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Paul Sharits was born July 8, 1943 and died July 8, 1993. Although Paul Sharits is primarily known as a filmmaker, his artistic practice was not limited to the realm of filmmaking. Painting, drawing, sculpture and performance all held a large place. They are not broadly known and yet are essential if we wish to understand the scope and singularity of his artistic work and achievements. His film and pictorial works revolved around two central themes: one, formal, closely related to music, fit within the world of abstraction, while the other unfolded within the psychological and emotional arena of the figurative. This exhibition proposes to show the connections between these different practices by demonstrating that they are but moments of a whole. Film can be projected, but it may also be approached as an object, in the way that Fluxus drawings, scores and objects are.

Sharits was familiar with painting and film in his childhood; his uncle's paintings fascinated him. Film was present through the family chronicle that his godfather shot on 16mm. It was he who offered Paul Sharits his first camera, along with the many reels of expired film that the artist used to make his first film: a psychodrama shot when he was fifteen. After studying painting at Denver University, Sharits dedicated himself to cinema. His films questioned the ability of the medium to produce works – employing the very mechanisms and elements of the medium itself: the filmstrip and its still frames, along with the passage of the filmstrip through the projector, and hence projection as material, too, within his multi-screen films or in his installations – that are anti-illusionist.

In the 1960s Sharits moved from painting to film: “I stopped painting in the middle 1960s but became more and more engaged with film, attempting to isolate and essentialize aspects of its representationalism.” Three events encouraged this change, one related to art – the discovery of Christo's motorcycle: “Then I saw Christo’s motorcycle and thought I would never get to that level of ‘concise toughness’”; the other two were of a psychological nature: his mother's suicide and his becoming a father, which made him decide to give up painting and to take up industrial design. The latter experience was not convincing, however. All these events led him to abandon the Illumination, Accident project and to focus on a radical approach to cinema. Henceforth, he would be a filmmaker. As he said himself: “cinematic” meant “cinematic treatment” of a non-filmic subject. So I began to look to the actual materials-processes of my medium, in the most basic-obvious modalities, for subject matter and for appropriate overall structural principles.” He then launched into a film that would become 8mm film studies of a psychodramatic nature. “During 1958, when I began making 8mm film studies of a psychodramatic nature.”

During his studies, he founded the Denver Experimental Film Society in 1962, which enabled him to see films he had been unfamiliar with up until then. It was after a screening of Stan Brakhage's Dog

