













# **McLuhan Geisha**

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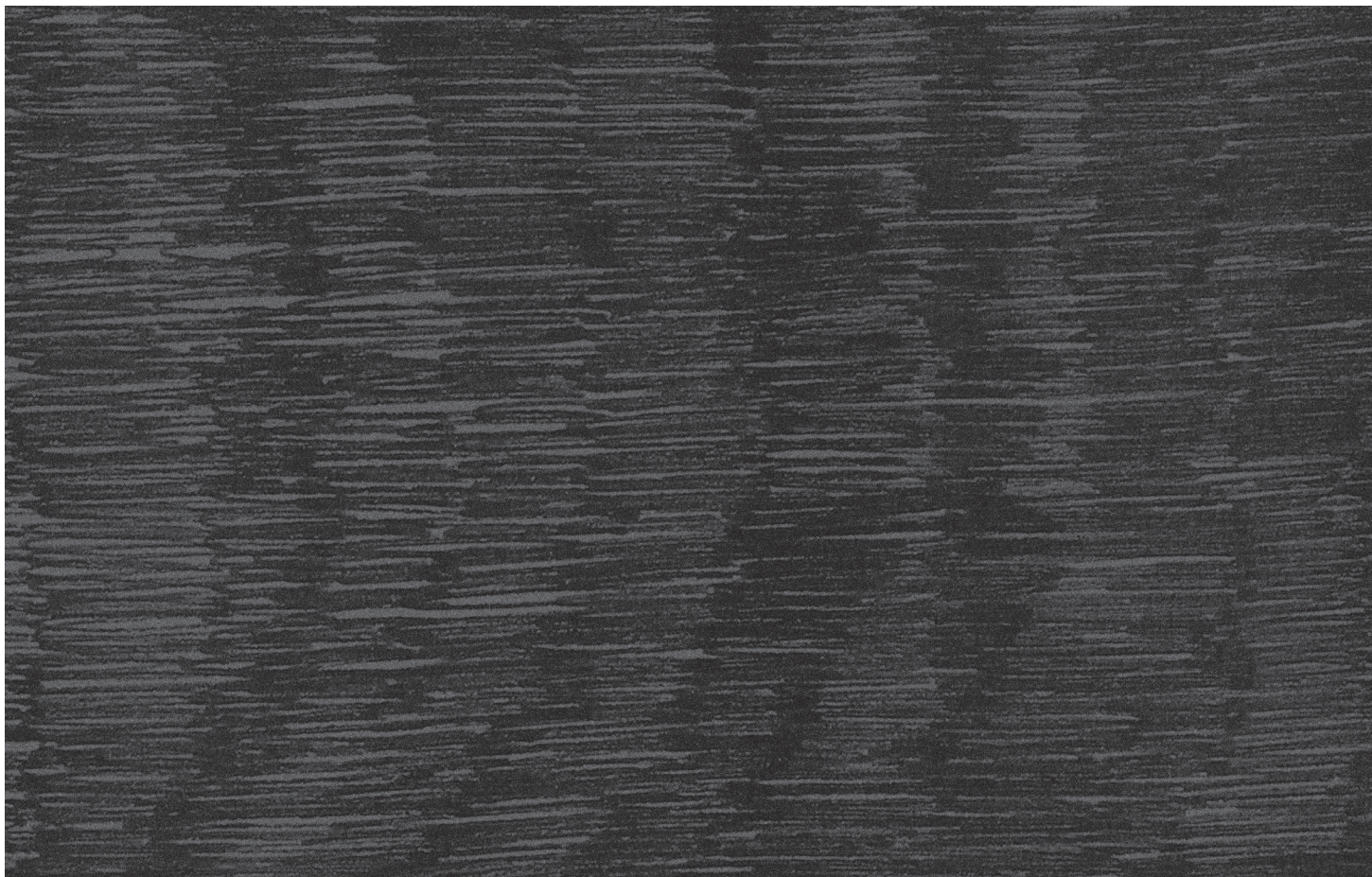
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OTHERS*





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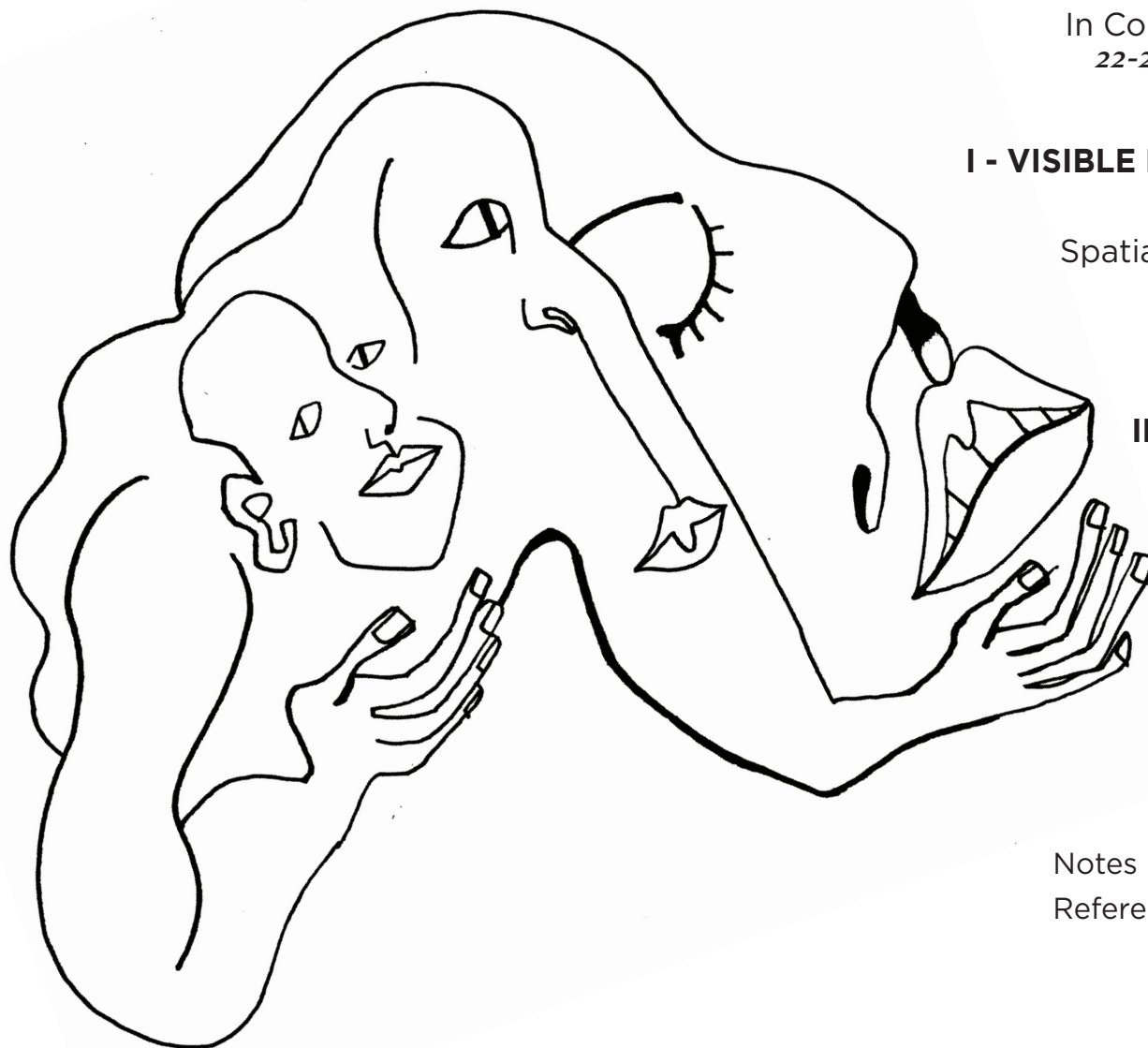
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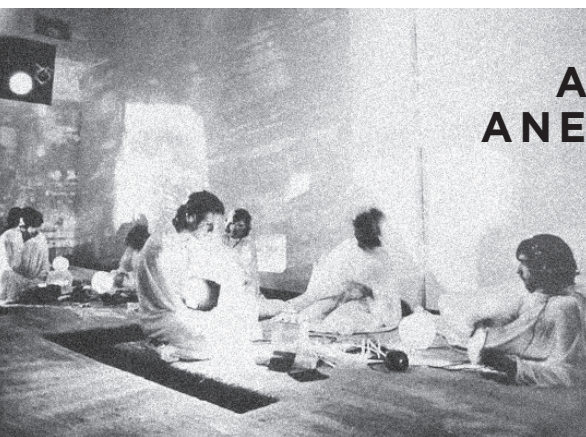






# Preface





## A 1968 ANECDOTE

(1) *The interior of Cerebrum*

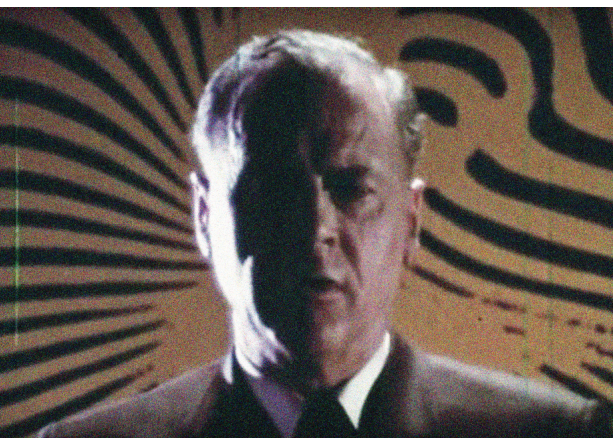
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On the 13th of December 1968, *Time* magazine published an article called *Entertainment: Mattress for the Mind*, introducing the most recent and curious experiment in public entertainment; *Cerebrum*<sup>1</sup>. Located at 429 Broome Street in Lower Manhattan, it was founded by the 24-year-old Ruffin Jr. Cooper and designed by the architect John Storyk<sup>2</sup>.

By definition, cerebrum is the main part of the brain in charge of the combination of the sensory and

the neural roles. It is linked to the coordination of the voluntary body action, influencing the subconscious<sup>3</sup>. However, *Time* article describes *Cerebrum* (1) as an experience, and illustrates it as a stage-less theater, a liquor-less cabaret, an occasion-less party, as well as an electronic studio of participation. In that sense, one cannot but question this entertainment form: Was it a theater? A cabaret? A party?

Additionally, the author of *Time* states that some have called *Cerebrum* a “McLuhan geisha house,” without further explanation. Supposedly, McLuhan refers to Marshall McLuhan (2), a Canadian intellectual who studied the effect of the communication technologies on men, in the mid-20th century. As for geisha house, it refers to the house of the Japanese female entertainers<sup>4</sup>. Geisha (3) are presumably the *Cerebrum* guides; performers who led the participants throughout the entire three-hour length of any session. Two sessions were held every night during weekdays, either from 8:00 pm to 11:00 pm or from 11:30 pm to 2:30 am. Phone reservations were needed<sup>5</sup>.



(2) Marshall McLuhan portrait



(3) Geisha performers, 1955

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Once past *Cerebrum*'s exterior muted façade, participants are welcomed by a taped voice, into an uncanny dark black room: "Welcome to *Cerebrum*. Your name, please?" Following is the appearance of the guides wearing white translucent gowns, ready to escort patrons into a contrasting white room. Occupied by sounds, light and visual effects, several actions took place in the latter space, such as the exchange of the street clothing to white translucent robes, the providence with gadgets and electronic tools and the guidance

into collective activities<sup>6</sup>. Intermedia, known as multidisciplinary<sup>7</sup>, is discernable at *Cerebrum*, through the simultaneous mix of disciplines, such as performance, music and other technological tools. It was denoted by Gene Youngblood in his book *Expanded Cinema*, as an "emotionally real experience through the use of audio- visual technology<sup>8</sup>.

*Time* also reports a sexual appeal observed: "a female who sat next to an obviously homosexual, obviously stoned, obviously distraught" male, and rubbed his hand softly for ten minutes. It reflected on *Cerebrum* as a place for "part-time voyeurs, exhibitionists and people who simply want to cleanse their psyches in public." In this environment, the singular psyche was the main focus, which explains *Time*'s portrayal of *Cerebrum* as a "downy mattress of the mind:" One experiences such a turn on, to the point of being turned off; a shift into an altered state through the senses, switching off the mind and turning on the unconsciousness<sup>9</sup>. *The New York Times* newspaper has also referred to this studio in relation

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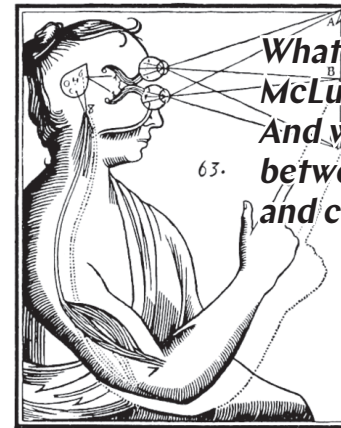


with the mind in an article entitled: “*Cerebrum: Club Seeking to Soothe the Mind*”<sup>10</sup>. A relationship then lies between the presence of a body in the *Cerebrum* space, holding a cerebrum; the physical organ, and the psyche or the mind, this metaphysical world of thoughts, feelings, and imaginations, connected with action and the awareness<sup>11</sup>.

