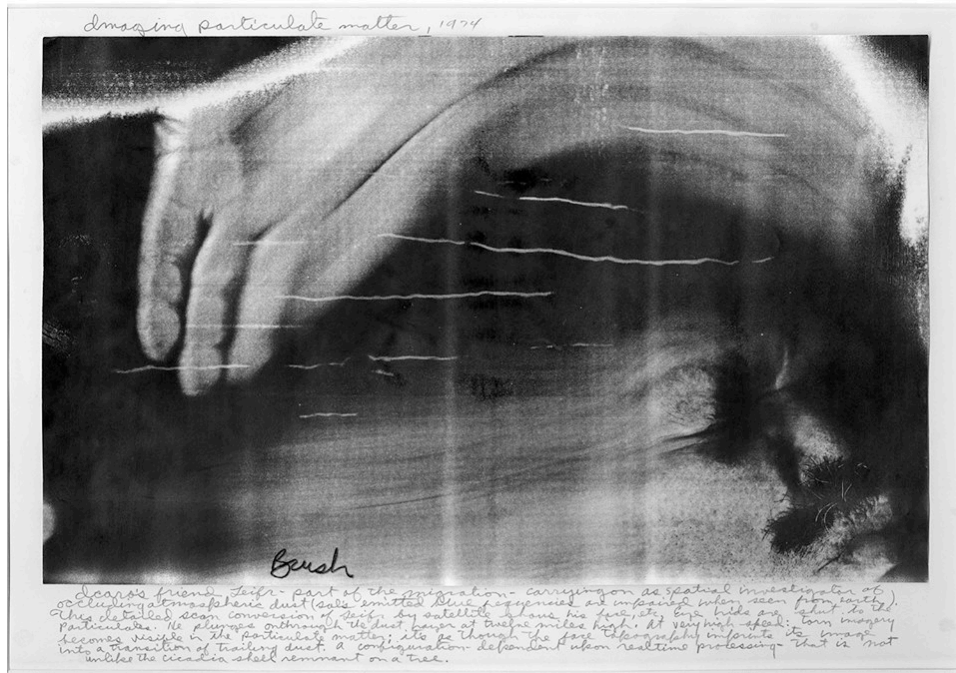


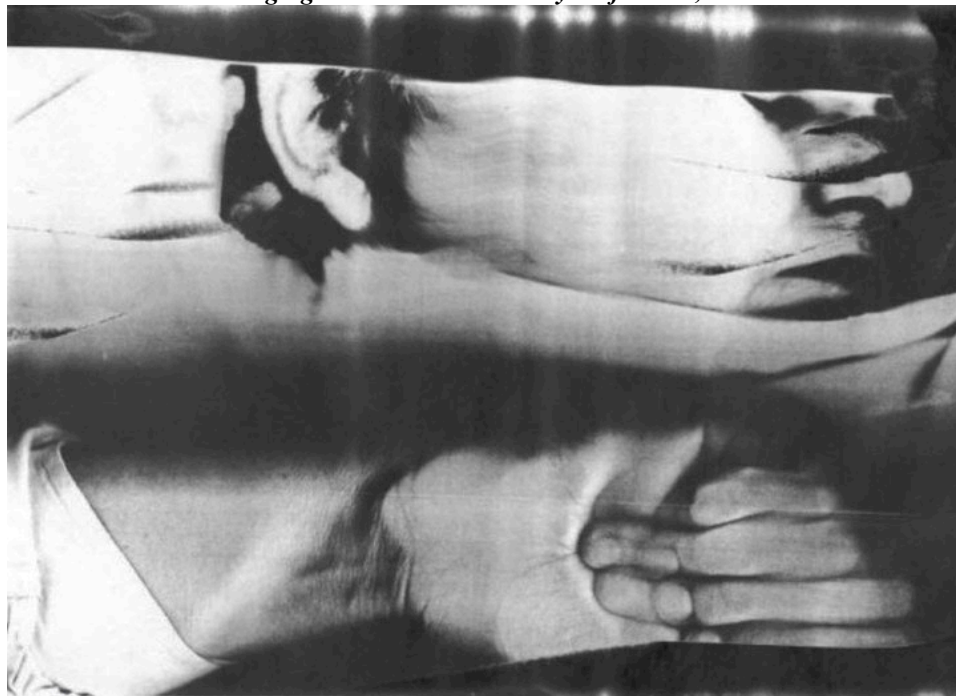
Generative Systems: (Re)Producing Hands and Faces

by
Jo-Anne Green

*“The surface of the mind trembles without cease,
Like the surface of the waters,
And like the waters
It assumes the shape of those forces
That press upon it.”*
– Roberto Calasso, “Ka”¹

