

**CASEY KAPLAN**

121 WEST 27TH STREET  
NEW YORK NY 10001  
TEL +1 212 645 7335  
FAX +1 212 645 7835  
WWW.CASEYKAPLANGALLERY.COM  
INFO@CASEYKAPLANGALLERY.COM

Liam Gillick

Phantom Structures

February 11 – March 19, 2016

Opening Reception: Thursday, February 11

Casey Kaplan is pleased to present Phantom Structures, an exhibition of new work by Liam Gillick. This exhibition consists of two bodies of work in which Gillick demonstrates the disparities and harmonies between the abstract and conceptual investigations at the core of his practice.

The first is a series of wall texts executed in pale, shimmering vinyl, which act as the framework for the exhibition. Since the 1990s Gillick's development of reappearing narratives concerning notions of functional and aesthetic exchange has become central to his practice, often forming the engine for a body of work. Varying from early statements of intent and written equations regarding the rationalization of production versus consumption to the suggestion of various mise-en-scènes, with references to late 19th century utopian writing, the works are a process of continuous reinterpretation. Gillick merges histories with an ever-shifting present, revealing a renewed outlook on his own work and the exhibition as form. Providing varying degrees of insight, the phantom texts gently guide the viewer through the parallel structures in the exhibition that exist as manifestations of a single thought or idea.

The text work *Afragmentoffuturehistory* (2002) comes from Gillick's rewriting of Gabriel Tarde's "Underground Man" (1905), which updated Tarde's provocative vision of a post-apocalyptic underground world focused entirely on philosophy and art. The work was also used as the title for his Turner Prize exhibition in 2002. *A piano and black snow...* (2010) refers directly to the artist's contribution to the performance-based exhibition, *Il Tempo del Postino*, in 2006. A Yamaha digital grand player piano performed the artist's attempt to play the Portuguese folk song "Grândola, Vila Morena" from memory - the song that played on the radio to signal the beginning of the Portuguese revolution in 1974. Black snow fell silently onto the piano while the sound only activated when there was an unexpected pause in the flow of the event.

The second component of the exhibition is a new series of abstract structures. Powder-coated aluminum and transparent Plexiglas platforms, screens, corrals and barriers are rooted in a questioning of the aesthetic of contemporary control systems. The works highlight a tension between the ideological norms of our built environment and how this quietly guides human behavior. The most iconic structures in the exhibition, a new series of Discussion Platforms, have remained essential to the artist's practice for 20 years. Beginning in 1996, these works designate zones to face up to the visual language of renovation, strategy, and development. Initially taking form as panels of Plexiglas in aluminum frameworks fixed to the wall or propped up by poles, in *documenta X* (1997) a large platform was suspended directly from the ceiling and became a transitional structure in one of the main exhibition spaces. In 2010, a large site-specific Discussion Platform was constructed as a link between a workplace, Centene Plaza, and its neighboring parking garage in Clayton, MO. Tinted glass panels swathe passersby with wide bands of color. Most recently in 2014, a large-scale multi-colored platform was installed at The Contemporary Austin's Laguna Park. Standing on the banks of Lake Austin it exists as a structure isolated from the language of post-industrial service economies.

Phantom Structures explores the ongoing relationships in Gillick's work between contemplation and theory in tension with the foundational logic established by his physical structures. By developing a language of abstraction rooted in continual renovation, Gillick's work endeavors to expose both the disparities and ties between modernist ideals of a refined aesthetic and the behavioral realities that result from endless development. Within this, the larger aesthetic structural framework of today, Gillick seeks to revisit the dysfunctional aspects of Modernism and provide a renewed approach to abstraction.

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# ARTNEWS

REVIEWS

## LIAM GILICK AT CASEY KAPLAN

BY Alex Greenberger

Through March 19



Liam Gillick, 'Phantom Structures,' 2016, installation view.

In the 20 years since he burst onto the international art scene, Liam Gillick has been loosely affiliated with the YBAs and the relational aesthetics contingent, but this British artist doesn't fall cleanly into either group. His work is more cerebral than that of other YBAs, and denser and more grounded than the relational-aesthetics adherents. So where does Gillick fit? The simple answer is: nowhere.

As this Casey Kaplan exhibition, titled "Phantom Structures," makes clear, Gillick's work was ahead of its time—more like what younger artists are doing today than what his mid-career colleagues are producing.

The artist's predilection for sans-serif gibberish, printed here in the form of vinyl wall text, persists, as do his Donald Judd-inspired Plexiglas sculptures. The pristine coldness of the installation evokes a dysfunctional office space.

Gillick has written extensively about capitalism, production, and consumption, and it's easy to fall into a rabbit hole of art theory when thinking about his work. One could spend hours pondering whether Gillick is referring to Constructivism or Minimalism, or whether his text works are intended to be critical of corporate language.

However far-out its ideas may be, this show feels very much of the here and now. "Phantom Structures" seems to reflect a contemporary kind of business: the tech startup. Consider, for example, the lemon-yellow, maroon, and pine-green Plexiglas sculptures lined up in the gallery, and then consider the fanciful colors that dot the offices of Google, Facebook, and Apple. The titles, too, are revealing: *Affiliations Screen* (2016), a tower of pale-blue pieces of Plexiglas, may refer to computer screens, while *Growth Elevation* (2016), a series of unevenly sized red rods, calls to mind a bar graph from a PowerPoint slide.

With its lack of electronics and screens, Gillick's work is fairly analog. It is now the job of younger artists to move Gillick's work in a more digital direction—for example, Simon Denny and DIS, whose Internet-inspired installations also mimic corporate offices unsuited to productivity. In that sense, Gillick's work has been predictive, and one wonders if there isn't still more to learn from his art.



Liam Gillick, *Afragmentoffuturehistory*, 2002, glittered vinyl, 57½ x 78 inches, installation view.

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# LIAM GILLICK

## PHANTOM STRUCTURES

INTERVIEW BY KATHLEEN HEFTY

Photography by Clement Pascal



Scorpion and Und et Felix, Installation view at Casey Kaplan Gallery, New York, 2012

*Organised, methodical, pragmatist. Form law to art school, Liam Gillick take us to his world made of art galleries and architectural models.*

For more than two decades, Liam Gillick has created installations and environments in galleries, museums, and site-specific locations throughout the world, drawing attention to concerns relating to production and consumption. His practice, in its entirety, extends far beyond the confines of physical context, consisting of an interconnected web of text, sculpture, writing, and curating preoccupied with the spatial and the social. The duality of his artistic output is no more apparent than in *Phantom Structures*, on view at Casey Kaplan Gallery in New York City through March 19, 2016. This exhibition of new work incorporates text-based works that respond to issues the artist has addressed and continued to explore over the past 15 years, presenting a framework that traces Gillick's varied positions since the 1990s in the form of artist statements, essays, and other texts. Prior to the opening of *Phantom Structures*, Kathleen Hefty sat down with Gillick to discuss the production process, curating, and his days as an activist in university.

KH For the exhibition you're opening at Casey Kaplan in February, as you're planning the process, how far ahead do you go into production?

LG Everything I do is based on material reality. I'm really a materialist. On the computer, I work with simulated gravity and address reality of weight and structure – in a really concrete way. I have a precise method when working on exhibitions. I approach the exhibition as an idea, rather than a collection of individual art works. I'm always thinking about the architecture more than I'm thinking about anything else. I make very detailed computer models of the space, no matter where it is – even if it's a garage in the middle of nowhere. It's a bit of a distraction, like when you end up reading the newspaper because you've used it to protect the floor when painting the walls. I'm actually just doing a task, which is pretty mundane, but it appeals to my brain. I start by making an architectural model and that's the time for thought and refection.

KH Production is an integral part of your work. Who produces the actual work?

LG It depends. If I'm working in a specific environment I want to work with local people because they know the working conditions – like I did in Istanbul this year. It also means I get to meet new people. At other times I work with the same person over and over again who is based in Berlin. I've worked with him for more than 15 years.

KH When it all comes together in the space, does it change?

LG No, very rarely. The work should be exactly the way I planned it while thinking alone. Occasionally, I'll do things where I throw away all those rules. But, I don't like to improvise. I want to plan things. I'm interested in planning as a concept and an idea, instead of speculation. Sometimes [in a gallery] I'll get there and the vinyl text people will come and say, "How high do you want it?" And I usually have to go back to my computer and open it up. Even if we're all standing there, I have to check my computer and find out, "Okay, so 50 centimeters from the ground." I don't like thinking about aesthetics. I like setting a table or making dinner. That's aesthetics. But I don't like the aesthetics of hanging an exhibition.



Portrait of Liam Gillick by Clement Pascal

KH Do you like to revisit the shows while they're up?

LG No. I hardly ever go back. I'm really suspicious of artists who hang out at their exhibitions. I know it's probably good for them and good for their work. I think it's because I heard about an artist when I was very young, who I really respect and admire – a much older artist. I was talking to the person who owned the gallery, and he said to me, "You know what, that artist comes to the exhibition every day and hangs around the gallery." And he said to me, "Never do that." And I've sort of taken it to a ridiculous extreme. Part of the problem might be something else. Increasingly I don't like the lighting in galleries. I find that it makes me really self-conscious. I feel uncomfortable. An exhibition is not for the artist it is for other people. So I ought to feel self-conscious in that space.

KH Do you think artists make better curators?

LG I just got off a Skype with three very important, very serious curators, because we're working on something. At one point one of them said, we need artists to help curate this thing we're working on because they're the best curators. I just didn't say anything.

KH Do you disagree?

LG I'm not sure. I wrote an essay about it last year, titled *The Complete Curator*, which is about the idea of the curator going beyond the demands of art. I just completed a follow-up titled *The Incomplete Curator*, which is more about the idea of the idiot savant curator – the kind of 'curator's curator.' I just think the thought processes are different. I think it's always interesting to see what artists think, but curating is also about the history of exhibitions and the history of ideas. It's not just about art. I'm curating a big show in Japan this year. It's the first time I've ever really curated something like a biennial. I'm trying to remember all the things that [curators do] that irritate me and not do them. So, the first thing I did was to go to Japan and take loads of photographs, and send [the artists] photographs that give a sense of the place and spirit of that city, then we will talk about specific locations.

KH When you started studying art, were you always drawn to spatial concerns?

LG No. I wanted to study law and philosophy so that I could become an activist. I had big teenage working-class delusions, and I still have them. And I even tried. I had a place at university and worked for a lawyer briefly, was an organizer for anti-nuclear campaigns, went on marches, and tried to ght the police – all that stuff. Then I changed my mind at the last minute and thought I'd go to art school, because I started understanding something about art as a critical space. [I'd] meet artists on these marches and I thought I don't really trust myself in the world of pure activism and the law. I realized enough to know at like [age 19] that if I did it the other way around I would never make any art work. Anyone who starts by being a lawyer and then decides to become an artist, they kind of miss the point. So you do it the other way around. You can always become an activist or lawyer afterwards. It's also why I'm often in a complicated situation with art which is dumbly political because my decision to make work was not related to the production of didactic art. I remain doubtful of the usefulness of showing the dominant culture the things that it already knows. While I think that single minded work is very, very important. It's not something capable of addressing the true complexity of our time. Some other unstable thinking is more interesting to me and maybe a truer reflection of what I can offer as a critical framework.

*"I'M INTERESTED  
IN PLANNING AS A  
CONCEPT AND AN  
IDEA, INSTEAD OF  
SPECULATION."*



Hydrodynamica applied, in saltwater: A Theory of Thoughts and Forms, installation view at 14th Istanbul Biennial, Istanbul, 2015

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NEWYORKOBSERVER

**THINGS TO DO**

**12 Things to Do in New York's Art World Before February 12**

By Paul Laster



Liam Gillick, Raised Laguna Discussion Platform (Job #1073), 2013. Installation view, The Contemporary Austin. (Photo: Dave Mead)

**Opening: "Liam Gillick: Phantom Structures" at Casey Kaplan**

A British conceptual artist who lives and works in New York, Liam Gillick returns for his eighth solo show at this gallery since 2003. Presenting two new bodies of work, the exhibition offers a look at the artist's conceptual and abstract investigations, developed within his practice over the past 15 years. The first component is a series of phantom wall texts, such as "Run to the nearest town. OK, I'm going to run to the nearest town" and "Shattered factories in the snow." These enigmatic phrases are interspersed with abstract sculptural structures, which consist of white powder-coated aluminum frameworks holding sheets of colored Plexiglas, which—much like the texts on the walls—redefine the architectural space of the gallery. Although they are pure abstractions, the sculptures are visually read in a linear mode, making the two elements flow together in similar fashion.

Casey Kaplan, 121 West 27 Street, New York, 6-8 p.m.

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**SERRALVES**



**LIAM GILLICK: CAMPAIGN**

FROM 28 JAN 2016 TO 03 JAN 2017  
AN EXHIBITION IN FOUR MOMENTS

This first exhibition in Portugal of Liam Gillick (1964, Aylesbury, UK) takes the form of an evolving presentation over one year that reflects Gillick's long-standing engagement with questions of process, participation, collectivity and decision-making, and of which his varied approach to language and the language of space is an expression.

In 'Campaign' Gillick presents a progressive overlaying of spatial and performative situations, including sound, sculptural and text-based works that have existed as early prototypes or sketches, but have never been produced on the architectural scale for which they were initially intended. In these works, Gillick poetically addresses themes such as time, history and duration, and the visual and spatial codes of the social.

'Campaign' is organized by the Serralves Museum of Contemporary Art, Porto and is curated by Suzanne Cotter, Director, assisted by exhibition curator Filipa Loureiro.

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**AO**

## London – Liam Gillick: “The Thought Style Meets the Thought Collective” Is On View at Maureen Paley

by O.C. Yerebakan

On view at Maureen Paley through November 22nd is a solo exhibition by prominent British conceptualist Liam Gillick, continuing the artist's vastly interdisciplinary practice mining fluid and interconnected social norms, and scrutinizing the overt or arcane methods that agents of society pursue in response to such dynamics.



Liam Gillick, The Thought Style Meets The Collective (Installation View)

A preeminent figure in the development of Relational Aesthetics, Gillick was included in 1996's influential exhibition *Traffic*, curated by Nicolas Bourriaud. Gillick, in his current exhibition, incorporates his earlier works from the 1990's with more recent pieces, delivering what he does best: orchestrating a united visitor experience in which works gain momentum through interaction. The pieces on view are often pulled from decades ago, yet share distinct qualities of being created in a collective action, tying to Gillick's current inspiration anthropologist Mary Douglas' interpretations of Ludwik Fleck, who is quoted on the press release via an excerpt. "Thinking is a collective activity" says Fleck, cementing Gillick's premise for his equally conceptual and engaging exhibition.

A broadcast from 1887 on the Subject of our Time, for example is a piece from 1996, employing a vintage radio broadcasting a text about radio broadcasting from a book written by Edward Bellamy in 1887, before this technology was invented. Next to such audial stimulation, Gillick introduces a text-based body of new works, adopting the striking allure of neon as linguistic element, pushing twists in language and perception



Liam Gillick, The Thought Style Meets The Thought Collective (Installation View)



Liam Gillick, The Thought Style Meets The Thought Collective (Installation View)

alongside the droning radio work. Abstract textual inversions such as “IN THE THOUGHT STYLE ‘S’” or “IN THE EPOCH ‘E’” shine on gallery walls as a part of a new series that is appropriately titled Discussion Platforms. The works make much of their attempts to define spaces and containers for thought, as if a concrete, almost numeral application to language could create new spaces for perception or revolution. Either way, Gillick’s point towards this thought is perhaps enough to actualize it.

Liam Gillick: The Thought Style Meets the Thought Collective is on view at Maureen Paley through November 22, 2015.

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# Wallpaper\*

## Disruptive art: Liam Gillick explores collective tensions at Maureen Paley

ART/ 16 OCT 2015 /BY EMMA HOPKINSON



*'An isolated investigator without bias and tradition, without forces of mental society acting upon him... would be blind and thoughtless,' is the assertion behind Liam Gillick's latest exhibition, 'The Thought Style Meets the Thought Collective'. Pictured: the bucket Gillick used to mix the glitter and vodka for his 'glitter floor' installation. Photography: Lucy Beech. Courtesy Maureen Paley, London*

Liam Gillick is an artist of context. His life's works have strayed from the ivory tower of autonomy and made the assertion that everything is part of something; that you can't see the one without understanding the whole.

His latest exhibition is based on anthropologist Mary Douglas and sociologist Ludwik Fleck's assertion that 'an isolated investigator without bias and tradition, without forces of mental society acting upon him, and without the effect of the evolution of that society, would be blind and thoughtless'.

'The Thought Style Meets the Thought Collective' is a sharp look at the way tensions and cohesion arise and diminish through the group production of creative work. Placed in Maureen Paley's gallery in Bethnal Green – itself a Mecca for disruptive art – the pieces on show span some of Gillick's collectively-produced work from the 1990s and new pieces he's crafted himself. Wander the works of one of the original YBAs and pick up his new book *From Nineteen Ninety A To Nineteen Ninety D* – a selected survey of the artist's groundbreaking projects, installations, methods, and practices. A solid chance to see the progression of a little piece of art history.

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Liam Gillick  
**Weapons Grade  
Pig Work**

01/04

e-flux journal #65 SUPERCOMMUNITY — may–august 2015 [Liam Gillick](#)  
Weapons Grade Pig Work

Aboveboard. I really am honest and open now. More and more. Since being out here. It's the place. It's bigger and softer. It's a better way to work. I've employed a bunch of people. Back where I came from the old cynics said, "I don't think you're being totally aboveboard with us." Aces in their places! That's my only response. When I shout that out these days everyone runs to their station and leverages their core competencies. That's what I want to achieve. So I can spend some time in my car moving around, sliding across town, aware that things are getting done. That's the way I've been doing it since I moved out here. Those old-school pseudo-academics are totally accluistic. Completely clueless. Across the piece we have a good set up here. The constant sun is affecting the entire project. We're aiming for efficiency improvements "across the piece," get it? Action. That's what it takes to really do something these days. Undertaking given tasks; putting things into practice. "Don't bother me while I'm actioning my deliverables." That's what I told the guys the other day. Whoops and hollers all around. It's full on here. Full action. Action items left right and center. Screw it. I have short-term goals that require a defined measure of work to complete. And that's what I am going to deliver. Basically a dynamic, proactive version of my very own to do list, 24/7. Actionable. Actionable. Actionable. That's the way it has to be from now on. So what if I clean my dashboard with a toothbrush? Action has to be taken at all times. Look, let's address things realistically for a change. I address things these days. I insist on it from the guys. No more "doing," "tackling," or "completing." I told them how these words nicely avoid making a commitment to which I might be held accountable. Semi-autonomy is the name of the game from here on in. "I will address all of your concerns in the upcoming weeks." Screw you and screw all your doing and making. It's a complete adhocracy as far as "work" is concerned from now on. A minimally structured studio where teams are formed as needed to address specific problems. You know what? Admin is written on my T-shirt. It's the word of the week. I told the girl who works in the coffee place. Political correctness already beat brevity when Secretary became Administrative Assistant. But brevity is back. "Get on the horn with my Admin." She stared at me. But in a real way. Look, we've all got to start embracing the trivial tasks we used to be far too qualified to suffer through. Adoption processes have to be enacted. People have to step along the path from cautious cynic to submissive consumer of my stuff. Aggressive mediocrity is the best way to achieve this. I had to drive back to the coffee place because I hadn't made my point clearly



Lucas Cranach's illustration of grappling techniques from the military treatise *The Art of Wrestling: Eighty-Five Devices* (1539)

enough. I told her. I am making a conscious effort to ensure that the bare minimum, and nothing more, is achieved. Get it? Now she will be impressed. In total “agreeance” with me. That’s all I ask for in the studio. A degree of “agreeance.” It’s a much fancier way of saying agreement, don’t you think? “Are we in agreeance?” More professional but with a sunny split that catches the mood out here. I want everyone to just air it out. To discuss issues openly. “Let’s get the team together and air it out this aft.” That’s this morning’s email to the team. I will be here all day. After a little nap it will be lunch “Al Desko.” The other day, once I had shuffled the wagon into its spot, I was amazed at the commitment around me. “I slept in so I’m having breakfast Al Desko.” Yep, that’s the spirit. The guys love me. They even made me a bumper sticker. “ALAP.” As Late As Possible. Get it? They love me. But I had to get serious with them. We had a little get-together at the Peruvian place and I made a little speech. I explained that ALAP is not funny – it’s a philosophy now and we are really moving along on it. Look. We are going to meet our deadlines at the last possible moment in order to avoid receiving additional pressure. I have told everyone here to just say to themselves, “I finished it last week, but I’m going to submit it ALAP.” Alignment. Consensus. That’s how we get things done. “Can we align on lunch orders?” “Can we align on production?” “Can we align for just a second?” All-hands meeting. That’s the new mandatory meeting for everyone here. Every morning, every evening. We’ve got things to do. I called from the car this morning. “Bob? We need an all-hands every morning and every evening.” Bob’s the only person I brought with me out here. A real alpha geek. He syncs all the devices and keeps tabs on the alpha pups. I realized that to keep up with the competition I would need six alpha pups in here for focus groups every month. They are all completely amped. They are so amped up about the new work. At first we just blew around some anacronyms. No one remembers what the letters stand for any more. Really useful. RADAR, ASCII, and SNAFU. I’ve been tweeting them. And the alpha pups are all on top of the best anecgloats. All those stories that make us look good and on the ball all the time. The main thing we are trying to achieve as a team here is a sense that we are animal spirits. Back where I come from some say we are victims of an irrational optimism that is driving us to risk our credibility on half-baked ideas. But I have a team that has been anointed. No one here can do anything wrong in my eyes. It’s not a time to anonymize anyone around here. That would just lead to anticpointment. Everything here lives up to the hype. I am all appetite – I told that to the girl at the coffee

03/04

e-flux journal #65 SUPERCOMMUNITY — may–august 2015 xLiam Gillick  
Weapons Grade Pig Work

place. My level of interest is off the charts. I am buzzed. I walked in the other day and shouted, “Don’t spend another minute on this shit until we get a sample of collector appetite.” Apple polish everything, that’s my new motto. Suck up and flatter some egos for a change. Back home they’re all armchair generals. I can take that. They might speak critically, but they have no experience in the field. They always talk “around.” They need to dialogue around my choice of work these days. Look, fire your arrows, kiddos. But if you don’t have any more arrows to fire, I think we’re finished here. Just give me an ask if you have anything to say to me. Stop making so many requests. That won’t cut it. I want to know where you all stand on the latest “collector ask.” Everything is an assignment capsule out here since I got the team really pumped. Everyone has a clearly defined job description. I told them after a long lunch: “Stop arguing about objectives and start handing out assignment capsules.” That got them focused. Goddammit. The pressure is on. I am suffering from an extreme case of assmosis. Don’t they realize how much sucking up I have to do? At this juncture my availability is going to be severely limited if people don’t start appreciating the degree of focus out here. Babylonian orgy? OK. You got it. It’s all a fucking bag of snakes back where I come from. Out here I can get work done. You can call it wallpapering fog, but that’s your loss. Call it weapons grade. Now you’re talking. Come out to the sun, stop testicutating about your pig work and start working the problem.