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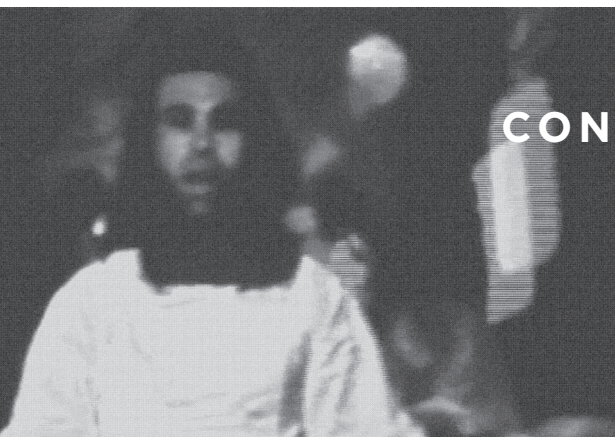
Even though some other sources have written about *Cerebrum*, little is known and not so many published documentations exist today. What is then referring to the McLuhan Geisha environment? And what could the relation be, between *Cerebrum*, the space and cerebrum, the brain?

An important factor to take into consideration is the hippie revolution that was taking place around that era. By considering it along with other research references, this writing will be held about Cooper’s purpose of such a thought-provoking place.



(4) Mind-Body Dualism illustration by Rene Descartes

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## IN CONTEXT

(5) Ruffin Jr. Cooper in the promotional video

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In a promotional video of *Cerebrum*, Ruffin Jr. Cooper(5) appears with long dark hair and beard, wearing a white jumpsuit and wide stiff sleeves like a sci-fi movie character. With an assuring voice, he introduced *Cerebrum* as it was initiated with 24 other member-associates<sup>12</sup>. Larry Vigus, the head guide of this space during all its span of existence, explained the following: Members were a mixed bag of young individuals - dropouts, artists, freaks, rebels, iconoclasts, musicians, longhairs, designers - most of whom were still career-less and must have been

considered as hippies when trying to manage this revolutionary business. However, no one had self-identified themselves as a hippie before the 70s<sup>13</sup>.

Emphasizing on Hippies<sup>14</sup>, whose movement started mainly in Haight-Ashbury in California and then diffused, this significant historical undertaking had affected artistic and cultural practices as well as matters in contemporary society, such as human-centered design, technologies, and sexual liberation. By taking a stand against the establishment, and through their behaviors, positions and acts, hippies or the New Communalists<sup>15</sup>, have envisioned an alternative future, not only by acts of rejection, but also by acts of application, stepping into action<sup>16</sup>. They were engaged in the cultural segment of the mass countercultural movement, along with psychedelic drug users, Zen Buddhists, feminists, to counter disciplined arts; while others were engaged in the political activism and manifestation, such as the New Left<sup>17</sup>, to argue against disciplined politics.

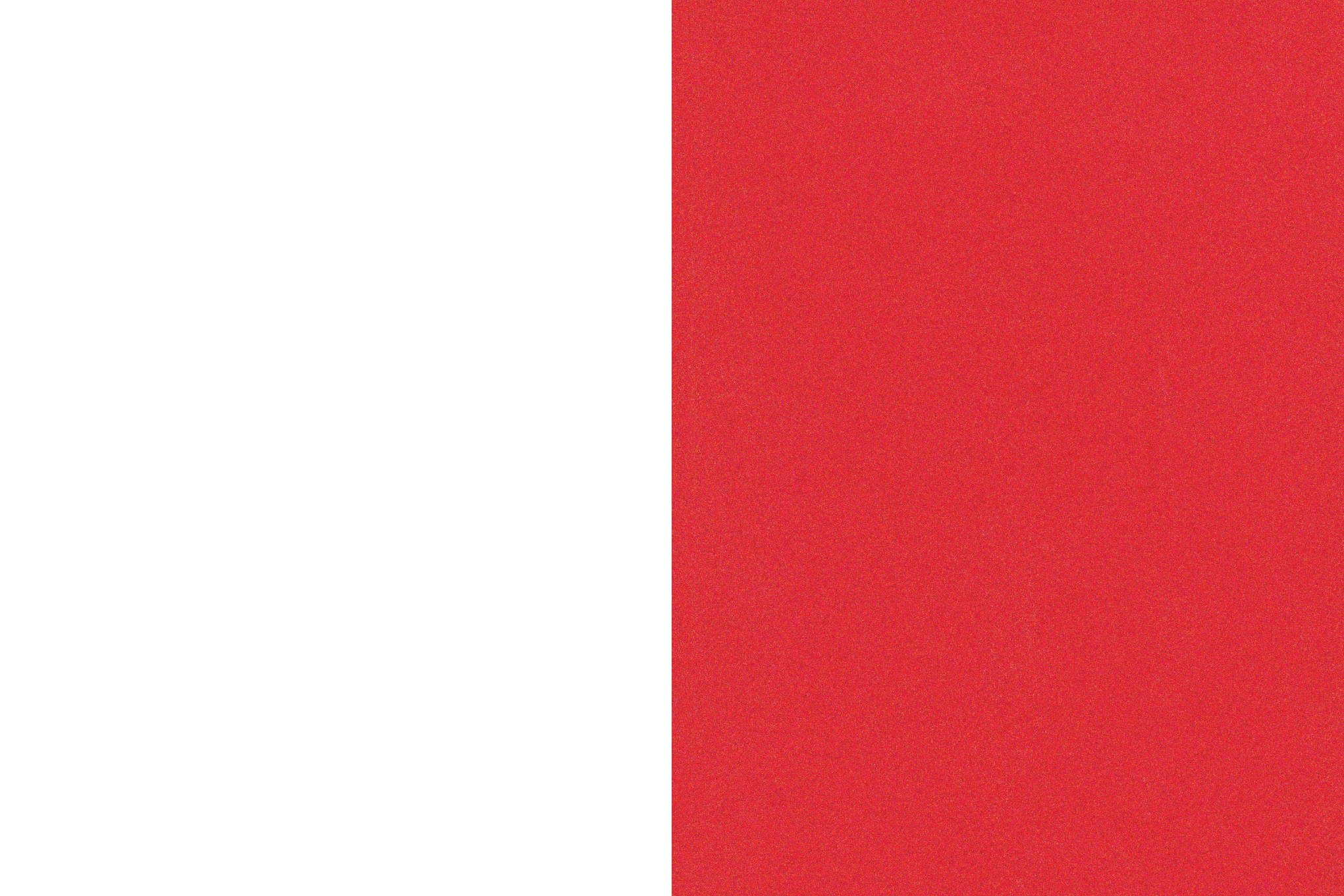
Both complementary groups were illustrated as a mixed scene of “one-ness” by the philosopher Herbert Marcuse: “where the hatred of the young bursts into laughter and song, mixing the barricade and the dance floor, love, play and heroism<sup>18</sup>.” Here, the young radicals’ spirit of togetherness is apparent. It is declared by the voices of resentment, showcasing the need for engagement with one another as well as with their environment.

Some artists and designers have then conveyed this involvement and participation in the creative process, as an ideal must for each individual<sup>19</sup>. Thus, their role changed into providers of alternative environments of expression. They re-defined spaces accordingly, turning them into participatory and immersive contexts - such as nomadic architecture, multimedia experiences, drug festivals, experimental theaters, underground nightclubs - mixing disciplines and forming Intermedia.

For the New Communalists, mind alteration was the new tool of perception, which changes realities. Their turn towards sexuality, rock music, festivals and psychedelic drugs, was not only a turn away from the conflictions of mainstream America, but also a turn inwards toward technologies and the transformation of perception. This generation saw the audio-visual communication as a new language of social change, creating a harmonious relation between art and technology. Artists have then employed these spiritual or electronic technologies, such as drugs or audio-visual technology, to reprogram the cerebral content and free the individuals<sup>20</sup>.

Affected by this revolutionary context, this writing will showcase how *Cerebrum* was exploited in its two aspects - the physical and the mental - and how its architecture was entwined with the individual’s psyche, altering his state of mind and revealing sexual pleasures.







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Ruffin Cooper, Jr.



Ruffin Cooper, Jr.



C E R E B R U M



Ruffin Cooper, Jr.



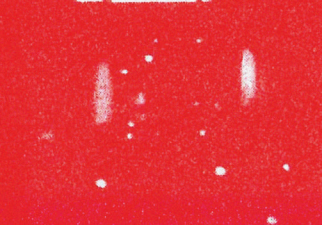
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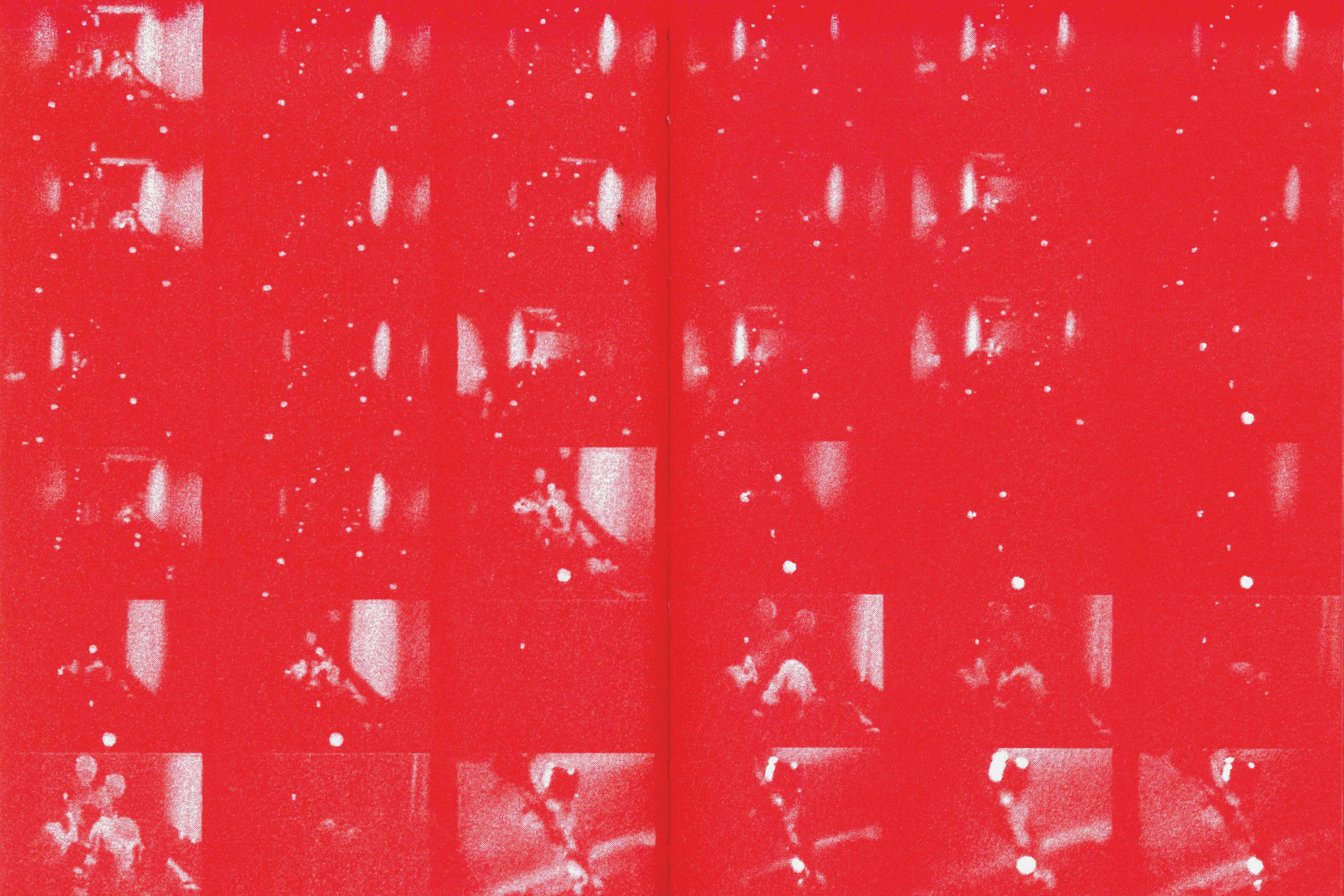
Ruffin Cooper, Jr.



Ruffin Cooper, Jr.











