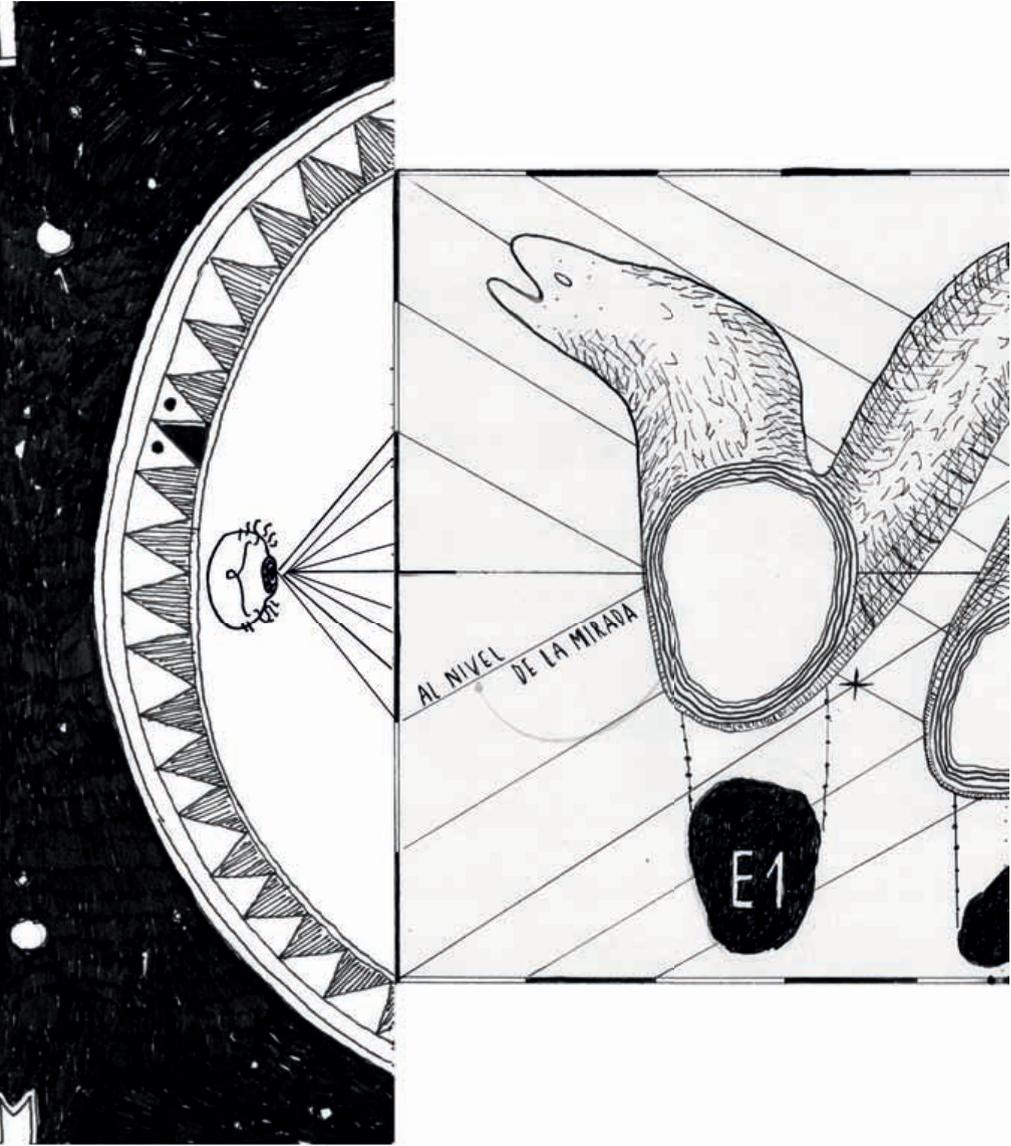


**NATURAL MAGIC**  
Vaults Room



## 2.

And thus a reference to nature  
is replaced with a reference to humanity.  
Men who previously proceeded at sea level  
now proceed above or below eye level.  
And let's say that: above eye level proceeds  
the person who hopes that divine elements,  
chance and destiny, resolve that which psychology  
and instruments are unable to perceive.