XXXXXXXXXX

Liam Gillick is a British artist who studied fine art at Goldsmiths College, London, graduating in 1987. His work deploys multiple forms to expose the new ideological control systems that emerged at the beginning of the 1990s.

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# The New York Times



## BARD LIBRARY TO GROW

The Center for Curatorial Studies at Bard College in Annandale-on-Hudson, N.Y., is growing, artfully.

A \$3 million expansion, overseen by New York-based architects HWKN, includes a remake of the interior of its library, while one of its big gallery spaces will become a new archive, designed by the British conceptual artist Liam Gillick. (It's the second artist-architect collaboration at Bard; another conceptualist, Lawrence Weiner, designed the entrance walkway 10 years ago.) The library will increase to 60,000 volumes from 30,000, and the archives and special collections will triple in size. "Ours is one of the pre-eminent libraries of contemporary art in America," Tom Eccles, the center's executive director, said. "This allows us to double the capacity of our holdings."

The expansion includes a major work by Mr. Gillick, whose commissions typically combine the functional and the aesthetic — free-standing walls of Plexiglas and seating platforms for communal discourse. At Bard, he has created slatted walls that allow visitors a peek at a colorful wall drawing by Sol LeWitt, "#475 Asymmetrical Pyramids (1986)." Mr. Gillick's own wall art plays off LeWitt's pyramids and incorporates found text from the curriculum of Black Mountain College in North Carolina, a school critical to the development of art education. "Mr. Gillick, more than any other artist I know, is interested in pushing art education forward," Mr. Eccles said. "He does believe art is an intelligent and intellectual pursuit."

The expanded Center will reopen this fall.

- GRAHAM BOWLEY

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## ENTERTAINMENT / ART

12 artworks you need to see at the  
Royal Academy Summer Exhibition

BY LAURA RUTKOWSKI

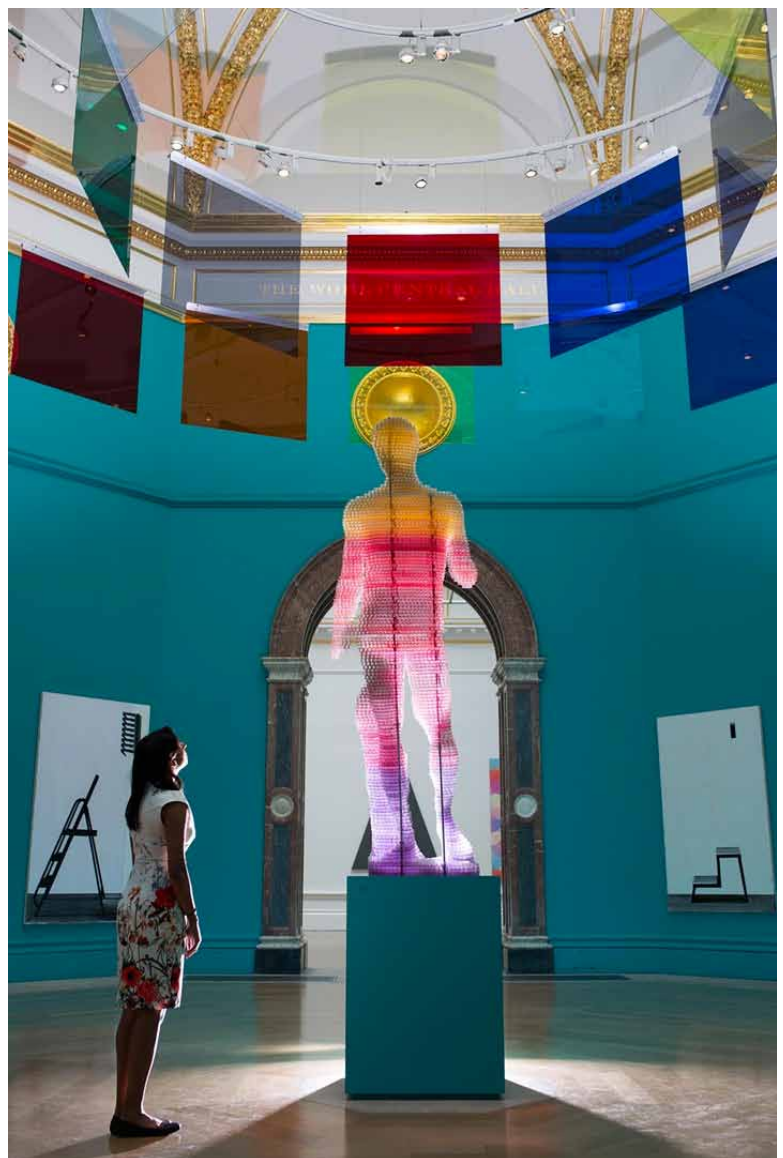
The Royal Academy's annual Summer Exhibition 2015, which has been running every year for the past 247 years, is back on. Here are the artworks you need to see.

### **Applied Projection Rig by Liam Gillick and Captcha No. 11 (Doryphoros) by Matthew Darbyshire**

Liam Gillick's Applied Projection Rig is reminiscent of Piet Mondrian's simplistic, primary colour-based squares. A rainbow hangs from the ceiling of Wohl Central Hall and overlooks Matthew Darbyshire's Captcha No. 11 (Doryphoros), a figure based on an Ancient Greek statue, but made from modern materials (multiwall polycarbonate and stainless steel).

Image: David Parry

Rutkowski, Laura, "12 artworks you need to see at the Royal Academy Summer Exhibition", [GQ British](#) (online), June 9, 2015.



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# MAGASIN

## FROM 199C TO 199D LIAM GILLICK

MAGASIN / Centre National d'Art Contemporain  
École du MAGASIN

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For more than twenty years Liam Gillick (born 1964, U.K.) has questioned the exhibition as a phenomenon and isolated the possible markers that could define it. These include the occupation of time, the role of the institution and varied forms of collaboration. In the 1990s the most prominent of his interests questioned the dynamic relationship between artists, curators and institutions. Twenty years later he is working with curatorial students to reanimate early works from the 1990s. The first version of this process was From 199A to 199B at the CCS Bard Hessel Museum in New York in 2012.

The exhibition From 199C to 199D is a completely new development that expands upon the original exhibition. Liam Gillick has worked closely alongside the students of the École du MAGASIN - Claire Astier, Neringa Bumblienė, Paola Bonino, Giulia Bortoluzzi, Selma Boskailo and Anna Tomczak – and MAGASIN Director Yves Aupetitallot for nine months towards the reanimation of a selection of key works from the 1990s. Particular focus is upon works that articulate changes and continuities in cultural, political and social discourse over the last twenty years. The exhibition at MAGASIN expands in different way through a forthcoming publication and the official website of Session 23.

A book will be published by JRP/Ringier that includes a survey of the Bard and MAGASIN exhibitions and includes essays by Paul O'Neill and Jorn Schaffaf.

MAGASIN/Centre national d'art contemporain  
Site Bouchayer-Viallet, 8, esplanade Andry-Farcy, 38028 Grenoble cedex 1, France  
T + 33 (0)4 76 21 95 84 F + 33 (0)4 76 21 24 22  
[www.magasin-cnac.org](http://www.magasin-cnac.org)

**CASEY KAPLAN**

121 WEST 27TH STREET  
NEW YORK NY 10001  
TEL +1 212 645 7335  
FAX +1 212 645 7835  
WWW.CASEYKAPLANGALLERY.COM  
INFO@CASEYKAPLANGALLERY.COM

# frieze

January - February 2014

Pierre Huyghe | Phillipe Parreno  
CENTRE POMPIDOU | PALAIS DE TOKYO, PARIS

Whatever happened to relational aesthetics? Theorized by Nicolas Bourriaud in the 1990s, the term designated the open ended art works that proliferated in Europe throughout that decade. Concerned with human interaction and the contingencies of everyday life, these convivial and frequently collaborative works broke with such modernist tropes as the discrete object, the artist's signature and the idea of radicality. Their aim, according to Bourriaud, was not to change the world, but to inhabit it in a better way - by stitching social bonds back together. By the early 2000s, however, relational art increasingly started to come under fire. Emblematic projects such as Rirkrit Tiravanija's soup kitchens were variously criticized for catering exclusively to the cultural elite, for perpetuating the status quo and for policing common space - criticisms that came to a head on the occasion of the 2008-09 Guggenheim retrospective 'theanyspacewhatever'. As for the artists, they apparently tired of collective projects and have been going their separate ways. The major solo exhibitions by former relational aesthetics practitioners Pierre Huyghe and Philippe Parreno taking place simultaneously in Paris - at the Centre Pompidou and the Palais de Tokyo, respectively - comprise both old and new works, highlighting the breaks and continuities in their output as a whole.

Bringing together 50-odd projects spanning more than 20 years, Huyghe's compelling Pompidou retrospective dwells on a number of recurring themes. His interest in what he has called 'reflexive time' or 'time for self-realization' (as opposed to 'mandatory' activities such as work or sleep), led him to found the pivotal Situationist-inspired L'Association des Temps Liberes (The Association of Freed Time) in 1995, which explored notions of unproductive time and a society without work. Four years later, *Le Procès du temps libre* (Free Time on Trial) illustrated these concepts with an assortment of documents ranging from Paul Lafargue's seminal book *Le Droit à la paresse* (The Right to be Lazy, 1883) to a found poster of a naked young woman lying meditatively in the grass. Elsewhere, the fragmented parallel narratives in *The*

*Host and the Cloud* (2010) materialized Jacques Lacan's concept of the split, decentred subject, while the French psychoanalyst's theorization of the interdependence of the real, symbolic and imaginary registers are evoked by neon tubes on the ceiling bent into the shape of Borromean rings in *RSI, un bout de reel* (RSI, A Piece of the Real, 2006). This is the very same figure traced over and over again by an iceskater on a rink installed in the retrospective's main space in *L'Expedition scintillante, Acte 3* (The Scintillating Expedition, Act 3, 2002) / *Untitled (Black Ice Stage)* (2013).

In addition to clarifying the dense web of interconnections that bind Huyghe's pieces together, the Pompidou exhibition also provides insight into the artist's working methods, most notably his practice of scoring or scripting real-life events or situations to generate ever new configurations. In the film *Streamside Day* (2003), for instance, Huyghe invented, organized and staged a celebration for a newly built town in New York State, complete with a parade, a concert and a public speech, which the inhabitants modify and reconfigure year after year. As the art historian Patricia Falguieres has pointed out, rather than the role of auteur, Huyghe privileges the unending conversation of collective speech, subject to continual renegotiation. The orchestration of life - whether human, plant or animal- was also the theme of *Untitled* (2011-12) the teeming environment he created for *dOCUMENTA(13)*. At the Pompidou, the film *A Way in Untilled* (2012) affords round-the-clock views of the original



Liam Gillick, *Factories in the snow*, 2007.

work, while its principal elements have also come back to haunt the show: Human, the dog with the painted pink leg, roams the space while Untilled (Liegender Frauenakt) (Reclining Nude, 2012), a statue with an active beehive on its head, reclines in an enclosed area beyond the museum walls. At the Pompidou, the bees and the dog co-habit with a spider, a stream of ants issuing from a hole in one of the walls and a variety of bizarre sea creatures housed in carefully designed aquariums, one of which features a hermit crab residing in a replica of Constantin Brancusi's 1910 Sleeping Muse (titled Zoodrom 4, 2011). Together, these creatures offer an ongoing spectacle that extends beyond the museum's opening times as well as its spatial limits. Portraying a world evolving in the absence of humans and at its own pace and rhythm, Huyghe's exhibition echoes the critique of anthropocentrism inherent in such branches of contemporary philosophy as speculative realism and object-oriented ontology. In particular, the autonomous reality it generates defies the participative modus operandi of relational aesthetics. As opposed to a retrospective in the conventional sense, Huyghe's show looks forward rather than back. Anywhere, Anywhere Out of the World, Parreno's exhibition at Palais de Tokyo, challenges yet another tenet of relational aesthetics: as opposed to Bourriaud's homely micro-utopias, it offers a giant spectacle of light, music, sound and image more reminiscent of a Wagnerian Gesamtkunstwerk. The show consists of a series of automated tableaux driven by the score of Igor Stravinsky's Petrushko (1910-11) played on Disklavier pianos connected to computers. Visitors are guided from one tableau to the next by means of a succession of sonic and visual effects. Ever since 'Il Tempo del Postino', the stage production and group show he co-curated in 2007 with Hans Ulrich Obrist, Parreno has been expanding on the idea of the exhibition as a sequence of ever-changing timed events. Yet despite its spectacular proportions and the occasional descent into cliché - as exemplified by the lingering close-up shots of a newborn baby's face (Anna, 1993) - Parreno's show offers many surprisingly intimate moments; for example, the gesture of including works by Liam Gillick and Dominique Gonzalez-Foerster, artists who were also part of the 1990s scene. No less moving were Parreno's evocations of such figures as Merce Cunningham and John Cage. Exploring the divide between presence and absence, How Can We Know the Dancer from the Dance? (2012) consists of an empty circular podium traversed by the ghostly footsteps of Cunningham's dancers, which Parreno recorded using underfloor microphones in their New York studio. An even more explicit homage, this time to both Cage and Cunningham, is concealed behind Gonzalez-Foerster's La Bibliotheque clandestine (The Secret Bookcase, 2013): namely, Parreno's re-enactment of an exhibition of Cage's drawings that took place at the Margarete Roeder Gallery, New York, in 2002. Every day, using chance operations, the staff at the Palais replaces one of Cage's drawings with one of Cunningham's, in such a way that this section will gradually become a show of Cunningham's work. The pair's enduring creative

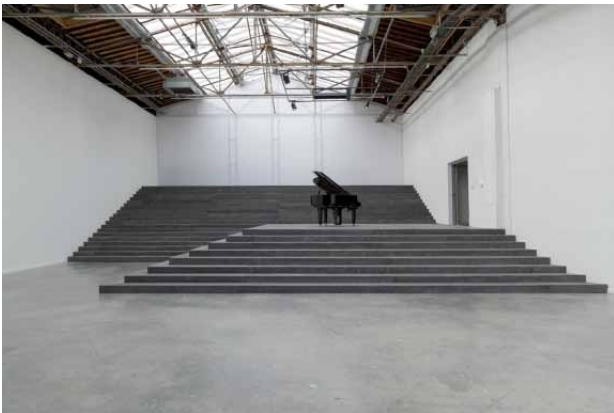
partnership was also an oblique reference to Parreno's own past - to the ongoing friendships, conversations and inspirational cross-disciplinary practices on which the '90s scene was based. The key to that time, Parreno seems to suggest, lay neither in relational aesthetics, nor in such oft-quoted 1970s precedents as Tom Marioni's beer salons or John Armleder's tea-drinking sessions, but further back, in the confrontations and exchanges between the different arts initiated at Black Mountain College in the early 1950s by Cage. Questions of lineage aside, the main thrust of Parreno's show lies in its equally insightful exploration of the shifting nature of contemporary reality. Tino Sehgal's Ann Lee (2011), an ongoing performance taking place throughout the duration of the exhibition, features young girls acting the part of the Manga character purchased by Huyghe and Parreno in 1999. Echoing the story of Petrushka, a puppet who developed human emotions, the performance bridges the divide between the virtual and the real. Other pieces evoke man's ongoing obsession with the simulation of reality: in counterpoint to the video The Writer (2007), in which an 18th-century automaton haltingly wrote out words with a pen, a modern-day robot in another part of the space is deftly reproducing the handwriting of the artist himself (ModifiedDynamicPrimitivesforJoiningMovementSequences, 2013). Eeriest of all however, is Parreno's film Marilyn (2012), which uses biometric identifiers to bring the film star to life. A camera surveys the suite in the Waldorf Astoria Hotel that she occupied in the 1950s, reconstituting her gaze. Meanwhile a robot re-creates the loops and curves of her handwriting and a computer imitates her voice, which can be heard meticulously describing the furnishings of the suite. Marilyn's almost palpable presence testifies to technology's near-perfect capability to simulate life, while suggesting that it might one day take our place. Huyghe's and Parreno's exhibitions are altogether different: one teems with life, the other is haunted by spectres and automatons. Yet they both question the role and place of the human species at the start of the third millennium. Such investigations might seem a far cry from the optimistic sociality with which their authors were associated in the 1990s, but then labels always omit far more than they include.

*RAHMA KHAZAM*

**CASEY KAPLAN**  
121 WEST 27TH STREET  
NEW YORK NY 10001  
TEL +1 212 645 7335  
FAX +1 212 645 7835  
WWW.CASEYKAPLANGALLERY.COM  
INFO@CASEYKAPLANGALLERY.COM

## ARTiT

### Liam Gillick Part I. ON A CERTAIN DAY IN A CERTAIN PLACE AND TIME By Andrew Maerke



Liam Gillick - *Factories in the snow* (2007), exhibition view in Philippe Parreno: "Anywhere, Anywhere, Out Of The World," Palais de Tokyo, 2013. Photo Aurélien Mole.

Born in England in 1964 and now based in New York, Liam Gillick works across diverse media, but is perhaps best known for his sculptural installations in which materials from the everyday built environment are transformed into both ironic, minimalist abstractions and powerful commentaries on the structures guiding behavior, and thought, in contemporary society. Extending his practice to architecture, graphic design, films and videos, Gillick is also a prolific writer of texts and books that inform his visual art projects without explicating them. Taking the form of speculative fiction or art and social criticism, the texts might contribute to the development of a body of work, but both texts and works operate in parallel to each other, rather than in a specific hierarchy.

Gillick recently visited Japan for the opening of his exhibition at Taro Nasu Gallery in Tokyo, "Vertical Disintegration," held from November 28 to December 27. As part of our annual special issue reviewing the events of the past year and looking ahead to the year to come, "Things Worth Remembering 2013," ART iT met with Gillick at the gallery to discuss the role of time in his practice and thinking.

I.

ART iT: It's funny you mention that you're staying at the Hotel Okura, the interior of which is like a time warp to a very specific period in postwar Japanese sensibility, because one of the topics I wanted to discuss with you is the idea of time and how it applies to your practice and thinking. From notions of historical time to labor time to parallel time and time travel, time seems fundamental in many ways to your concerns, but it also seems to be something that you work around as opposed to using directly.

LG: Yes. Philippe Parreno has an exhibition now in Paris at the Palais de Tokyo, ["Anywhere, Anywhere, Out of the World"], where he plays quite directly with time. For me, the problem is often expressed in a way that's more still or stable, in the same way that the Okura has a particular

atmosphere. This is partly to do with my placement of objects, as well as a conceptual element: the existence of physical objects rather than the expression of time in a clear way. I think Philippe is questioning the exhibition as a site where you might not know how much time to spend there – he is trying to play with exhibition time. My issue with time is less to do with the exhibition as a space, and more to do with what I'm thinking about when I'm working.

But I have to say my previous visit to Tokyo affected me very strongly – I took a lot of photographs – and that's happening again. So my certainty has started to disappear, which is good for me, but it changes something, and I don't know what that is exactly. I know this seems a strange thing to say, because obviously Tokyo is just another modern city, but maybe there are elements of inside and outside that get confused here. There's something about the design of objects in Tokyo and the particular trajectory of modernism that they reflect. I'm going through a phase of testing some ideas at the moment, so many of the certainties I had, or the areas that interested me, are not so clear any more. I'm trying to look more, to check and verify things rather than build a big conceptual construction and say, ok, this is a big set of ideas and here's the work. I'm going back to more physical things. I'm trying to be less in my head and more concentrated on the way things are made. This is a good city for doing that.

ART iT: This confusion of inside and outside could apply to the sliding door piece in the exhibition here, *Scorpion then Felix* (2012), which divides the two galleries. When I entered the exhibition space, the door had been left open, so I could see into the interior room and have some sense of looking through a pictorial frame, but without being particularly conscious of the relation between the door and the space beyond it. It was only when I shut the door and looked again through its bars into the interior that all of a sudden a scene materialized. Looking through the partial obstruction of the door completed the space.

LG: Exactly. I think what happens when I come here is that I become aware of the fact that I still have a lot to learn or understand. This has nothing to do with Japanese culture or history or architecture in a specific way, and more to do with how space is used and divided and how, when space is valuable – meaning literally that there's not much of it – new views are created through screens or barriers that play with the perception of space.

So coming back to your question about time – time or duration is normally the thing I'm really thinking about, but when I come here, I'm forced to think about space and deception, too. In Tokyo, looking at the spaces between everything, you're not sure how deep something is or how wide it is or how far it continues, because there's the effect of what Donald Judd used to call "real illusion," where devices are used to suggest that there might be something more or beyond, when in fact there might just be a wall, or a narrow void. So, for this exhibition, instead of coming to Tokyo, looking at the gallery and making new work, I wanted to stay away at first, then bring work from outside and start to think of new ways to produce something that will appear later somewhere else. My stay here will lead to a displacement. My time in Tokyo now will affect the exhibition I do in Germany next year.

ART iT: This recalls the scenario for your novel *Erasmus is Late*, in which parallel times coexist in the same space.

LG: It does. I was watching television this morning and saw the news about Caroline Kennedy's arrival as the new United States Ambassador to Japan. The Okura is right next to the Embassy and she came to the hotel for some kind of diplomatic courtesy call, but of course what's also happening there is that the hotel was built [in 1962] just before the death of President Kennedy, so there are a lot of strange parallels and time slips taking place. Maybe what I'm looking for at the moment is a subject. The experience of staying in the Hotel Okura, with all this activity and symbolic politics and symbolic architecture, turns me into a ghost in the room, because I'm invisible there – I'm just a guest. I have my camera out – but so do many others – and if I have a camera then it means I am only taking a few photos. I'm killing time. I'm standing there and people walk right through me. Yesterday all these diplomats and people were weaving around me and I was standing silently as if I didn't exist. It's a good place to not exist. People leave you alone. So it's a good time to think, and look for a subject.