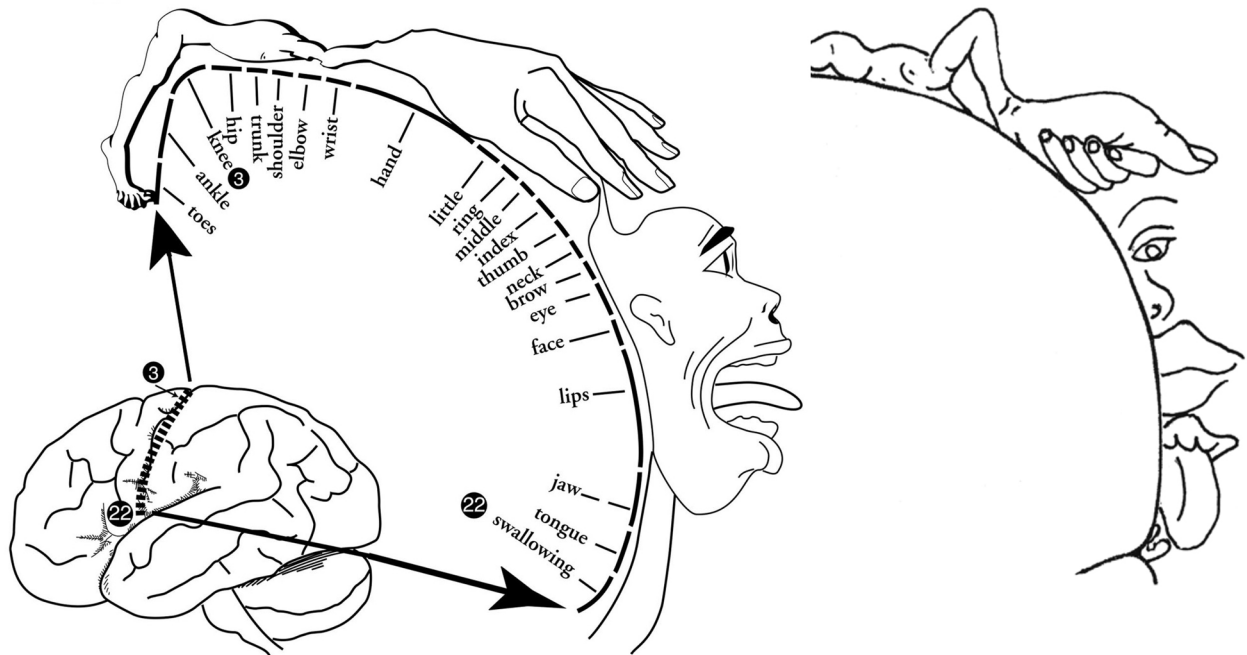


“Imaging Particulate Matter” by Leif Brush, 1974



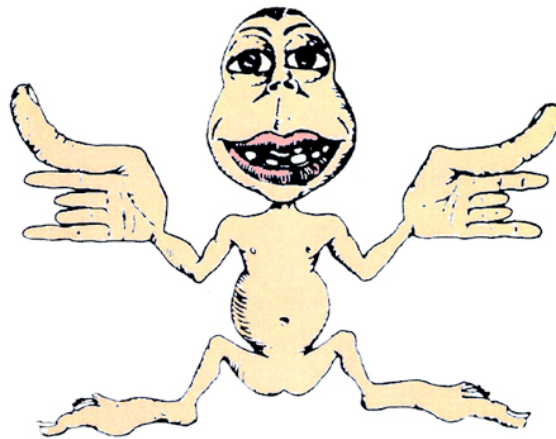
“Layering, Stretching and Compressing Sonia in Time” by Sonia Landy Sheridan, 1974

Generative Systems' fascination with hands and faces calls to mind Wilder Penfield's *cortical homunculus*:



The Homunculus, based on Penfield's classic diagram² & ³

In complex brains networks of neurons map their corresponding body parts, constituting *virtual surrogates* or *neural doubles*. (Antonio Dimasio) However, the *cortical homunculus* is a distorted map, in that there is more space devoted to faces and hands than to the larger areas of the trunk and legs.⁴