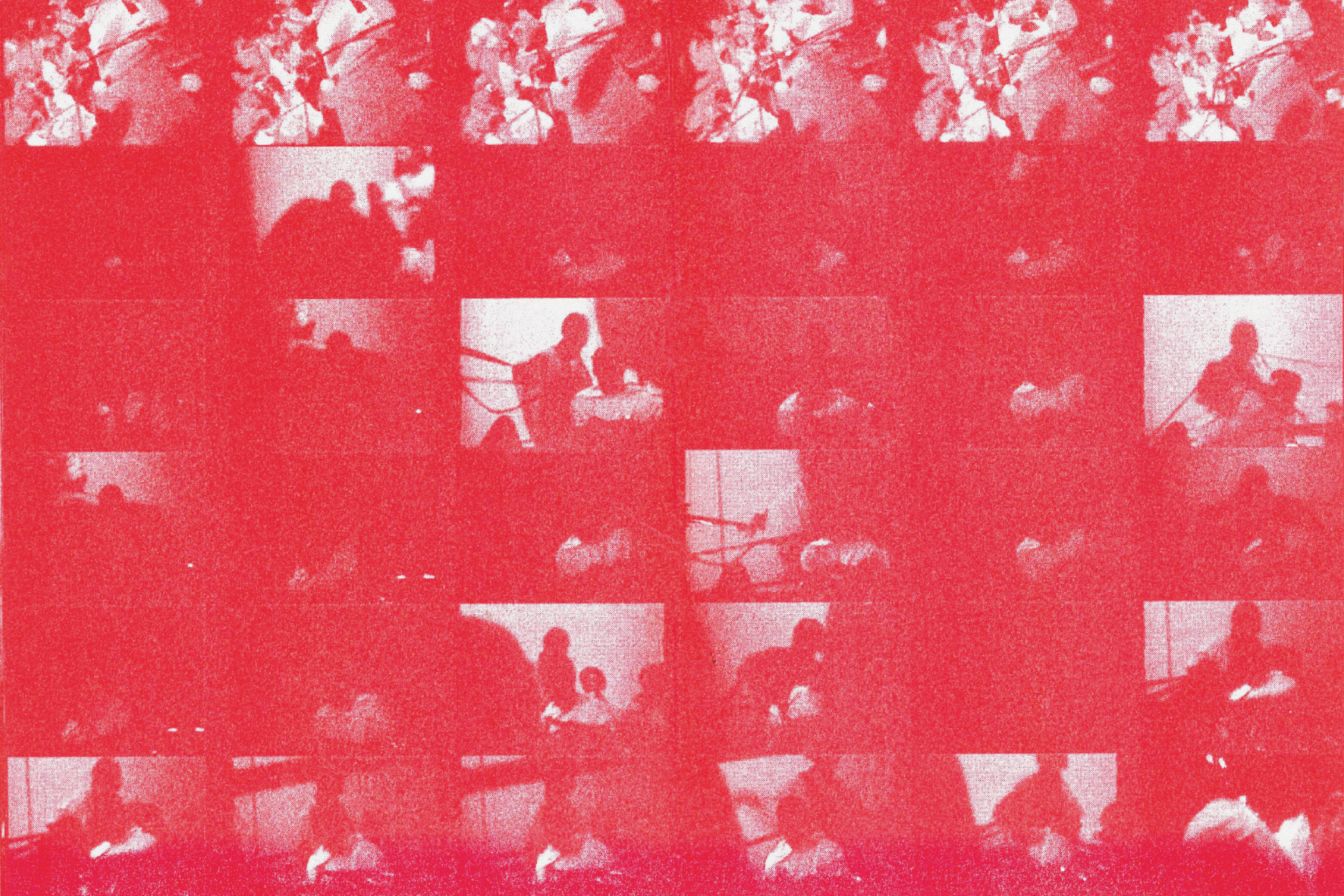




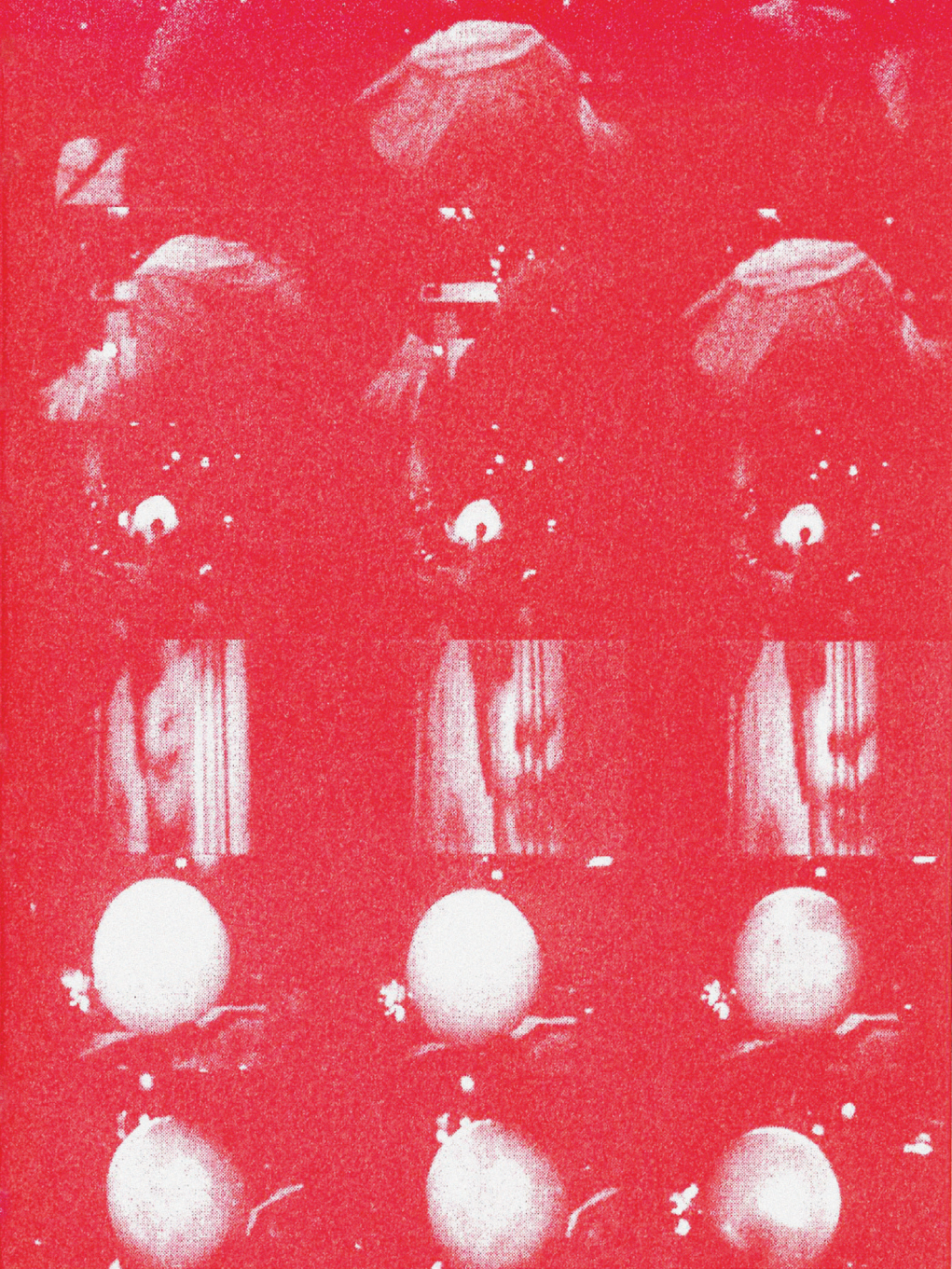




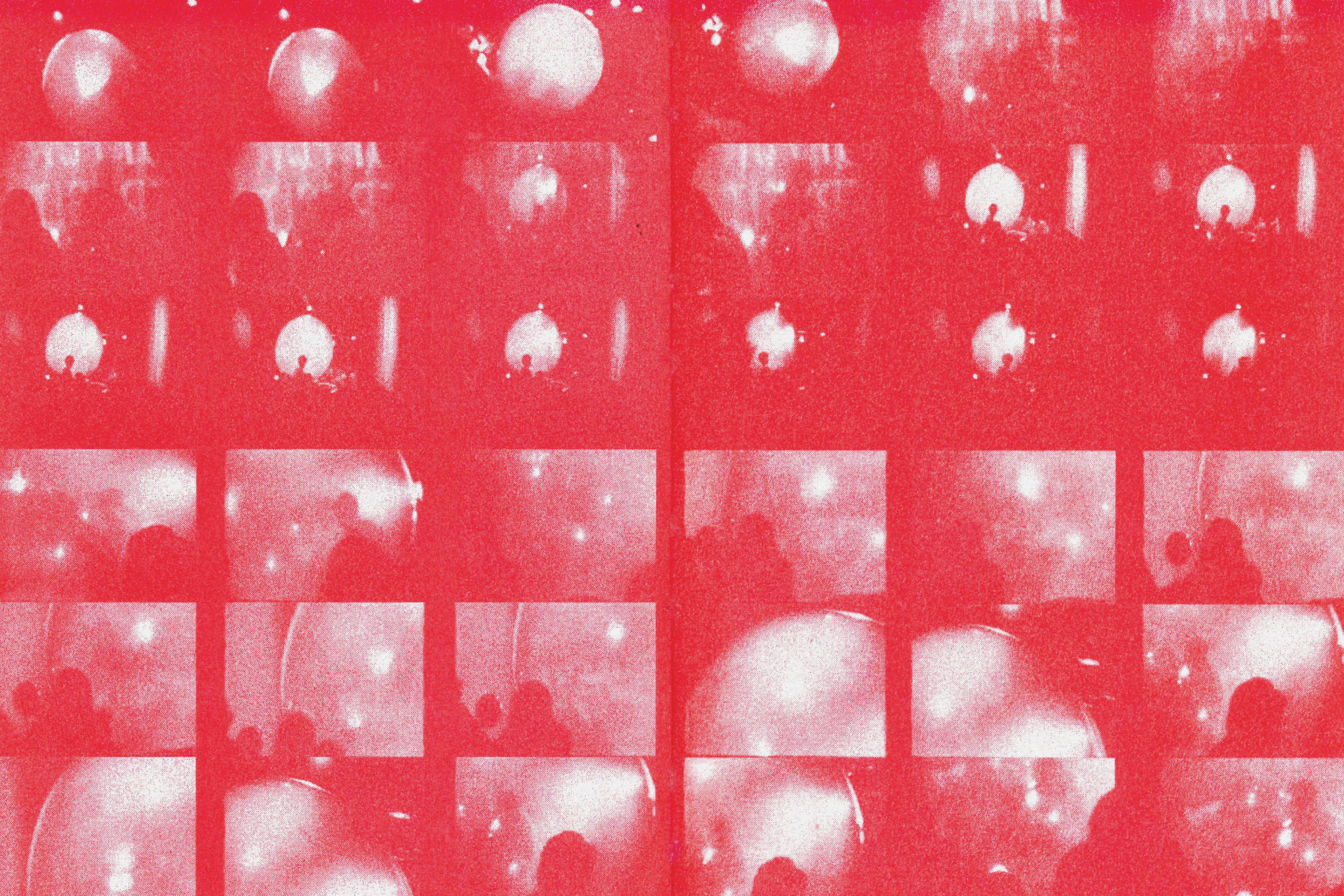




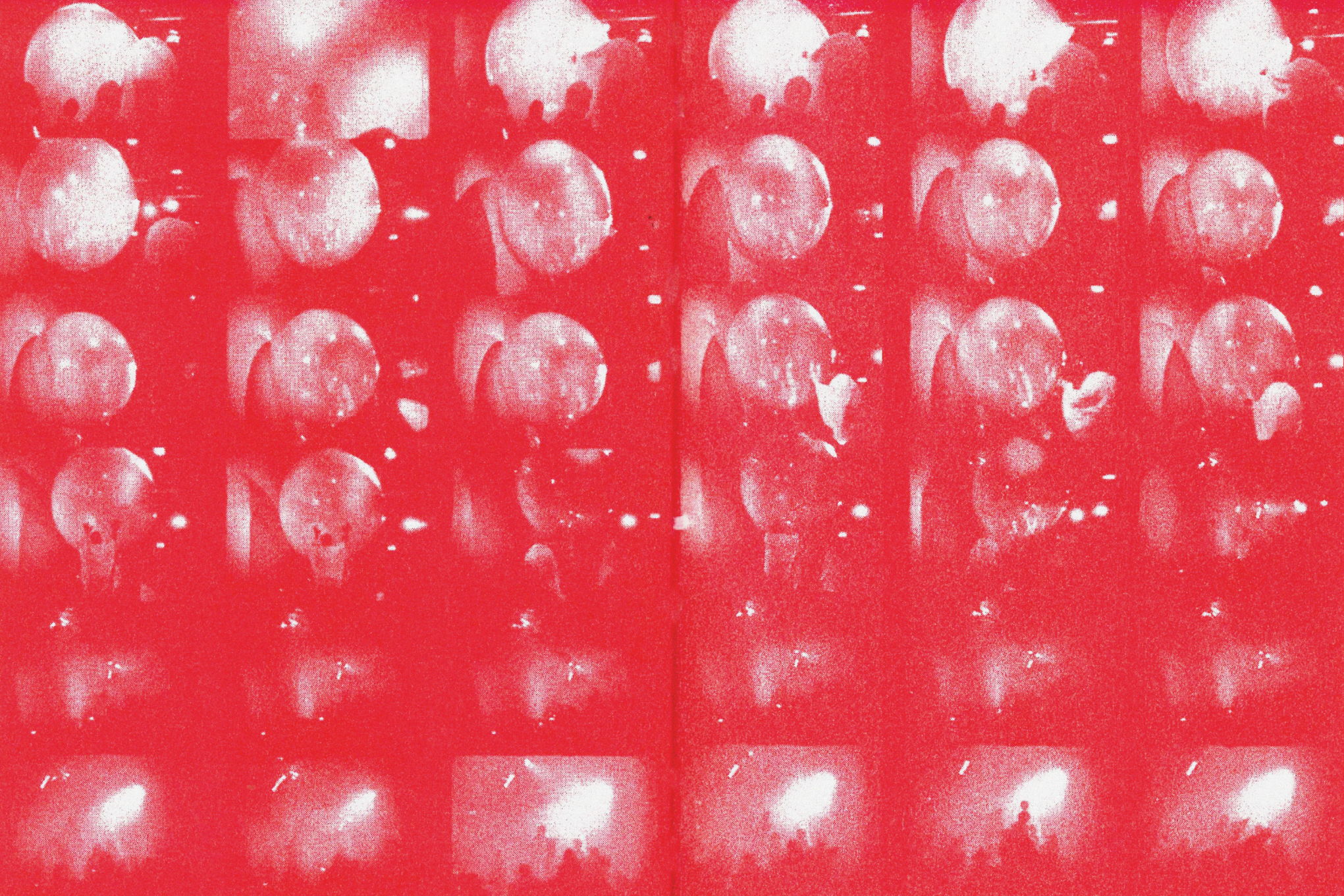




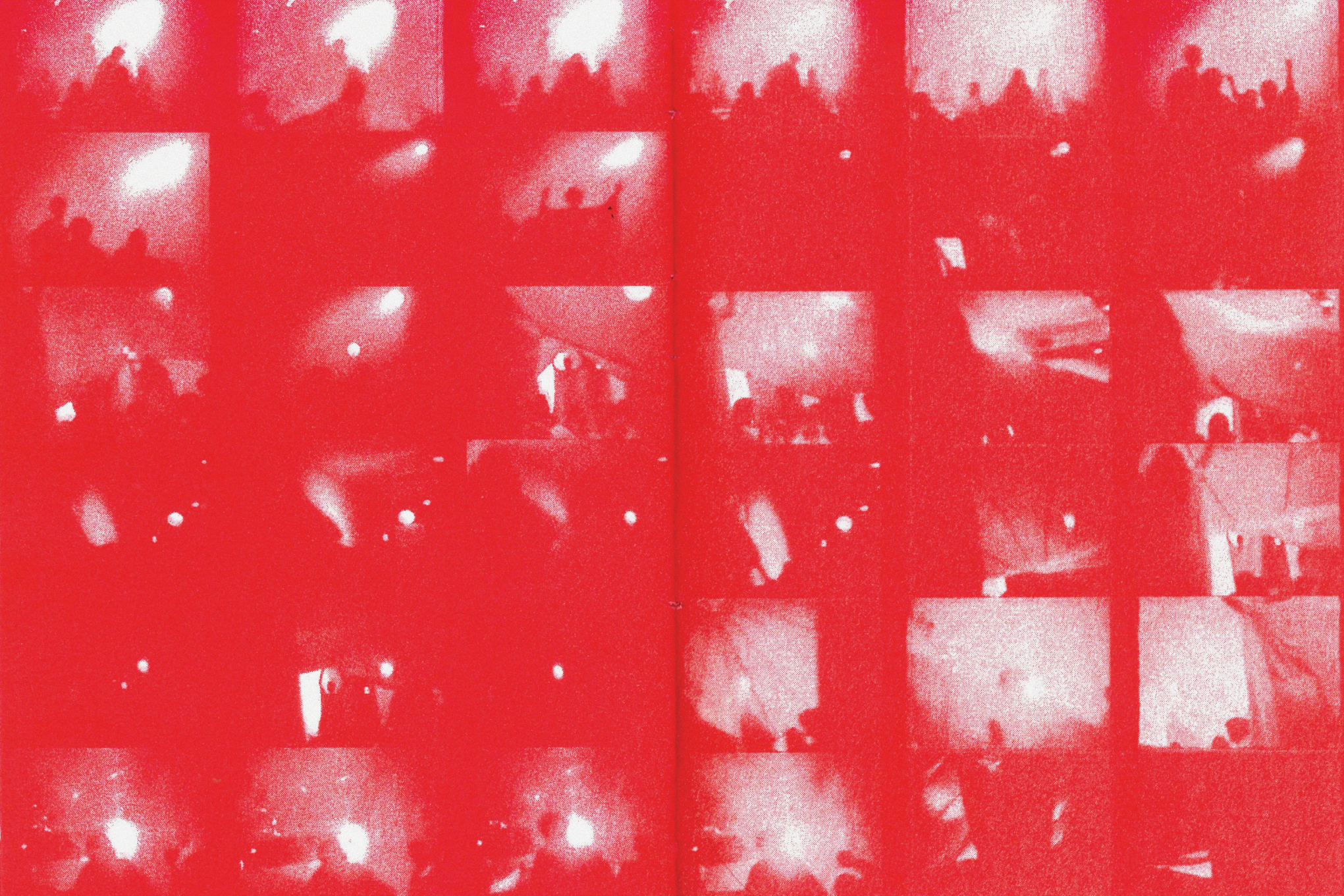




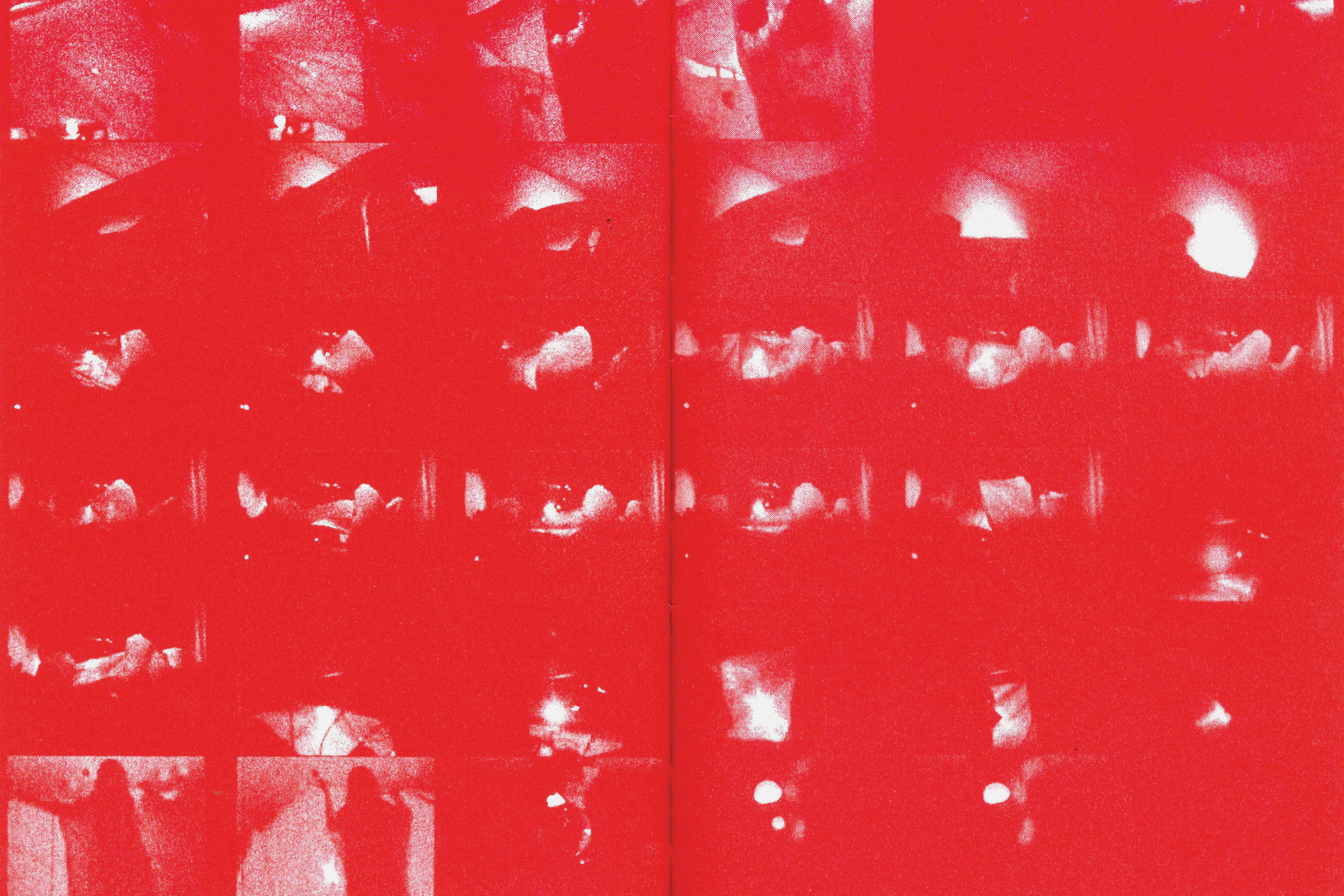




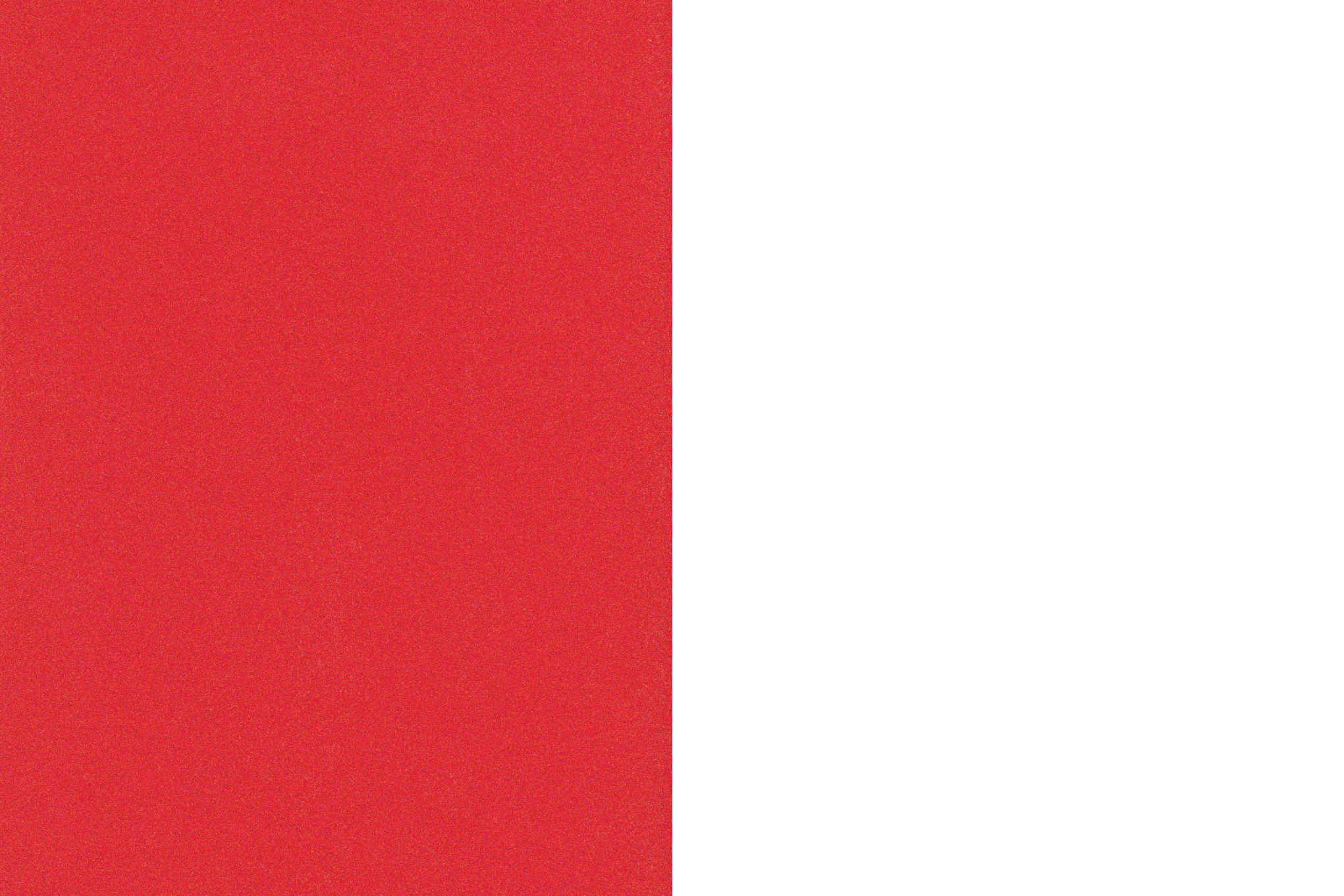




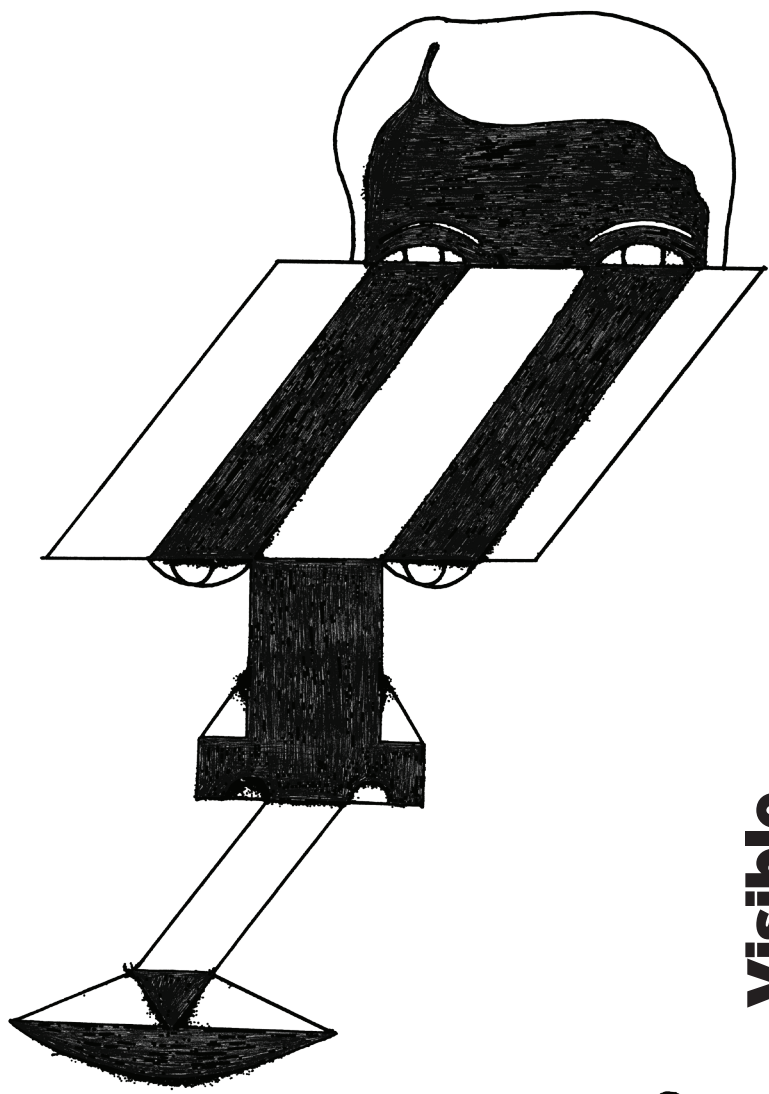








McLuhan Geisha



**Visible  
Environment**

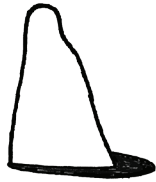






Illustration by Cynthia Merhej

## SENSORY MANIPULATION

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In 1968, before *Cerebrum*, Ruffin Jr. Cooper had a bigger enthusiasm. It was one of creating a new form of entertainment center involving “three motion picture theaters, dancing and dining places, fun-house devises, a swimming pool, cocktail lounge, four mobile ice skating rinks, a 24-hour radio station and a series of arcades<sup>21</sup>.”

Predicted to cost a fortune of \$25,000,000 by the writer and businessman Alvin Toffler in *Future Shock*, this dream of Cooper and his associates was never realized. As a result, *Cerebrum* was born<sup>22</sup>,

but only legally registered as an “environmental studio of participation”, due to budgeting and licensing problems<sup>23</sup>.

This could convey a certain confusion in the nature of *Cerebrum*, between what it was supposed to be and what it turned out to be. Its shape has been described inconsistently. For some, it stands between a happening, a nightclub or a multimedia environment influenced by psychedelic art<sup>24</sup>; for others, it is an unconventional nightclub in form of a pleasure dome<sup>25</sup>. However, for Youngblood, *Cerebrum* is “neither [...] it’s one of many current phenomena that constitute a pattern-event toward the eupsychia<sup>26</sup>, that is implicit in the intermedia experience as a kind of sensory-stimulation laboratory<sup>27</sup>.” The space could then be defined as a sensory-stimulus laboratory where one can go beyond the mind. A laboratory, by definition, functions under controlled conditions where experiments or research is done<sup>28</sup>.

Based on Andrew Blauvelt in his book *Hippie Modernism: The Struggle for Utopia*, the avant-garde scene of



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the sixties did not remain devoted to the art object as seen in previous eras; rather, it focused on immersive milieus<sup>29</sup>. The artist or the designer took then the role of an ecologist, involved with the whole physical setting<sup>30</sup>, complementing with his desire of perceiving viewers as participants and integrating technologies within his work<sup>31</sup>. At *Cerebrum*, as Cooper had articulated, the laboratory research lays in the importance of bringing to light the “self-expression” of participants in his work<sup>32</sup>, which seems to be his purpose.

“Self-expression” in the physical sense, could be seen, embodied or revealed, but it could also be hidden mentally, as a form of inner revelation of expression. Reaching that is possible through the room manipulation, as a reference to the visual artist Stephen Kaltenbach’s article *Room Alterations*: “It is possible to manipulate an observer to achieve an alteration in his perception of an object, of his environment, or to simply initiate a change in his perception<sup>33</sup>.”