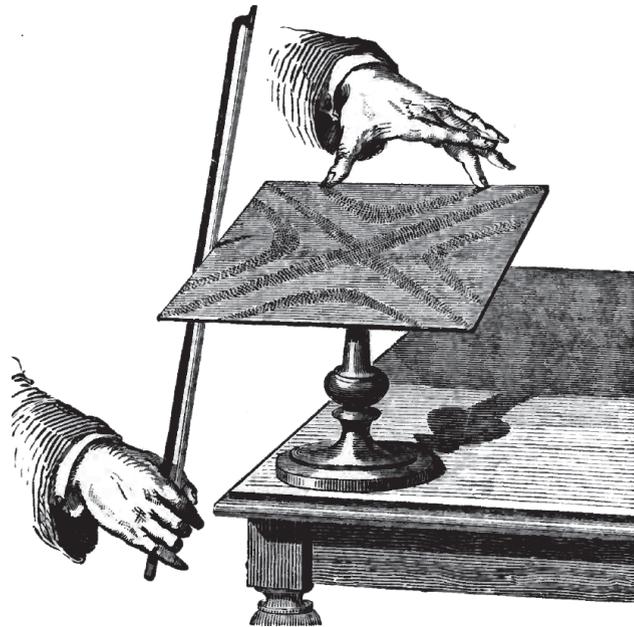
In the **Vaults Room**, *Natural Magic* offers visitors a second “instrument of the imagination.” While in the first space the projected image expanded, permeating the room and subverting its architecture, here the beam of light of the 16 mm projection bends and passes through the wall. In a play of reflections, it appears on the other side, projected onto a suspended screen.

The architectural features of the room give rise to an intimate encounter with illusion, revealing another transformation: the film allows us to see the effects of what are known as Chladni figures, the patterns formed by particles on a flat surface when sound waves are applied to it, so that sound becomes form. These images resonate with several frames from *The Sun Is Counting the Earth's Rotations*—the film projected in Space 1—and also with the small glazed plates displayed in the anteroom.

It is thus a double experiment—almost scientific in nature—with a complex methodology: on the one hand, there is the beam of light, reminiscent of a magic lantern. On the other, the sound that enlivened the film projected in Space 1—now reconfigured as particles through vibration—becomes a dynamic speaking form. Here, noise becomes image, and, like the dancer in the film, it shapes and alters space, constructing a new cosmos.