1. “During 1958, when I began making 8mm film studies of a psychodramatic nature.” See “I Feel Free” in this catalogue.
2. Stan Brakhage also studied at the same university a few years earlier.
5. See “My painting (& film)” for Galerie A (Amsterdam, 1989) in this catalogue.
6. Concerns a feature film that proved impossible to edit and finish. With regard to Illumination, Accident, see the interview (unpublished) between Hollis Frampton and Paul Sharits within the framework of Media Studies at Buffalo, 1973, and “My painting (& film)” op. cit.
structure whatsoever, unlike that explored in the New Novel, Jean-Luc Godard's films, or even in radicalized narrative deconstruction because his works did not attempt to shape any narrative of the New American Cinema, which consisted of shattering a dominant cinematic narrative own purposes and in his own terms, the approach often found in works by many other filmmakers Although painting fell within the scope of this dualism between abstraction and the figurative, Sharits's specific potentialities. In Ray Gun Virus, Sharits was no longer dealing with abstract film, even though this work consists of a stroboscopic succession of still pure color frames, accompanied by the recorded sound made by the sprocket holes as they pass over the projector head. He would go so far as to say that it was "a color narrative."3 It is a concrete film, in that it uses the medium's very materiality. He plays with the medium's basic components: the perforated filmstrip and dust specks in Apparition Motif. The film operates according to the rhythms and sequence of colors that make the experience of the film a visual exploration as much as a realization as to the specificity of the experience proposed. Does the film resist? Or does it stand in the way of its perception? The film offers us a peculiar experience, which consists of an exchange between what is being projected – what we perceive of it and what appears on the screen. The film resists the analysis of its experience during the screening. The Biker makes us pass from public space (the theater), to a private experience (the analysis of the phenomena of our perception of the film)," before bluntly slamming us back against the screen. We go from the Biker to the physical perception of the screen (volume effect) and from the screen to the Biker, but this return modulates the perception we have of both the screen and the Biker.33 This understanding of film in its entirety, as an image, an anticipated vision of film presented by Frozen Film Frames (Birn's painting3): Film, that film of moving images, resides in our memory, whereas painting presents itself immediately through all its elements. Frozen Film Frames
8. Program scores dated January 8, 1975, for the Whitney Museum of American Art, New American Film Series. 19. I made a few things for him but I don't remember them all, so I don't think I could produce a reliable worklist for doing things for him. I just don't; I'm not sure why. I don't think he would allow me to do it. I am beginning to believe that I had a large part in making the film I want to make. 20. Letter of May 20, 1967 to Stan Brakhage. 21. See in addition to Jean-Claude Michalski in the catalogue, initially published in Diir as empty screen. Robert Macfarlane, Malcolm Moody, Paul Sharits (Paris, Editions Valeurs, 1999). 22. An earlier film by these same filmmakers. Although painting was as uncomfortable because it was not even shown before being rediscovered in the 1980s, namely, Leisten (1951) by Gil Wolman. 23. In *A Theory of Film*, in *Film Culture* #8 (Winter 1963-64). 24. Program notes dated January 8, 1975 for the Whitney Museum of American Art, New American Film Series. 25. I made a few things for him but I don't remember them all, so I don't think I could produce a reliable worklist for doing things for him. I just don't; I'm not sure why. I don't think he would allow me to do it. I am beginning to believe that I had a large part in making the film I want to make. 26. In “A Theory of Pure Film” in *Field of Displacement and Other Projects*; published in Catalogue 3 of the same name, Albright-Knox Art. 27. McCall, *Line Describing a Cone*. 28. In a mid-November 1966 letter to Stan Brakhage. 29. This experience felt while watching a Sharits' film is analysed by Ralf Schmitz in *Animation and the Experience of Perception*. 30. The film's structure thus is a true beginning. It is a concrete film, in that it uses the medium's very materiality. He plays with the medium's basic components: the perforated filmstrip and dust specks in Apparition Motif. The film operates according to the rhythms and sequence of colors that make the experience of the film a visual exploration as much as a realization as to the specificity of the experience proposed. Does the film resist? Or does it stand in the way of its perception? The film offers us a peculiar experience, which consists of an exchange between what is being projected – what we perceive of it and what appears on the screen. The film resists the analysis of its experience during the screening. The Biker makes us pass from public space (the theater), to a private experience (the analysis of the phenomena of our perception of the film), before bluntly slamming us back against the screen. We go from the Biker to the physical perception of the screen (volume effect) and from the screen to the Biker, but this return modulates the perception we have of both the screen and the Biker.
scenarios clash with the flicker’s chromatic flash, which obeys a whole other logic of sequences. This regular repetition of sprocket hole noise anticipated the soundtracks of various films in which a/nome words were indelibly repeated, such as TOUCHING, Inferential Current and Epidotic Generation, and for the installation Sound Strip/Film Strip. But it is in Color Sound Frames that will directly provoke this noise by the rhythm, by varying speeds and with synchronous sound, of scrolling filmstrips complete with their sprocket holes. Inferential Current deploys sound processes similar to those used for the image. In this film, two strips of flicker film stream in opposite directions. Depending on one of the strip’s running speeds, the word repeated in each of the soundtracks produces blocks of swelling meaning, such as can be experienced, for example, with Steve Reich’s Come Out and Jemma Rain. The overlaying of sound loops, staggered or not according to their speeding up or slowing down, produces these effects, which distance themselves from what is percieved visually despite a processual similarity.