In that sense, Cooper and his collaborators could be seen as ecologists, as well as manipulators of perception through the manipulation of *Cerebrum*’s environment. This is a form of mind-control that is possible through the use of mediums, which, in the case of *Cerebrum*, involved technical tools, such as the audio-visual technologies, as well as corporal ones, such as performance of the guides and participants.

An example of a *Cerebrum* thematic scene would be: while a DJ was

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(6) *The Beatles filming Strawberry Fields Forever*



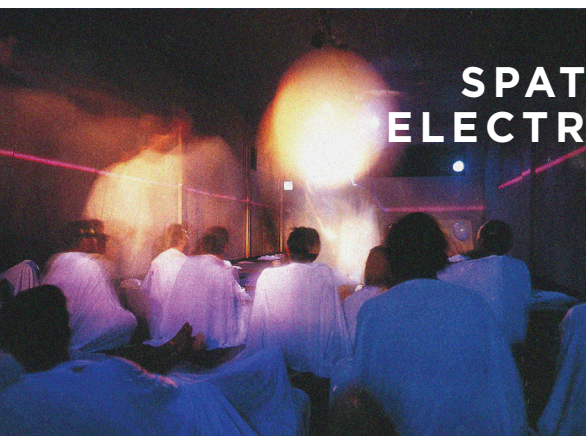
playing *Strawberry Fields Forever* (6) song of the Beatles, images of strawberries would be projected, along with segments of the movie *Wild Strawberries* (1957) by the director Ingmar Bergman, and a film depicting a young woman running through a field. Simultaneously, ice flavored strawberry cubes were provided by the *Cerebrum* guides, as well as a strawberry odor<sup>35</sup>.

These extensions are a massage process which diffuses psychic mobility and affects the behaviors, the environment and the culture. Through the senses, participants at *Cerebrum* capture the vibrations of the music, the refractions of the light and the images, the olfactory receptors of the smell as well as the pressure receptors of the touch, in order to process it

through their nervous systems. Identically to the architecture of the discotheque, as mentioned by Fluvio Ferrari in *Discoteca 1968: L'architettura Straordinaria*, it is a place where its immersive spell draws "symbolic territory underneath our consciousness." One is astonished by the magic of multimedia and engages into his hidden origins<sup>36</sup>. However, *Cerebrum* goes beyond being a nightclub, and beyond the multimedia effects only, providing "a trip for a "New Form of Communication<sup>37</sup>."

In this narrow space - able to fit 56 people maximum<sup>38</sup> - in its "primitive, both artistically and technologically" form<sup>39</sup>, the individual floats around few others; using this collective form of communication as a sensory-based interactive research.





(7) Individuals at Cerebrum

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Moving on to the actual architecture of the space, *Cerebrum* was designed for free by John Storyk<sup>40</sup>, and built using volunteers. Storyk transformed an empty rectangular box; a long-skinny loft into an electronic space, and worked around basic architectural elements.

The façade was a black painted silent storefront with “no sign.” The interior of this laboratory, of around 20 meters long, 8 meters wide and 7 meters high<sup>41</sup>, was divided into two main connected rooms.

Concerning the dark entrance room, it only contained a television fixed to the ceiling next to a powerful magnet that distorted patterns, and a tape diffuser for reception purposes<sup>42</sup>. As for the white room – reached by a ramp – it had a 60cm elevated white flooring, including a central walkway and fourteen square platforms. Storyk referred to these as floating pods<sup>43</sup>. They fit four people each, permitting smoke to rise from the ground, balloons to inflate and bubbles to form.