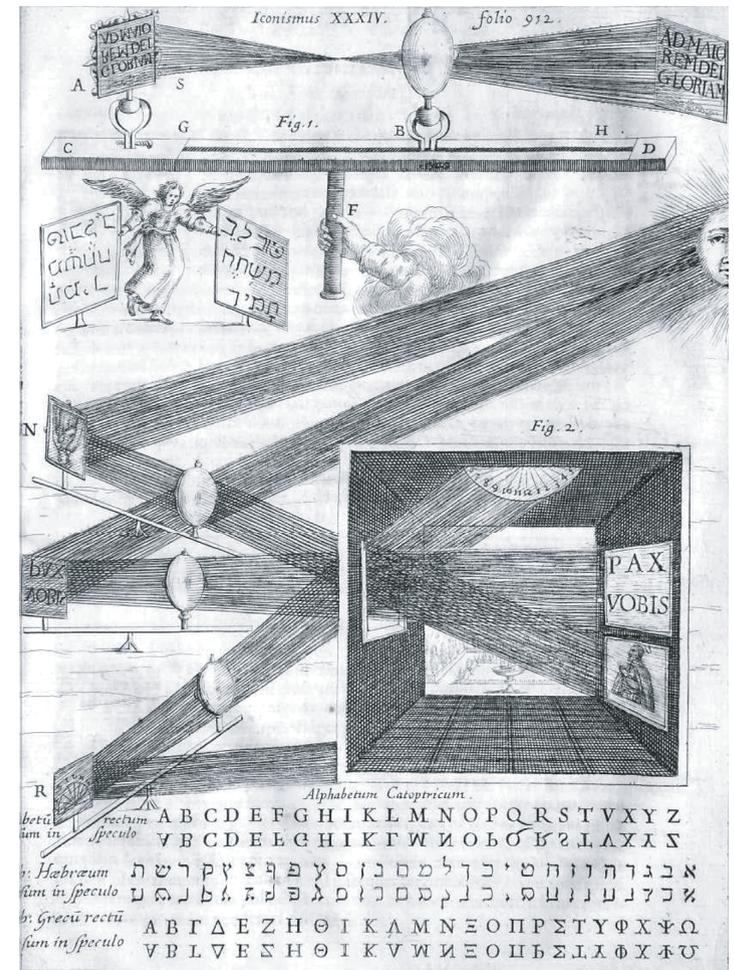
The unedited raw footage of the projected film (*Hearing Forms*, 2021) incorporates a kind of performance for the camera: the images we see were filmed in the order that they took place, the camera turned on and off, without editing or cuts. This phantasmagoria or trick of the senses materializes like a light from the past, reminding us of the old illusion technique known as Pepper's ghost, which is often considered one of the first steps toward the invention of cinema. This effect has been specifically adapted for the Vaults Room—just as described in old treatises on skillfully deceiving the senses—so that the entire building seems to house an illusion for an eye positioned in various places at the same time.

MICRO



Amédée Guillemin, *The Forces of Nature* (London: McMillan and Co., 1872), 175.

MACRO



Athanasius Kircher, *Ars Magna Lucis et Umbrae* (Romae: Sumptibus Hermanni Scheus, 1646), 1.037. © Herzog August Bibliothek Wolfenbüttel

