These dreamfilms are thus amateur films – and actually at the other end of the Nouvelle Vague's preference of the auteur cinema. Each film has a story to it, which I know leave you to imagine for yourself while watching.

Warren Neidich

As an artist Warren utilizes multiple mediums to express a wealth of ideas with a variety of practices. Beginning with photo based works in the late 1990's his work has expanded today to include video, installation, performance and painting. Recently his fundamental query has shifted to ask how the history of art may be read as a product of the mutating conditions of culture and how these ensuing changes, in the cultural landscape, sculpt the material and immaterial conditions of the Brain and Mind. His work was shown in many solo and group exhibitions. Warren Neidich was also the founding editor of the journal neuro-aesthetics and the author of several inspiring articles and the book *Blow Up*, on cinema, photography and the brain. Today he will talk to us about *Neuropower*.