In Sears Catalogue 1-3, Dots 1 & 2, Wrist Trick, Unrolling Event, Word Movie (Fluxfilm 29), Ray Gun Virus, Piece Mandala/Eld War, Razor Blades, TOUCHING and NOTHING, Shattuck combined photos and illustrations with pure color frames. The confrontational dynamic between these elements is emphasized by the fragmentary aspect of the first films, which function according to an accumulation of short, distinct loops. These loops enabled Shattuck to establish sets of tonalities, chromatic sequences that produce effects of volume, and depths of contractions and expansions of the color field modelled by the flicker speed as much as by the dominant that distributes them. With these early films, he recorded the creation of emerging forms, their movements and speeds that depend, for a major part, on tonalities; some of the tonalities led to large forms, while the sense of movement seemed to stem from the recurrence of colors used over a duration. Razor Blades’ operas and closes this first series of films, which do not develop according to systematic forms or mandalas, as was the case with Piece Mandala/Eld War, TOUCHING and NOTHING. The recourse to a form that established a linearity running throughout the film allowed a loosening up in the arrangement of rhythms, according to pre-established geometrical expansions (which are also found in various sketches and preliminary diagrams for these films). Is it in this increase and saturation of the pulsation – may we speak of the variable of the intention? – that the fixing of units in TOUCHING, while in NOTHING the accentuated chromatic variations separate themselves from the figurative elements. These chromatic interludes, these irradiations, suddenly appear – just like the flashes that cause our perception of the mandala to vacillate, thereby favoring the immediacy of the chromatic assault. In NOTHING, the soundtrack shapes the perception of the flicker in a new way. With Ray Gun Virus, the roar of the sprocket holes brings about acoustic phenomena similar to those unfurled by the music of LaMonte Young or Terry Riley: drone. The word “destroy” breaks down into two parts, “de” and “stroy,” which suspend our comprehension of the meaning, and favor acoustic drift, if not to say unpredictability.

TOUCHING opens up the possibilities of juxtapositions between sound and image that are not causal or even processual. TOUCHING’s soundtrack has been constructed from five versions of “destruction” being said aloud and joined together without any pauses. As Shattuck himself notes, the word “destroy” breaks down into two parts, “de” and “stroy,” which suspend our comprehension of the word itself, and give rise to paratextual words – or so we believe we hear – like those shapes/images produced by the flicker. This sound repeated throughout the film matches the visual pulsations, although it slips away in the middle of the film, where silence reigns. With Word Movie (Fluxfilm 29), the sound of declaimed words seems to respond, precede and follow the streaming of certain words appearing in the image, whereas NOTHING juxtaposes distinct temporalities. We don’t see the immediate connection between a telephone’s ringing and the falling backwards off a chair. On the other hand, what we feel as an affirmation of the inherent potentials of a system that allows us to activate the sound outside the image, and vice versa. The sound of this film is episodic, most of the film is silent; we could say that, when sound suddenly arrives, it infinges on the image.

At the beginning of the film, we can hear a glass breaking, then the sound of liquid pouring into a container, and, at the end of the film, when we hear cows moo, we deduce that the liquid in question is milk. There is no causal logic between the sound events and neither are these linked to the visual. Sound and image have a confrontational, contradictory, almost surreal relationship.

We should also question the relationship between the texts – be they humorous (‘A-R-E-Y-O-U-D-E-A-D’ in Razor Blades) or trivial – and the figurative images, and how the verbal warnings (text on screen) and violent images (surgical operations, assaults, and sexuality) function. The slit eye reappears several times in Razor Blades (the two half-circles that do not form one of the film’s two screens), and in TOUCHING (the eye operation), echoing the recurrent image in Un Chien Andalou, and, later, 3rd Degree features an attack on a woman’s face, her eye, by the use of a lit match. We can see this face more easily in Bad Burns because the film specimen is projected normally, whereas the 3rd Degree installation has the projection pit by 90 degrees. In Razor Blades, a sequence alternates the faces of a man and woman with very brief shots of a piece of meat sliced in two by a razor, which is then coated with shaving cream.

In Sound Strip/Film Strip, the scratch on the sprocket hole is part of this same humor that plays with film’s capacity to produce visual illusions: “That can’t happen since the sprocket hole is just empty: there can’t be a scratch inside it.”

The trace of facial scratches in TOUCHING appears as a trickle of glitter, which is inappropriate to say the least. We are in the presence of a representation heightened by abjection. The scene’s violence is minimized and mocked by this blood that isn’t, because it consists of glitter. We are in the realm of “bad taste,” which is part of a “camp” esthetic that has appropriated materials and moods from other domains. References to comic books and cartoons abound (the light bulb bouncing out its black light in NOTHING). Comedy is also present in Analytical Study II. Unhinged Lenses, a specimen of worn out filmstrip vainly tries to pass through an analytical projector; the pseudo-educational film on how to wipe your ass in Razor Blades. This humor that makes light of bad taste is also found in the boxes splashed with colored paint, so it is in most of the boxes objects. Pair of Silent Shoes Covered in Plastic Spiders, Keys...