## Dream Baby Dream<sup>1</sup>

Antonio Menchen

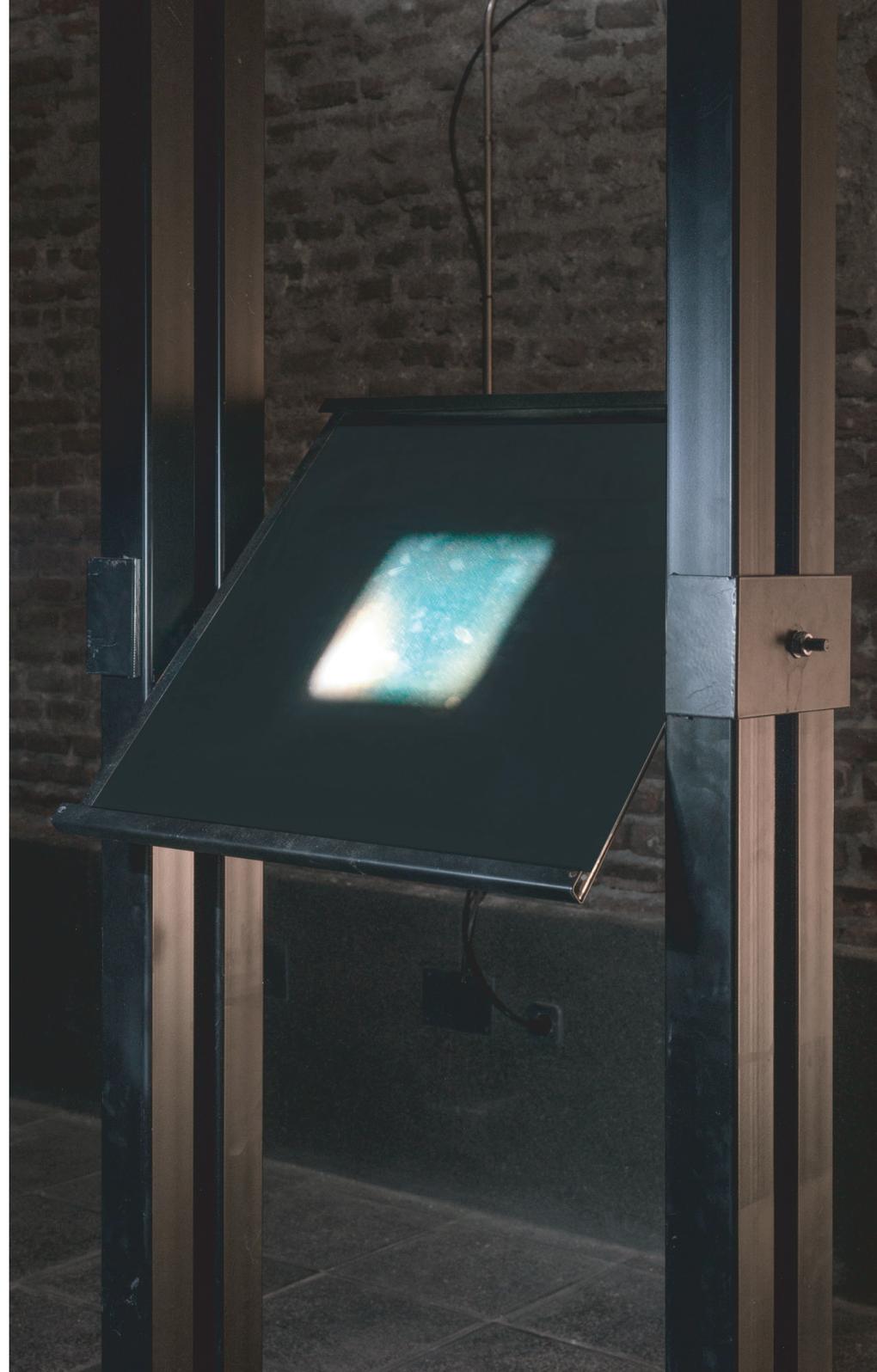
A few of those lines come toward my eye in the darkness, leaving me momentarily blinded. They move from side to side incessantly, changing color from red to green to blue. Then back to black. The lines pass through clothing, through the dark shapes of each of those bodies before me. The low light turns them into silhouettes, flattening the details of their faces, their hair and clothes, all equally, all moving. The lines glow in space, as if they were solid, as if the pigment that colors them were suspended in the air. As if we could catch the particles and mold them with our hands, intercept them. But those lines are nothing but light. They dissolve, they are like dust, disappearing amid the heat that radiates from each person in the club. This condensation expands, extends, broadens the lines vibrating to the rhythm of the music. A choreography of heads and shoulders, a succession of precise movements. We begin to listen to the body, although our mind is only concerned with feeling or thinking through it. This “through it” is like passing through, making our way through the darkness, as the medieval alchemical maxim says: “Proceed toward the obscure and unknown through the still more obscure and unknown.”<sup>2</sup> Using the darkness to reach that which needs light—the gaze, the eye, the body—and thus restore the distance between memory and oblivion, and also between lived experience and the experience of dreams. I amuse myself by recreating a model of that room in my mind, revisiting each wall, every corner of that miniature. I also reproduce the humid atmosphere, the slippery floor, people’s gestures, every beat, the absence of light. Memory allows us to contemplate what happened, as César Aira said in reference to Argentinean writer Copi. Although in Copi’s case memory takes place in the present, in the unfolding of events. And therefore the past becomes



a miniature, which becomes an instant, a lightning flash, as Aira puts it.<sup>3</sup>

It's hot in Madrid. It's summer and no one thinks of leaving that basement. It's around nine in the morning. The music plays on and people are still dancing, sweating. Some smoke as they dance, others drink, many fan themselves in time with the beat, a few even sleep stretched out on a sofa away from the dance floor. Outside, only the sun and the empty city await. A succession of images has been projected all through the night: quickly, not arbitrarily but so changeably that they are gradually crumbling in my mind like a never-ending multitude of particles of different shapes, textures, and colors. They merge and combine, interspersed in time. As soon as one image vanishes, it is replaced by another, so it is hard to tell what came first and what followed. I am still on the dance floor, in front of the DJ. I sense the bodies around me, their heat, the air displaced by their movements, the gestures that delimit the space where I dance. At that point I realize that I usually dance with my back to the person choosing the music, or else to one side, facing the clubbers attending the session, looking at the dance floor. That's right: with my back to the DJ, sometimes moving to the side of the dance floor, rarely placing myself in front of the booth.