ART IT: You often describe your works as parallel positions, and the way you describe the Okura sounds as if it's a gigantic parallel position. But in terms of your work, is it possible for there to be time in a parallel position?

LG: Yes, it is possible. It's a complicated thing to explain. I wrote about it in depth last year, but you would need to have the whole text to understand what I was talking about. The point is that this all depends on the point of view. Imagine you have parallel strands of ideas or thinking. If you look at them one way, there seem to be separate points, but from another angle ideas appear to intersect.

Maybe what I'm talking about is not finding a new subject but finding a new point of view. For the last days I've been playing with isometric projection, used when you draw a building with no perspective, a technique which also appears in older Japanese art. In the old prints, for example, the front of a building and the back of a building will be the same length, because the artist was trying to show all the information in the image with no distortion of perspective. Maybe what will happen with this parallel thinking is that the time component of my work will change if I change my point of view.

But in the end I'm not sure. I'm in a period of doubt about a lot of things. This is partly because I just started making a film with a French filmmaker who previously did some work with Godard and made a great film about surgeons. He wants to make a film about an artist who is played by different artists at different ages. I'm the middle artist, because I'm 20 years older than the youngest one and 20 years younger than the oldest one. We already filmed in New York, with me just talking, explaining, talking about time, and by doing that I had this sense, like in a bad movie, of opening a door and suddenly standing in the middle of a field, surrounded by space. So I need to decide whether to go back through the door or to start to construct a new way of playing with time.

Singular Roundrail (Red) (2012), powder coated aluminium, 5 x 200 x 5 cm.  
Courtesy Liam Gillick and Taro Nasu, Tokyo.

ART IT: You mentioned your certainties are starting disappear. What are these certainties?

LG: There has been an increasing pressure in the last few years that has come with the emergence of a new art history, a history of contemporary art. This history often looks at what was missed and tries to bring it back, to replay or reanimate something that happened in the past. There's a lot of reanimation and recuperation going on, which means saving something or reenacting it, and I'm thinking about this a lot. One response is that I'm starting to make a film about another artist, Richard Hamilton, who died in 2011. Instead of thinking about ideas, as it were, I want to look closely at the ideas of another artist. Hamilton had a lot of good ideas. He did a lot of work around Duchamp. In the 1950s he played a lot with time and he played with projection and the idea of the exhibition as a form. He also liked to collaborate with other people, but then I think at a certain point he felt that he had to look more carefully at the artists he admired or who had influenced him, and verify what they meant for him. He went through a long process of reconstructing work by Duchamp and also transliterating Duchamp's notes into a form that could be clearly understood. So I decided to make a film about him as another way to find an escape route. I think he's an interesting character, but of course he's quite central at the



same time. He's not on the edge. He's not forgotten. Certainly in Britain a lot of people think they like him, or think he's good, even though they don't know anything about him.

ART IT: Is the film going to be a condensed way of doing what Hamilton did with Duchamp?

LG: I don't know, to be honest. I have all this archival material, but I don't know how to start. I like the idea of making a film without permission, although obviously I can't upset him. It is a bit like repeating the past. Like if something strange happens or there's some kind of crisis, you recreate the situation or conditions that caused the crisis. I want to just look at this person and see what kind of film I can make. I don't know what it will produce, but something will happen.

I'm in that situation where, if you can imagine someone who's working and focused and writing or producing work on the computer, and then there's a knock on the door and they suddenly look around - I'm that person. I'm looking around, because I've suddenly realized that I need to check something. Some of it's to do with being physical, some of it's to do with watching and photographing, and some of it's to do with new subjects, using a human being as a subject, or a city. We'll see.

Part II

ART IT: Earlier this year you presented the Bampton Lectures 2013 at Columbia University in New York, which were collectively titled "Creative Disruption in the Age of Soft Revolutions." The lectures focused on four combinations of dates and themes: 1820 Erasmus and Upheaval; 1948 Skinner and Counter Revolution; 1963 Herman Kahn and Projection; and 1974 Volvo and the Mise-en-scène. Were the lectures a summation of a certain trajectory in your thinking?

LG: Yes. The lecture series is very materialist. It is about the history of materials and production and objects, and on that level it does have a lot to do with everything I've done in the past 20 years. The lectures will be made into a book published by the University, and the book is now twice the length of the lectures. I've almost expanded it too much, so now it covers too much. So I have to edit it, but I can't even look at it, I hate it so much. I have to sit down and rewrite it. It's sitting in the hotel room right now. But I'm just walking around, taking photographs of the floor. I thought I would do the edit here, but of course I haven't done anything of the sort. Right now the problem is voice, like what voice should I use, who speaks? That's something I have to work on.

ART IT: Previously have you considered time to be an actual material you're working with or, as in the lectures and Erasmus is Late, are you more interested in a speculative playing with historical time?

LG: A few years ago I would probably have given you a simple answer. What's happened recently is there's more of a gap between the abstract work and the text - a bigger space that is not accounted for - which might be connected to the deliberate decision to make art in a state of distraction. In any case, I decided to keep working this way and let the gap get bigger. In 2005 I abandoned the book I was writing, *Construcción de Uno* (Construction of One) - which was literally about the construction of an individual, and also about questions of production. This changed the way I worked - it allowed the gap between abstraction and the text to widen - so exhibitions would jump, between having a subject and not having a subject, without any consistent method while moving through time. That's basically what's been happening, although it doesn't really answer your question.

I think what I'm doing is checking some of my assumptions about the relationship between objects and time and the perspective from which you

look at them, and of course part of this has to do with trying to respond to the emergence of people agonizing about object-oriented philosophy and speculative realism and new ideas about animism. I'm an artist who works in a context: there's one group of people now who are talking about animism, and another thinking about objects and how they affect everything and how to look at something from the perspective of an object and so on, and I'm working out my position in relation to all this.

I know we think about contemporary art as this big matrix of different stories and directions, but the decision to be an artist is also a kind of philosophical position. You sometimes have to decide where you stand in relation to this or that. Some of my friends are taking clear positions. Pierre Huyghe has decided he's interested in a certain position, Philippe Parreno has decided he's interested in another position. And I have an enduring fascination with the problem of abstraction, the problem of the art object as a thing, and I don't know if I'm ready to escape to the cinema or the landscape. I still believe in the possibility of doing something in an art gallery, even though they seem so stupid to me as well. There's a certain feeling that galleries have that strikes me as ridiculous. But I still want to deal with the legacy of abstraction in relation to time and to other ideas, and the artist as a phenomenon and the genealogy of an artist, and also the question of "point of view" as an artist. In a way the title of the exhibition at Taro Nasu, "Vertical Disintegration," is about all of this. Vertical disintegration is a management concept where if you're producing, say, an airplane, you devolve autonomous companies to produce all the different parts, which are then assembled as a single airplane. The exhibition is not a collection of fragments, but it is made of irresolvable elements from different moments that come into one space. It's very much an exhibition about exhibitions, which maybe is a terrible thing to do, but sometimes necessary.

ART IT: The practice of vertical disintegration, or, specifically, subcontracting, was a major part of the Japanese postwar economy. Were you thinking about that in relation to the exhibition?

LG: I didn't really think about that. Japanese production is such an enigma for some people and always connected to simple misunderstandings about "other cultures." I have always been interested in what you could call the Scandinavian Model, on one hand, and not so much how the Japanese industry functions, but I do think a lot about Japanese structural components, and the innovations produced.

ART IT: What's interesting about the Japanese context is that you would have a mom-and-pop factory making widgets for a major industrial conglomerate in some warehouse in a residential backstreet. The scale of production was really skewed.

Liam Gillick & Louise Lawler - Exhibition view, "November 1-December 21" at Casey Kaplan, New York, with Gillick's Övningskörning (Driving Practice Parts 1 - 30) (2004) in foreground. Photo Jean Vong, courtesy Liam Gillick and Casey Kaplan, New York.

LG: That's something I find really fascinating, because the work I make comes from that kind of environment. It's like having a mom-and-pop organization, as it were. I work with the materials that are left over after you build the city, or after all the construction is finished. I make almost everything in Germany, which has a similar, although different, quality of structural production as exists in Japan. There are mid-level businesses there, which are higher up in the chain of production and bigger than a small business, but which still allow you to do a small number of things quite easily and at good quality. It was actually in 2001 after I came back from the residency at CCA Kitakyushu on my last trip to Japan that I started working this way. To that point I would always work in the gallery space, ordering all the materials and cutting and assembling them on site; the gallery was the site of production for me. After Kitakyushu I went straight to Zurich to make an exhibition there, and worked in my normal way, but when the exhibition was finished I thought, I will never work this way again, I need to change the way I work. I don't know why I had to change it, but I found someone in Germany to work with and have continued to do this ever since. Something happened while I was in Japan that made building work in a gallery seem stupid and meaningless. Maybe it was from seeing what you describe, seeing different scales of production in one place, which is much more evident in Kyushu than in Tokyo, because you have different industries each nested inside each other like a doll within a doll within a doll.

In any case after Japan in 2001 I decided I wanted to make use of the potential of production in Berlin at the time, which was connected to the rebuilding of the whole city. I could get anything I wanted done by pulling out little strands and pieces from this enormous reconstruction process.

ART IT: Are the materials literally taken from construction sites?

LG: No, they're taken from the various distribution sites around Germany. Everything is kind of new, but extra. The material for the black piece downstairs on the wall [Extended Regression (2013)] - those specific



aluminum extrusions - were made for the façade of a big building in Berlin but weren't used, so I bought all of it and then started to make work with it. There's something about the different size of businesses in Germany, with these different levels, that means you can find resources in different places. Materials don't disappear. They get moved from a big situation to a slightly smaller one, and then I take it out and bring it to an even smaller situation.

ART IT: I saw the video documenting the installation of your collaborative exhibition with Lawrence Weiner at M HKA in Antwerp, "A Syntax of Dependency" (2011), which includes interviews with the staff of the flooring company that produced and installed the linoleum mats used in the work. This also evokes the German situation. It brings up the question, what is the economic scale of possible positions?

LG: I don't know. This is what I've been thinking about, and it's very confusing at the moment. On my way here this afternoon I was thinking, maybe I need to address the question of scale. Maybe that's part of the problem. There is a problem about scale that gets lost in the way people talk about art now.

Today I was in the area of the Mori Tower and there were these little paths and parks caught between these huge towers, creating sudden shifts of scale. I don't know what I was thinking, but I realized something. So I'm thinking much more about physical things at the moment rather than time. Scale and expansion and contraction and numbers of aspects of how things are produced in opposition to time.

I just made a film in Texas for an exhibition with the Contemporary Austin. In this park in the middle of nowhere, I made a standing form about 90 feet by 25 feet [Raised Laguna Discussion Platform (Job #1073) (2013)], and then I shot the film in the park. The film, [Margin Time 2: The Heavenly Lagoon (2013)], speaks about questions of time and production in a basic way. I mainly filmed trees and flowers, and then divided the footage into four sections, each with a different soundtrack. The first soundtrack is the sound of microprocessors being produced - which actually sounds quite soft and natural, with a lot of soft clicks and whirs. The second part is from an interview with Lawrence Weiner, when he was 29, that took place while he was working on the exhibition "When Attitudes Become Form," with the interviewer asking questions like, what does it mean to produce something, and how does it exist in your head, or anywhere, or does it change if you move it from one place to another. The third part is the sound of pilots going through the pre-flight systems check. You hear a little speaking, but mostly you hear all the emergency sounds and phrases like "wind sheer" and "50 feet," and then the engines start up. And then the last section is Gilles Deleuze talking about territory and deterritorialization, but with a big reverb on his voice, so that it's like a voice of authority, without any subtitles. Basically, for an average American audience, they hear a French guy speaking with a big echo, and he can't breath properly, because he smokes too much, but I wanted them to hear the voice as a thing in itself, which sounds so beautiful with the reverb.

So when you talk about these other projects, they are important in a way, but they definitely have the sense of being a project. What I've been doing is connected to unpacking or taking things apart and on some level being much clearer, and on another level changing my approach, whether by working with other people, using another artist as a subject, or doing collaborations with older artists, as with Lawrence Weiner at MuKHA and now with Louise Lawler at Casey Kaplan Gallery in New York. I like this idea of working with people who are a little older – partly because I can now – and they are prepared to do it - but also I am aware that we will only do it once. It's the same with the Richard Hamilton film I am going to make. It's just my way of finding a way to recharge some ideas without pretending to be 25.

III.

ART iT: The design of the door downstairs, with a frame filled in by vertical slats, is similar to the sliding doors made of wood that are often used in Japanese restaurants. Was that part of the inspiration for the work?

LG: Not consciously, but in fact it's possible there is a connection. I am interested in non-fundamental, extra architecture, the thing that is a canopy or a screen or a door that is not completely closed but only symbolically closes or alters the space. That interests me regardless of Japan. For instance, I did something similar in the German Pavilion at the Venice Biennale in 2009. In the entryway to the pavilion I placed these blinds made of vinyl, which are usually meant to stop flies from entering, to create a zone without completely closing it. It's about seeing people through something, creating spaces of semi-autonomy rather than a space that is completely autonomous.

I generally work in a really material way. I have an idea and sit down with technical paper or at the computer and start to make models of the architecture, and then I start to work within the actual architecture. It's a really specific way of working.

ART iT: In your writing you've been critical of the idea of transparency, and yet in your works you often use transparent materials.

LG: In my writing I refer to transparency more in a political sense. Transparency is the physical manifestation of the democratic lack in neoliberalism. We are told the banking system or financial regulation has to become more transparent in order to liberalize it somehow. Right now I think all these things are changing and shifting a bit, but in the past I was worried about the idea of art that suggested an equal exchange. I want things to be grayer than that, even as my work is becoming less gray and more precise. There's a more precise battle between abstraction and the texts taking place now. But that doesn't mean I am more interested in art as a set of certainties.

ART iT: For me there's a duality to your work. On the one hand it appears to be quite benign, on the other it appropriates the logic of the barrier, the kind of device that is built into the everyday environment as a means to restrict behavior.

LG: Absolutely. I've been looking at Dan Graham's work a lot more because I have so much in common with his interests and I have to make some decisions about that relationship. In fact, what I want to do is start talking to him. I saw a very good improvised exhibition of his work in Porto recently.

I think with both of us there's this feeling that you should address questions in the culture that are not exactly ambient but are at least evocative rather than didactic. There's also the problem of the viewer, the human relationship to the work, which I think Graham has always dealt with very clearly: the viewer has a very clear perspective, but it's also fucked by the reflection of the materials and so on.

I'm wondering whether or how to deal with this question of the human relationship to art. I'm thinking about Philippe Parreno's exhibition in Paris, which is literally a journey through a series of different experiences. With this exhibition, Philippe has clarified something very strong about his work, and it means I have to rethink my work as well.

I work in relation to other artists, not just in relation to a space or a city or so on. Philippe and I have started making a new film together using CGI animation and will introduce a number of people we have worked with in the past. We are working initially with an animator who works on big budget

films in French cinema to create visualizations of a series of settings or mise-en-scènes. Two of the early visualizations are inspired by the first night I ever spent in Tokyo, but now reworked on an extreme level so that the city looks like a cross between Venezuela and Japan - urban highways intersecting all over the place and half-finished buildings with people living in them. As a project, it sounds basic, but it's going to start to produce something.

ART iT: Cerith Wyn Evans was also deeply affected by his first trip here. He said of Tokyo, "the matrix of the codes that the city was performing was devastating."

LG: I can imagine. You can see it in his work. It sounds like I'm saying this to be polite because I'm a visitor, but that's not really the case for me. It's interesting to work in a place that was completely remade within the lifetime of my father. Yesterday I spent an hour walking around the area near the Okura, and I realized that every single thing I saw had been built since 1950, or even 1970. That has very strong implications. It's like somebody took lots of human energy, condensed it and stored it in this physical production. There's nothing magical about this process, but in a certain way, it's really powerful.

The areas I'm interested in have always been middle-area questions around renovation, compromise, collectivity without communism, organization of production that involves individual work and team work, and when you come here, even in the downtown area, you see this all locked into physical form. So that's what I mean: I'm only affected by being here in relation to other objects. It's not about Japanese culture; it's to do with the physical manifestation of human energy into condensed physical object form. Raised Laguna Discussion Platform (Job #1073) (2013), painted steel, 304.8 x 406.4 x 1096.6 cm. Installation view at The Contemporary Austin. Photo David Mead, courtesy Liam Gillick and Casey Kaplan, New York.

ART iT: There are certain repeating forms that appear in your works. How do you understand this idea of repeating form when each work is also given a specific title at the same time?

LG: I don't have a good answer. Sometimes there are specific reasons why I use certain forms, and they have a particular function, but they're not based on any system thinking. Some of it is about asserting a type of expression or set of forms that needs to be restated and refined in order for it to communicate.

One of the works here, [Suspended Agreement (2010)], is an advanced version of earlier versions of my "Discussion Platforms." The first versions were made alone and very quickly and just hung from the ceiling. I couldn't have made this advanced version in the beginning. There's nothing fundamentally different - it's a similar production technique - but there's something about it that satisfies me in terms of what it's doing now. It occupies a type of physical space that I felt needed to be occupied.

And it does so using a restricted number of forms: the "T" shape and the "L" shape. These are my shapes – aluminum extrusions. For example, in working with three-dimensional digital software, whenever you open a new file the program automatically gives you a sphere, a square and a triangle as the fundamental forms to work with. I have always liked working with the non-fundamental forms, and the "T" and the "L" are the first variants of the fundamental form of the square. You remove two sides, or you put two lines in relation to each other, but they don't have the supposed "truth" of the cube. They are essentially the shapes that are used to make windows or storefronts, temporary construction, office spaces. And it's the same material, too. It's hard to do certain things with these shapes, which are what you could call secondary forms, because they're not closed like a square. But you can make them sit without fixing them together: there are only four screws holding the whole piece together here. These works are always meant to go in relation to something. They're not really meant for a white room. The "T" and "L" are relational rather than fundamental.

So that's where these things come from, and I'm still satisfied with them to a point, but I'm taking some time now to examine other things, like the idea of the artist, the idea of contemporary art and also collaborative thinking, while at the same time trying to keep alive something that's to do with my version of abstraction, which is a very material, relativistic, parallel way of doing things.

ART iT: You use abstraction both as something that is non-representational

and as something that has been extrapolated from a complex set of information.

LG: Exactly. In the new book I am publishing of my Columbia University Bampton Lectures there are two early chapters, one on abstraction and one on parallelism. In a way they say the same thing, but one's referring to where you are placed in relation to ideas and the other is about where things are placed in relation to other things. I started using the word abstraction at some point in relation to physical work because I wanted to remove some of the narrative and storytelling aspect from the work, or the feeling that it has a designated use. I started using it partly to be annoying or irritating. But it's true that I often use the same term, or a similar process, to talk about two completely different things.

ART IT: The "Discussion Platforms" are suspended from the ceiling, which to me suggests an inverted or upturned space of discussion. Is this what you had in mind for the concept?

LG: Absolutely. For me it creates a sort of pressure rather than liberation. I always have the feeling there's something above me, a discomfiting presence. The term "platform" implies that you should be standing above it, not underneath. It was possibly influenced by reading *The Tin Drum* when I was young. In the book there's the part where the boy sits beneath the seats during a Nazi rally and discovers a space of potential away from the corruption of ideology taking place above. It becomes for him a protected space that acts as a screen. If you've ever sat beneath a stadium, there's something very profound about that feeling of being underneath, hidden, and free while getting glimpses of the action and hearing the mood of the crowd.

ART IT: Ideology is of course itself a "platform" upon which discussion takes



place, so being beneath the platform suggests a space where you can see the structure of ideology and how it supports what is going on above.

LG: Yes. That was the original idea. It designates a space within which you can think about the idea of these things. You don't have to actually do it. It's not an instruction to behave a certain way or actually do something. That's the basis of my frustration about how people have tried to write about participatory art or relational aesthetics, which misses the aesthetics part and only focuses on the relational part, for example, or misunderstands the differences in certain participatory practices and assumes that there is a designated action that is even across time, space and ideology.

ART IT: Is it accurate to say, then, that your works emerge from a kind of corporate aesthetic, or an aesthetic of control, as both a residue and a commentary on that aesthetic?

LG: In a way, although I was also thinking about renovation, and how spaces of culture are designed or thought about. The Mori Tower hosts a museum but also has offices, and in fact many museums today are indistinguishable from office buildings. The Museum of Modern Art in New York has the same flowers, the same front desk, the same women in black clothes, the same atrium as a big corporation. I wasn't thinking about corporate things as such, I was thinking more about how they have merged.

ART IT: But the architecture of control is increasingly integrated into every facet of our lives now through things like proprietary software connecting our smart phones to our computers, determining how we communicate, how

we relate to our photos and music and so on, and it seems that with each upgraded device it gets harder and harder to work around that proprietary structure.

LG: There are probably workarounds, but you need to work harder to do it. With my work, when we're talking about these physical things and not the conceptual or written aspects, it is quite sinister in a sense. The work seems to be attractive but of course the door that evokes a traditional sliding door is still made out of painted aluminum, and the handrail [Restricted Roundrail (White) (2012)] is placed too low, so it might have some other function. In the apparently formalistic arrangement of these things, I always think of them as though they have some kind of electrical function, as though they're used to disperse heat: they are the disguised element of something that has an environmental or channeling function. So I think that there is a way to talk about my work in relation to physical things and to look at what you're looking at and say, "Here is a relationship between this specific thing and other things in the world." But most people don't do it because they don't want to, or they think it's maybe not relevant, but it absolutely is relevant. So I agree with you, and that's why I spent so much time today sitting and looking at disguised forms of control. And of course Japan's particularly good at this, so in these corporate environments you don't really see any control system when in fact there are all these subtle things taking place within the built structure of the place. I think most tourists would single out the man with the white gloves who tells people politely to avoid the hole in the street. But that's not control. That's service, or a legacy of class and identity, but not really control. What's more interesting is how the semi-public space is arranged around the base of a building so that it is completely abstracted away from a sense of control, but still affects the way people behave much more than the guy with white gloves pointing at things, who's just doing a job.

