



Zürich, 22. 04. 2008

**“Dreamachine: David Woodard, Sheela Bimstiel, Christian Kracht”  
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On Friday, April 16, 1943, in the laboratories of one of Basel’s major pharmaceutical companies, Sandoz, the 37-year-old Dr. Albert Hofmann invented LSD. In the 1950s, after many years of experimenting with the proto-religious properties of stroboscopic light in his Juniper Hills, California home, where he had fashioned a quaint Socialist commune, Aldous Huxley experienced a wave of inner light and an opening of “the doors of perception” onto “a sacramental vision of reality,” when he ingested mescaline. By the 1960s psychoactive drug use was widespread, moving an unprecedented demographic spectrum to experience multiple viewpoints and alternative senses of time and space, pre-articulating our Silicon Valley culture.

*If we close our eyes together, then we will see where we all come from—Rolling Stones*

During the ‘70s and ‘80s, in the media-propagandized wake of the Tate killing and Beatles break-up, psychedelic drugs were dismissed en masse as passé. Cocaine abuse, disco dancing, new wave rock music and TV watching prevailed, in an era of consumerist backlash.

In 1990 the 26-year-old American music conductor Dr. David Woodard reintroduced the Dreamachine, a stroboscopic contraption that had been barbarically devised in 1959 by the English mathematician Ian Sommerville and the Canadian mystic poet Brion Gysin, based on their reading of *The Living Brain* (1953)—a then standard textbook written by Huxley’s friend and colleague, Dr. W. Grey Walter. The neurology syllabus staple featured a chapter on Walter’s continuation of Huxley’s stroboscope experiments, circa 1947, in which subjects close their eyes in the presence of a bright flickering light, set at various intervals and yielding most interesting results within the Alpha (8 to 12 per second) range.

Consistent within the catalog of William S. Burroughs interviews, the Dreamachine is a frequent topic, anecdotal and metaphoric. Woodard built 1,000 machines—including one for Burroughs’ fabled “Ports of Entry” retrospective at Los Angeles County Museum of Art (1996), and two for Burroughs’ personal use in the year ending his life (1997)—establishing an international dream bank. Ten bright flickers per second, flashed upon closed eyelids, will cause the optic nerve to send a 10hz pulse signal into a subject’s cortical tissue. The resultant neural activity approximates the state normally experienced at the beginning of a dream.



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On a different wavelength: during the '70s and '80s, whilst popular culture had languished into psychoactive recess, the Indian sex guru Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh was promoting a view of man as a machine, condemned to the helpless acting out of unconscious, neurotic patterns—a view echoing those of Gurdjieff, Kraftwerk and Freud. Rajneesh's ideal of the "new man," who transcends the poles of convention and thus operates with enhanced intuitive faculties, recalled the teachings of Nietzsche in his *Beyond Joy and Evil* and especially *Zarathustra*. It was through the interpretive genius of Rajneesh's personal secretary and lover, Ma Anand Sheela, that his message would find its crystalline form and resoundingly positive application.

Rajneesh taught that we are all potential Buddhas, with capacity for enlightenment. Accordingly, every human may experience unconditional love and respond rather than react to life: "You are truth. You are love. You are light. You are bliss... When the ego is gone, the whole individuality arises in its crystal purity." By the early 1980s, on an Oregon mountain estate that Ma Sheela had selected and purchased for the Bhagwan, which developed into a thriving commune, Rajneeshpurim, a vast and ever-expanding collection of Rolls-Royce motorcars attracted sannyasins—practitioners of an advanced Rajneeshian ritual called sannyas—from across the globe.

Cabaret Voltaire presents Switzerland's first exhibition of an authentic Dreamachine, built by Woodard. In collaboration with Dr. Sheela Birnstiel, née Ma Anand Sheela, since 1990 a Baselland specialist in the treatment of the pathologically and mentally sick, including Downs Syndrome and Dementia, and the sole proprietress of two successful mental health retreats, Sheela and Woodard guided a group of 14 gifted patients in a symposium centered on the muse-like and therapeutic value of stroboscopic light. For a period of two hours each day—culminating on April 16, the sixty-fifth anniversary of Hofmann's invention—patients created watercolor paintings in the presence of a Dreamachine, which was lent for this purpose by the German art collector Alexander Schröder. Along with the Dreamachine, which visitors are welcome to experience in the privacy of a cordoned area, a selection of completed works from Woodard's and Birnstiel's symposium are on view.

Please greet the artists at our Friday, May 2 reception: Christian Kracht will read from a text distinguishing the Dreamachine from TV, and David Woodard will read from a text connecting the Dreamachine to the realm of coincidence and Sheela Birnstiel will present her work in Matrusaden and her experience with the Dreamachine, after which Kracht, Birnstiel and Woodard together will form a brief Q&A panel.

David Woodard, Schloss Wiesenburg, April 2008

Curated by Adrian Notz and David Woodard

Special Thanks to Dr. Sheela Birnstiel, Christian Kracht and Alexander Schröder.

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