The mat aspect of the painted boxes’ colors, the juxtaposition of features in the boxes objects and the abstract paintings, and then in the “expressionist” works of the 80s, the chromatic juxtapositions, all combine to explore the limits of taste. Scenes of violence, either represented or suggested, are also found in the treatment of the filmstrip itself, be it by scratches or burns, or even both together in certain cases, as in Analytical Studies, Epidotic Generation and 3rd Degree.
This first 60' version was an "Introduction" to the (hop). Way of the titles the last 60' of the film is this section transferred. A pulsating mantra image is formed by the two contiguous images: the circle from alteration of preliminary table created virtual circular image and variations with enable a picture of the visual screen of the eye (getting back into the eye, to the real origin of the visual image). The half circles begin moving forwards and backwards at different speeds and the mantra gradually opens. Together cell division; imagine an opening and closing of any diagram, was an organic shape, and for each of the viewer's eyes. The circles more expensively to each other, one continually getting larger, the other continually getting smaller. The circles indicate the gesture of teeth brushing in (J) and (K); one half of the teeth brushing (J) moves on the left arm; in brash image on the left), the other half on the right; simultaneous with the set of expectations, diagonal vary run toward into each other. Each eye (J)'s cycle runs through the very "wish" phase. phases and phases flashes below each time (K) runs through its cycle. (W) is in constant configuration with (L), as patterns constantly alternating in positive and negative once forward while flashes of a pen in a (diaphanous) expanse of creative power over and over. UV is the inverse of (W) - passion, as (K) plays against (W) which optically move (W) with other page explorations (single letters, notes, marks, spread apart, and in almost exclusive quotations: A M E R I C A D E A D E A D K U R U Y). In (J) figure, alternately sets this female, relates in a highly formal space; in (S) the same figure(s) pointless in a new environment, a path is continuously adverted with an image of raw meat being sliced in half by a knife and then covered with a yellow tissue coating (reference to deep (J)'s strawberry shorts-sauce) which is stumped with glittering stars. In (J) is an interpretational leap, a highly personal act signalled as holistic, an allegorical ritual: at first this seems humorous, yet, through repetition, the mood becomes hilarious. The Okonosaurus is returned by (K) to which a face constantly and radically changes expression; the face, changing colors and alternating its positive and negative, is suddenly absorbed and then reverberated with deep (L). Into the positive-negative and an image of a man blushing his wrist and ever and over in interest with a small opening and closing its very eyes, the same approach; here, the face seems somehow connected to the arm and wrist being sliced. The cutting in (J) develops new possibilities with deep (K) which begins as a strawberry sauce but gradually becomes an image of a broken flower being surgically removed from the mother's womb. The same survey, from a different angle, in interest with words and a month opening in deep (L): a decorated circle makes visible, formally balancing the symmetrical strawberry aesthetic (of) and implying a future towards the opening northern section of the film. (K) contains two images of the cloistered circle and two the viewer head to the snowy world, the man who uses his teeth in a (J) to leave-brushing. (S) shows the man shaving in a (J) image, lower image of him shaving in (W)3000's an outline of nearly visual plane simultaneously matching; with shallow, blue, white in the (K) 's, "whistler's" voice and motion to "bliss": Fjord, yellow, off-white, brown, lavender wear, based on...
This violence, whose traces can also be found in many of Sharits’s paintings from the 1980s, is visible and made more distinct in the presence of a film. The epiphanies, in which he talks about Sharits’s anxiety, about his own anxiety. Aside from being interested in perceptual realities, perceptual thresholds and the possibility of creating temporal chords of color, a lot of it has to do with the projection of internal feelings.