I don't do it out of a lack of respect but because I like to watch people dance. I enjoy myself more looking at the movements, the outfits, the looks exchanged by those who are on this side. I confess that for me the idea of dancing in front of the person choosing the music is associated with being a devotee, a fan, which does not interest me. Only music, only sound, can affect me in a way similar to contemplating a bonfire. An ever-changing image, an object without a fixed form. It gives off a heat that blinds us, we have to look away, but at the same time it hypnotizes us, it attracts us and doesn't let go.



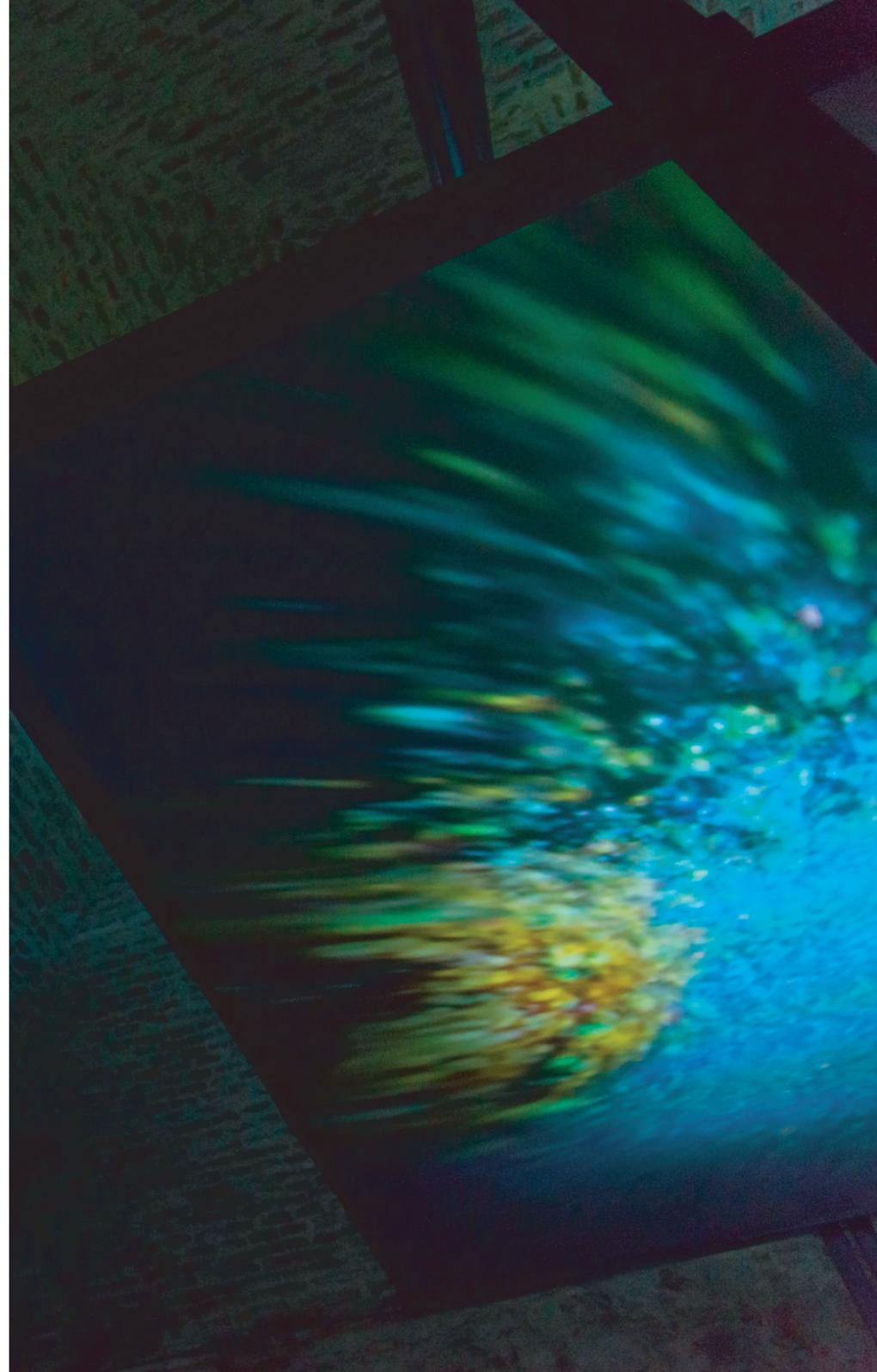
Back on the dance floor, I scarcely recognize faces. Some ring a bell, but none are really familiar. I notice someone with a snake tattoo on their arm. The details of the image show the reptile's scales. I leave the dance floor and go to the stairs to rest for a while. The person I had noticed sits down next to me. With the walls vibrating around us, we start chatting. We repeat questions, some phrases, words. We try to read each other's lips, because we can hardly hear what the other is saying. In that enclosed place, beneath the surface of the city, words come more slowly than images. Dazed, I manage to say that sometimes you go somewhere and come across people who are not important in your life until something—an encounter, a coincidence, a simple gesture—makes them a permanent part of your routine. She smiles and says that what I am describing sounds like something out of a film.