ART IT: With the door piece, the other immediate association is the prison cell.

LG: Absolutely. So at the moment I have to decide how to proceed. Now what do I do? I would say that these works are getting to the point where this is just about the way they should be. They are about as big as they should be for this kind of space to make it work, and in this exhibition we are seeing an advanced expression of this kind of work. For my exhibition in Berlin in the spring I will strip away all the surface and color from everything, just to see what happens. It's part of the same process I described to you before. Take the surface off; make the artist a subject; collaborate with people who were important for you when you were young. Play with time in a new way. It's a process of taking apart a lot of things and laying out the different elements to see what you have.

ART IT: "Horseness is the whatness of all horse." What does that mean to you now?

LG: I like it because it's an expression of Irish genius – the quote comes from *Ulysses* by James Joyce. And it's a very modernist expression, but of course it has deep philosophical roots: the quality of a horse is its horseness. I like it because it seems to answer a particular question through a quasi-philosophical statement, but it evokes images in your head that are somewhat stupid or strange. It keeps bringing you back to the horse. The line comes from Joyce, but for me it also connects to Tarkovsky, and the part in the film *Solaris* where the protagonist is bidding goodbye to earth, because he has to go on this long journey, and there's a few points where you see a horse, and that horse has the quality of a horse - it has this fundamental quality of horseness. Of course the planet of *Solaris* is actually a kind of sentient memory machine which plays with the reiteration and revitalization of memory, and the horse is a thing, an essence and an entity. So in a way the phrase is a great mockery of early modernist thinking and its puritanical focus on material things, because it's about a horse and beyond a horse at the same time.

It's really weird that you mention this work, because as I was walking here I thought I heard horses, and then I realized of course there are no horses in Tokyo, and then I had this idea of riding to the gallery on a horse, and leaving it tied up outside or something like that. So, there you go. It's that combination. It's a great statement. The thing is the thing, or the thingness of the thing, but it's taking an abstraction and turning it into a physical, contradictory image. It's a stupid thing to say and it's brilliant at the same time. I think I need a bit of that every day.

**CASEY KAPLAN**

121 WEST 27TH STREET  
NEW YORK NY 10001  
TEL +1 212 645 7335  
FAX +1 212 645 7835  
WWW.CASEYKAPLANGALLERY.COM  
INFO@CASEYKAPLANGALLERY.COM

# The Contemporary Austin

LIAM GILLICK

September 21, 2013 – January 5, 2014

Laguna Gloria  
The Jones Center



A sparse aesthetic vocabulary belies conceptual complexity in the work of Liam Gillick (British, born 1964), in which distilled elements of utopian modernism, power ideology, social interaction, and corporate production make up a constellation of open-ended proposals. His work references function, then departs from it; mines architecture, but prioritizes aesthetic; suggests known structures, only to abstract them; proposes narratives, then fragments, rearranges, and corrupts them. Alluding to iconic mid-century modernist architectural forebears, such as Mies van der Rohe and Le Corbusier, and the Minimalist sculptors who followed shortly thereafter, such as Donald Judd and Carl Andre, Gillick's three-dimensional objects tend to be industrially fabricated in materials such as steel, aluminum, and Plexiglas and to take the shape of autonomous platforms, shelves, cubes, and architectural interventions on walls, floors, or ceilings. Emerging from the dynamic arts program at Goldsmiths College, University of London, in the late 1980s, Gillick expanded into social sculpture, cultural critique, and "Relational Aesthetics," the critic Nicolas Bourriaud's term for art within a context of relationships. Gillick's process of creating and producing his commissioned objects is an intellectual and participatory one,

catalyzing collaboration and engagement with both the commissioning institution and the public. His sculptural works—in combination with his excursions into writing, architecture, design, film, and music—propose a network of phrases, sentences, and paragraphs that critique a set of idealistic objects and ideas implicit in our lived environment.

For his two-part exhibition at The Contemporary Austin, Gillick has taken on the rich and complex identity of Laguna Gloria, a site with a historic Italianate villa and twelve acres of lush, semi-wild landscape bordered on three sides by water. At the Jones Center—on view in the video gallery and as audio projecting from the first-floor soundscape—is the second in a series of films the artist has produced dealing with specific architectural sites toward the construction of new, speculative narratives addressing territory, power, and change. At Laguna Gloria, Gillick has created a multicolored, powder-coated steel platform structure, with the participation of the museum as well as local architects, engineers, and fabricators, installed at the base of the Driscoll Villa stairs on the shores of Lake Austin. With its colorful fins and geometric forms, the work is a surprising architectural insertion into

*Liam Gillick (British, born 1964 in Aylesbury, U.K.) currently lives and works in New York. He is perhaps best known for a traveling retrospective titled *Three Perspectives and a Short Scenario*, shown at the Kunsthalle in Zurich, the Witte de With Center for Contemporary Art in Rotterdam, and the Museum of Contemporary Art in Chicago in 2008-09, and for his installation in Germany's official Pavilion at the 53rd Venice Biennale*

**CASEY KAPLAN**

121 WEST 27TH STREET  
NEW YORK NY 10001  
TEL +1 212 645 7335  
FAX +1 212 645 7835  
WWW.CASEYKAPLANGALLERY.COM  
INFO@CASEYKAPLANGALLERY.COM

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

**November 1 – December 21**

Casey Kaplan is pleased to present an exhibition by Liam Gillick and Louise Lawler. Lawler's work provides a critical examination of the way art is displayed, documented and reprocessed. Gillick uses many strategies to examine the tension between modes of production and the legacy of abstraction.

This exhibition marks the first time that Gillick and Lawler have shown together, and is the result of a simple idea: to have two artists show alongside one another in the same space. Here, Gillick and Lawler operate in parallel – Lawler occupies the walls and Gillick hangs his work from the ceiling. The dates of the exhibition determine its parameters. The artists then produced two extensions – one via text and the other through images - that both address time without resorting to time-based media. Working with others is vital to both artists' practices, producing a welcome shift in their individual focus and concerns. Lawler has worked most notably in the past with Allan McCollum and Sherrie Levine. Gillick recently produced an exhibition with Lawrence Weiner, *A Syntax of Dependency*, at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Antwerp, Belgium.

Lawler's work takes two significant images from her archive and stretches them at eye-level around the perimeter of the gallery space. Both images are of institutionalized artworks. The first is focused on the space between works by Carl Andre, Richard Serra and Gerhard Richter. The second image is of an Edgar Degas sculpture of fourteen year-old ballet dancer, Marie Geneviève van Goethem, photographed and cropped from behind. Once placed and pulled, they transform into smeared abstractions, occupying a new time and space that is disconnected from the photograph's originating moment.

Gillick's large-scale, text-based installation, *Övningskörning (Driving Practice Parts 1-30)*, describes a scenario conceived during a site-visit to the town of Kalmar, Sweden where Volvo had first instituted its socialistic approach to auto-manufacturing in a now-defunct factory. Formatted as an outline for a book, the work consists of key sentences from the text that are cut from aluminum and suspended from the ceiling. The narrative imagines how production could be controlled following the breakdown of organized systems. Its compressed reading can only be had while moving through the gallery, following the blurred and stretched images on the walls.

Liam Gillick (Born 1964, Aylesbury, United Kingdom) lives and works in New York. Gillick's work is currently the subject of an exhibition at The Contemporary Austin, Texas (through January 5, 2014). Additionally, his work is included in *9 Artists*, Walker Art Center, Minneapolis (through February 16, 2014) and *ANYWHERE, ANYWHERE OUT OF THE WORLD*, a survey of Phillipe Parreno and his collaborators, Palais de Toyko, Paris (through January 1, 2014). Past solo exhibitions include: *Liam Gillick: From 199A-199B*, curated by Tom Eccles, Hessel Museum of Art, Annadale-on-Hudson, New York (2012) *Liam Gillick: One Long Walk – Two Short Piers*, Kunst- und Ausstellungshalle der Bundesrepublik, Deutschland (2009) and the travelling retrospective *Three Perspectives and a Short Scenario*, Kunsthalle, Zürich, organized by Beatrix Ruf (2008), Witte de With, Rotterdam, organized by Nicolaus Schafhausen (2008), Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago, organized by Dominic Molon (2009). Texts that function in parallel to his artwork include: *Proxemics (Selected writing 1988-2006)*, JRP-Ringier (2007); *Factories in the Snow* by Lilian Haberer, JRP-Ringier (2007); *Meaning Liam Gillick*, MIT Press (2009); and *Allbooks*, Book Works, London (2009).

Louise Lawler (Born 1947, Bronxville, New York) lives and works in New York. A retrospective of the artist's work is currently on view at the Museum Ludwig, Köln through January 26, 2014. Louise Lawler has had one-person exhibitions at the Wexner Center for the Arts, Columbus, Ohio (2006); *Dia:Beacon*, Beacon, New York (2005); the Museum für Gegenwartskunst, Basel (2004); *Portikus*, Frankfurt (2003); and the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington, D.C. (1997). Her work was included in *Documenta XII*, Kassel, Germany and the 1991, 2000, and 2008 Whitney Biennials, New York. Lawler's work is held in the collections of the Museum of Modern Art, the Whitney Museum of American Art, the Guggenheim Museum, LACMA, the Art Institute of Chicago, and Tate Modern, among others.

For further information about the artists or the exhibition, please contact Loring Randolph or Alice Conconi, [loring@caseykaplangallery.com](mailto:loring@caseykaplangallery.com) and [alice@caseykaplangallery.com](mailto:alice@caseykaplangallery.com).

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CASEY KAPLAN  
121 WEST 27TH STREET  
NEW YORK NY 10001  
TEL +1 212 645 7335  
FAX +1 212 645 7835  
WWW.CASEYKAPLANGALLERY.COM  
INFO@CASEYKAPLANGALLERY.COM

# The New York Times

November 21, 2013



## Liam Gillick / Louise Lawler

By KAREN ROSENBERG

Casey Kaplan

525 West 21st Street, Chelsea  
Through Dec. 21

In their first collaboration, Liam Gillick and Louise Lawler stay within their comfort zones but manage to nudge us out of ours. Their familiar methods of institutional critique (photographic in Ms. Lawler's case, sculptural for Mr. Gillick) combine to form a dynamic, disorienting installation.

Mr. Gillick's contribution is a text piece composed of cutout aluminum sentences, which hang from the ceiling in neat rows and lure readers deeper and deeper into the gallery. Gradually, it reveals a vague and halting narrative about workers at a defunct factory (the Volvo plant in Kalmar, Sweden, as the news release tells us).

Ms. Lawler contributes a striking background, a long vinyl wall sticker that links the three rooms of the gallery. The image printed on it is a stretched-out version of some of her earlier photographs of artworks in bland white-box settings; here, pieces by Degas, Richard Serra and Gerhard Richter, among others, are distorted beyond recognition.

The collaborative ethos of the show, the references to the socialist history of Volvo production, the relentless conveyor belt of the installation and the content of Ms. Lawler's photographs (individual artworks by top-selling male artists, blended into a single seamless strip) all signal discomfort with the rah-rah capitalism of the current art market. But no alternatives are proposed, and the installation leaves us with a haunting vision of a factory in limbo. As Mr. Gillick's text puts it, "No one has secured the building, and no one has wrecked it either."

**CASEY KAPLAN**

121 WEST 27TH STREET  
NEW YORK NY 10001  
TEL +1 212 645 7335  
FAX +1 212 645 7835  
WWW.CASEYKAPLANGALLERY.COM  
INFO@CASEYKAPLANGALLERY.COM

# ARTFORUM

CRITICS' PICKS

LIAM GILLICK AND LOUISE LAWLER  
CASEY KAPLAN  
525 West 21st Street  
November 1 - December 21



View of "Liam Gillick and Louise Lawler," 2013.

What's most surprising about Liam Gillick and Louise Lawler's first collaboration—for which both artists created separate installations dealing with modernist ideals—is how distinct their work is from the other. Lawler has taken over the walls with a narrow photographic relief that spans the perimeter of the gallery while Gillick has engaged the ceiling, hanging aluminum cutouts of texts abstracted from his hypothetical account of labor relations after the shutdown of a factory. Lawler's friezes are photographs she took of works by Edgar Degas, Gerhard Richter, and Carl Andre at various institutions and then stretched into pure abstractions, printing a narrow band that bisects the center of the gallery's walls.

An awkward but exhilarating spatial parallelism emerges between Gillick's chunks of text and Lawler's rush of colors. With their alternating elements of technical introversion, revision, and crisis, both works trace a spectral history of modernism, from themes of industrial revolution to high modernism, institutional critique, and portents of postmodernism. Where Gillick points to the material and organizational conditions of labor, Lawler looks at the way surplus value extends from the rarified art objects she depicts. Her photographs, removed of representational function, shift the focus from the objects' material existence to their symbolic significance. Formally and conceptually, Lawler's relief demonstrates plasticity and reflexivity, while Gillick's subjects are self-actualized in manifestly readable objects by text itself. The sense of compression created by the heavy narrative and dizzying walls provokes the impulse to draw relational readings between the two. At the same time, their incisive dislocation from each other represses this inclination and suggests that the exhibition—or, what appears as two discrete installations sharing the same space—creates equal opportunity to consider the meaning of production, as it does the production of meaning.

—Genevieve Allison

CASEY KAPLAN  
121 WEST 27TH STREET  
NEW YORK NY 10001  
TEL +1 212 645 7335  
FAX +1 212 645 7835  
WWW.CASEYKAPLANGALLERY.COM  
INFO@CASEYKAPLANGALLERY.COM

Glass, Liz. "Liam Gillick and Louise Lawler: November 1 - December 21 at Casey Kaplan Gallery," *DailyServing*. December 4, 2013. Online.



## Liam Gillick and Louise Lawler: November 1 – December 21 at Casey Kaplan Gallery

December 4, 2013

By Liz Glass

The simply titled exhibition *November 1 – December 21*, on view at Casey Kaplan Gallery in New York, pairs works by artists Liam Gillick and Louise Lawler. Sharing the space of Kaplan's Chelsea gallery, Gillick's cut aluminum text pieces dangle from wires attached to the ceiling while Lawler's almost filmic photographs cling neatly to the walls. Though they occupy the same space, the works of these two artists do not coalesce into anything resembling a collaboration; rather, the show reads as a convenient pairing of two bodies of work that, presented alone, would have left the gallery feeling more antiseptic than inviting.

This is not to say that the works on view are not compelling, either taken together as they are here, or considered individually. Whereas much of Lawler's previous work has focused on artworks in various locales—be they the pristine white walls of a museum, the opulent home of a collector, or an unidentifiable art-storage site packed in with crates and cases—the works on view at Kaplan diverge from her usual approach. Lawler's photographs have long fascinated the art-inclined, offering glimpses of works we may know and love in unusual settings, while offering subtle prodding gestures toward questions of value, circulation, commoditization, and use. Here, however, Lawler swerves a bit from her usual path. In these newly manipulated works, two of Lawler's photographs are transformed. Her 2010 image *Life Expectancy*, which captures carefully clipped segments of works by Carl Andre, Richard Serra, and Gerhard Richter, sets the stage, and is paired with an elongated version of itself, stretched into long pulls of color and line. Beyond the wall break, another of Lawler's images, this time depicting Degas' *Little Dancer*, receives a similar treatment. In each of these new works, the single image is lengthened to the extreme, creating abstracted images that guide the viewer deep into the show, their expanses stretching along walls and into corners.

The effect of these pulled images is quite beautiful, as they degrade into swaths of abstract, softened color. But the content seems a bit perplexing to those familiar with Lawler's usual, succinct imagery. What is the purpose of these elongations, and what metaphor can be found in these aesthetic experiments? As Lawler's taffy-pulled photographs wrap along the gallery walls, the images do more than stretch out—they also break down. What began, in both works, as recognizable, even iconic images of art become visually incomprehensible, referentially divorced. If we apply the metaphor of time to these elongations, Lawler's pulls begin to point toward the distancing effects of history, the disintegration of meaning, and the aestheticization of ideas.

While Lawler's photographic pulls seemingly frame the gallery space, Gillick's contributions to the show dominate the rooms themselves, carving out large blocks of impenetrable space as they hang heavily from the ceiling. While messages might break down in Lawler's works, Gillick asks us to read his work, formed through stylized letters in shining black. While Gillick's sustained interest in design and photography is of course present here, this work takes a narrative approach. The 30 phrases of *Övningskörning (Driving Practice Parts 1-30)* are challenging to decipher, their difficulty requiring the viewer's rapt attention. Gillick's phrases seem to string together into sentences or paragraphs in places, but some key information is missing. Weaving together these intentionally partial fragments, we can construct a sketchy narrative about labor and usefulness in a stressed capitalist system.

One block of text in the center room of the installation reads, line by line: "all former employees without work | especially the older ones | a relatively progressive company | generous severance payments | and time to consider what to do | money runs out increasingly anxious | increasingly alienated from society." Though Gillick's work was made in 2004, its subject seems more current than its age, its words evoking familiar images and feelings related to the recession and economic uncertainty of the past five years. While Gillick's installation corresponds, originally, to a visit the artist made to a Swedish Volvo manufacturing plant some years ago, this specificity seems not to matter. Gillick's phrases pull us in through their halting, matter-of-fact elegance, allowing us to imagine countless associations, images, and scenarios linked to the crises of late capitalism.

The works presented in *November 1 – December 21* remain staunchly separate from one another, though fibers of connection begin to emerge if one looks for them closely. If Lawler's images deal with the breaking down of an image, the recession of understanding, then Gillick's words can be seen to somehow echo a similar degradation, the erosion of a labor-based economy. As the press release for the exhibition argues, both Lawler's and Gillick's works deal with time, but here time does not have a neutral quality; instead, it ushers in and lays bare the breaking down—of systems, and of understanding.

**CASEY KAPLAN**

121 WEST 27TH STREET  
NEW YORK NY 10001  
TEL +1 212 645 7335  
FAX +1 212 645 7835  
WWW.CASEYKAPLANGALLERY.COM  
INFO@CASEYKAPLANGALLERY.COM

# The New York Times

“Art Begetting Art, and Social Commentary, Too,”  
The New York Times, July 6 2012, p.C23.

ART REVIEW

## Art Begetting Art, and Social Commentary, Too

‘Anti-Establishment’ and Liam Gillick’s Work at Bard



A survey of Liam Gillick’s work from the early 1990s in “From 199A to 199B.”

By KEN JOHNSON

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ANNANDALE-ON-HUDSON, N.Y. — The road to a job as a museum art curator used to be winding and haphazard. Now there are degree-granting programs like Bard College’s Center for Curatorial Studies and Art in Contemporary Culture, which has been processing aspiring organizers of world-changing exhibitions for 20 years as of this summer.

Along with other anniversary events the center is presenting a pair of exhibitions in the spacious galleries of Bard’s Hessel Museum. Viewed as independent shows, “Anti-Establishment” and “From 199A to 199B: Liam Gillick” are remarkably enervating. Considering them in light of the occasion, however — and that one was organized by the center’s executive director, Tom Eccles, the other by its graduate program director, Johanna Burton — the shows are fascinating to think about together. What do these exhibitions tell us about the education of curators today?

In her brief introductory essay Ms. Burton characterizes the model of the artist implied by “Anti-Establishment,” which she organized. Seemingly contrary to that title, the 13 individuals and collectives she picked are not uncompromising rebels. They do little to unsettle well-established norms of contemporary art making. But, according to Ms. Burton, they imagine “novel collective relationships and emergent models of engaged citizenship.”

Some of the work is overtly political. Sculptures by Wynne Greenwood consist of pink, portable televisions equipped with strap-on harnesses; mainstream and queer cultures collide.

A duo called H.E.N.S. present a weakly humorous installation revolving around a pair of adult-size baby bouncer seats that you can sit in, positioned in front of a television playing a sock-puppet show. The long title of this piece

is worth quoting for what it says about the ennui of the citizen artist steeped in stale theory: “Alternative Pedagogy and New Left Daycare II, consisting of: H.E.N.S. World-Historical Sock-Tragic Puppet Drama, Marxist Baby Buggy Bouncers, Pragmatic Piscene-Pedicure Program; Showing The Subject’s Passage from Vulgar Individualism to Agonic Pluralism.”

Much of the work is more self-reflexively preoccupied with art than with worldly affairs. Scott Lyall’s opalescent, Minimalist canvases, digitally covered by thousands of tiny bits of color, invite thought about painting in an age of mechanical reproduction. “Kiss Solo,” an installation of videos of young men dancing by Brennan Gerard and Ryan Kelly, is a response to “Kiss,” a performance work by Tino Sehgal that was part of his exhibition at the Guggenheim Museum in 2010. Pam Lins makes prickly, abstract sculptures out of plaster, string and other materials, which she displays on sleek pedestals. A wall label notes that Ms. Lins “was thinking about a particular photo of Henry Moore in his studio and the parts of sculptures that are usually hidden, or better, covered up.”

There is an exhilarating exception to the prevailing conceptualism: an installation in its own gallery of Abstract Expressionist-style paintings made with vibrant Day-Glo paints and displayed under ultraviolet light, by Jacqueline Humphries. With their nearly hallucinatory, artificially enhanced luminosity and quicksilver shapes the paintings suggest a sudden irruption of transcendental energies into imaginative consciousness.

None of the artists in “Anti-Establishment” exemplify Ms. Burton’s characterization of the engaged citizen artist more completely than one who is not in her show: Liam Gillick, the subject of Mr. Eccles’s exhibition. Routinely associated with the much-debated Relational Aesthetics movement, Mr. Gillick is a nearly ubiquitous figure on the international art scene as a conceptual artist, speaker, writer and collaborator with other international luminaries like Rirkrit Tiravanija and Pierre Huyghe. He designs shiny, quasi-architectural sculptures for sale in commercial galleries, but here the focus is on projects from the 1990s, driven more by verbal than visual thinking.

If you like the idea of reading news articles, letters, documents and other sorts of informational material as an art experience, this show is for you. Sprinkled throughout “From 199A to 199B” are fabric-covered panels onto which invitees — all alumni of the Bard Center program — have pinned material from magazines and other sources that caught their eyes and minds. One large gallery has pushpin panels covering the lower parts of the walls all the way around. Tacked to them are pages from Tattoo Magazine and an operational manual for a large airplane. A lot of uncovered pinup surface remains, so you can only imagine the flood of information that could be in store.

