

As part of Joachim Koester's exhibition *Of Spirits and Empty Spaces* the Institute of Contemporary Art asked the artist to try out a new Brain Space Laboratory station. As it happened Koester had been hoping to extend his project to include a physical experience of the sources of his work and an external, subjective point of view, and he invited critic and curator Yann Chateigné to design Station 7.

The outcome of a dialogue between Koester and Chateigné, the station *The Curtain of Dreams: Hypnagogic Visions* – a title inspired by Henri Michaux's *The Curtain of Dreams* of 1956 – was approached as a living, theoretical extension of a collaboration dovetailing, in a way, with the artist's monographic project. Comprising works under study – in particular Koester's film *My Frontier is an Endless Wall of Points* (2007), based on Michaux's mescaline drawings – and a study day, the station brought together different forms and formats with a conversation, a lecture and a concert.

The aim of the programme was to clarify certain concepts, points of reference and connections at work in the pair's proposal; this latter was a atypical undertaking in the form of an «atlas for four hands» made up of artworks, films and archival and documentary material, but also of less clearly defined traces, of clues and remnants collected in the course of the ongoing dialogue between the critic and the artist. Focusing on the «visual images», as Michaux terms them, that take shape in the mind on the cusp between wakefulness and sleep, the proposal was also envisaged as probing the research of the Brain Space Laboratory participants while at the same time sharing the different lines of thought and putting them into perspective. Last of all came the re-creation, through a study day and a «hypnagogic evening», of what an exhibition could not convey: music, speech, interchange and access to the event's specific, transitory experience of time.

An introduction set this proposal in the general context of the Brain Space Laboratory project, whose considerations it helped to fuel and revitalise. It should be remembered that at the Institute two spaces are given over to the Brain Space Laboratory

Summary of Station 7

Le rideau des rêves. Visions hypnagogiques
The Curtain of Dreams: Hypnagogic Visions

Space Brain Laboratory

Institute of Contemporary Art,
Villeurbanne/Rhône-Alpes

experiments: the laboratory itself and the container. Within the actual body of the exhibition these spaces house presentations that function as transitions to the study day subject.

Yann Chateigné presented in detail the issues involved in his project, conceived of as a «visual essay» asserting an indeterminate status and bringing together different kinds of shared documentary and artistic material. Retracing the modalities of the collaboration with Koester that led them to mesh their approaches in closely related research areas, Chateigné threw light on the network of interconnections that saw them start out with a work by Koester and navigate towards more obscure zones of critical thinking: the history of the avant-gardes and of popular culture. The three guests were then introduced via their specific roles in the project: Koester himself; Pacôme Thiellement, filmmaker, writer and essayist; and Greg Davis, musician, publisher, collector and lender of the exhibition.

Chateigné outlined the centres of interest (transversal artistic stances, popular culture, etc.), the affinities (music, the history of the strange, etc.) and the rationales (of collector, of reader, etc.) that led him, in close collaboration with Koester, to arrive at a project enabling a rethinking of the divisions effected by traditional art history and a questioning of other points of view in an interplay between creativity and artistic externality.

The anthropologist Denis Cercllet offered his view of the Koester exhibition: for him what the artist is doing belongs to the category of works that allow an encounter with a kind of order within the world and a real testing out of a presence in the world.

The Koester œuvre signals a new relationship with a construction of reality made of representation, of visual strata forming the substance of a different history. Chateigné then focused the interview with the artist on the latter's singular relationship with abstraction. In his commentary on the photographic work *The Black Mirror of John Dee* Koester outlined one of the fundamental theories behind his œuvre: after the last untouched regions of the Earth had been mapped by artists and the twentieth century

dawned, exploration turned *inwards*, with the coming of psychoanalysis, linguistics and new mathematical theories.

Art historian Arnaud Pierre gave an account of the first results of recent research into the experiments with cybernetics applied to sleep by Hungarian-born French artist Nicolas Schöffer (1912–1992); he presented hitherto unpublished archival material, together with a detailed study of the issues involved in conditioning states of mind with light, notably via the new means of dissemination offered by the spread of television in the 1960s. Mention was also made of Schöffer's singular «Lumino» project, with its blend of design object, video work and social utopianism. Pacôme Thiellement reacted with an outline of his research into the connections between television, occultism and politics, a contribution that tied together his analyses of David Lynch's TV series *Twin Peaks* (1990–1991), the French literary magazine *Le Grand Jeu* (1927–1932), and the questions of dreams and gnosis.

The paper by philosopher and art critic Jean-Louis Poitevin paved the way for a collective conclusion with a meditation on the current status of the image, the role of the artist and our problematical relationship with the idea of reality as such.

As Poitevin saw it, Koester's exhibition tended «to situate itself, interrogatively, in the dying wave of modernity». In the distinctive time frame of our era the task is to interrogate anew what philosopher Günther Anders calls «Endtime», and to bring to the surface experiences which, while forgotten or blocked out, nonetheless keep us locked inside the realm of the incommunicable. In a way Koester's work slices into the taboo that dominates today's world: the one against acknowledging intermediate worlds. Denis Cercllet approved the identification of this taboo against contesting the reality of reality, and the attacks on it, as allowing each of us to test out the uncertainty of our knowledge of the world (the world being the product of our perception, which itself remains uncertain).

There are good reasons for looking into the singular relationships prevailing between today's artists and

thinkers and the experiments, aspirations and revolutions of the 1960s and 1970s, which sought to theorise the atypical and the incommunicable (via drugs and so on).

Thus the participants found themselves having to deal with a broader range of questions regarding history and its reinterpretation today. Drawing inter alia on the theories of Michel de Certeau on the writing of history, and reminding participants of the political dimension of Koester's work, Yann Chateigné described the works, archival material and traces used as the starting point for this study day devoted to the grey areas of contemporary historical narrative as «the black mirror of history».

The day closed with the European premiere of Greg Davis's *Full Spectrum (part 7)*, the seventh composition in a series of tributes to the pioneers of New Age music.

Yann Chateigné

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