
I space brain laboratory C A

**review on Gianni Colombo & Paul Sharits
preparing for station (1)0**

exhibition from 24 June to 14 August 2016

Since its creation in 2009, the space brain Laboratory, initiated by Ann Veronica Janssens and Nathalie Ergino, Director of the Institut d'art contemporain, taking the field of art experimentation as its starting point, has questioned practical and theoretical research that allows the creation of links between space, time, body and brain.

Interdisciplinary in nature, this project brings together thinking and experiences from artists and researchers in the humanities and physical sciences (anthropologists, astrophysicists, art historians, neurophysiologists), covering progress in neurosciences and astrophysics along with current practises in hypnosis and shamanism...

In preparation of a new research cycle that will begin next Autumn,

starting with Station (1)0, this Summer the space brain Laboratory will present a review of the different research done between 2009 and 2014. Being units dedicated to exploration, the stations of the space brain Laboratory are made up of study days concerned with are the study of artworks, whether they unfold in situ, or ex situ, as with the Centre Pompidou-Metz in 2012.

From its very origins, the Laboratory has based its work upon space itself, on the one hand as a possible vector of artistic fact, on the other hand as an extension of the eye, the brain and the body, out as far as the cosmos.

How to deal with a world wherein our understanding of space has shifted, beginning with the advent of general relativity and, more recently,

quantum physics, from a euclidian vision to a space as yet undefined?

The Laboratory thus proposes to bring together different research work, from the phenomenological dimension of specific artistic propositions.

Beyond the opticokinetic works of the fifties and sixties, the principal of the *Flicker* (or blinking lights) is seen here more from the point of view of a Brion Gysin and his *Dreamachine*, as much for its creative dimension as for the inter-relational aspect that it suggests. This overwhelming of visual perception is exaggerated by the colourful mists of Ann Veronica Janssens, spaces of immersive lights capable of provoking a global physical experience such as an experience of the infinite that can be « touched ». As for Matt Mullican, it is through the practise of hypnosis that he approaches the cosmic dimension of the environment, which then drives him to create his own cosmology.

Starting from the field of art, the different contributions of these nine stations have examined the mechanisms of perception, whether it be a matter of spatialisation, loss of bearings or modified states of consciousness. Reinforced by recent progress made in the fields of neuroscience and astrophysics, along with developments in anthropological and philosophical thinking, they have dealt notably with notions of the body in action, proprioception, topo-kinesthetics, and empathy. A redefinition of our relationship with space, a

sensitive and dynamic experience of the world and newer modes and approaches have been obtained in this way, upsetting the traditional oppositions of body / mind, man / world, conscious / subconscious, material / immaterial, rationality / intuition...

With works by Gianni Colombo and Paul Sharits, the Laboratory revisits “in practice” questions raised throughout the different stations. Gianni Colombo creates spaces that aim to deconstruct space, by disturbing the visitor’s centre of gravity, and also by unbalancing it with the help of luminous and mobile devices and systems. Reinforcing corporeal acuity, the variations and elasticity of Colombo’s universe create the impression of an expanding space.

The films of Paul Sharits, like events composed of colourful lights, amplify pure visual effects to the point of creating immersive environments. The impact on the retina of a succession of stills creates a pulsating virtual volume. This “extended cinema” substitutes the sensorial presence of the projection for the illusion of the image.

Beginning with station 1(0), the space brain Laboratory proposes to base itself on a perception that is « extended », taking into account the interrelationships between man and his environment, his relationship with the Earth and the Cosmos. With regard to a civilisation that induces the growing compartmentalisation of

the human being, within a notion that remains nonetheless dualist, the laboratory intends to explore recent research in the fields of astrophysics, astrobiology, anthropology... crossing them with that of artists, today questioning notions of the man-world, of the body extended to the scale of the universe. From perception to fusion, from immersion to osmosis...