For another project Mr. Gillick proposed that copies of all the public papers of the United States presidents be displayed in a gallery and made available to anyone interested. Here, as a compromise, they are accessible on computers via the Internet.

One room is reserved for a project called “Moral Maze” that has yet to happen. Mr. Gillick will invite people who have been peripherally involved in activities of politically and ethically fraught import — minor players in the illegal drug trade, for example — for public discussions in the gallery.

Mr. Gillick represents a model of the artist that is especially popular now in academic circles: the activist social critic who tries to intervene in mainstream currents of contemporary complacency and awaken politically critical consciousness by any means. It is easy to see the appeal of that model for today’s ambitious curator, who, in turn, replaces the old model of the curator as a connoisseur of visual aesthetics. The new, professional curator is a globe-trotting intellectual sophisticate, attuned like Mr. Gillick to an ever-expanding field of ideas rooted in Marxist gospel. Under the new curatorial regime art becomes an educational and participatory experience often tied to newsworthy events of the day.

Artists whose primary concerns are social and ideological will appreciate this sort of curator. Those invested in aesthetically and metaphorically resonant objects of uncertain practical utility might feel excluded and misunderstood. But in a few years or decades the paradigm will change, as tenured faculty retire. New tread will be put on old rhetoric. The marginalized will be returned to the center and the favored cast out. That is just the way it goes.

“Anti-Establishment” and “From 199A to 199B: Liam Gillick” continue through Dec. 21 at the Hessel Museum of Art, Bard College Center for Curatorial Studies, Annandale-on-Hudson, N.Y.; (845) 758-7598, [bard.edu/ccs](http://bard.edu/ccs).

CASEY KAPLAN  
121 WEST 27TH STREET  
NEW YORK NY 10001  
TEL +1 212 645 7335  
FAX +1 212 645 7835  
WWW.CASEYKAPLANGALLERY.COM  
INFO@CASEYKAPLANGALLERY.COM

# MOUSSE

## Spaces of Critical Exchange by FIONN MEADE



Top – Prototype Design for a Conference Room (With Joke by Matthew Modine, Arranged by Markus Weisbeck), 1999, installation view, "David," Frankfurter Kunstverein, 1999, Courtesy: the artist

For years now Liam Gillick has extended his artistic activities to the construction of discussion spaces – raised platforms, circular seating, partitions and structures that offer the body a limited set of options. Structures that are not easy, in which you have to choose to enter or not, but which also open up subversive, skeptical possibilities – of being there without taking part, or of getting distracted. Fionn Meade met with the artist to understand more about these structures and the problematic relationship of the artist with this particular type of production, where he has only formal control.

Fionn Meade: I want to ask you about your design for "The Desperate Edge of Now" at e-flux's new exhibition space, a show that features the work of British documentary filmmaker Adam Curtis, curated by Hans Ulrich Obrist. For me, it recalibrated a number of projects you've been involved with here in New York and elsewhere, including your collaborative part in the design of Ludlow 38's exhibition space, as well as your contribution to "OURS: Branding Democracy" at the Vera List Center for Art and Politics, for example. These projects extract sculptural and typographic elements from your own work to frame highly charged political content on a scale that seems approachable and even accessible. How do you see this commitment to exhibition design extending, but also complicating your practice?

Liam Gillick: One thing all of those projects have in common is a kind of lack. They're described as discursive, or you said "collaborative," when, in fact, they all demonstrate three key things: lack, suspicion, and withdrawal or a sense of subjugation,

or something close to that. From the artistic perspective, they demonstrate a kind of submissiveness by working alongside structures or people for whom the process of actually accepting a movement into that kind of space is difficult or problematic. So, the strange thing about all of the things you mention is that they are quite isolated moments for me, working on them.

### Isolated from your ongoing concerns?

You feel that they ought to be collaborative, they feel and smell collaborative, and it feels like there exists a clear exchange of ideas. But, in fact, what happens is that some of the people involved are deeply suspicious of contemporary art as an idea. For them contemporary art is clearly marked by certain excesses—an excess of ego, or an excess of stupidity, or the market, or co-option. If you read Adam Curtis' interview with Hans Ulrich Obrist, he talks about his frustration with art being about other art. For him this means nothing new can happen. But what really happens is that for the people you're supposedly collaborating with, even when it's an institution like the New School, there is a deep suspicion of art, and an out-of-focus idea of what contemporary art does. So, as an artist you are trying to demonstrate that it is indeed possible to create a space where there could be the conditions of critical exchange. And to a certain extent that is a kind of submissive role.

You've previously used the word "resignation," a resignation of form. But at the Vera List, in the lead up to the last presidential election, your contribution deployed a raised staged or platform housing circular benches for a series of charrette-like dialogs or seminars, an idea taken from architecture and design where you put people in a room and give them a problem to solve. But the sculptural scenario makes the very idea of dialog agonistic upon immediate viewing of the form.

Yes, but this relates to what we could call the sometimes lazy language of discursive spaces. At some level, I create structures that don't carry the traditional modernist or neo-avantgarde ideas of what's required. Traits that historically were assumed to be best—flexible, mutable, user-friendly—become scenarios that are not easily modified, creating frameworks of difficulty. To my surprise, in none of these cases did anyone say, "but what if we want to move anything?" or "can we change it?" because in the end they didn't require flexibility. For me this started with the Berlin Biennale in 2001, in the attic space at Kunst-Werke. It was the first time I did anything that was a space for discussion or something to happen, and I made it virtually impossible to change the space. I did this deliberately in a bloody-minded way to make a point against the emerging ambience of the start-up or the tech company, or what's become extremely common within corporate life: the break-out room. I wanted to do something that had a physical structure tied directly and intimately to the structure of the existing space, to create not a secure, but rather a fundamental place within which something else could happen. The place itself wasn't flexible, the idea being that the discourse should be.

This imposing of a boundary condition seems consistent with all the projects. As with the walk up, walk down form at Ludlow, you took a narrow Lower East Side space and made it even more difficult to navigate, prompting and perhaps even imposing subjectivity.

Yes, but this kind of subjectivity can often be de-coded. It's not a mystery. This is going somewhere I haven't talked about ever because, actually, I find it difficult and it's hard to find language for it. But in each case, you create the possibility for a clearly determined set of choices to be made by the body and space. Therefore, you can turn your back, as it were, on the show or on whatever is taking place (the event, the discussion) in Ludlow, and sit on the first steps, looking out the window towards the street if you so desire, in the same way that people sit on church steps without any intention of going in or taking any part. It's the same with the circular seating at the New School: you have the option to sit facing inwards and thereby be in a small group facing each other, but you can also all face outwards and therefore, because it's a circle, you're quite alienated from the people, even if they're sitting close to you. You're definitely separated. This phenomenon allows for skeptical presence within the structure.

You can compare this to what Nikolaus Hirsch did for the architectural intervention of United Nations Plaza in Berlin. Being an advanced architect and writer, his initial assumption is that, like a lot of architects, he believes in the agency of the mass. If you give them elements that can be combined in different ways, they will spontaneously perform a productive social structure. So, he basically made cubes that can be combined in any way that you want.

Right, the idea of a re-combinatory freedom.

This imagines that people would spontaneously make a stadium if necessary, or individual seating if necessary. But, of course, what happens is that in most situations people's heightened skepticism about their very presence at a series of discursive events makes them reluctant to play out the role. And, in this sense, I agree with some of Claire Bishop's positions on participation and its problems. You can't make these assumptions about people, you can't expect them to all do the right thing. At the UN Plaza in Berlin, it required that someone, each time, had to take responsibility for showing people how it could be.

To demonstrate their freedom and participation.

Right. Now you could argue that this reveals that people actually don't want to spontaneously come together and make collectively built spaces in order to have a discussion. But this, in and of itself, isn't a profound observation.

Yes, if you look at say Neoconcretismo transitioning into Tropicália, for example, the collective and performative act exists via the use of something that already has behavior tied it—as with say Oiticica's Parangoles—where there is a pre-existing socialized, almost ritualized reference coming from outside the exhibition space, outside of the architecturally enframed. You've often inverted or used architectural motifs and excerpts—an overhang or a waiting space—to create a formalized “hanging out” that seems to promote or imply a delinquent tendency.

Absolutely, but hanging out takes place in and around structures that are often not being used for that which they are intended. While not being too biographical about this, I am very conscious of witnessing that post-war donation of space to and for people. This gesture of giving you things like playgrounds, like the low planters you find in suburbia or surrounding a shopping mall. I'm influenced up to a point by this, by semi-fixed, ambiguous yet determined spaces you can step in or out of. There's a moment where you've crossed the barrier and you're in it or out of it. It's not the same as purely hanging out, because the whole place is not available. I try to create some form of barrier or notion that you're in it or out of it. It gives you the opportunity to decide whether or not you view yourself as taking part.

Of course, hanging out is slightly undervalued. What's the alternative? The bar is not hanging out. Bars and cafes are where revolutions start, but the types of revolutions that start in bars and cafes aren't necessarily by their nature communist or Marxist or even progressive. They can also be fascist. They can go in either direction. But hanging out retains potential. In being generous about things like Occupy Wall Street, it has a strong component of hanging out.

In my view, giving public address a collective face again seems one of the most important things to come out of the Occupy movement. People still need a corporeal, politicized collectivity. And perhaps this is a counter to the individualized managerialism that Adam Curtis points to, the perpetual training that characterizes much of contemporary professional life, the digital increase in self-managing your time and labor that puts you in a nonstop competition first and foremost with a projection of the self? This plays out to some degree in the art context via the prominence of symposia, where the tacit agreement can often seem to be that if you frame out and schedule time for critical discourse, you've already met the “discursive” expectation, a pre-apology as you've put it.

Yes, the announcement can become the most crucial thing and it's actually the least examined component for it carries with it pseudo-ethical assumptions that it must be inherently good, which we can't know. But the things we are talking about can seem played out when they're not, they're quite recent, and they're very vulnerable, and we cannot assume that they will always be accommodated. There's already a kind of backlash within certain institutions against the idea of any kind of discursive component.

That seems definitely true. But one thing coming into view within the art context is the importance of an editorial position—an editorial gathering with multiple perspectives and subjective positions, but an emphasis away from one-off events and pre-apologies. Instead, a renewed editorial emphasis on proposition and serial voicing is recurrent and relates to what responsive programming might need to be today. Even with e-flux and the flood of announcements that bulwark their market position, they've put forward their position as invested propositions via e-flux journal and, now, the exhibition space.

Yes, exactly.

People write from an opinionated place on repeat occasions for their journal. The editorial does, however, create a boundary between those interested and those not. And, in this regard, perhaps an interest or lack thereof in the editorial underscores which venues are interested in the political.

Yes, it has a very specific position in that way. But what's happened with e-flux is really quite simple. And what's perverse about these things is that what appears to be an editorial position can only appear when it's backed up by a fraught, complicated series of disagreements. It can only come from an excess of positions. It has become a kind of gathering site for a number of people who are there on a daily basis, who are young and negotiating or fighting over positions rather than agreeing. However, saying that, there are also problems around it. I've proposed myself that Adam Curtis make a film about e-flux. Starting with: “This is the story of a man” [said like a film narrator] who realized that he could sell information that already existed freely in the world.” But these things are tricky, all of the platforms we're discussing. It's not like MoMA where it's laid out, ritualized and institutionalized. These other things, they're not there yet. We're not sure how people should behave.

You've discussed this as a gap between production and presentation, a need to get yourself into complications where there is not yet a consensus.

Absolutely, but what's interesting is you're somehow not seen as being responsible for them. That's one of the lacks I was talking about. You can bypass many of the questions of responsibility via the general flow of the way contemporary art is distributed and exchanged. You can evade them. On the other hand, I find that frustrating and irritating. What I find more urgent now is the problem that as this terrain gets more and more complicated and more and more examined, what would be another step? Or how would you then proceed? When Cyprien Gaillard is making pyramids of beer that you have to drink your way through...it's hard to know...

What a provocation even is.

Yeah, I'm not sure anything I've ever done has been any form of provocation. For me, this terrain that we're focusing on is the biggest question or problem for me. Yet what's frustrating is that it doesn't seem that it's the same for others. Of course, on one level it's extremely good because that means I can just dangle around and keep playing with it until I get bored or until it becomes irrelevant. But this leads to the question of the submissive or resigned character.

This relates to an idea we've talked about previously, that of secondary character, or what Robert Musil presaged as the "without content" as it relates to humanism, a cultural shift where we no longer have access to the genre forms that we might have previously ruptured, when the agonistic, and even parodic relationships to genre and narrative are no longer available or productive. In other words, what happens when the Brechtian sense of didactic or informative rupture is no longer available?

Part of the problem is to do with exchange. And I don't mean an exchange of money, but exchange as an aspect of cultural practice. What I've done is include documentation and description of these parallel projects alongside everything else I did to try to give it some form of correspondence or enforced conversation with my other modes of production, playing with the level of exchange.

You've called that a lobbying strategy before. The notion you're lobbying for someone else, but who that person is might be left out of the equation to some degree.

Yes, precisely.

But what does that mean for a socio-economic and consumer public that in many ways increasingly does not have a face or even familiar social guise? Here, I'm talking about the extent of collective abstraction where in film, video, and other advertorial kind of scenarios, it has gotten to the point of referring to "extras," the people in the background, as literally "BG" for "background." The on-set call for people to enact public scenarios is now "BG." This seems related to digital shifts in production of course, but also speaks of an utter abstraction in relation to questions of public and the habitus of political behavior. This slip from "extras" to "BG" supersedes the secondary register of playing with and off of genre forms. And this leads me to think about what a series of secondary positions looks like when gathered, how can you collectivize secondary representation against such erasing and hegemonic abstractions as "BG" and "data visualization"?

The thing I've been doing is to tend to stay away or disappear. I realized I don't want to be seen as being responsible for the given structure, which is almost the opposite of how you're supposed to function as an artist. And I have to work out what I think about that. Because what happens when you hide during the presentation of something, or you disappear, or you become hard to reach, is that people still come to you. It's a nuanced problem. The reason they come to you is because they have something they need or something they want to tell you. So, I have to work out my relationship to the background, or to the extras, or how I stand in relation to that. For many artists in the past that has led to "I'm going to take responsibility for this and the way I'm going to do it is to show people what to do." This is an approach of "I will sit down first and I will stay there and I will demonstrate how to behave."

Again, the beta-participatory, demonstrative.

But I don't want to witness what takes place during the given moment or framework because I've been avoiding dealing with the thing you're talking about—the relationship between the extra, or the background, or the activated viewer, or the distracted presence. In each case, these works allow people to have their attention drawn to something else for which I am not responsible. The best way for me to behave is to not be there. If I'm there, then I'll be seen as somehow responsible for both the structure and the content. And to be honest, there's a group of people that already do this, which is architects. Architects disappear.

Yes, they tend to.

I need to work out a model of behavior that is different from this...because there are dangers in that architects tend to be men of a certain age, who can read.

Yes, if there's any profession that still tends to argue for the existence of a heroic genre to be grasped and held on to, in the manner of "tradition and the individual talent," it has to be architects.

This is why last year I taught an experimental architecture course alongside a professor at an advanced architecture program within a very good university. But I found the assumption was that the best model for building anything was a pavilion, some kind of space where people could gather without reflecting on context. It shouldn't be public housing or something else, but rather it should be the pavilion. This betrayed a further assumption that things cannot be done anymore and the pavilion is the ultimate expression of the temporary. This included the assumed behavior of people as either witnessing a spectacle or getting involved in some kind of discourse or dialogue. By choosing the latter, of course, it didn't matter what that dialogue was. It was enough to trust that if you gave them something, the audience would come and people would do something. These two assumptions (spectacle or discourse) seem very problematic. I have to address, in the near future, some of these issues.

This idea of temporary engagement or duration gets at a contradictory dynamic within exhibition-making today that your involvement in exhibition design complicates. When the Ludlow 38 space opened in 2008 through to when I think they took out the stair structure in 2010, the boundary principle of the stairs imposed a behavioral presence that existed over a number of seasons. It was incorporated in a series of very interesting shows and display decisions. And, if you look at it from a durational standpoint, this imposition and incorporation into display gave your contribution a multiple stance that is quite different than a discursive symposium or even a show featuring one of your platform and bench scenarios.

That's because it's part of a less discussed thing. It's related to how I've often designed gallery graphics as a level of intervention that elongates a gesture, as with Galerie Meyer Kainer, Esther Schipper, Casey Kaplan, and Air de Paris. That seems connected to what we're talking about.

Yes, because it involves a different notion of address/addressee. It has a different durational register, and so a different effect of audience and public. This isn't unrelated to the idea of an editorial agenda but here it is more disguised.

The problem is that the specific editorial agenda discussed earlier assumes that there is probably something wrong with the idea of a certain type of artistic ego or a certain type of persona. It assumes certain collectivist things that are not necessarily good. That's part of the tension of my involvement. I can't assume that everything collective is good. For example, I think Fluxus bears the part of flux in e-flux. And Fluxus has exactly this problem that it starts as a dynamic, which seems to be a somewhat freeform collection of people who intervene within other institutions and setups and provide durational and, sometimes, even catastrophic structures or deconstructions. But in order to continue that freeform collective sensibility, the best thing to do is to package it. This gives it some kind of aesthetic concretization that solidifies the anti-capitalist and freeform aspect of the whole thing. And what that does, if you talk to some people of that generation, they will say that the packaging under which they subsumed their ego or their potential removed the possibility to do other things. It removed the possibility to effectively, powerfully undermine or play with structures. And therefore you get conceptual art.

This is something that I'm thinking about all the time: to what extent to leave the dominant culture alone and to what extent to leave the dominant system of artistic validation and exchange untouched? Should we retire to a collectivist sensibility with the presumed knowledge that, at least, we're better people. I'm not sure about these things. But on the other hand, I'm concerned about these things. I find it very difficult. I find Occupy Wall Street very difficult in this way.

Don't you think on some level, the dynamic of what you've called the setup or the rollup—in early forms of theater it used to be called the fit-up—an in-flux form that can deploy immediate collectivity, has been central to how to engage political activism for a long time? And this gets back to the question of a corporeal need—an expressed, visualized corporeal—that's taking place in a lot of different parts of the world. And this urgency seems to ask something other than a consideration of the ethics of self-management and affective labor. Many people think this implies a gathering collective (once again) that does not retire from the moment of event.

A crucial thing here is that if you look at the way that art exists generally in the culture it is to be experienced either privately or publicly. And that leaves an enormous gap in between. In the last twenty-five years the old question of what was audience or who is something for has been left to organizations that are focused on consumer individuals, meaning the people who become data and not individuals. The individual appears only as a data apparition. If I keep turning up to MoMA everyday, they'll be curious, monitoring that this guy that gets in for free turns up all the time at nine o'clock in the morning. My pattern of showing up will lead to something they might try to work out, but only in the analysis of a flow of data. This shift in audience and consumer strategies is slightly underestimated and under-discussed.

The relegating of audience (always a difficult question) to those following and re-forming data into consumer patterns has, in part, led to an algorithmic or predictive notion of audience and consumer that is much further embedded in the art context than we might want to think.

Yes, because if you deploy work in a public transport station, for example, you will get an audience because they have to walk past whatever it is to get from A to B. And most public-minded interventions, for example, have dissolved into relying on the fact that people might be walking past.

But this relates to a lot of overtly politically motivated artworks that borrow their energy from a socialized space or arena that is not necessarily addressed in the work but again exists more as an unexamined abstraction not unlike the "BG" principle really.

My deployment of secondary structures around which a series of events may or may not take place expressly takes up who is there rather than what is taking place. This comes from concrete historical interests. For example, I was always fascinated—before Ron Jones made a work about it—by the discussions between the Vietcong and the Americans about what shape their conference table ought to be for the Paris Peace Conference. The Americans, of course, felt it should be a long rectangular table with the Vietcong on side and the Americans on the other. The Vietcong thought it should be a circular table around which all parties could see each other and that this form would symbolize something. They came up with variants: triangular tables, wiggly tables, and so on. And on a banal level, I think these variants are not closed.

They're openings and contested ones that need to take an actual shape in order to potentially occur, and they exist alongside or beneath more overtly didactic positions. This seems the case with some of the architectural motifs you've worked with as well. Overhangs, kiosks, tables, and benches aren't going anywhere. They are apparatuses that are going to be with us but they have both residual and immanent politics.

They're not recuperative, they're not reenactments, they're not based on anything. They try to set up situations, but it's kind of anti-enduring in its very nature. You have to remain skeptical about them. They also create for me a sense that they can be unsatisfying or difficult even though they might appear to be quite straightforward, smooth. The irony is that they carry with them some of the qualities that people use to talk historically about art. When you read the journal of an artist or a critic or a painter talking about something being on the edge of something and it being permanently unsatisfying and it being a feeling of an obligation, but one that cannot be justified.

We've discussed this idea of the unaccountable before. And how that also relates to politicized abstraction, for instance, in relation to a discussion we had about Blinky Palermo. His use of the readymade fabric was not just a painting gesture, it was of course of that, but it was also a socio-economic critical gesture aimed at re-directing the prevailing political rhetoric of "Wirtschaftswunder," the so-called West German economic miracle that elicited and circulated so many new middle class materials and products.

I've done a similar sort of thing. I use certain materials that are quite useless for certain things. For instance, the structures are not great for holding fundraisers. They appear to be generous but ...

But again they're more agonistic, actually.

Right. But I think people often misunderstand that word. They think agonistic has to do with confronting someone with something that is beyond the confines of everyday life, or beyond taste. I'm in a show right now called "Utopia Gesamtkunstwerk" in Vienna. The basic assumption of the show seems to be made through videos or pictures of people doing transgressive things. But in fact it's supposed to be a show about an agonistic approach towards the dominant narrative of art. Instead, it's people taking their clothes off, or throwing things at each other, or showing dead people, or blowing something up.

What's interesting about these provisional designs of yours is that they nevertheless provide a frame to highly content-driven work. Adam Curtis, for example, applies his editorial sense to politically fraught content, mixing wit and experimental and pop culture film techniques with journalistic research. As with Harun Farocki's background in television and the episodic necessity of having to think about production in perhaps more agile terms, or Alexander Kluge's involvement with television and his current online distribution of episodically structured content, these are all generational examples of producers with televisual fidelity. But they've honed abilities to re-direct such coercive tactics. I was wondering what you thought about that approach. Because even the Harun Farocki show at MoMA, if you happened to see that, it wasn't primarily about presenting via an archival presentation. It was rather a compression tactic that felt like it could detonate that entire floor in comparison with a lot of other presentation strategies.