The Cortical Homunculus as a Figurine⁵

In Generative Systems' *copied* "Hands and Faces" series, the "so-called copy machine"⁶ transcribes a 3-dimensional, living system (human mind-body) into a 2-dimensional representation of that system. Here the copier cannot serve its intended purpose – to create faithful reproductions of text/image, information/document: if the 'document' can be equated with DNA (an inert sequence of information), its copy is more analogous to mRNA, whereby, in the process of copying DNA, the cellular complex must read, splice, edit i.e. translate and

interpret the DNA sequence. The sequence is, thus, *expressed*, not copied. Fidelity is often sacrificed to ensure the survival of the replication machine, i.e. the cell. “(T)he music inscribed in the score does not exist until it is played, (and) players rewrite the score ... in their very execution of it.”⁷

Of the 3M Color-in-Color copier, Sonia Sheridan wrote “The most exciting feature of this system is ... its capacity for instant production.”⁸ Just as our bodies constantly seek stasis, so do we in our creative outputs: as we create, we add, erase, and reassemble our compositions until they feel balanced.

“The artist ... can now move (objects) about, arrange and rearrange them, cut them up, fold them, animate them, make any combination of colors within minutes... I found the interaction of the various parts of the system a key to rapid exciting image metamorphosis.”⁹

This process is life (like), where life is a verb not a noun. The first “object” forms the basis or foundation of the next, each new “object” generating multiple more, each capturing the dynamics of the system (human mind-body) and mimicking its flux. Lived experiences are reconstructed and replayed: “some frames of recollection are dropped on the mind’s cutting-room floor ... to create new scenes that were never shot.”¹⁰ The mind-body and its creative process -- manifested outside of the body -- are *autopoietic* (self-making). Stasis is achieved through movement. Constant change is a form of equilibrium. Reality is an “unending process of movement and unfoldment... in which one *senses* an unbroken, undivided process of flow.”¹¹

In these scanned/copied “Hands and Faces,” the bright light of the machine slides across bodies, coaxing them into momentary suspended sleep, re-awakening them when darkness returns; an alien circadian rhythm. Pressed tightly against the glass bed of the machine, bodies sometimes seem confined; other times, they appear to be on the verge of breaking through, as if the surface is not impenetrable glass but, rather, water.



“Layering, Stretching and Compressing Sonia in Time” by Sonia Landy Sheridan, 1974¹²

¹ Quoted by Gretel Ehrlich in “Facing the Wave: A Journey in the Wake of the Tsunami,” page 60

² Retrieved from http://www.intropsych.com/ch02_human_nervous_system/homunculus.html on 6/19/13

³ Wikimedia Commons. Retrieved from http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Sensory_Homunculus.png on 6/19/13

⁴ “The principle seems to be that the most important and sensitive areas of the body are most generously represented in the map.” From: Reith Lectures 1976: Mechanics of the Mind Colin Blakemore Lecture 3: An Image of Truth Transmission: 24 November 1976 – Radio 4. Retrieved from

http://downloads.bbc.co.uk/rmhttp/radio4/transcripts/1976_reith3.pdf on 6/16/13

⁵ Retrieved from <http://artandperception.com/2007/03/whiffs-of-north-american-modesty.html> on 6/19/13

⁶ Sheridan, Sonia. “Generative Systems.” Retrieved from <http://www.fondation-langlois.org/html/e/docnum.php?NumEnregDoc=d00035224&IndexPage=1990> on 6/16/13

⁷ Fox Keller, Evelyn. “The Century of the Gene,” Harvard University Press, 2002, page 63

⁸ Sheridan, Sonia. “Generative Systems.” Retrieved from <http://www.fondation-langlois.org/html/e/docnum.php?NumEnregDoc=d00035224&IndexPage=1990> on 6/16/13

⁹ *ibid*

¹⁰ Dimasio, Antonio. “Self Comes to Mind: Constructing the Conscious Brain,” Vintage Books, 2012, page 223

¹¹ Bohm, David. “Wholeness and the Implicate Order,” Routledge Classics, 2002, page x

¹² “I pressed my face onto a white sheet of 3M VQC coated paper. Then placing my hand and face on the platen (sic), passed the VQC paper with my lotion coated face through the machine. The VQC takes a photo of my face, reveals the greased face and solarizes my hand. Almost 1/2 century later I may have forgotten the sequence, but the idea is correct - layering of face pressured onto paper with a layer of VQC copier image. But always using 3M C-in-C toner.....” Posted by Sonia Sheridan on Generative Systems Facebook Group. Retrieved from <http://www.facebook.com/groups/generativesystems/>, 6/20/13