Nathalie Ergino

LABORATOIRE ESPACE CERVEAU

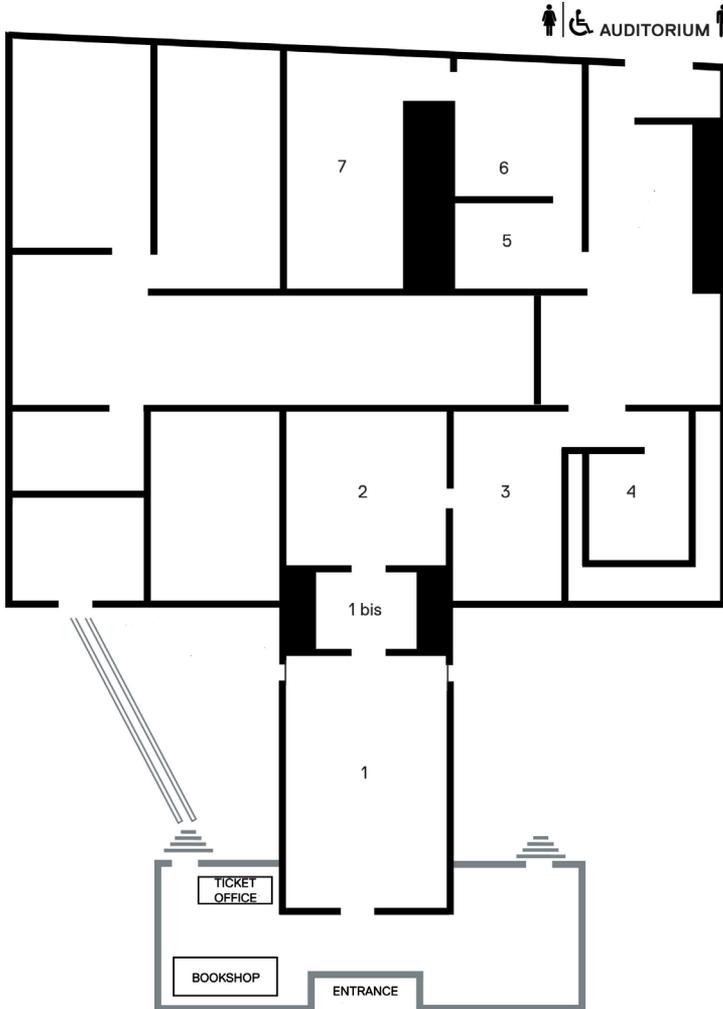
Initiators

Ann Veronica Janssens, artist
Nathalie Ergino, director of the Institut d'art contemporain, Villeurbanne/Rhône-Alpes

Participants

Elisa Brune, writer (novelist and essayist) and science journalist
Denis Cerclet, anthropologist, lecturer at Université Lumière Lyon 2
Arnauld Pierre, art historian, professor at Université Paris IV-Sorbonne
Jean-Louis Poitevin, has a doctorate in philosophy and is a writer and art critic.

Exhibition rooms



SPACE BRAIN LABORATORY

GIANNI COLOMBO :
ROOM 1 : Architettura Cacogniometrica,
ROOM 1 bis : Rotoplastik
ROOM 2 : 0-220 Volt (environnement lumineux), Cromostruttura
ROOM 3 : Topoestesia - tre zone contigue (itinerario programmato), Dessins préparatoires
ROOM 4 : Spazio Elastico, Preparatory designs

DOCUMENTATION SPACE : SOUTH HALL

PAUL SHARITS :
ROOM 5, 6 & 7 :
Axiomatic Granularity, Word movie / Flux, Analytical Studies n°2, Unframed lines

room 1

GIANNI COLOMBO 1937, Milan (Italie) - 1993, Melzo (Italie)

Gianni Colombo was the prime instigator of lumino-kinetic art in Italy. Beginning in 1959, he created variable reliefs, in permanent motion or inviting viewer participation (*Potential Area*, 1960; *Fluid Structure*, 1960). His first solo exhibition was held at Milan's Pater gallery in 1960. Previously he had participated in the group show 'Le Mouvement' at the Galerie Denise René (Paris, 1955) with Yaacov Agam, Pol Bury, Alexander Calder, Marcel Duchamp, Jesus Rafael Soto, Jean Tinguely, and Victor Vasarely... The latter published his *Yellow Manifesto* in conjunction with the show. That was the birth of kinetic art, which experimented with the play of light and movement, taking into account space and the body of the viewer.

Gianni Colombo soon became interested in the question of movement in art, as well as the phenomenon of instability. He integrated light into his research, combining it with movement in space, producing changing environments that destabilised the viewer's perception. Beginning in 1964, he created ambiances, using projectors or lasers and moving walls, ceiling, and floor, thus generating « elastic spaces ». Gianni Colombo's œuvre is fully a part of what Guy Brett – one of the first to observe the importance of viewer participation in the 1960s – would call a 'kineticism of the body'. The introduction of tactile viewer participation in the kinetic artwork engendered genuine

sensory experiences, echoing Merleau-Ponty's analyses of the phenomenology of perception, a major reference for many artists of the period. Gianni Colombo won first prize at the 1968 Venice Biennale for his 1967 environment, *Spazio Elastico*. He has participated in many exhibitions in Europe and the United States. His work was recently featured in *Gianni Colombo: The Body and the Space, 1959-1980*, his first solo exhibition in England (London, Robilant + Voena, 2 October – 20 November 2015).

Architettura Cacogniometrica, 1984

Initially designed for ELAC (*Lyon Space for Contemporary Art*) in 1984, this architectural structure, built in situ, is composed of a continuous, ordered series of alterations to the horizontality of the floor of the exhibition space. Each of these alterations appears on a level inclined to different degrees, easily surmounted by the spectator.