Some of that effect has to do with the fact that this period of television is now over. That kind of independent vision (as with Curtis) existing within what was usually a state-run enterprise or a corporate enterprise is done. A lot of people think of deregulation as being exclusively about banking, but of course it was across the board and the BBC increasingly brought in independent production structures. The thinking is that this should have brought more radicality, and more autonomy, but it didn't and it doesn't. And this is because in order for the independent to survive within the corporate the independent has to

communicate with the corporate, and in order to do that the independent has to develop language that can persuade the corporate that it's not about the content of what's being produced, but merely about further development.

The effectiveness of the pitch becomes the content.

Right. Whereas what happened with these large enterprises in the past, they had something in common with universities, where you had certain forms of tenure that would allow eccentric production that was tolerated over many years because the idea of tenure could be judged at an early point. So, this generation has some rightful nostalgia for the exceptions that existed, but on another level, relatively speaking, this approach and these works are still quite radical when understood as art.

You can see a shift over to the art context probably because there's more of an audience there, isn't that also nostalgic in some ways for such work?

Yes, but I do believe that the art context can become this refuge for people who can't find another space to work in. And this confuses people who only think about art, this question of quality, or value, or what's the best, or what's the next move. The art context is a site in which it is possible to operate.

But this comes back to this question of audience, on one hand, and the relative status of the work in relation to all other work. I have to play with this a bit in my position. And I'm slightly dissatisfied with the options. The way the general discussion is directed at the moment, neither side, if you can say there are sides, wants to address what is there. One side of the art discussion views these exceptions cynically as merely extra stuff along the lines of doing a lecture or writing. It's not bad for you, but it's just extra stuff that can't be valued or exchanged any other way. While the other side appreciates that you're making a gesture, which apparently has a reduced ego and points towards the collective. I feel that both these positions are slightly wrong. But in order to change them I'm not quite sure what to do. This relates to the argument that television is where people feel they can get this otherwise alienated audience that cannot read or understand the nuances of advanced art. But I'm not so sure.

I think you're right, there is an anachronism to the notion of counter-public that Curtis, Kluge, and Farocki enact in very different but related ways, but an anachronism they invest in and therefore continue to find spaces of address for. But it's not a television or cinema audience primarily. It's an art audience where the work employs televisual acuity.

But this relates to questions about why do this e-flux project with Adam Curtis as an exhibition, why do it when we can already watch it on YouTube? Especially, I've heard this from people under thirty. I would say, I'm perfectly aware of that, and that's where I watch them too, but the point is there's something about this point of designated watching. And once you've shown it, it's been done. Curtis has been shown in New York in the context of art, therefore—

Yes, and now thankfully Farocki has now been shown at MoMA, and therefore his films and videos are in their collection for future deployment. So, the idea that this is not of importance is a bit misguided.

But there's an assumption here that ethics must have immediate utility, and it's part of what made me reluctant to engage with the Occupy Wall Street artist group about how can we make better places to sleep in that police couldn't call a tent. I found it slightly distressing and I couldn't brainstorm this. Not to say I couldn't think of something, but my instinct would be to distract the police, to create another kind of problem. And what we're talking about are issues that are in various stages or steps, they're not equivalent. In fact, the strategies and processes required are actually quite different in each case. And it's this excess of differences and lack related to artistic collapse that is actually the potential.

Yes. But that's where this notion of exhibition can be too quickly foresworn and given over to the mall structure of certain museum ambitions. You can't give the conceptualizing and enacting of institutional exhibition space over to this array of consumer choices approach, to an all-purpose utility museum.

It is odd because art seems to be so much a history of over-determining and having to deal with given space.

It reminds me of the fact that Seth Siegelaub just put important publications from his archive and past production online via James Hoff and Miriam Katzeff's project Primary Information, including the so-called Xerox Book, a touchstone to conceptual art. And while those catalogues argued, in part, that the exhibition can happen via the extension of publication, or even in place of it, this didn't preclude or somehow absolve the actual exhibition space for Siegelaub or artists he worked with. It was, instead, a dialectical relationship. When these were put on line in a sensitive and contextualized way, the Xerox Book received 25,000 downloads on the first day, a huge number. But one of the things you start to realize here is the importance of editorial sensibility and how the editorial can be responsive and create specificity, unique awareness, and access. And this does not preclude and it is not unrelated to the question of temporal, corporeal exhibition space. We need to see more institutional wherewithal being put behind a dialectic that starts to look at these things as going hand in hand more seriously. Otherwise,

it's the marketing/mall impetus of a menu of options.

We're in the middle of quite clearly drawn battle lines, that don't get talked about very often. It's a big moment to make certain gestures and some people aren't quite aware of that.

Yes, unfortunately one side of the argument would say, hey we're actually creating the new next thing, but oddly this new thing is still to be defined by the size and stature of the building, its architect, and the spectacular programming, while the other side would be the editorial agenda or the institutional addenda that performs the editorial as pre-apology and nearly finished upon scheduling. But this seems a false division and behind the aesthetics of our time.

I'm looking around at things trying to figure out what's taking place. The consolidation of e-flux, for example, with a space that is frankly not very different from any other space, it could be a private gallery, and why that decision was made and what would it mean if they had done something completely different? The discussion in the past three years about hyper-capitalism and exchange, systems of flows of capital, tend to lose sight of the fact that if you look at the Forbes list of the top ten richest people in the world, they all sell cheap things to large numbers of people. They've snuck in under the radar. Among the ten richest people in the world, H&M, the Mexican mobile phone company guy, etc. These all involve exchanges on a low level that have aura reliability and low price. And they all involve displaced areas of production. I think the discussion has to move away from discussing pure capital flow and look more closely towards daily exchange.

In Warhol's Diaries he talks about 1980 and Julian Schnabel coming to his studio. He's struck by how pushy this person is and he realizes that while he's busy going around to parties, all these people like Schnabel are making and producing tons of work. At the same time, he's sure it will play itself out and he doesn't need to worry. He views himself as a product of his lifestyle choices and the emphasis on how things are produced. He ends up feeling that he will always outlast the opportunistic person who tries to hyper-identify with traditional artistic productions and roles. He just has to wait them out. For someone often viewed as the plastic person who is very synthetic, he's actually taking a long-term perspective.

Warhol saw that it wasn't just his time that he needed to be involved in, but that he needed to involve production in the time of others. By seeing production time as a concept and an aesthetic plane, Warhol was able to elongate and open up certain aesthetic conventions.

Everyone always assumes that Warhol is fascinated by TV, but he describes a meeting with HBO or one of the cable channels in the early '80s and talks about how after ten minutes he wanted to leave because he didn't come there just to be insulted. They tell him that he's too quirky and won't play in the Midwest. And they have to do something in order to change the ideas, and he leaves. They think he's simply a populist that wants to reach out and be understood, which is not the case. In trying to get around some of the ideas we're talking about, I've been looking at the idea of genealogy and diary as actual records of the passage of time, mannerist records, but literally records of time. Thinking about this not as art in diary form, which is usually terrible, but more toward an idea of genealogical time.

This relates to "the genealogy of exchange," a theme that was part of a recent class I taught, and how this complicates historical narrative in the art context. Basically, the approach being that if you look at the effects of an art context from a given time period—even the recent past—what you really find are complications of production, and reception, mutual difference, existing with needs for allegiance, needs for alliance. The kinds of things art can and should talk about. But this upsets a mutual dependency that is over-relied upon in contemporary art, namely the art historical discussion of representative figures versus the fluctuation of the market. We too often leave the genealogical complication out, which often means the terms of production are left out and much of the most incisive dialog.

A focus on the cultural as a way of understanding humans, and desire, and history, tends toward reification, tends towards what society would believe at any given moment is the highest production of that society, often seen as an artwork. And thereby even the best kind of Maoists or Marxists get caught up in this problem of the artwork rather than cultural production. And therefore you don't understand anything about the Centre Pompidou and why they hung a Renault 14 in the entrance when it opened and not a Van Gogh. But they did. When you walked into the Centre Pompidou in 1977, there was a Renault 14, otherwise known as "La Poire" hanging from the ceiling. And that told you a lot about their intentions and what they believed was significant.

And this relates to skipping over where and how the place of judgment and the place of taste resides within the genealogical trace. It is not solely belonging to the art historical and journalistic. In the always looking back register, when everything is made to look historically coherent or journalistically responsive, the genealogical can conversely reveal more about judgment, taste, and power. From figures as diverse as say Jean Rouch to Andy Warhol, you see an emphasis on creating a genealogical present in their work. And that takes you beyond Pop Art or cinema vérité.

This emphasis is fascinating but hard. My starting point for a whole new body of work is the first and fragmentary novel of Karl Marx, which he wrote when he was nineteen, called *Scorpion and Phoenix*. Basically an attempt at a comic novel, or what passed for one in the 1830s, it's similar to *Tristram Shandy* in the sense it has a rambling endless style. But it is clearly a genealogy or an attempt at a parodic genealogy. And I'm trying to find a way to play with that. It relates to how when we're talking about these other projects, I'm not necessarily thinking about how to make a better space. I'm often thinking about the relationship between the Goethe-Institut as a quasi-autonomous agency in relation to the government of Germany, historically, and their desire to work with Volkswagen MINI to do something nearly the opposite of say Orchard Gallery around the corner at the time it began in 2008, Orchard being an offshoot of American Fine Art (AFA), where the last souls of that gallery found a home. Where Rebecca Quaytman could stand around during the openings and talk to people about the fact that she also had some ideas, and incidentally become...

The painter of our time, so to speak.

Exactly, and in being there, and seeing that all happen. This relates to what my work was about at the time.

I think that's the dynamism of genealogy. We can problematize how Orchard was almost instantly commodified, but that was, in part, due to an assertion of art historical importance the moment it opened because of who was involved: the genealogical awareness, the connection to Colin de Land and American Fine Arts. Orchard was many things, but it was centrally a statement by those involved that we're not going to lose that particular tracing, we're going to do something with it. The fact it was quickly picked up on and marketed and gave some people huge jumps in their career is a different discussion. It's certainly related, but it comes out of what people were responding to, namely genealogical sensitivity, and not market grandiosity.

I remember being at one of the early openings where there were never many people, like all classic events. I was with Carol Greene and she grabbed my arm and said, "we are at something that is... we're at something and we're the only ones that are here." She used that term, "Do you realize we are at something?" And, I said, "yes, I know, I understand."

One thing this really speaks to is sensibilities that go beyond claiming representative figures. Because one thing about Colin de Land and AFA is that you cannot say that everyone he showed had the same agenda, the same style, the same intensity. He was very aware of maintaining a platform of difference, fostering inconsistencies as an integral part of quality. There's no one artist that represents AFA then or now. Instead, what you get is a kind of genealogical exchange. Orchard had that over a concentrated period of time. An important question that Orchard also brings up is what does it mean to have or insist upon a genealogical sophistication when everything is so sped up. AFA was, in some important ways, a model for not speeding up.

Yes, the kind of advanced critical curatorial response has been to use recuperation and reenactment, and work on the documentary and the archive and so on. At the same time, we're in a moment where even these things are at a fairly advanced state in regards to questions of time and speed.

That's why I brought up the 25,000 downloads of the Xerox Book. This is not simply a testament to everyone being suddenly obsessed with Seth Siegelaub. It's that the content is thoughtful, important, and James and Miriam have done something virtual that has a sensibility to it, and they've cultivated the interest in book form and now PDF format. In gaining the confidence of Seigelaub, over a number of years, the release shows that this relationship exemplifies an aspect of audience. This gets back to the Warholian idea of elongation rather than his quip about fifteen minutes of fame. 25,000 downloads on the first day doesn't mean let's now do this recuperative gesture every month. That would simply lead to exhaustion ala the hyper-productivity of Schnabel. And I think that was somewhat true of Orchard as well. It was actually an understanding that genealogical self-awareness could bring a hypersensitivity (and with it perhaps some pitfalls) to the table. This relates back to questions of scale, which I started with. Some of these projects that you worked on, as in the case of Ludlow 38 and Tobi Maier's projects during his time there, deployed exactly this archival sensibility, a recuperation of artists that should be seen and discussed more. Jiri Kovanda, Julius Koller, Józef Robakowski, Lili Dujourie, Kriwet, the list goes on. It's a connoisseurship of recuperation, and one attentive to scale that makes the factory scenario seem a bit absurd.

But there are people who think they are doing the latter. And so layers of delusion are multiple. People think there are layers of art that are multiple, but in fact there are layers of delusion that are multiple. There are no layers of art. It's quite simple.

Genealogical hypersensitivity and archival re-animation are certainly things to be thinking about—and Hans Ulrich Obrist is acutely right about that—but it's also this related question of the editorial I think. Some younger artists often don't have an editorial take beyond a mild or disinterested concern for a journalistic understanding of how to use reference, citation, and relativity. And if you read the New York Times or listened to NPR during the first Bush election, it's not hard to understand how such disillusionment springs from normative, complacent idea of what an editorial stance might be. But as with the insistence upon doing an Adam Curtis exhibition rather than just publishing an essay with online links, the editorial has to be re-configured to be more responsive and involved in art today.

The reason why this developed culturally was so that you could be in Kansas and read clearly the writing that was from New York or Chicago or whatever center was under review, or viewed as important at the time. And this reminds me of Lawrence Weiner, who I talk to a lot and who is important in all of this.

Lawrence responds to this through a form of stating things and relationships, and I have a similar method in terms of how to deal with various levels of engagement. When teaching, students often think the problem is how to create space for work and how to have the opportunity to be free, but in fact the problem is how to remain critical because the system tends towards reification regardless of whether or not you resist it. For example, when I do projects like the ones you brought up, the value system doesn't know how to deal with them. I have to either enforce something like I did in Munich for the project I did with Maria Lind in 2003 Telling Histories, where I gave the entire show as an artist donation.

Similarly, when I did the Edgar Schmitz show at the ICA in London, I made an agreement with the ICA that the materials used to build frame the content had to be brought back by the people who provided the materials—the lumber, and all of it. Not solely because of some ecological concern but much more due to this question of exchange. I wanted to find another model of exchange for that set of physical material objects within the culture after the event. In Munich, it was to just to offer it as fundraising, and at the ICA it was to take everything apart and give it back to the people who had given it to them in the first place. But with the projects in New York, it's been more difficult to come up with a similar game, much more difficult.

Perhaps because everything is much more attended to and thereby attenuated by the market here.

At the e-flux opening, I jokingly asked where's the pricelist? I was half serious. The pricelist used to be a NY insistence, a bit like the thing in the elevator, the certificate of safety inspection in the office.

To me this relates to not giving up "curating" to some newly termed "curatorial" or even worse "paracuratorial" emphasis on the adjectival. But rather to emphasize the hand in hand importance of exhibition-making and editorial responsiveness, while also insisting that the barely disguised collusion between art historical methods and market methods acknowledge and open up some territory and support for more genealogical sensitivity.

Well, I'm sometimes hoping that when I'm working on something it will be the end of it. That we can draw a line under it afterwards, but much of what we're talking about leaves tiny steps.

The question of when should you give up the ghosts of certain concepts is actually a helpful one, and an ethical one. Curatorially speaking, you have to have aesthetic, connoisseurial skills, but you also have to have pragmatic skills that can translate, and you have to be sensitive to the transitive expectation of a a message or code that most artists carry to varying degrees. And yet, on the other side of it, you have to be aware of the fact that exhibitions are also constitutive, they do become a thing, the exhibition is an event, and it does have a frame. It is there. But this is not either/or. Poesis and the transitive emphasis is arguably one of the most essential things about art, but it doesn't happen without the constitutive, the frame. And if we don't see those two things as dialectically related we're in trouble because it ends up giving responsibility for the frame up to the voices of marketing. That shouldn't be the only claim.



"Adam Curtis: The Desperate Edge of Now," exhibition view, e-flux, New York, 2012. Courtesy: e-flux, New York

CASEY KAPLAN  
121 WEST 27TH STREET  
NEW YORK NY 10001  
TEL +1 212 645 7335  
FAX +1 212 645 7835  
WWW.CASEYKAPLANGALLERY.COM  
INFO@CASEYKAPLANGALLERY.COM

"Liam Gillick," Modern Painters, June 2012, p.34-35.



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**LIAM GILLICK**  
WHERE POST-STUDIO  
ART HAPPENS





## Liam Gillick

TEXT BY DANIEL KUNITZ

PHOTOGRAPHS BY KRISTINE LARSEN

AN ENGLISHMAN, LIAM GILLICK works out of a light-bathed, bookfilled apartment high above Manhattan's East Side, where he lives with his wife, the artist Sarah Morris. Acknowledged as an originator of what has come to be known as relational art, Gillick is the first post-studio artist we've visited for Studio Check. When asked how he works, he first claims to spend "a lot of time trying to find space to not work because I spend a lot of time lying down, to be honest." Still, he does maintain an area just off the kitchen devoted to artistic endeavors, and every object we inquired about yielded insights into his busy life. Although Gillick's activities include sculpture, design, architectural interventions, writing, and music, most require spending quite a bit of time in front of the

computers on his immaculate desk. "I'm from the first generation that used computers without having any computing skills," he says. "So I grew up with the screen as the space of work, which creates a kind of equivalence between projects. Whether you are doing something for a big building or a small nonprofit, somehow mentally, because of the screen space, you treat them somewhat equally."

On June 23, CCS Bard Hessel Museum, in Annandale-on-Hudson, New York, will open "From 199A to 199B," an exhibition looking back on many of Gillick's projects. Some engaged with institutional structures (art centers, gallery spaces, and the like); some were collaborations with such artists as Gabriel Kuri, Philippe Parreno,

and Angela Bulloch; and others were autonomous works Gillick adds that "they were also all produced in close relation to a new generation of curators who emerged at the time: Maria Lind, Barbara Steiner, Nicolas Bourriaud, and Nicolaus Schafhausen."

#### MODEL

"This represents the hubris of public projects, which are often done speculatively. Architects pitch ideas and do competitions, things that are dangerous for artists. They make you feel like you've lost contact with the potential of art. But they can suck you in. This was an example. I worked really hard on the project, forgetting that, of course, there was absolutely no possibility of this thing actually ever happening. I keep it around because it reminds me not to be an idiot."



#### GLITTER

"Glitter is important stuff for me. I keep little jars of different grades of it on my desk. This is partly because with this kind of material, it takes much longer to really get a sense of it. I know what an eight-foot-long piece of aluminum is like, but a .002-inch glitter flake? I keep things around which are the least familiar-to the point where they are really in my head and I could say to someone 'I need .002 PVC red glitter' and know what I'm talking about."



#### RAL CODE BOOK

"This is the basis of everything. The RAL code is an industrial paint system, which is usually for architecture. And it is quite limited-terrible purples and mauves. Few good grays. But if I specify RAL 7040 gray in St. Louis or Zurich, it will be exactly the same. My work is very binary. On one level it has these narrative threads and meandering logic: on the other hand, it's got this very material relation to abstraction, and part of that is the use of the RAL code."



#### FAILED WORKS

"I don't keep work around. I don't want to be surrounded by my work, because I'll start to like it or believe in it. That's when you start making stupid claims about your work. I have a fabricator in Berlin whom I see maybe twice a year. We keep a big distance. One of the reasons is to avoid the performative aspect of making things and being watched, as if that in itself is interesting. It also stops me from compromising. Artists often compromise but don't call it compromise. They call it happy accidents. But when I say I need it to be RAL code 3020, I've made that decision and it shouldn't be changed."

#### MIDI KEYBOARD

"Like a lot of people who are suburban, I grew up playing music. I had years of sitting with a sadistic Hungarian piano teacher. At art school I pretty much stopped playing music. And that was the big thing about that British moment. We all decided not to have bands and to be artists instead. Historically everyone comes to art school and starts a band. Now I do a lot of the music for Sarah Morris's films. There is a connection between the computer and the piano keyboard. I'm multi-fingered when I type-my hand makes these shapes, different key commands, and so on. It's partly thanks to the music teacher."



#### RULER

"This is crucial. It's a memory stick in the true sense. It's a two-foot ruler, a nonhuman dimension. One foot is close to a man's foot, but two feet is harder to get your head around. I often use it in relation to me, to double-check. Just by changing the seat height by, for example, half an inch, you change the whole demeanor of the person, or the relationship between people."

CASEY KAPLAN  
121 WEST 27TH STREET  
NEW YORK NY 10001  
TEL +1 212 645 7335  
FAX +1 212 645 7835  
WWW.CASEYKAPLANGALLERY.COM  
INFO@CASEYKAPLANGALLERY.COM

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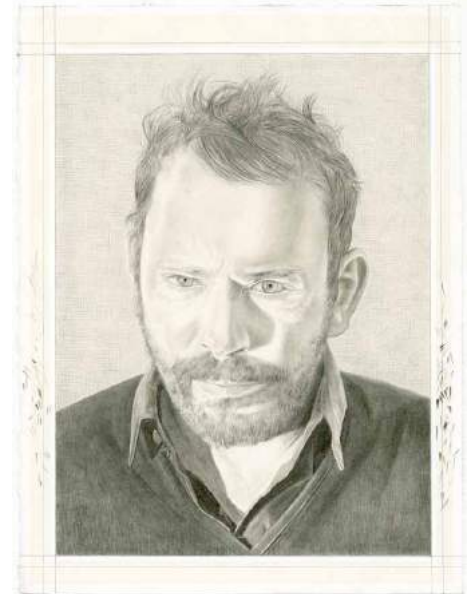
whyisproduced  
whatisproduced

William Corwin sat down with Liam Gillick to discuss a recipe for creating public art that is neither grandiose, kitschy, nor dismissive of the public; the responsibilities of the contemporary curator; and the joys of lying face down on the floor. Gillick currently has an exhibition at Casey Kaplan (Scorpion and und et Felix, May 2 – June 23) and will have a survey at Hessel Museum of Art at Bard College's Center for Curatorial Studies this summer (June 23 – December 21) titled *From 199A to 199B*.

William Corwin (Rail): Your survey *Three perspectives* and a short scenario took place at four geographically separate institutions. Could you talk about the thinking behind a multi-city, multi-part retrospective?