*Cerebrum*, compared to discotheques of the same era, didn’t sell alcohol or cigarette<sup>44</sup>. In terms of space, it dismisses stages, furniture and ornamentation, unlike Electric Circus<sup>45</sup>. It must have looked empty when not active due to the absence of dance floors or socializing corners. In the example of furniture focused design, we could mention Gino Marotta’s (8) cloud barriers at the nightclub of hotel Grifone in Bolzano<sup>46</sup>, or the flexible re-arrangement of elements of L’Altro Mondo in Rimini, such as the mini-bars or removable stage structure<sup>46</sup>.

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*Cerebrum* however, only allows flexibility through multimedia visuals, sounds, and interference of balloons, fogs and bubbles throughout the night.

During each session, light, mainly red, as well as video projections, were constantly flashing on *Cerebrum*'s white wall facets and floor carpet. After the eyes perceive the light through refraction, and send a

message to the brain through a nerve impulse, the individual receives the light stimulus, which could be interpreted as an excitement, suggesting liveliness. As for the music, it was a continual alteration of sounds, shifting every 15 to 30 minutes. Its vibration gets transformed by the ear into nerve electrified pulses, or could also be detected through the tactile sense.

Thus the importance of the rhythm and the intensity of light and sound, determining a complete presence or absence in the electrical brain and modify its rhythm<sup>48</sup>. The switching of scenes as a whole, allows the constant recreation and re-interpretation of multiple imagery, like Carousel slide projector, or a stroboscopic stage light projectors. Movements become slower and perceived clearer. This audio-visual rhythmic blinking studies and controls the movements, creating an effect of endless visual duplications.

Gadgets and electronics, handed out by *Cerebrum* guides, took over the space. Oddly, *Cerebrum* guides provided the patrons with low-cost children toys, (etch-a-sketch, view-master, Kenner's «give-a-show» projector), as well as



(8) Gino Marotta's furniture at Hotel Grifone in Bolzano

kaleidoscopes, musical instruments, mirrors, balloons, colored Plexiglas pieces, headphones, stereos, etc.. These portable handheld devices were used by some for drawing and the creation of visuals, and by others for looking into projected images. Even if projected videos and heard sound were always there, the instruments, as well as the psychedelic imagery of the kaleidoscope and the use of the mirror for the matching faces, were additional options. (9)

As a “psychedelic playpen<sup>49</sup>,” and a “super electric tuned on far-out fantasy, where anyone can play<sup>50</sup>,” *Cerebrum* mimics a process of reincarnation to reach awareness. It takes participants back to their “inner-child”, bringing out childhood and playful acts; as a “how-to” on communication and bonding through the expression of feelings and thoughts, minding others and environment.

Even if people paid an entrance fee at *Cerebrum*, it appears to be as a nonprofit organization with the notion of “Entertainment as Education<sup>51</sup>.”

Though no new technologies were created, artists of *Cerebrum* wanted to educate patrons about the reality of their society, providing them with “the necessary consciousness<sup>52</sup>.” In the same way, McLuhan appeared in a documentary (2) called “*Educational Movie/Documentary of 1960's - This is Marshall McLuhan: The Medium is the Message*,” presenting his ideas about the society to educate, using multimedia for the video effects<sup>53</sup>.

