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Rowan Bailey (University of Huddersfield)

Sculptural Plasticity and the Brainbody

This paper proposes to explore, through new materialist insights drawn from art and neuroscience, an alternative imaging/imagining of brain plasticity. Such a reading presents the brain image in and through enactments of the *brainbody*; a phenomenon which accounts for the brain's own entanglement with 'bodies, mind, behavior, socio-cultural contexts, and meaning-making' (Schmitz and Höppner, 2014: 546). The paper will examine curatorial strategies deployed by Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev, in particular, insights generated out of DOCUMENTA (13) (2012) and the 14th Istanbul Biennial SALTWATER: A Theory of Thought Forms (5 September-1 November 2015). These international exhibitions engage a diffractive methodology of reading *through* the form-iterations generated by the brain on socio-cultural and psychic levels. Secondly, analysis of a recent film by Ursula Biemann and Mo Deiner entitled *Twenty-One Percent* (2016), presents an approach to artistic research where the *brainbody* phenomenon and agential matter meet through the chemical compound structure of the body and its intra-celestial relationship to the universe. Finally, the paper will consider brain imaging technologies in the context of *The Human Connectome Project*, and to the ways in which a reading of this brain – as a collective speculative fiction of newly discovered regions – could think neuronal imaging beyond the formal necessities of neuroscience and into the spaces of our plastic imaginations. By rethinking the historical and contemporary technologies and apparatuses of brain imaging through the channels of artistic research, a diffractive imaginary for sculptural plasticity will be realised.