Liam Gillick: After a while artists start to view time in relation to their work slightly strangely—in a way that's out of sync with how it's received. So, to me it feels like that project already took place quite a while ago and was part of a very different mentality than my concerns right now. I tend to view exhibitions that way: as an extension of the state of mind you're in when you are immersed in a project rather than when or where it was.

But that particular exhibition did give a strong indication of the way I work. It was part of an attempt to do a retrospective that moved across a number of cities. The exhibition started in Rotterdam, moved to the Kunsthalle in Zurich, made a pause in Munich at the Kunstverein, and ended up in Chicago. In each location the idea was to create a new structure rather than bring together old work. Within the structural design of the exhibition I created a plan that would allow me to give half of each space back to the institution and make it their responsibility to deal with the implications of that—to take responsibility for their actions. I was trying both to implicate the institution and to show something about my approach to working.



Portrait of the artist. Pencil on paper by Phong Bui.

In each case, the venue decided to treat their obligation differently. In Rotterdam, they thought it would be interesting to show new exhibitions of much younger artists inside my retrospective, to put me in conflict with the next generation, as it were. In Zurich they thought it would be interesting to reanimate and replay some very early work I'd done, which tended to be participatory. In Chicago, the idea was to have a discussion together about what to do. In the end we did something that was integrated within the fabric of the building. So you had this strange sense of a very strong framework combined with a clear decision by the institution. There were two final components: a big display case that moved to each venue that had a lot of ephemera in it, bits and pieces I'd worked on that couldn't be accounted for in any grand narrative—editions, little books, posters, and bits and pieces that were given a very prominent position—and a big projected Apple Keynote PowerPoint type thing that read like a big hi-def movie, in which you could see the development of my work, images of work fading into each other over time. As you saw each image in turn, a story started to build on top of them; a text gradually emerged on the screen. I wrote the overlaid text in real time as I put together the Keynote; it was a story about alternative models of production and work. In the exhibition as a whole I was trying to account for all these different aspects of my work simultaneously: the institutional aspect, the things that cannot be explained away, and the way everything I have done has an intimate connection with writing.

Rail: How did you feel taking a passive role in the curation of your work? Did you come to loggerheads with any of the people you were working with?

Gillick: No, it's the opposite—I gave them back fifty percent of the exhibition. I gave it to them as a gift.

Rail: Were you happy to see what they did with it?

Gillick: Well, I wanted to make it a problem for them. I wanted them to take responsibility for having invited me to do something. Three out of the four curators I had worked with a few times over the years. But I was trying to avoid this binarism

that develops over time, the question of whether the artist is “happy” or “sad” or doing something in an appropriate way. I wanted to turn the problem away from the artist-centric perspective and make it their issue. I think it worked extremely well; there were cases where it didn’t concern me what they were up to. For example in Zurich throughout the duration of the exhibition they re-enacted various moments in my early work, often quite simple things, that often just involved gathering together certain things and leaving them lying around. Then they would clear up and do another work. And, you know, I think they did it better than if I’d done it myself. I think there is a lot of misunderstanding about intentionality in relation to art, a lot of automatic assumptions about the kind of autonomous artistic figure, but I’m from a generation that really started to work a lot with curators as part of a new sort of formulation or new set of relationships. I occasionally want to turn that back onto that easy collaborative flow. Yet I don’t want everything to be a kind of easy thing that’s somehow always just about sitting side by side and working out what to do; I wanted to sort of turn the problem a little bit. The curators I worked with all seemed very happy to take over their part of the exhibition, which told you a lot about the power dynamics we have developed over time.

Rail: I’d like to focus on the work itself, though I understand that the presentation and curation of the exhibition are vital aspects of the discourse of your work—a transition from the macro to the micro, so to speak. What are you presenting this May at Casey Kaplan, and then this summer at Bard?

Gillick: But the retrospective was also the work. The exhibition itself is also the work. And with each presentation I have to rethink the relationships and the way the exhibition can be a site for the continued development of ideas rather than just showing off the latest “works.” There is no concrete division between curating something and working on something—even when I work alone. Artists have always curated themselves if no one else is around. The two upcoming shows are perfect examples of this. For Casey Kaplan, I am at the beginning of something. I recently closed an exhibition at Eva Presenhuber gallery in Zurich, which introduced a new project that came out of reading Karl Marx’s incomplete comic novel, *Skorpion und Felix*, that was written when he was 19 and maybe thought he could be Laurence Sterne. I am continuing this work at Casey’s in May. It will introduce some new forms and invert the normal way I have been deploying graphic work in relation to my own imploded abstraction. For Bard I was invited to develop an exhibition that might make sense in relation to the 20th anniversary of the Curatorial Studies program there. I am showing work from the 1990s—the exhibition is titled 199A – 199B—and it will bring together work that required a strong curatorial context to function. There are a lot of misunderstandings about participatory art of that period. And this exhibition will show that there was much more of an institutional consciousness at work rather than an attempt to entertain or hang out with the public, as it were. I am working with current students and alumni. It will be extremely interesting to see how this works. Curatorial self-consciousness has increased a great deal in the last 20 years—whether you like it or not. From the beginning I worked alongside some of the first curatorial skeptical of the given system and created the groundwork for the dynamic situation you find today. The works at Bard are from the early point of this meeting between artists and the new curators. It was an interesting moment where people were working out where they stood. It produced profound disagreements but many times a fierce coalition of interests between curator and artist in the face of intransigent museums and institutions that didn’t want to change and had no interest in examining their strange working methods.



Liam Gillick, *Three perspectives and a short scenario*. Kunsthalle Zurich, 2008. Installation view. Image courtesy of the artist and Kunsthalle Zurich.

Rail: What is your relation with public art; how do you feel about presenting art in the public sphere where it can be viewed very passively by the public, perhaps not necessarily in a very intense way?

Gillick: Most public art is the realization of a kind of accommodation between public and private funding—that’s just one of those compromises that’s developed in post-industrial countries. Meaning there’s an obligation on the part of people who are building things to put some percentage of their budget into some art, but it’s not really “public” art as such; it should really be called a different name, like pseudo/public/compromise-work/structure or something like that, but that might not catch on as a term. What public projects offer me is an opportunity to collaborate with architects. My conversation with the architects is usually a questioning one. They’re often pretty sure they’ve worked out what the relationship with the public is going to be; it’s quite interesting and that’s their job. In the most developed cases their vision of the future is either participatory or experiential, so it’s like, “Here’s a plaza, everyone’s going to sit here and have lunch, and have a conversation,” or, “Here’s a plaza, and everyone’s going to kind of be, not overwhelmed, but like whelmed by this sort of optical experiential sort of soft abstraction that somehow

is derived from the history of the site.” So I’m often asking questions and I’m trying to get involved in aspects of the building, the structure, that they haven’t viewed as being “appropriate” or “necessary” for public art, or introduce stories or abstractions that are not “derived” from something within the site. I’m working on a couple of things right now where I’m looking at neglected aspects of the project by studying the plans they’ve worked on and produced. I’m trying to identify dead zones, dead ends, parts of corridors which if you really walked down them in real life you’d end up hitting your head on the underside of a staircase. Things that have been overlooked.

Rail: Can you say which project this is?

Gillick: I’d rather not. [Laughs.]

Rail: That’s all right.

Gillick: In order to work in a productive way, with an architect, a city, or just a group of people, I tend to keep it all to myself until it’s completed. I don’t allow, for example, anyone to use computer renderings of a project until it is done, as I don’t trust that aspect of contemporary planning. Of course, this baffles a lot of agencies, corporations, cities, universities, because they often assume that artists just want to be visible. They’re often a bit surprised that I’m the one insisting, “No, let’s not use any renderings, let’s not put out any drawings into the world, let’s not do anything like that unless it’s a real relationship.” What we call public art is not graduates in Europe. They were outside of the theoretical framework that I’m normally involved in; it’s just one aspect of it—the oral exam version, as it were, of theoretical speculation. And as with the oral exam, sometimes you turn out to be much smarter than they thought, or much dumber. That’s why I quite like doing these projects. I’m very interested in the idea of what I call the distracted viewer. I’m a distracted viewer myself; I’m not interested so much in these supposedly deep levels of engagement that people fantasize about. I want things to exist as a backdrop, as a distraction that may sometimes become effective because of the moment or the context, not because they have an aura or address something false and pseudo-profound. What you don’t often see is the adjustment and the reorganization of a building that has been a result of my input during the architectural process. For something I’m working on right now in Scandinavia, they are changing the way the building meets the ground in order to make the work I want to do possible, and I would say that is actually a component of the artwork. I know damn well it’s going to be pretty hard to get the city to explain that the way this building meets the ground is a component of the artwork. It’s going to be too abstract to describe. But that’s part of my involvement in a way. It will alter the public experience of the building.

I am interested in cultures that commit to the problem of art in public spaces, and I do not view it in the traditional way. I treat it with skepticism, but I’m not as harsh as I might be about other things. I’ve spent quite a lot of time in Mexico. There’s quite a lot of public art in Mexico City in particular and there is a tradition of abstraction in public places. But you go somewhere like New Hampshire, you might get to a rotary traffic system and there will be like a kitschy thing in the middle. But I’m not going to treat it with the same level of critical awareness that I might have for an exhibition at 303 Gallery or the Whitney Biennial. I’m curious about it; I’m curious why a decision was made, why these places are viewed as appropriate. I think this is a realm that isn’t completely sorted out yet. It’s still a relatively recent phenomenon, and the thing that’s really shocking is the way that the work is not being addressed in a hard-core way by a new generation of curators,



Liam Gillick, “Discussion Bench Platforms,” “A ‘Volvo’ Bar + Everything Good Goes,” Casey Kaplan, 2010. Installation view. Image courtesy of Casey Kaplan, NY. Photo: Cary Whittier.

despite the amount of resources that are available, because of legal and bureaucratic constraints. People sit around, and quite understandably complain about a lack of resources. But if you look around at the amounts of money sloshing around for these kinds of private/public projects, you’ll see that the possibility of allocating that money differently really still has to be addressed. Someone still has to get a grip on that. The problem with a lot of these projects is that everyone apart from the artist, the architect, and maybe one or two curatorial minds, generally is just involved to get paid; it’s like a sideline, a little extra thing. Therefore people aren’t applying pressure politically, psychologically, and intellectually to redirect some of those funds so they don’t always have to manifest as a sort of abstraction in a new building. And of course I am not even against abstraction in a new building.

Rail: One of the things that's interesting about your background is you had an activist impulse of starting up a printing house—creating projects that were then disseminated by the artists themselves. I'd like to talk about your beginnings in London, in the period of the so-called YBAs, when artists and curators often didn't get paid, they just produced.

Gillick: It's difficult to talk about these things in clear terms. Certainly it's very, very difficult to make any kind of statement about an ethics of production in relation to young artists, and I've worked with a lot of them since I've been in New York. You should never muddle up ethical positions with lack of money.

Artists need to get paid for their labor like anyone else. That's not the same as talking about the art market with these fabulous and incredible terms people often do. My original studies were going to be in philosophy and law; I had a very strong desire to fix the errors of the past, if you could call it that, by getting involved in the Labor Movement as someone who could be an educated advocate for a very particular set of interests. But I changed my mind after working for a "good" lawyer one summer and thought I should go to art school instead because I felt I could always go back later from art to labor but I would never manage to do it the other way around. So I ended up at Goldsmiths but not on the same terms as some of the others. I had given up something to be there. Goldsmiths at that time had quite a lot in common with places like CalArts, where you felt there were teachers there that were real; they were actual artists, but they didn't have unified ideas or ideologies; basically you got to witness arguments between people in their early 40s at a peak of work and rhetoric.

Rail: Who are you talking about?

Gillick: They're not all going to be known so well here, but Jon Thompson was extremely important, Richard Wentworth, who was in the last Venice Biennale, and Michael Craig-Martin, who's usually given most of the credit, but of course was part of a discussion. There were a number of other people who would come in and out, Sarat Maharaj was there later on, but at the time there was also Yehuda Safran, who's now involved with Columbia Architecture School—he was at Goldsmiths around the time I was there. So basically, rather like an American high-end advanced sort of art school, I had the sense it was not about trying to instill a particular attitude or something, but it was really about asking why. Why did you do that?

Rail: Was that typical of British art schools?

Gillick: No, not at all, completely the opposite. There had been earlier interesting moments, like St. Martins, where Anthony Caro taught, and very good people had come through there, like Barry Flanagan, Richard Long, and Gilbert and George, for example. But their positions came from a reaction against the late-modern orthodoxy of Caro's belief systems and his way of teaching. If we were French we would say that Goldsmiths was a post-'68 kind of school. The teachers were people who had been in their 20s in the late '60s and were more of the generation of Richard Long and Gilbert and George. There wasn't one dogmatic position that was forced upon students. It was an open framework that was based on asking questions instead of reinforcing an orthodoxy. It was also a time of intense class reorganization; some classes were seeing the opportunity to enter higher education for the first time.

The Goldsmiths environment was affected by three things, the first of which being a very democratized belief system which held that it was possible for anyone to be an artist. The idea was never to seek out talent or quality, although there was a sense that something should be interesting rather than uninteresting. There was a lot of discussion around the question of being interesting in the world versus being interesting in the context of art, and whether there was a difference. So there was a lot of applied philosophy, thinking about the nature of objects and how they get value. The other two things that were really crucial were the class clash and a big North/South divide. In the U.S. there are enormous differences in class, and geography, too, of course. But because Britain's much smaller and more densely populated it's much easier to be mobile. You can go to college wherever you want in the country. So you tend to get a collision between people from the North and South suddenly taking place at the university level.

Rail: Where are you from?

Gillick: I'm from suburban London, so I'm therefore a Southerner. The North/South clash



Liam Gillick, "Discussion Island Discussion Bells," 1997/2011. 10 stainless steel tubes, chains Tubes: 6' 180cm long each x various diameters: 1" (x3), 1.5" (x3) and 2" (x4). Image courtesy of the artist and Casey Kaplan, NY. Photo: Cary Whittier.

certainly marked that time and hasn't been thought through or talked about in any meaningful way. You could see people's ideas and thoughts start to develop in a very particular direction because of this combination of stresses. It produced a quite interesting set of possibilities and unique egos.

Rail: Can you characterize the perceived difference between the Northerners and Southerners?

Gillick: No, not categorically, but, if you look at the three most well-known artists in Britain whose names have travelled to the U.S., it's Henry Moore, David Hockney, and Damien Hirst, and they're all from within 10 square miles of each other, in Yorkshire, in the north of England. It's difficult to characterize, or make a set of stereotypes about these things, but one thing you can say is maybe it's connected to a different way of speaking or approaching the world. Therefore, literally a different voice. A voice that does not always necessarily echo the voice of authority but still speaks with authority.

There are a lot of self-mythologizing things, like the idea that they might speak clearly or plainly. If you look at some of those artists it seems to allow them to say quite pretentious things without it sounding that way. As if they are telling the truth about an untruth.

Rail: Sort of like talking about art sounds a little more down to earth when they say it?

Gillick: Well, you could also argue that it has an anti-intellectual quality but I am not completely sure. In the States there's this concept that if you go to both the very south and the very north you'll find plain-speaking people who will just tell it like it is and not get muddled up in bullshit—very different from what you'd get in New York.

But you've got to remember that people of my generation were always very interested in music from the north of England—The Fall, Cabaret Voltaire, Joy Division; it's all a Lancashire/Yorkshire axis. So it's not like this was an alien group of people; it's just that, for most people, college was the first context in which these groups came together, and therefore their first exposure to different ways of speaking and addressing the world. Maybe it's made it easier when I've spent time in the U.S.,

because I'm very conscious of it here, too: I can hear accents, I can see when these similar processes happen in the U.S. Whereas we'd all like to keep the myth that we don't notice these differences somehow. I'm rather interested in the difference between an artist from Georgia and an artist from Washington State and how there are enormous differences in the way they address the world rather than what they do. I think there's slightly too much obsession in the U.S. with the coasts: people fixate on the differences between L.A. art and New York art. I'm fascinated by the axis up the middle as well, or going from Northwest to Southeast; these are distinctions we don't think about as much.

Rail: What else is coming up for you, aside from the public projects you mentioned earlier?

Gillick: Like a lot of people, I tend to work on a number of parallel projects simultaneously. I use the usual defense that most people use when someone asks them what they're doing, which is just tell people where I'm going or where I've just been, rather than try to really address the question.

Rail: What are you doing with your time now, outside of art?



Liam Gillick, "Lying on Top of a Building...The Clouds Looked no Nearer than when I Was Lying on the Street..." 2010. Stainless steel Each run of text 60 cm x 18.28m x 20 cm. Installation view. Fairmont, Pacific Rim, Vancouver. Image courtesy of the artist.



Liam Gillick, "Restricted Underlined," 2011. Powder coated aluminum. 5.9 x 39.4 x 5.9" / 15 x 100 x 15cm. Image courtesy of the artist and Casey Kaplan, NY. Photo credit: Cary Whittier.

Gillick: I'm about to publish a book in French, which is a translation of a small book I wrote about work, labor, and life in 2010, titled *Why Work?* It addressed the accusation that artists no longer provide an alternative way to live and addressed issues around precarious labor and assumptions about an artist's methodology. The book is produced in France using letterpress by the studio of Vincent Auger. Goatskin parchment covers. A lot of craft. But all the images are actually produced in Illustrator. I produced a new cut of Helvetica also on the computer. So in a way the book is an embodiment of the ideas within it.

I'm also at the beginning of several big public artworks; there's one in Sweden, one in Texas, and one in Switzerland. If I can keep them separate I can avoid a collision where they'll all end up being done at the same time. Often, I'm not doing anything, and that is the situation to be in. I like to work, I'm interested more in production than consumption: I need to develop, I need to think. But the thing that's hardest to gain is a feeling of doing nothing—finding the empty space in between things. What I actually intend to do this week, as much as possible, is one of my favorite things: just to lie face down on the floor in my apartment and apparently do nothing. I don't actually know what happens in that process. It's sort of like thinking, a kind of weaker form of thinking, clearing your mind.

People often ask, "Oh, can I come film you working in your studio?" or "Can I come photograph you in your studio?" and I don't really have one. I just tend to work at home; in a way, I never got out of the suburban bedroom. I'm either manically working on a drawing or on the computer; it looks just like anyone else in the cultural sphere. Or I am just lying face down on the floor surrounded by bits and pieces.

**CASEY KAPLAN**

121 WEST 27TH STREET  
NEW YORK NY 10001  
TEL +1 212 645 7335  
FAX +1 212 645 7835  
WWW.CASEYKAPLANGALLERY.COM  
INFO@CASEYKAPLANGALLERY.COM

**LIAM GILLICK  
SCORPION AND UND ET FELIX**

EXHIBITION DATES: MAY 2 – JUNE 23, 2012

OPENING: WEDNESDAY, MAY 2, 6:00 – 8:00PM

CONVERSATION WITH Benoit Maïre, SATURDAY MAY 5, 10:30AM

Casey Kaplan is pleased to announce *Scorpion and und et Felix*, an exhibition of new works by Liam Gillick (b. 1964, Aylesbury, UK).

The exhibition takes its title from an early unpublished manuscript of a comedic novel by Karl Marx, *Scorpion and Felix*, in which three characters Merten, the tailor; Scorpion, his son; and Felix, his chief apprentice, engage in a satirical narrative that abstractly references irresolvable philosophical polemics. In one chapter titled, *Philological Brooding*, Marx etymologically references himself within the origins of Merten's name. At the end of the fragmented narrative (only pieces of the text survive today and much of it is thought to have been burned by Marx himself), Merten attempts to save his dog, Boniface, from a miserable death by constipation - a fate that Merten compares to the agony of Boniface's inability to speak and to write his own thoughts and reflections. Merten cries out in the last line, "O admirable victim of profundity! O pious constipation!"

Incomplete, and therefore only open to a partial reading or misunderstanding, the novel is an entryway into Liam Gillick's exhibition and practice; its final point also open to interpretation as a self-deprecating, comedic reflection on the archetypal struggles of all artists, writers, filmmakers, poets, and others. Gillick's practice is a divergent one (including sculpture, writing, architectural and graphic design, film, and music) that resists methodological boundaries and constraints, and shows a fondness for discursiveness, distractions, and evasive tactics.

Since the late 1980's, Gillick has focused on production rather than consumption, examining how the built world carries traces of social, political and economic systems. Anticipating a forthcoming survey of Gillick's work from the 1990's at the Hessel Museum of Art, Annadale-on-Hudson, *Scorpion and und et Felix* continues a series of floor mounted rail sculptures that he began in 1988. Rails are typically a functional form that provide support or alternatively limit access to a space. Here, they are placed on the floor and at obscure heights on the walls, questioning their function (or nonfunction) to create a linear framework for the viewer's movement through the first two rooms of the gallery. In the third room, Gillick presents new, monochromatic L-shape forms that also traverse the floor and the wall. Reminiscent of office cubicles, barriers, waiting areas and processes of renovation, they operate as semi-autonomous abstractions and reiterate Gillick's interest in the legacy of "applied modernism", the two way movement between utilitarian design and modernist art and architecture.

Three large-scale graphic works derived from medieval woodcuts confront the implied contemporary vernacular of Gillick's wall-based and freestanding structures. Previously presented in past exhibitions as posters and graphics, the vinyl wall-drawings show a character spinning yarn and two dogs. Together, the works in the show pursue logico-formal connections in an ahistorical narrative about thoughts and material.

Liam Gillick (Born 1964, Aylesbury, United Kingdom) lives and works in New York. A survey of the artist's projects and installations from the 1990s, entitled *Liam Gillick: From 199A-199B*, curated by Tom Eccles, will open on June 23rd at the Hessel Museum of Art, Annadale-on-Hudson, New York. Gillick represented Germany at the 53rd Venice Biennale, 2009. Past solo exhibitions include: *Liam Gillick: One Long Walk – Two Short Piers*, Kunst- und Ausstellungshalle der Bundesrepublik, Deutschland (2009) and the travelling retrospective *Three Perspectives and a Short Scenario*, Kunsthalle, Zürich, organized by Beatrix Ruf (2008), *Witte de With*, Rotterdam, organized by Nicolaus Schafhausen (2008), Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago, organized by Dominic Molon (2009). Liam Gillick publishes texts that function in parallel to his artwork including: *Proxemics* (Selected writing 1988-2006), JRP-Ringier (2007); *Factories in the Snow* by Lilian Haberer, JRP-Ringier (2007); *Meaning Liam Gillick*, MIT Press (2009); and *Allbooks*, Book Works, London (2009).