Architettura Cacogniometrica is an immersive work through which the visitor is invited to move freely. We thus experience a series of states influencing not merely our process of perception, testing our sense of balance and reflexes, but also the representation of the itinerary induced by the loss of our sensory points of reference.

This representation is continually adjusted as we move about the structure.

room 1 bis

Rotoplastik Plexiglass original piece (round), 1967

Rotoplastik Plexiglass original piece (square), 1967

Rotoplastik Alessi (4/99), 2010

These various objects illustrate Gianni Colombo's research on volumetric combinations (arrangements) of forms and the perception of movement. These *Rotoplastiks* inevitably evoke Marcel Duchamp's *Rotoreliefs*, which examined the combination of the effects of movement, light, and space. Manufactured by the Italian design firm *Alessi*, the art multiple *Alessi Rotoplastik (4/99)* is made up of five wooden shapes held together by a pivot axis, each with a slit allowing it to slide horizontally on the axis. When the pivot cylinder is turned, the wooden shapes automatically arrange themselves into different combinations.

room 2

0-220 Volt, 1976

This kinetic installation is a luminous structure based on multiple possibilities of modulation of intensity, with – as indicated by its title – incandescent lighting ranging from 0 to 220 volts. The alignment of the lighting boxes produces a pulsatile signal with changing light intensity, sometimes bright, sometimes flickering like a candle, creating an organic dimension.

Cromostruttura, 1970

Cromostruttura is an object made up of plexiglass sheets programmed to light up at regular intervals. The alternation of lighted zones within the structure and the variations in light and colour intensity of each of the facets continually compose and recompose this object.

room 3

Topoestesia - tre zone contigue (itinerario programmato), 1965-1970

Designed in 1965 for the exhibition *Vitalità del negative nell arte italiana 1960/1970* at the Palazzo delle Esposizioni in Rome, *Topoestesia - tre zone contigue (itinerario programmato)* is a major piece in Colombo's oeuvre and also one of his most monumental environments. The installation, in the form of a corridor, offers an immersive journey through three successive spaces, which incorporate progressive spatial deformations and rhythmic light variations, creating a path where visitors, in direct connection with their experience, are confronted with a series of psychophysical tensions.

Project for Trigon 67. Ambiente/Environment, 1967

Progetto Per Spazio Elastico, 1967

Project for installation of the room at the XXXIV Venice Biennale, 1968

Project for ELAC (original drawing), 1984

A group of preparatory designs is exhibited in Rooms 3 and 4. Produced between 1967 and 1984, in Indian ink and pencil on tracing paper, they display various environments developed by Gianni Colombo, particularly his installation *Spazio Elastico*.

room 4

Spazio Elastico, 1967-68

Spazio Elastico is a work that exemplifies Gianni Colombo's praxis. White elastic threads transect a darkened space, forming a virtual volume of 4 metres by 4 metres, constantly animated by a shape-changing movement transmitted by hidden motors. Once again, this work is not addressed to the eye alone, but to the entire body of the visitor, whose presence is inseparable from the experience. Like all Gianni Colombo's environments, this work generates a behavioural instability and exposes the visitor to stimuli not unlike those used in experimental psychology.

Via pulsations, the artist explores the concepts of vital energy and physiological sensation; he invites visitor intervention as the (true) « motor » of the work. A new visual situation is created, dilated, based on peripheral vision and instability. To experience this work is to have one's entire body interact with the space; to express an act equally psychic and physical, nervous and muscular.

south hall

Documentation Space

The research spaces of the space brain laboratory provide access to a developing group of works. These works, drawn from the archives of the IAC, present a panorama of recent art history, creation, and reflection, aligned with the themes developed in the laboratory. A consultation table makes available documentation on the 9 previous stations: recordings of study workshops, lectures and conferences, summary reports, publications by participants, artists' catalogues, etc.

room 5

PAUL SHARITS 1943, Denver (États-Unis) - 1993, Buffalo (États-Unis)

Paul Sharits was an experimental artist and filmmaker (32 films produced between 1962 and 1987). He graduated from the University of Denver's School of Art with a BFA in 1962, the same year he directed his first film, the 16mm *Wintercourse*; he also received an MFA in visual design from Indiana University Bloomington in 1964. He taught in Baltimore's Maryland Institute College of Art, then was recruited as an experimental filmmaker by the Center for Media Study of SUNY Buffalo, subsequently creating many experimental filmmaking groups in several universities. In the early 1970s he developed a film study programme at Antioch College in Yellow Springs, Ohio.

From 1973 to 1992 he was director of undergraduate studies at the Center for Media Study at SUNY Buffalo.