*Cerebrum*, being hidden, permits the loss of contact with reality, the deformation of time and space, and the non-distinct image of oneself in relation to its environment. One could be profoundly shocked, becoming aware of countless realities. For Toffler, in such simulated environments, the reality as well as the present become forgotten<sup>54</sup>. The individuals’ cerebrums, nurtured by the electronic signals and the corporal performances, start to connect to a virtual network; an invisible electronic living virtual space, where social roles were erased and equality was highlighted. Thus the existence of *Cerebrum* as a counter-environment



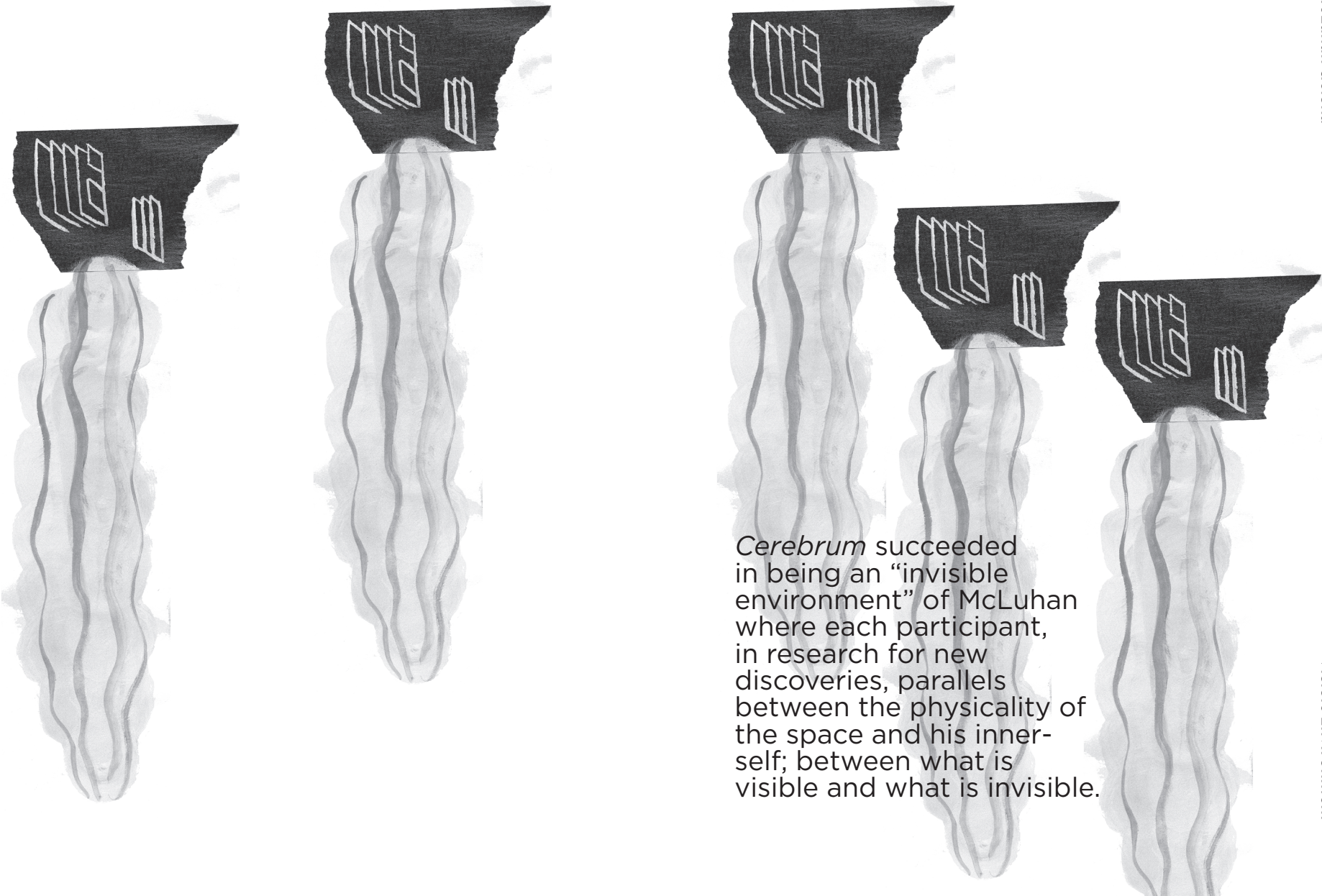
of McLuhan, which enlightens the individual about the physical environment as well as the self-constructed one<sup>55</sup>. It succeeded in being an “invisible environment” of McLuhan where each participant, in research for new discoveries, parallels between the physicality of the space and his inner-self; between what is visible and what is invisible.



*(9) Participants playing with projectors and mirrors, film tapes and balloons*



*Cerebrum* succeeded in being an “invisible environment” of McLuhan where each participant, in research for new discoveries, parallels between the physicality of the space and his inner-self; between what is visible and what is invisible.

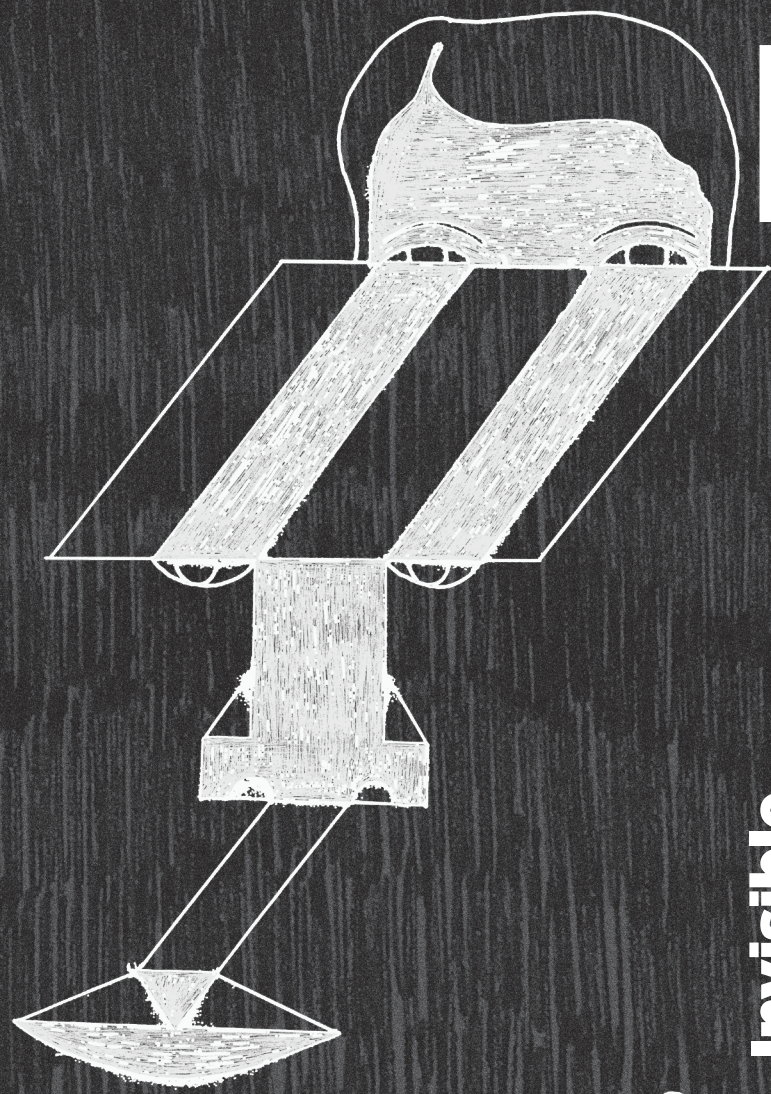








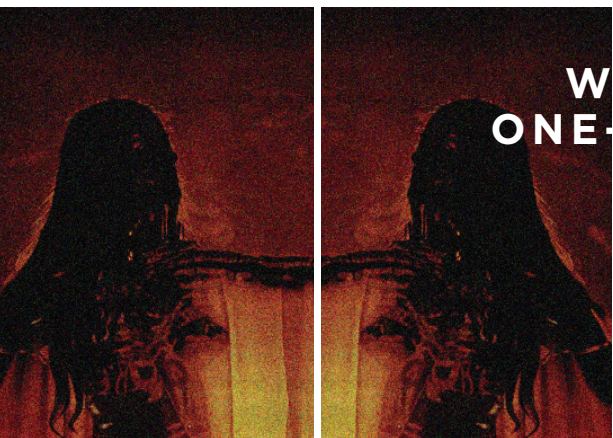
McLuhan Geisha



**Invisible  
Environment**







(10) Transparency of the white gown

## WORLD OF ONE-NESS

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In the electronic age, McLuhan has thought of the electronics as integral, appearing as an energy that makes individuals delve spiritually into their inner selves, similarly to drugs. It leads to a state of complete relaxation of mind<sup>56</sup>.

At *Cerebrum*, this state of mind-relaxation was not only reached through the basic architecture design of Storyk highlighting multimedia, but rather accentuated through the behavior and minimal performing gestures and acts of the guides. Compared to Geisha in *The New York Times*, they were reported as such with their attitudes and barefoot

look, but instead of offering tea, they proceeded to distribute headphones<sup>57</sup>. Their wordless full-on concentration on the participants and their contemplation of the bodies and actions of others required patrons to stay present in the moment: to first connect with the other, then with the environment and finally blend within the latter – becoming all one. By applying their planned rituals, they become themselves part of this other: Instead of only being the artists, they become participants, taking a role and making the boundaries of such a space even more fluid<sup>58</sup>. In the white uniformed gowns as an extension of the nude body, one could seek the role he desires.

McLuhan expressed that having a role during that time was a need for discovery<sup>59</sup>. The quantity of information provided through the circuitry of the electronic age couldn't be handled by the young generation<sup>60</sup>. Hence, they started looking for mythical forms: "a formula for putting on the universe<sup>61</sup>." The term "Putting on," rhyming with "turning on", relates to the search of discovery of an acoustic space instead of a visual space. This space of instant information "involved everybody in



everybody<sup>62</sup>,” and created a “world of one-ness” where time was coming to an end and space was disappearing. The world, as explained by McLuhan, becomes a global village; a simultaneous happening, in which individuals act as primitives and create a tribal<sup>63</sup>.

With this in mind, McLuhan saw the tools of communication as mediums and extensions of the body. In his writing *The Medium is the Massage: An Inventory of Effects*, published in 1967, he explained that the medium of the electronic age was re-shaping humans dramatically on their social and personal life.

For instance, at *Cerebrum*, the lights, the projectors and the music instruments, become the extension of the eyes and of the ears; mediums that massage the nervous system through the senses.

In the example of the music, which led the evening and made the participant travel from a contextual experience into another, the presence of the dual listening, collective, through the speakers, as well an

individual, through the headphones, showcases the importance of sound at *Cerebrum*. This brings to mind the *Deep Listening* notion of Pauline Oliveros, which differentiates between listening and hearing. It is about an expansive learning process of the perception of sounds, inclusive of the whole time & space continuum of sound<sup>64</sup>.” *Cerebrum* is about hearing.

But also the collective actions guided by the Geisha, such as touching, dancing, playing with the other, has bound patrons together, like in the parachute scene (11) : individuals stand next to each other, holding it, dancing and moving it all together, floating it up and down and feeling each other’s movements and bodies. This is what enhances a tribal sense through the action of the body, linked to the mind. At *Cerebrum*, participants go back to basics, looking for the primitive state where sophistication is rejected, wanting to be surrounded. Having complete awareness of the body, individuals end up discovering a new aspect of self-consciousness through sensual experiments with the other.



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(11) Parachute scene



The harmonious minimal participatory evenings and the Geisha procedures connect participants and erases individualism. The more people participate in the experience of *Cerebrum*, the more the wires and the bigger the network, shaping an expansion of a human machine.

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Subsequently, these new forms of communication, technologies and gestures, become a new abstract language, an abstract language in parallel to the mother language. As McLuhan had predicted, in a wordless and intuitive world, the young will then learn and discover faster than ever, “like a technological expression of the action of consciousness<sup>65</sup>,” because of the enormous sense of involvement and the resulting depth of motivation.







## ALTERED STATES TO SEXUAL PLEASURES

Even though there had been no explicit proof of drug inducement or any evidence of personal experience about an altered state at *Cerebrum*, *The New York Times* article compared the experience to a similar one of getting “zonked<sup>66</sup>.” To get zonked, is to be dazed and to see double. Also, as mentioned earlier, *Time* magazine have described a participant as “stoned<sup>67</sup>.” However, both, drugs and electronic technologies, could give a glimpse to the beyond, resulting in psychedelic effects of hallucinations.

In the example of LSD, it was identified as a design tool<sup>68</sup>; a tool which awakens consumers, taking them into a process of transition from a state of consciousness into unconsciousness; from the visible into the invisible<sup>69</sup>. It held with it the freedom of existing in the mind<sup>70</sup>. It lead the user into the “unattainable but nevertheless to be obtained” erotic,

political & social fantasy - a feeling of unity & wholeness; a wonderful return to the Garden of Eden integrity”, as said by Julian Beck; a member of the Living Theater experimental troupe<sup>71</sup>. Fully associated with McLuhan’s primitive communities and the hippies’ ethos, LSD’s characteristics of ego-death, represents an “actual death and rebirth of the body<sup>72</sup>.” Everyone had to wake up in order to apply the social structural changes dreamed of. This fretful revolt is sexual, spiritual as well as political; a moment of great eagerness. How did then *Cerebrum*’s artists design the individuals’ research at the laboratory, in the hallucinatory and sexual spirit of these times?