\(^4\) Knowing this aspect allows for a reading of Sharits’s work by adding an emotional dimension often overlooked by many critics more focused on a formal approach. It becomes more difficult to keep up with Sharits once the films become reflections or diaries of his anxieties (Brancusi’s Sculpture Ensemble at Tirgu Jiu, Figment, Rapture). The analytical and theoretical dimension was, of course, present in his work and in most of his films from the 1970s, but it was not so much his sole impetus. The autobiographical dimension was, however, far away, be it in his films or his paintings, the series Poseanu and Foscalo, which, though deeply abstract, reflected a life at that moment. At the beginning of the 1980s, this dimension came to the fore in his pictorial works where the subjects related to the events of his life, such as the assault when he was shot at point-blank range in a bar in Buffalo. The question of epiplany is recurrent; it becomes the subject of an installation and a film, Epileptic Seizure Comparison, whose traces can be found in a few interviews with Sharits in which the question of sound and music motivated a reflection on what film is and what film should be. For him, it was not a matter of establishing some synaesthesia or another, but of making use of musical models, and more precisely, of how the way music functions by finding “operational analogues” between ways of seeing and ways of hearing, and asking “can there exist a visual analogy of that quality found in a complex aural tone, the mixture of a fundamental tone with its overtones?”\(^3\) Understanding how a chord’s notes are arranged, how they follow on from each other so as to create a melodic fabric, enabled Paul Sharits to offer solutions with a view to film that operated according to elementary units of the filmstrip. The flicker clusters of still pure color frames created melodic lines depending on the intensity of hues, their duration, and their juxtaposition with the colors that preceded and followed them. A projection does not allow us to capture one color more than another in the way that the frozen film frames (which therefore serve as a notation system) do, but it does allow us to understand the melodies, passages, shifts, colored contractions and expansions worked on in this or that film. Sharits declared that a particular section of Declarative Mode resulted from the finale of Beethoven’s 7th Symphony: Such a declaration does not however mean that the film’s aim was related to synthesis. It happens that for brief moments in the film, musical rhythms served as a model for a section’s arrangement, even if it meant using the rhythmical structure of a movement or part of an allegro, etc. It is in this sense that we speak of partial synthesis. When a film or an installation put two screens in direct relationship (one in the other when it comes to Declarative Mode and Triple Light), it is even easier to grasp the musicality between the two screens (instrument), which may be in or out of phase, before joining together again to produce an image or passages, and the dissoning of one image into another. The melodic dimension of the flicker films is even more palpable in Sharits’s work because it followed a development that was often amended: the marginal notes. Watching **NOTHING** does not enable us to grasp the development’s symmetrical structure, even though, in the second half of the film, a familiarity with the rhythmical and chromatic lines being explored. Is this because the eye has grown used to, and impinged more easily, in the experience of the duration, the chromatic relationships that have already been presented? In this case, identifying the arrangement of a chromatic grouping and repetition are what give me to a musical dimension. Is this capturing of the musical element reinforced because, for the main part, **NOTHING** is silent, just as Declarative Mode is entirely silent? If we compare these two films with Ray Gun Vines, which juxtaposes the sound of sprocket holes with the colored, projected flicker, the purely musical dimension fades in favor of a visual experience that emphasizes the mechanism’s functioning: the flow of filmstrip in front of a shutter that brings about the flickering, and the projector head that reads the optical information offered to it. This musical dimension can be perceived more clearly in the flicker films than in those where the filmstrip is refined.
49. With regard to doodling, or automatic drawing, Len Lye demonstrated implicit film at this, directly scratching the filmstrip. See Len Lye, ed. Jean-Michel Bouabane, Roger Hettiarachchi (Paris: Prospective Center, 2000).
50. In his interviews with Gary Garrels, Shatits speaks about the final quality of the image specimens used in 3rd Degree.
51. In a letter to me in February 1988, Paul wrote that he had removed from film to video, and that he hoped to make ‘Ritornello.’ He wrote very probably ‘color field pieces.’ In video:

S:STREAM: S: ECTION: S: ECTION:S: S:ECTIONED escapes this prescription. It is not actually a flicker film, and yet the musical paradigm is forcefully affirmed by it. With this film, Shatits said he had finally come “to use superimposition, as a way of attaining both ‘depth’ and the possibility of ‘counterpoint.’” Later on, he would ask that his reader “not jump to the conclusion that ‘musicality’ is the primary intention behind the film.” The film’s organization is important because it requires at least four distinct sources of information: the superimposed shots of the river (which pass from six to none, looped 3 times), scratches (8 sets of three scratches every four minutes from the fourth), repeated words (numbering six, layered one on the other), and beeps and splices (the relationship between the beeps and the splices is modular). The film compares the filmmaker’s streaming with the water’s flow; it questions the intereval existing between the photographic recording, which creates the illusion of three-dimensional space, with the filmmaker’s two-dimensional physical space. The six shots of the river interweave in an effervescence of information flows that nearly let us single out any particular one.

When only one flow remains, we have the impression of seeing others. We have entered a realm to do with the imagination; a construction (as a figure). The first word repeated in a loop, like in TOUCHING: upon which, one by one, the others are spliced, initiates this figment. The repetition induces another sound effervescence, another flow about which we perceive the difference without, however, halting to note them; they are part of the information flow and the experience. An interval’s arrival on the scene is part of the proposition and reinforces it. Each set of scratches makes us look at the frame in another way, along with the water currents, and the relationship connecting these two kinds of photographic and graphic information. The scratch affirms the mediam’s fragility as much as its materiality; it is for this reason it has often been cast aside by entertainment movies and nearly claimed by avant-garde filmmakers. An entire archeology about the incorporation of the scratch as a source of information, and what is the relationship connecting these two elements (both in the figurative and literal sense) has been developed by artists and filmmakers, such as Isidore Isou, Maurice Lemaitre, and Carolee Schneeman, to mention just a few. 

One thing that is glaringly obvious in S:STREAM: S: ECTION: S: ECTION:S: S:ECTIONED, as is the case with Wim-Willem, 3rd Degree, and even Rapture, is that photographic quality matters little to the filmmaker. By photographic quality, we mean what is technically envisaged as the norm: good exposure, sharpness, lighting. In these films what is worked upon is not the beautiful image but the production of a cinematographic image, which is to say, an image that is only by and in the projection, an image by which we will induce thinking about the apparatus as much as about the mechanisms that allow us to grasp what is at play during the reception of these propositions. Herein we find what Duchamp advocated as to the participation of the spectator with regard to the composition of a work. These are the procedures that Shatits employed in S:STREAM: S: ECTION: S: ECTION:S: S:ECTIONED and which describe the relation to the musical; the predictability of the arrival of the scratches, without however knowing exactly their positioning, matches the increasing layers of declaimed words as much as, by symmetrical inversion, it recalls the diminishing and reconfiguration of the river sequences. The sound of the splices, which is not synchronized but staggered according to diminishing intervals, emphasizes both the implausibility of the system Shatits’s employs as much as the possibility of lingering at all kinds of intervals within a system. The scratches of varying thicknesses and changing colors sometimes set off leads in the image, the flows, partially becoming scratches or vice-versa, produce an overlap in the image’s thickness, between the back- and foreground. A fusion by extraction of the cinematographic illusion is produced in the course of a scratch, while others, like a Lye doodle, buckle and twist in order to keep the separation between the nature of the two filmed objects present in the image. At each splice, all the scratches disappear from a still frame; all we see is a black mask centered in the image, the beginning of a flicker is induced by the interplay of the splices in the river shots. The scratches and flows fit into one another in an amazing counterpoint from which emerge beeps and the scratches’ static, like a fleeting ritornello. Because of the logic of this film’s development is predictable, we can ‘explore’ those moments of particular tension in which the illusion of a stream of projected images plays with that blur of images: the projected filmstrip, the one we are actually busy watching.”
Frozen Film Frames Study: Declarative Mode II, felt pen on graph paper, 1976, private collection

Study for Score of Declarative Mode II, felt pen on graph paper, 1976, private collection
impensive if I wish to truly actualize my intent of developing a clear ontological analysis of film's many mechanisms and disunities). 102

We mentioned earlier that Paul Sharits’s installations require spectator participation because they are above all analytical. They explore the notion of projection streaming along with the conditions of how the work is received. Spectators question how the piece was produced, thereby enabling it to also be the means of what it puts into place. The work’s contents are not concealed, “they are its specimen.” It is because these works are open, can be entered or left at any time, do not have a predetermined running time, their compositional structure does not respond to plot development criteria, and their contents are immediate, that they require a commitment from spectators. As a spectator of the Dream Displacement installation noted, the sound layout in relation to the image induces a gap in the projection space, which encourages viewers to constantly move about. 103 What’s more, projection is spatially distributed, which reinforces the movement in the space. One must pace around the projection space to activate it. Although everything is present from the beginning, it is the moving about that enables one to grasp what is unfolding in the projected work. Each work configures the space it occupies in a specific way. 104 The images’ format, the way in which they fit exactly together, often reproducing a horizontal rather than vertical unspooling filmstrip, their relationship with the sound, which may be environmental (a sound landscape) or localized, renews exactly together, often reproducing a horizontal rather than vertical unspooling filmstrip, their relationship with the sound, which may be environmental (a sound landscape) or localized, renews