« I began making 8mm movies when I was fifteen, with a camera I borrowed from the mother of the friend I filmed with. When I was seventeen, my uncle gave me a 16mm camera and showed me how to use it. But I learned by myself, mostly. I started a film club where I showed experimental films (Luis Buñuel, Fernand Léger, Man Ray, Stan Brakhage, Maya Deren, Kenneth Anger) and classic films (Dreyer, Griffith, Eisenstein, etc.) I didn't want to study film at school. It was too academic and I didn't want to be contaminated by other people's ideas. On the other hand, I did study painting at school. Then I gave up

painting; that's when I began to make films¹ ».

Paul Sharits' works were shown regularly in film and video festivals throughout the world. He contributed to many solo and group exhibitions, particularly in the 1970s, in art galleries, institutions, or large-scale international events. His aesthetic values led him to push back the limits of sensory perception with multiple simultaneous projection systems as well as the use of the *flicker effect*, which he was one of the first to utilise. He combined permutations and complex chromatic gradations with effects of pulsating light. Going beyond the schema of abstract painting in motion which had long characterised pre-war experimental film, Paul Sharits sought in his films to foreground the somatic/aesthetic; that is, a direct correlation with the plastic/cognitive experience of the films, far beyond the merely optical.

« What interested me, beyond painting and film, was creating a kind of atmosphere, a kind of image including people and their environment. I was trying to create that atmosphere more through image than substance² ».

Word movie / Flux film 29, 1966

This film functions as a display of some fifty words, « repeated » according to various relations of sequences and positions. Each frame (each isolated image of the film) lets us see and hear a different word or fragment of a word. The word takes on a value simultaneously plastic (a sign, an image onscreen) and

signifying (language). The scansion of the soundtrack accompanies the visual sequence of words appearing in view.

Playing on the effect of retinal persistence, the whole is composed (in the musical and visual sense of the term) as a flux: words are mixed optically and conceptually with each other to form a kind of « single » word, continually transformed. *Word Movie / Flux Film 29* is an homage to the American poet Emily Dickinson.

1. Interview Paul Sharits with Corine MacMullin and Gérard Courant, *Cinéma 81*, n°273, septembre 1981.

2. Id.

room 6

Analytical Studies n°2 : Unframed Lines, 1976

Paul Sharits' experimental film expresses itself by exploring the varieties of sequential appearance, chromatic variations, and the « texture » of images. *The Analytical Studies* series displays this gamut of exercises that expose camera « failures » and printing « errors » as well as numerous « attacks » on the film. The artist questions the very nature of the medium and its constituent elements (screen, projected light, film stock, frame, passage of the filmstrip through the projector). The artist plays metaphorically on the distance separating the surface of the retina (the watcher's eye) from the animated one of the screen. It is precisely that interval that the artist ceaselessly questions through the problematics of the cinematographic projection space.

room 7

Axiomatic Granularity, 1973

In 1972 Paul Sharits began a series of studies on the « granular imagery » of colour film emulsion. The term « imagery » (used by the artist himself) designates the only thing that remains on the filmstrip after developing: the representation of visible crystals or « granularity ». Composed of four parts, the stages of a protocol of observation, the film *Axiomatic Granularity* displays the particles that make up the film image, deliberately enlarged to be visible to the spectator. The question here is what the image is, which is out of focus at this scale. Establishing a possible lineage of modernist theories such as those of Clement Greenberg and Michaël Fried on « the auto-reflexivity of the medium », this film – dedicated to the writer and director Jonas Mekas – deals with fundamental aspects of the cinematographic apparatus itself, putting into play a *generative* idea of the image in which the surfaces that pullulate (a sensation reinforced by the soundtrack) with coloured particles give birth to multiple possibilities within a single image.

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space brain laboratory

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OPENING HOURS

From Wednesday to Friday, from 2 pm to 6 pm - On weekends from 1pm to 7 pm -

ACCESS

The Institut d'art contemporain is located 5 minutes from the Lyon Part-Dieu neighbourhood
Metro line A (stop : République)

Bus C3 (stop : Institut d'art contemporain)/ C9 (stop : Ferrandière)/ C16 (stop : Alsace)

Vélo'v station 1 minute away on foot

PRICES

• full price : 6 euros • concession : 4 euros • free -18 year olds

UPCOMING EVENTS

Free guided visits on Saturday and Sunday at 4 pm and on weekdays by appointment.

Friday 8 July at 12.30 pm & 1pm Visite sur le pouce - Express visit and lunch on site.

Sunday 10 July at 3.30 pm : Family Sunday - Family visit followed by a nice afternoon snack.

BOOKSHOP

Bookshop specialising in contemporary art
accessible during the opening hours of exhibitions

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