In the catalogue of the exhibition, *Ecstasy: In and About Altered States*, Midori Matsui reflects upon the de-centered vision in a world that lacks a dominant center, where shared physical effects contradict by linking and separating the sense of being. It visually creates a dizziness but still expresses physical identity; allowing participants a better sense of individuality.







Presumably, *Cerebrum* artists have also used the fragmentation of perception to erase the ego of participants, who used the physical space as the central element of transformation. In their altered states, what they perceived through their visions would be destroyed and reconstructed by their minds; creating new visions. A collapsed *Cerebrum* will, via physical disembodiment, then link the participants to an unconscious mind<sup>73</sup>.

The reach of this ecstatic experience of the mind transcends the body of the individual, and is called a “visionary experience<sup>74</sup>.” The latter is a way to blend spirituality into the society. It raises awareness through augmented individual sensations, and is referral to McLuhan’s theories of the mind, body and space relation. This “visionary experience” was the road to Cooper’s notion of “self-expression,” embodying a conception of the brain shift of the design subject – the individual – influenced by the electronic technology shock<sup>75</sup>. The distorted invisible environment becomes a liberal device, where the new shape of the body is centered, expanding the emotional forms.

Unlike Gysin and Burroughs’s Dreamachine<sup>76</sup>, *Cerebrum*’s dream system has a more sexual appeal. (12) As Youngblood said: “At *Cerebrum* one is voyeur, exhibitionist and participant<sup>77</sup>.” One could watch, pose and act.

(12) Dreamachine - Brion Gysin and William Burroughs





Within that same moment of great eagerness, the sexual liberation was becoming unveiled. Homosexuals were noticed at *Cerebrum*, as well as a gender liberty, and a sexual feel in the space; noting that nudity was not allowed.

Guides, boys and girls, didn't act as seducers, rather as performers even in the most intimate situation that could become sexual, like in the example of participants obliged to take off their clothing<sup>78</sup>, and wear white togas behind a curtain held by the Geisha. Gene Youngblood has described the feeling of being naked under the toga as "delicious, especially for men." One is instantly self-conscious yet not embarrassed; fascinated with the silky feeling of their own body<sup>79</sup>.

The body was a celebration, during which participants are reminded of their naked original selves, like the primitives of McLuhan. It turns into a nude psychotherapy<sup>80</sup>, which puts the person in touch with their own organism in the presence of others. For men, as for women, these semi-transparent unisex pieces of cloth hide and cover the whole body without

the extremities, but at the same time reveal an intimate self, leaving the body shapeless. The material's fluidity flows with one's movements and the sensory experience begins first with this awakening of the tactile sense.

In one of the *Cerebrum* photos (13), two persons were sitting and looking at a standing person, manipulating the toga creating a patterned ghost shadow behind it. *Time* magazine's reporter, himself was watching others; describing a couple seen "mild-petting" in the corner<sup>81</sup>. Although *Cerebrum* focused mostly on the collective, it was also a provider of liberties. Participants could act upon fantasies while no one was watching, placing them in a voyeur position when it comes to each other and leading them to sexual pleasures.

Furthermore, the tactile experience is also felt by pressure between tempered stimulated bodies. Throughout the night, hand cream was provided by the guides in the purpose of making a group of six in circle, holding hands and closing the eyes. Slippery, as a physical hand



massage, was the consequence, feeling the “hands melt into others, rubbing and squeezing anonymous flesh” as Youngblood described<sup>82</sup>. The Geisha’s behavior was asexual physically, but playful mentally, wanting to amuse people with the desire of an un-happening sexual action.

As six people lay down on the floating floor, the feet touch and the guides interfere to squirt them with the cream. Youngblood described the scene’s effect as extraordinarily erotic<sup>83</sup>. The outside interference of the guides massaging must’ve added

to the intimacy, more focused on its own senses and on the action of others, as the eyes were closed. Un-purposely, this highly sexual appeal in a public space was a given<sup>84</sup>, but to the point that some people have said that at *Cerebrum*, “it always looked like it was going to become an orgy at any moment<sup>85</sup>,” a type of orgasm analyzed by Roland Barthes in his experience at Le Palace in 1978<sup>86</sup>. For him, the physical body contact was not necessary. “It was like making love in abstract<sup>87</sup>.” bodily pleasures were taken to another dimension, where sexuality fused with the whole body. Chemical substances and audio-visuals waved to spread pleasure from the center of the body to its ends. The combination of elements at *Cerebrum* eroticizes it as an entity into an electro-wired collective machine<sup>89</sup>.

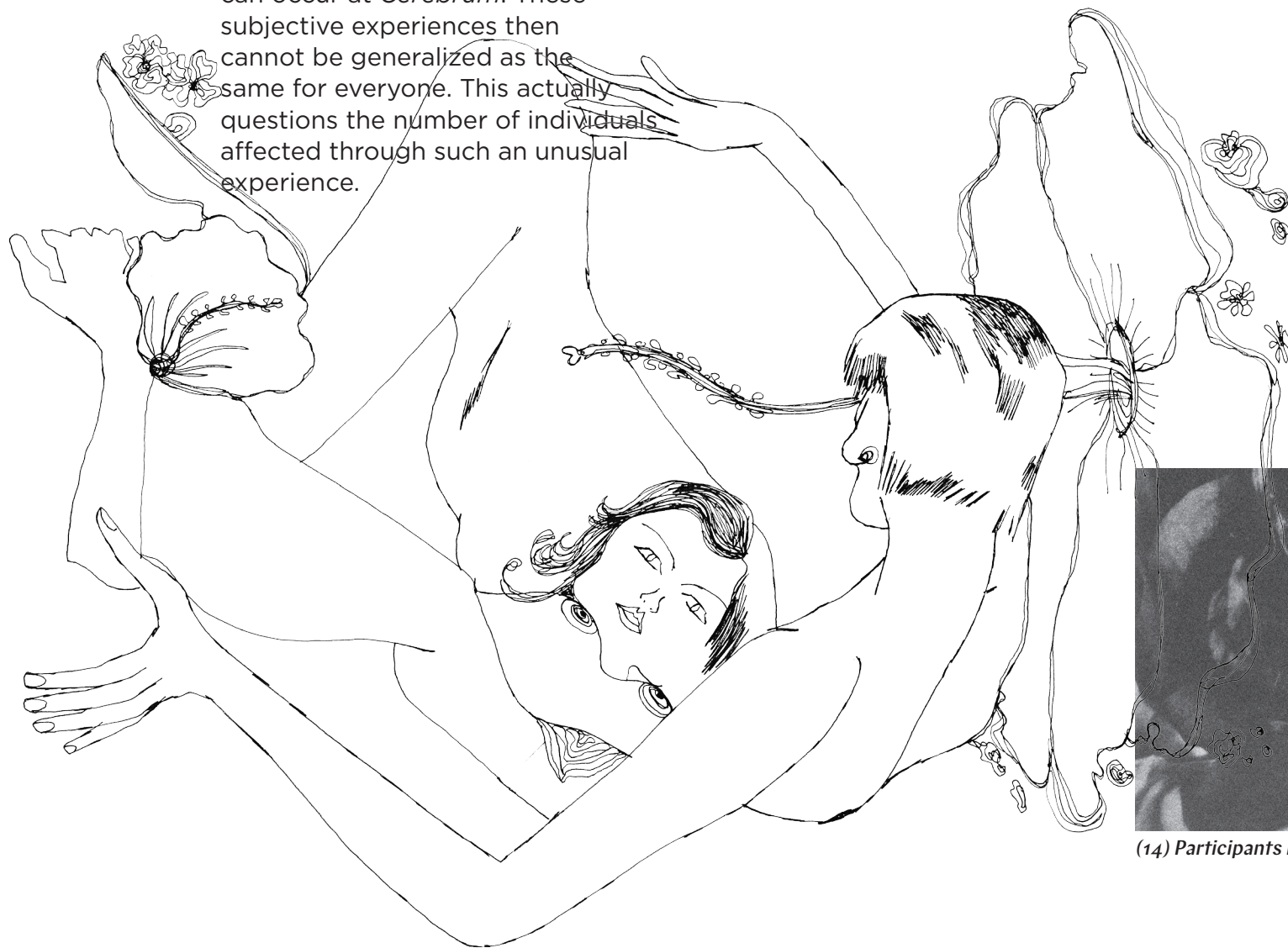
In the end, all experiences provided by *Cerebrum* mean nothing unless the participants are willing to embrace them. As specified in *The New York Times*, if the individual is not “slightly zonked” and ready to “lose themselves in a prism and do not care for group activities”, one could not be



(13) Geisha, participants or both? Individuals in the white gowns



altered. As *Time* also mentioned that “Nothing, anything, everything” can occur at *Cerebrum*. These subjective experiences then cannot be generalized as the same for everyone. This actually questions the number of individuals affected through such an unusual experience.



(14) Participants interacting together











## BRAIN WITHOUT WALLS

Despite the interest of several magazines and newspapers in this form of entertainment, *Cerebrum* closed only nine months after its opening<sup>89</sup>; due to its low incomes. The ending story was said to be, either a threatening act by the “mob<sup>90</sup>,” or, the participation of Cooper and some *Cerebrum* members’ in the Woodstock festival in August 1969, planning on not returning back<sup>91</sup>. Indeed, Cooper ended up hopping on the Hog Farm Bus – Hog Farm being a hippie community involved in politics and music, which traveled in America in a mobile bus - and never came back to continue working on *Cerebrum*<sup>92</sup>.



In comparison to the Hippie movement, *Cerebrum* had no radical impact at a big scale. However, Cooper's desire of involving participants in applying his self-expression theory was traced.

McLuhan Geisha was then born as a revolutionary invisible laboratory, for awakening individuals about their surroundings. Being in constant research for themselves, where sensorial transition could happen, and fantasies could be built. It is in itself a design tool of personal liberation and collective perception, in the purpose of engaging its patrons into becoming even closer to the "other." *Cerebrum* took part of reshaping a culture through the interlinking of the technology and the corporal mediums with the mind, but most importantly highlighting the collaborational design between the mental and the physical.

When Marshall McLuhan explained about the mediums' relation to architecture, he referred to the photograph as a museum without walls<sup>94</sup>. This brings back to mind

Malraux's writing, in 1953, about an art world where its physical variety couldn't fit in one museum. Therefore an emergence for a "museum without walls" was necessary for the assembly of all major art works, locating it in the imagination<sup>94</sup>.

For McLuhan, every new medium restructures our sensory, and most importantly, reorients our spaces into an undefined architectural forms "without walls"; which are then hidden in the brain of each individual. Considering the brain as a space that could be "aired-out"<sup>95</sup>, *Cerebrum*, this visible architecture form of entertainment, will then dissolve through the electronic mediums, where the brain becomes the invisible milieu. *Cerebrum* is then a brain without walls.

Today, McLuhan Geisha can still be considered as a place of the future, since nothing exists in its form. It questions the necessity of physical entertainment spaces, and believes in the potential of the design tools and mediums, as forms of social transformation.







# NOTES

## PREFACE - A 1968 ANECDOTE

<sup>1</sup> Unknown author, "Entertainment: Mattress for the Mind," *Time*, no. 24, (December 1968), Accessed July 17, 2017, <http://content.time.com/time/subscriber/article/0,33009,839684-1,00.html>.

<sup>2</sup> John Storyk is currently the founding partner of Walters-Storyk Design Group, an architectural acoustic company. He was 22 years old when he designed Cerebrum, which opened a door for him later on to design Jimi Hendrix's Electric Lady Studios.

<sup>3</sup> Tim Taylor, "Cerebrum", InnerBody, Accessed September 28, 2017, [http://www.innerbody.com/image\\_nerv02/nerv41-new.html](http://www.innerbody.com/image_nerv02/nerv41-new.html).

<sup>4</sup> Geisha are refined trained female artists. They normally perform at tea houses, to entertain men mainly: eating together, playing music with the shamisen instrument, dancing for them, etc. Unlike prostitutes, no sexual interactions are allowed.

<sup>5</sup> Bowery Boys, "Welcome to Cerebrum. Do you have a reservation?" *The Bowery Boys*, (December 2009), Accessed August 24, 2017, <http://www.boweryboyshistory.com/2009/12/welcome-to-cerebrum-do-you-have.html>.

<sup>6</sup> Unknown author, "Entertainment: Mattress for the Mind."