In Epileptic Seizure Comparison, we share the seizure in two ways, on the one hand we see and hear patients’ cries, on the other we hear and see a sound transcription of the alpha brainwaves of these same patients, along with a chromatic conversion of this same seizure, from the interior. Both screens flicker alternately, dispersing the seizures in a triangular environment that only adds to their intensity.

Epileptic Seizure Comparison revived the use of double screens, which were one of the permanent features of Paul Sharits’s cinematographic work – from Razor Blades, through Vertical Contiguity, Declarative Mode, Brancusi’s Sculpture Ensemble at Tirgu Jiu, and Tirgu Jiu. The double screen’s multiplicity of spatial configurations enabled him to contemplate connections that could activate the virtualities of film. Symmetry may have been what was explored, or the complementarity between images, or the relation may also, as was the case with Declarative Mode and Tirgu Jiu, examine mise-en-abyrne, and thereby question the frame and its boundaries, as well as the overlappings of the frame, as in Tirgu Jiu, which shares similarities with Shutter Interface. Some films became, like 3rd Degree, as much a study of the intimidated woman’s fragility and vulnerability as it is of the film’s; the theme had already been broached, but in a more formal manner, in Analytical Studies 2 and 4.

From 1982, Sharits’s film output began to diminish after the assault mentioned earlier, which nearly cost him his life. He returned more ferociously to painting and exhibited more often. His paintings’ subjects became more openly autobiographical and revived certain motifs found in his films: the nightmare in Ray Gun Virus is found in several paintings, of which Infection Plate is an example. His working of pictorial matter was more refined; paint was directly emptied from a tube onto the canvas, or applied by means of a cake decorator, the themes referred back to moments of destruction, infection, etc. Networks of lines creating superimposed figures call to mind certain cinematographic effects in which a delay, a lapse between seeing and perceiving is created. At this point, painting represented a new terrain for experimentation that film could no longer provide. Nonetheless, new directions were explored in film, among which the diary film dimension was fully assumed in Brancusi’s Sculpture Ensemble at Tirgu Jiu. This dimension would be extended further in Figment, whose form closely resembles a chronicle in episodes (serial), which enabled Sharits to discover new sound designs. This question of new sound relationships is illustrated by the project concerning Chopin’s mazurkas. During a trip to Poland, Sharits discovered this composition and decided to launch into a new project, doing tests by filming to the music’s rhythms. 105

A few weeks later he sent the score, which would serve as the guiding line for the film’s production, back to Józef Robakowski. Exhibiting installations required maintenance that Sharits would often have to oversee, making exhibition a draining task, a supplementary constraint that became enormous. The precariousness of his living situation led Paul Sharits to explore less costly mediums: video and performances, thereby reconnecting with the Fluxus spirit.

The moment has now come to consider his work in its entirety; we hope this exhibition and this catalogue mark the necessary beginnings.

Epileptic Seizure Comparison, and also 3rd Degree, portrayed Sharits’s personal history. Epilepsy was always something Sharits dreaded, and above all the fear of the being/being epileptic; or the fear of Being? 54. “Statement Regarding Multiple Screen/Sound Locations: Film Environments-installations” (1976).
56. See the description by Leonard Michelson of Epileptic Seizure Comparison; or that by Rosalind Krauss of Sound Strip/Film Strip, in this catalogue.
57. I am grateful to Mathis Suchon for alerting me to this title’s other connotations: to give name to the third degree. A phrase first heard in American film noir films in the 1930s. Paul Sharits watched all kinds of films; for his classes, he borrowed examples from all genres of film dating right back to Böck’s Vagabondage. A study of the relationship between Paul Sharits’s films and B-movies would be worthy of attention.
58. The experience is detailed in “An Artist in memory” by Józef Robakowski, initially published by Hallwalls 2004, for the opening of American: right and explained in this catalogue.