She grabs my hand and we return to the dance floor. The colored lights move through the darkness again. They run over our bodies, bathe them in color, unite them. Our dance moves become heavier, but together we come to form a plane. Now everything belongs to reality, to the sensitive material of the moment, to all that acts and reacts. And thus, it belongs to a possible image—to a possible plane, as I recently read in a text by Deleuze. By that stage of the morning, memory has already given way to vague recollections. My body is simply staying alive, holding itself upright, but I managed to remember that at the beginning of summer Julia had sent me this text and recommended that I read it. I think about the image-movement plane that Deleuze described in his lectures on Bergson as a plane that is everywhere, that is the set of all possible planes. A plane that contains everything, with nothing outside of it—from a person to molecules to atoms.<sup>4</sup> In other words, looking anywhere one invents that possible plane, or that possible image. Making a possible film out of one's gaze.

To leave that basement was to put out the fire, to stop dreaming, to end that summer. It was time to get out of there. Climbing the stairs was made difficult by the fatigue we had accumulated, especially in our legs. The distance to the street seemed infinite: a journey in which everything that had happened that night and all that summer would be assembled in our minds. The music was still playing, we left it behind. Without it, we returned to the surface and turned away from the darkness, regained another light. Noticing in the street how time had been compressed, and all those hours spent underground seemed like just a few seconds, disoriented us. We start to walk. We have decided to return home under a Sun that casts its rays on us. Little by little we get farther away and, like a flash or a reflection, the sound, the movement, the reality and fiction, the adventure and the images of that night pass through our minds again. In short, the light passes through us.

#### Endnotes

- 1 Suicide, "Dream Baby Dream," Island Records, 1979.
- 2 Marguerite Yourcenar, *The Abyss*, trans. Grace Frick in collaboration with the author (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1981). Originally published as *L'oeuvre au noir* (Paris: Gallimard, 1968).
- 3 César Aira, *Copi* (Rosario: Beatriz Viterbo Editora, 1991).
- 4 Gilles Deleuze, *Cine I. Bergson y las imágenes* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Cactus, 2009).
- 5 Words borrowed from Jean-Luc Godard's 1982 film *Passion*.



Path taken by the light beam through the mirrors until it is projected on the screen.