<sup>7</sup> Andrew Blauvelt, "The Barricade and the Dance Floor: Aesthetic Radicalism and the Counterculture," *Hippie Modernism: The Struggle for Utopia*, ed. Andrew Blauvelt and Ross Elflin (Minneapolis: Walker Art Center, 2015), 25.

<sup>8</sup> Gene Youngblood, "The Artist as Ecologist," *Expanded Cinema*, Introduction by R. Buckminster Fuller, (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1st edition, 1970), 348. Accessed June 15, 2017, [https://monoskop.org/images/f/f2/Youngblood\\_Gene\\_Expanded\\_Cinema.pdf](https://monoskop.org/images/f/f2/Youngblood_Gene_Expanded_Cinema.pdf).

<sup>9</sup> Unknown author, "Entertainment: Mattress for the Mind."

<sup>10</sup> Dan Sullivan, "Cerebrum: Club Seeking to Soothe the Mind," *The New York Times*, (November, 1968), Accessed August 1, 2017, <http://query.nytimes.com/mem/archive/pdf?res=9F03E7D7123AEF3BBC4B51DFB7678383679EDE>.

<sup>11</sup> Based on the mind-body dualism notion of Descartes, as regards to

the mind and the brain being two separate entities, Mind-body dualism, Wikipedia, Accessed September 25, 2017, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mind%E2%80%93body\\_dualism](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mind%E2%80%93body_dualism).

## PREFACE - IN CONTEXT

<sup>12</sup> "Cerebrum, Soho, 1968," February 26, 2009, online video clip, YouTube, Accessed on 5 May 2017, 0:12, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VjozaLBbrUs>.

<sup>13</sup> Larry Vigus, Email message to the actor, August 14, 2017.

<sup>14</sup> Blauvelt, "The Barricade and the Dance Floor: Aesthetic Radicalism and the Counterculture," 22.

<sup>15</sup> Fred Turner called the hippies as the "New Communalists."

Justin McGuirk, "Selling Freedom", "Tools of Personal Liberation," *California Designing Freedom*, ed. Justin McGuirk and Brendan McGetrick (London: Phaidon Press, 2017), 10.

<sup>16</sup> Blauvelt, "The Barricade and the Dance Floor: Aesthetic Radicalism and the Counterculture," 26.

<sup>17</sup> The New Left were a political anti-establishment movement in the sixties, involving activists, fighting for social change and improvements in the social rights, associated with the hippies and the anti-war manifestations movements like the Free Speech Movement.

<sup>18</sup> Blauvelt, "The Barricade and the Dance Floor: Aesthetic Radicalism and the Counterculture," 24.

<sup>19</sup> Jim Burns, *Arthropods: New Design Futures*, (London: Academy Editions, 1972), 8.

<sup>20</sup> Alexandra Midal, Pascal Rousseau, Jelena Martinovic, Nicolas Brulhart, "VIDEOMINDS", *Mind Control: Radical Experiments in Arts and Psychology 60-70s*, Accessed June 30, 2017, <http://mindcontrol-research.net/videominds/>.



## I - SENSORY MANIPULATION

<sup>21</sup> Tom Henderson, "New Sound Mixes Sirens, Lights, Flowers, Crickets," *Omaha World-Herald*, April 14, 1968, 9B.

<sup>22</sup> Alvin Toffler, "Simulated Environments", *Future Shock*, (New York: Bantam Book, 1970). Accessed August 12, 229, <https://cdn.preterhuman.net/texts/literature/general/Alvin%20Toffler%20-%20Future%20Shock.pdf>.

<sup>23</sup> Larry Vigus, Email message to the actor, August 11, 2017.

<sup>24</sup> Bowery Boys, "Welcome to Cerebrum. Do you have a reservation?"

<sup>25</sup> Toffler, *Future Shock*, 228.

<sup>26</sup> Eupsychia is coming from Eupsychian (eu + psyche+ -ian), coined by the psychologist Abraham Maslow, meaning "having or moving toward a superior mind or soul." "Eupsychian," Wiktionary, Accessed on October 1, 2017, <https://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/eupsychian#Etymology>.

<sup>27</sup> Youngblood, *Expanded Cinema*, 359.

<sup>28</sup> "Laboratory", Wikipedia, Accessed October 1, 2017, <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Laboratory>

<sup>29</sup> Blauvelt, "The Barricade and the Dance Floor: Aesthetic Radicalism and the Counterculture," 19.

<sup>30</sup> Youngblood, *Expanded Cinema*, 346.

<sup>31</sup> Midal et al., "Environments Immersifs."

<sup>32</sup> Henderson, "New Sound Mixes Sirens, Lights, Flowers, Crickets."

<sup>33</sup> Stephen Kaltenbach, "Room Alterations," *Mind Control: Radical Experiments in Arts and Psychology 60-70s*, Accessed June 30, 2017, [http://mindcontrol-research.net/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/5\\_stephenkalten-room-manipulation-whitney-1968.pdf](http://mindcontrol-research.net/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/5_stephenkalten-room-manipulation-whitney-1968.pdf).

<sup>34</sup> "Overview of Sensation," *Boundless Anatomy and Physiology*, Accessed September 18, 2017, <https://www.boundless.com/physiology/textbooks/boundless-anatomy-and-physiology-textbook/peripheral-nervous-system-13/sensation-127/sensory-modalities-686-10305/>.

<sup>35</sup> Vigus, Email, August 11, 2017.

<sup>36</sup> Fluvio Ferrari, *Discoteca 1968: l'architettura straordinaria*, (Torino: Umberto Allemandi & C., 1989), 22.

<sup>37</sup> Sullivan, "Cerebrum: Club Seeking to Soothe the Mind."

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>39</sup> Toffler, *Future Shock*, 229.

## I - SPATIAL ELECTRIFICATION

<sup>40</sup> John Storyk, Email message to the architect, July 8, 2017.

<sup>41</sup> Vigus, August 14, 2017.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, August 11.

<sup>43</sup> Storyk, Email, July 8, 2017.

<sup>44</sup> Vigus, Email, August 11, 2017.

<sup>45</sup> Electric Circus (1967-1971) was a famous nightclub in New York City, which invited experimental bands and become known for the use of mixed-media.

<sup>46</sup> Unkown author, "Il Night Piu Piccolo: Cesare Casati Ed Emanuele Ponzio", *Discoteca 1968: l'architettura straordinaria*, extract from "Domus", n°.491, October 1970, 38.

<sup>47</sup> Ferrari, *Discoteca 1968: l'architettura straordinaria*, 35.

<sup>48</sup> Midal et al., "Cerveau Électronique."



<sup>49</sup> Unkown author, "Entertainment: Mattress for the Mind."

<sup>50</sup> "Cerebrum, Soho, 1968," YouTube, 1:35.

<sup>51</sup> Gene Youngblood, *Expanded Cinema*, 348.

<sup>52</sup> Gene Youngblood, *Expanded Cinema*, 359.

<sup>53</sup> "Educational Movie/Documentary of 1960's - This is Marshall McLuhan: The Medium is the Message," online video clip, YouTube, Accessed on 25 June 2017, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t1axnba\\_Ueg](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t1axnba_Ueg).

<sup>54</sup> Toffler, *Future Shock*, 228.

<sup>55</sup> Marshall McLuhan, "The Invisible Environment: The Future of an Erosion", *Perspecta*, Vol. 11, (Cambridge: The MIT Press on behalf of Perspecta, 1967), 163-167, <https://www.scribd.com/document/61062984/The-Invisible-Environment-The-Future-of-an-Erosion>.

<sup>61</sup> McLuhan and Fiore, *The Medium is the Massage: An Inventory of Effects*, 114. The word "participation mystique" was first used by the philosopher Lucien Bruhl (1857 - 1939).

<sup>62</sup> McLuhan, "The Invisible Environment: The Future of an Erosion", 167.

<sup>63</sup> "Educational Movie/Documentary of 1960's - This is Marshall McLuhan: The Medium is the Message," YouTube, 14:30.

<sup>64</sup> Pauline Oliveros, "The difference between hearing and listening," published November 2015, TEDxIndianapolis, Indiana, online video clip, YouTube, Accessed on 1 October 2017, 6:48, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=\\_QHfOuRrJB8](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_QHfOuRrJB8).

<sup>65</sup> McLuhan, "The Invisible Environment: The Future of an Erosion", 167.

## II - WORLD OF ONE-NESS

<sup>56</sup> "Spiritual Technology - Marshall McLuhan," online video clip, YouTube, Accessed on 1 July 2017, 3:20, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ys4LBk8u3uU>.

<sup>57</sup> Sullivan, "Cerebrum: Club Seeking to Soothe the Mind."

<sup>58</sup> Fred Turner, *From Counterculture to Cyberculture - Stewart Brand, The Whole Earth Network, and the Rise of Digital Utopianism*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 48.

<sup>59</sup> Marshall McLuhan and Quentin Fiore, *The Medium is the Massage: An Inventory of Effects*, 100.

<sup>60</sup> "Marshall McLuhan Speaks Special Collection: The Future of Man in Electric Age", online video, Accessed on 12 July 2017, 6:10, <http://www.marshallmcluhanspeaks.com/interview/1965-the-future-of-man-in-the-electric-age/?t=12m57s>.

## II - ALTERED STATES TO SEXUAL PLEASURES

<sup>66</sup> Dan Sullivan, "Cerebrum: Club Seeking to Soothe the Mind."

<sup>67</sup> Unkown author, "Entertainment: Mattress for the Mind."

<sup>68</sup> LSD was identified as a design tool in 1966 by the architecture journal *Progressive Architecture*. Alastair Gordon, *Spaced Out: Radical Environments of the Psychedelic Sixties*, (New York: Rizzoli, 2008), 87.

<sup>69</sup> Peter Lunenfeld, "See What You Want", "Tools of Personal and Fantasy," "STATE OF TRANSCENDENCE," "Spiritual Technologies and the California Dream," *California Designing Freedom*, 54.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid*, 29.

<sup>71</sup> Martin A. Lee and Bruce Shlain, *Acid Dreams: The Complete Social History of LSD: The CIA, The Sixties, and Beyond*, (New York: Grove Press, 1985), 166.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>73</sup> Chrissie Iles, "Double Vision," *Ecstasy: In and About Altered States*, 162-163.

<sup>74</sup> Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev, "Transcendence and Immanence In Some Art of Today," *Ecstasy: In and About Altered States*, 141.

<sup>75</sup> Midal et al., "Cerveau Électronique."

<sup>76</sup> It was constituted of a rotating cylinder generating a rhythmic alternation of light and black, in the purpose of entering into a state of relaxation which should release a process of hallucination or the discovery of models of awareness. *Ibid.*

<sup>77</sup> Youngblood, *Expanded Cinema*, 363.

<sup>78</sup> Toffler, *Future Shock*, 228.

<sup>79</sup> Youngblood, *Expanded Cinema*, 361.

<sup>80</sup> "Nude psychotherapy is the use of non-sexual social nudity as an intentional means to improve the participant's psychological health". "Nude Psychotherapy", Wikipedia, Accessed September 16, 2017, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nude\\_psychotherapy](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nude_psychotherapy).

<sup>82</sup> Youngblood, *Expanded Cinema*, 363.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>84</sup> John Storyk, Email message to the architect, July 8, 2017.

<sup>85</sup> Bowery Boys, "Welcome to Cerebrum. Do you have a reservation?"

<sup>86</sup> Pol Esteve compared the dance culture to an orgasm in the exhibition catalog 1,000m2 of desire referring to Roland Barthes's experience in Le

Palace in 1978, comparing it to an orgasm. Pol Esteve, "Sexographs, "Make Love in Abstract", *1,000m2 of Desire: Architecture and Sexuality*, trans. Carmen Artal et al., (Barcelona: Diputació de Barcelona, 2016), 189.

## POSTFACE

<sup>89</sup> Bowery Boys, "Welcome to Cerebrum. Do you have a reservation?"

<sup>90</sup> The "mob" or Mafia groups were controlling the nightclubs in New York in the 60s, in this time of alcohol prohibition. They were the ones who sold the cigarettes and liquor. Cerebrum was not dealing with the mob.

<sup>91</sup> Vigus, Email, August 11, 2017.

<sup>92</sup> Storyk, Email, July 8, 2017.

<sup>93</sup> John McHale, "The Man From Mascom," in *The Expandable Reader: Articles on Art, Architecture, Design, and Media* (1951-79), ed. Alex Kitnick, (New York: GSAPP BOOKS, 2011), 79.

<sup>94</sup> Kristoffer Milling, Malraux and the Musee Imaginaire: The 'Museum Without Walls,'" Culture in Virtual Spaces, Accessed on August 1, 2017, <https://culturalvirtualspaces.wordpress.com/2014/06/17/malraux-and-the-musee-imaginaire-the-museum-without-walls/>.

<sup>95</sup> Diedrich Diederichsen, "Divided Ecstasy: The Politics of Hallucinogenics", *Ecstasy: In and About Altered States*, 187.



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