For further information about the artists or the exhibition, please contact Loring Randolph or Alice Conconi, [loring@caseykaplangallery.com](mailto:loring@caseykaplangallery.com) and [alice@caseykaplangallery.com](mailto:alice@caseykaplangallery.com).

Upcoming exhibition: NO. 17, JUNE 28 – AUGUST 3, 2012

GALLERY HOURS: TUESDAY – SATURDAY, 10:00AM – 6:00PM

HENNING BOHL, MATTHEW BRANNON, JEFF BURTON, NATHAN CARTER, MILES COOLIDGE, JASON DODGE, TRISHA DONNELLY, GEOFFREY FARMER, LIAM GILLICK, GIORGIO GRIFFA, ANNIKA VON HAUSSWOLFF, BRIAN JUNGEN, JONATHAN MONK, MARLO PASCUAL, DIEGO PERRONE, JULIA SCHMIDT, SIMON STARLING, DAVID THORPE, GABRIEL VORMSTEIN, GARTH WEISER, JOHANNES WOHNSEIFER

**CASEY KAPLAN**  
121 WEST 27TH STREET  
NEW YORK NY 10001  
TEL +1 212 645 7335  
FAX +1 212 645 7835  
WWW.CASEYKAPLANGALLERY.COM  
INFO@CASEYKAPLANGALLERY.COM

Cashdan, Marina, "Sweater Art in Miami," The New York Times, The Moment, Thursday, December 8, 2011.

# The New York Times

## Sweater Art in Miami



POP-UP The artist Liam Gillick's clothing designs for Pringle. The artist did a capsule collection for the brand.

"I'm that generation of artists who tries to think very hard about new sets of relationships between people and spaces and how people work with artwork," said Liam Gillick, who was one of several artists in Miami's Design District this month exploring a relationship with a big Fashion brand. Cross-disciplinary collaborations, often accompanied by pop-up stores, are the name of the game during Design Miami, the design adjunct to Art Basel Miami Beach. This year's brilliant moments included Mr. Gillick and Pringle of Scotland; Beatriz Milhazes and Cartier; and Anselm Reyle and Dior.

"I didn't really want to do an ironic, one-off deconstructed sweater," Mr. Gillick said of his collaboration with Pringle, the Scottish cashmere brand. "I'd rather do something that has more complicated implications."

The result, called *liamgillickforpringleofscotland*, is a capsule collection of cashmere sweaters and leather accessories incorporating Mr. Gillick's signature modernist color-block designs and retro color palette. "I try to think of how to extend a collaborative mentality and how to deal with things that work in parallel in the art context," Mr. Gillick said. He continued his exploration of "how things acquire meaning and value" at the Casey Kaplan pop-up gallery (conveniently situated above his collection's pop-up shop), where 200 pounds of red glitter - a recreation of his 2001-5 work 'The hopes and dreams of the workers as they wandered home from the bar' - covered the floor.

Around the corner, at the Fondation Cartier's pink-frond temporary space, "Aquarium," a massive mobile by the artist Beatriz Milhazes dangled from the ceiling of the dimly lighted room. Comprising 11,980.82 carats worth of diamonds, rubies, emeralds, sapphires, quartz, beryl, turquoise, coral, feldspath, tourmalines, opals, topaz and peridot, this larger-than-life piece of jewelry was reminiscent of Ms. Milhazes's kaleidoscopic paintings and Sculptures, and evoked both her art-historical influence (namely in geometric abstraction) and Brazilian background.

Meanwhile, over at Dior's popup shop, the German artist Anselm Reyle took the brand's DNA and ran with it, "Blade Runner" style, to create a postmodern wonderland befitting the collection of accessories on which he collaborated. Mr. Reyle reimagined the classic Miss Dior bag with neon stitching and dangling charms made of colored plexiglass, one of his signature materials. Two walls of video screens showed Mr. Reyle creating one of his lush impasto works - the artist makes sweeping gestures in purple paint using a large spatula and scraper - as well as a neon relief, both present in the store, along with a foosball table and, for those who can afford neither a Reyle original nor a Reyle Dior bag, a "nail bar" featuring Dial nail polish in Mr. Reyle's vibrant color palette.

-MARINA CASHDAN

**CASEY KAPLAN**

121 WEST 27TH STREET  
NEW YORK NY 10001  
TEL +1 212 645 7335  
FAX +1 212 645 7835  
WWW.CASEYKAPLANGALLERY.COM  
INFO@CASEYKAPLANGALLERY.COM

Ulrichs, David, "Lawrence Weiner and Liam Gillick," *Modern Painters*, May 2011, p. 75



**ANTWERP**

**Lawrence Weiner and Liam Gillick**

*Museum van Hedendaagse Kunst Antwerpen // February 3—May 22*

AFTER 20 YEARS OF artistic dialogue, word-art pioneer Lawrence Weiner and contemporary Conceptualist Liam Gillick are having their first exhibition together. As a starting point for "A Syntax of Dependency," curator Dieter Roelstraete has unearthed a quote from a 2006 conversation between the two New York-based artists in which they bemoan the fact that although they'd embarked on many projects together, none had come to fruition. Despite a 22-year age gap, Weiner, 69, and Gillick, 47, have great mutual respect and admiration, which make this collaborative—rather than merely double-billed—exhibition possible. The show consists of a single site-specific installation composed of 36 strips of linoleum of varying widths and five colors: black, yellow, red, white, gray. These cover the museum's roughly 17,000-square-foot ground floor in different patterns, some of them reminiscent of the Belgian flag—pure happenstance, according to the artists.

On top of this surface the pair have spelled out phrases in French, Dutch, and English. "Outside of any given context," for instance, is printed inside a speech bubble whose oval shape neatly mirrors that of the lighting fixture on the ceiling directly above it. This fragment could be read as a comment on the show itself, which shies away from explanation in terms of the artists' biographies or overall careers, operating on an aesthetic, rather than semantic plane. There is no hierarchy: Gillick's and Weiner's contributions appear inseparable, all brought to the same ground level.

When the exhibition is over, the work will not be sold but destroyed, a refreshingly grand gesture in the midst of economic crisis. —David Ulrichs



FROM TOP LEFT:

[Liam Gillick and Lawrence Weiner](#)

Installation view of "A Syntax of Dependency" at Museum van Hedendaagse Kunst Antwerpen.

Lawrence Weiner and Liam Gillick.

CASEY KAPLAN  
121 WEST 27TH STREET  
NEW YORK NY 10001  
TEL +1 212 645 7335  
FAX +1 212 645 7835  
WWW.CASEYKAPLANGALLERY.COM  
INFO@CASEYKAPLANGALLERY.COM

Art Review. November 2011. "Terraces of Desire" pp. 99-101

# Art Review:



## TERRACES OF DESIRE

words LIAM GILLICK

There was a large international exhibition in a very beautiful region of the country. A lot of artists had been invited to take part. They were mainly from Europe and North America. Almost everyone in the show had arrived to stay for a few weeks, to work towards the exhibition and to enjoy the place. All the artists who had bothered to come were given large studios to work in, and stayed in apartments built quite close to the gallery. Some of the artists knew each other before the exhibition and others got to know each other through their stay and the show. Some of the artists were more gregarious than others. Each evening there would be a meal or party and although not everyone turned up to every event, most of the time the artists got along together pretty well.

In 1992 I wrote a short text titled 'Donating Money to the Getty Foundation'. It was written as an informal anecdote about a few artists sitting in a house on top of a cliff in the South of France. In the story the house was made up of a large number of pods - connected by tubular corridors. One of the walls were flat, yet the place was full of paintings. It didn't seem necessary to write about this in the text, so I didn't bother to picture the hanging system deployed throughout the house. There was no host in this story - a crucial new form of absence. The pods were made of rough concrete or stucco in the form of spheres, each with a flattened base - the windows were round and the connecting tubular corridors were in the form of extruded arches linking the varied spheres.

After about a week staying in this beautiful part of the country there came an invitation to visit a house. The house was quite a long way from the gallery and arrangements were made to share cars and organise lifts from different people so that all the artists could

go and visit what was rumored to be a really great place. Most of those travelling to the house that day were surprised at how long it took to get there, but when they arrived everyone realised it had been worth it. The house was incredible, like something out of a film. It was unself-consciously kitsch enough to be un-intimidating, but impressive enough for the most cynical visitor.

This was a straightforward tale of emerging consciousness amid a shifting dynamic of power and patronage in art. Influenced by Ingres and Other Parables, a 1972 book by John Baldessari, it was one of a number of short stories that combined to provide some kind of update on the position and state of artistic autonomy in relation to the stealthy rationalisations at the heart of globalisation in the early post-Reagan/Thatcher era.

Everyone felt at ease. There were two swimmingpools. It was a very hot day. Some people stripped off and began swimming while others just hung around by the pool. There wasn't much in the way of refreshments but no one really cared. The house was positioned towards the top of a cliff and the main pool was built so that it overlooked the sea. You could spend hours floating around in the water and gazing down at the sea many metres below. Time passed and everyone seemed to be happy. As it got dark, and as if it could have been any other way, it was announced that there was to be a buffet supper at the far side of the house.

Where Baldessari text had tended to focus on the plight of the artist in the face of history and the problem of production, these texts placed the artist in an implicated position in relation to the way the art system might draw people into the logic of a revised poststatist and fundamentally neoliberal set of operations. The artist is no longer faced with the stubborn presence of an assured artistic past but instead become an ambivalent social figure - populating villas, seminars and dinners- while daily demonstrating exemplary attributes of scepticism and desire.

That was really perfect. Some of the artists rushed to eat before others and some were more desperate for a drink. People started talking, opinions were exchanged. At one table sat two artists from the west coast of America. One was telling the other about how he felt a bit guilty about selling quite a lot of work. The other artist sympathised and said he used to feel the same but had tempered his guilt feeling by donating some of his income to worthy causes. As the two pursued their conversation another artist came up and joined them. He listened to what they were saying.

As far as he could see, artists never made enough; even the ones who were really raking it in deserved it, and those who were not making much money but did good work ought to be properly rewarded.

The traditional movement of power had been redescribed in the 1980 as a trickle-down process where loss of regulation would free capital to move - now unfettered from state intervention- in a logical if meandering flow to those capable of predicting its outflows and drains, but always in search of promised

torrents. In 1992 the luxury-brand conglomerates and spoils from the former USSR were yet to congeal from the primordial soup of chaotic and seemingly infinitely fragmented post-wall structures. One certainty was emerging, however - that this promised trickle/flow/drip might not be operating in one direction only. Away from the obvious traumas of increasing wealth inequality- even at the heart of apparently developed cultural life - the artist would increasingly be seen as a figure of support for the foundation, the visionary and the corporate structure as much as a recipient of its largesse. In 1992 it was still not completely clear how on earth this strange state of affairs would actually come into being. But you could already see artists struggling with way to comprehend their sudden emergence onto the well- stocked-yet-hostless terrace of desire.

A graphic consisting of a light gray rectangular background with black, all-caps, sans-serif text. The text is arranged in seven lines, with varying word lengths and spacing, creating a rhythmic, almost calligraphic feel. The text reads: "THE ARTIST WOULD INCREASINGLY BE SEEN AS A FIGURE OF SUPPORT FOR THE CORPORATE STRUCTURE AS MUCH AS A RECIPIENT OF ITS LARGESSE".

Anyway, the artist sat there listening to the other two going on about their guilt feelings and how their dealers had really helped out when it came to working out what charities to give to. He felt it was time to say something. There was a pause in the conversation and he interjected. 'You know,' he said. 'You've got a point there, what I do is give a portion of my income to the Getty Foundation.' There was a silence and the two artists from the west coast of America turned to look at the artist who was claiming to give some of his income to the Getty Foundation. One of them said, 'Gee, that's real bad. You know that the Getty Foundation's real big and powerful already, don't you?' They carried on with the meal and changed the subject. It was the only moment of tension or flash of heat in an otherwise good day.

A curious postscript to the glib scenario described has been a surprising inability to map power or even represent its aura within the critical framework of an advanced art. The critical default has become an increasingly fraught attempt to prevent the traumatic result of contemporary lack or a poetic pseudo-sublime image of what may never have existed in the first place. Both these options leave us without a critical map to the real location of power and, as a consequence, do no more than offer solace or sympathy in a context of critical empathy. So until something changes, the terrace remains - a limbo for the contemporary - the only place that can be mapped with its familiar nodes of bar, exit and screen.:

CASEY KAPLAN  
121 WEST 27TH STREET  
NEW YORK NY 10001  
TEL +1 212 645 7335  
FAX +1 212 645 7835  
WWW.CASEYKAPLANGALLERY.COM  
INFO@CASEYKAPLANGALLERY.COM

## Art Review:

Herbert, Martin, "Liam Gillick & Lawrence Weiner," Art Review, September 2011, Issue 52, p. 177.

# LIAM GILLICK & LAWRENCE WEINER

Liam Gillick & Lawrence Weiner:  
A Syntax of Dependency  
MuHKA, Antwerp  
3 February - 29 May

It was, perhaps, only a matter of time. Luxuriantly bearded, loquaciously oracular and, arguably, the leading exponents of propositional conceptualism among their respective generations, Liam Gillick and Lawrence Weiner were destined to work together. Indeed, according to the press materials accompanying this collaborative project, they've been nearly doing so for around 20 years. In the meantime, naturally, they've been talking about it. Which makes sense, since Weiner's wall-text-centric work effectively proffers language as nudge for thought, and Gillick's diversity of works have often floated the teasing possibility of their being nexuses for open-ended conversation. Both, to some degree, rely thinking for its own sake.

In practical terms, pairing up has profile dividends for each. Gillick explicitly folds himself into the larger tradition of conceptual art - a fancier bracket than 'relational aesthetics' - and Weiner gets to look like more than, let's say, a self-satisfied old stager whose art peaked decades ago and who now just slaps enigmatic phrases on the facade of whatever glossy museum has just opened. His propensity for doing the latter denotes that both artists have, to a degree, branded themselves: Weiner with his adaptable texts in their characteristic hollowed-out fonts and Gillick, though less so nowadays, with the snazzy-coloured Le Corbusier carports of his 'discussion platforms.'

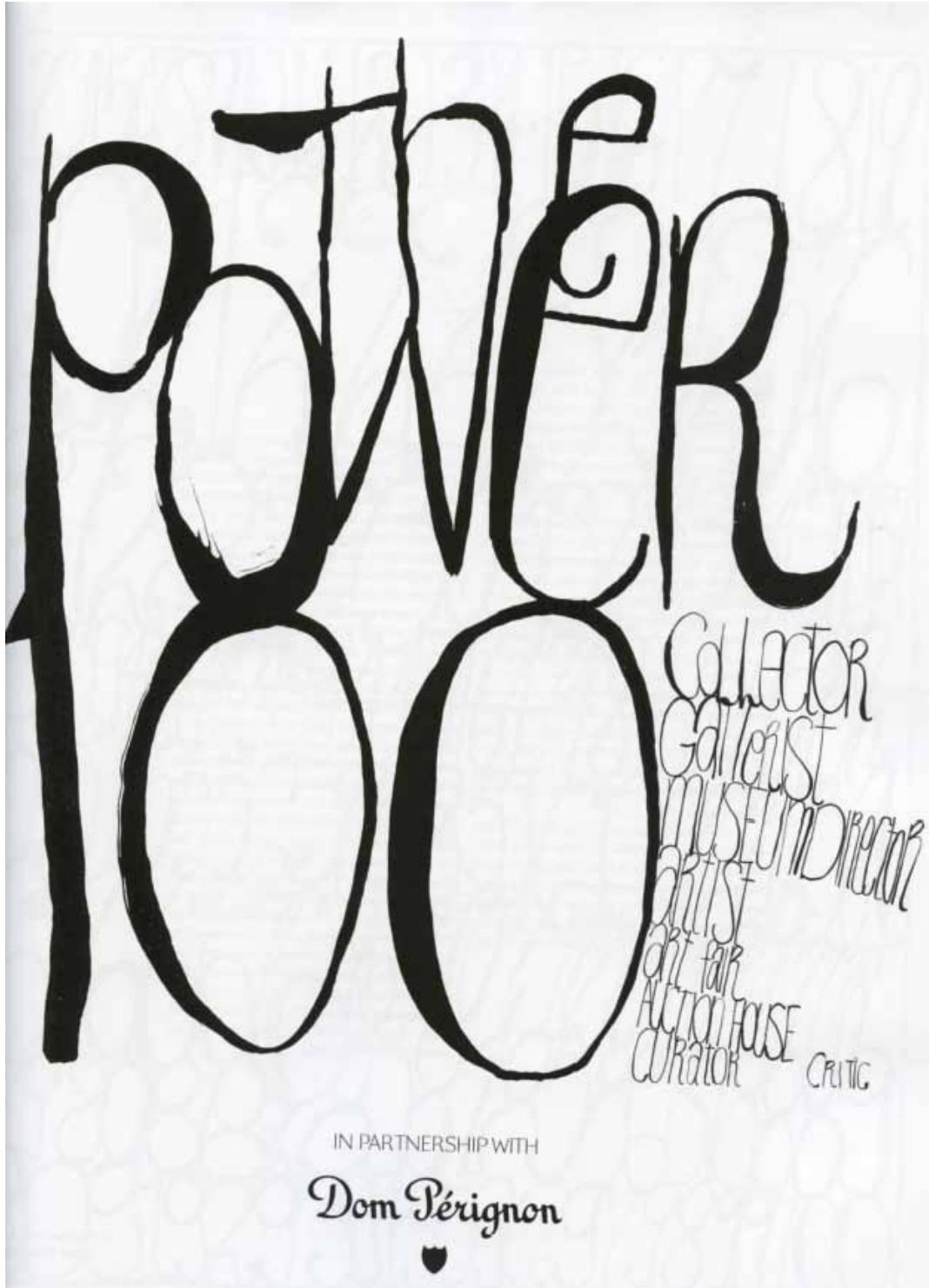
The first question hanging over this show, then, which occupies the entire, epically scaled first floor of MuHKA, is which aesthetic would dominate.

The answer: neither. A Syntax of Dependency, at once rich and austere, is a floor-covering work involving multiple texts laid onto a vinyl pattern of stripes in red, black, and yellow (not irrelevantly, the colours of the Belgian flag) and grey, something like an aestheticised basketball court. The language, and the fact that it is translated trilingually, feels Weineresque; the idea of these standalone phrases divvying up the space into contemplative sections that, ideally, exert some kind of unpredictable ideational gravitation feels strongly Gillickian. But the mind won't settle in these zones. Consider the phrase 'That what/sets the stage/for what this is the artwork talking about itself, pointing to its own capacity to spur the synapses - but it doesn't quite do so, because it doesn't refer to things outside of itself. (See also, elsewhere, 'Folded into itself.')

A Syntax of Dependency wants you to think, but it wants you to think about itself as a system: about how, as the title suggests, everything within it is contingent. The colourist reference to the host country, for instance, could be significant it could open onto national politics - or it could not; one text, after all, reads, 'Outside of any given context.' Of course, the latter is not true at all, since A Syntax operates precisely within conditions that have governed conceptual art since the 1960s: dematerialisation, a related air of high-minded asceticism, a refusal of affect. Its rematerialisation strategy - for this is a work that draws strong attention to MuHKA's classy architecture nevertheless depends for emphasis on conceptualism's refusal of the object. And if it's cut with the indeterminacy that was always implicit in Weiner's work in particular but which became more explicit when 1960s art was recast by 90s artists, the effect of A Syntax is merely to join these two ways of working together into a continuum of conceptual art in which Weiner and Gillick get to look like prime movers. That surely gratifies both their egos; meanwhile, the rest of us get a big, quietly swaggering, sharp-edged show that can effectively be traversed in five minutes flat, carried intact in the memory and considered at leisure.

- MARTIN HERBERT

CASEY KAPLAN  
121 WEST 27TH STREET  
NEW YORK NY 10001  
TEL +1 212 645 7335  
FAX +1 212 645 7835  
WWW.CASEYKAPLANGALLERY.COM  
INFO@CASEYKAPLANGALLERY.COM



# 32 LIAM GILLICK



Category: Artist  
Nationality: British  
Last Year: Reentry (34 in 2009)

Complex and critical, Gillick's parallel productions of text and artworks have placed him increasingly at the centre of debates about what it is to be an artist today, trapped, he recently wrote within 'a regime that is centred on a rampant capitalization of the mind'. A new interactive installation, *Game of War Structure* - based on French theorist Guy Debord's chess variant - opened at IMMA, Dublin, in September. Collaborations, a key feature of Gillick's practice, have continued, most recently with e-flux (Gillick's text 'The Good of Work' appears in the collective's catchily titled and recently published book *Are You Working Too Much? Post-Fordism, Precarity, and the Labor of Art*), with old friend Lawrence Weiner for an exhibition at Antwerp's MuHKA and with Pringle of Scotland for their London catwalk show (which featured Gillick-designed monogrammed benches) and a collection of bags, accessories and knitwear to be launched at this year's Art Basel Miami Beach. In addition to all that, Gillick teaches at Columbia University in New York City and the Center for Curatorial Studies at Bard College upstate.

CASEY KAPLAN  
121 WEST 27TH STREET  
NEW YORK NY 10001  
TEL +1 212 645 7335  
FAX +1 212 645 7835  
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INFO@CASEYKAPLANGALLERY.COM

## THE ART NEWSPAPER

Buck, Louisa, "There's a perversity in my method," The Art Newspaper, No. 229, November, p.54

# "There's a perversity in my method"

*With a biennial, two shows and a knitwear range on the go, Liam Gillick talks about the lasting effect of his Goldsmiths years*

By Louisa Buck

**O**f the much-vaunted generation that studied at Goldsmith in South London in the late 1980s, Liam Gillick is undoubtedly one of the most cerebral. A writer as much a maker of objects, his practice is underpinned by a lot of theory. His long standing fascination with the way that visual environments affect human behaviour has resulted in him producing a plethora of quasi-functional and architectural structure using a minimal formal language. He has also made direct and sometime permanent intervention into buildings—most notably at the Home Office in London in 2005, which include a coloured glass canopy. He also produces texts, books, and films. In 2009, Gillick was chosen to occupy the German pavilion at the Venice Biennale and he has recently donated the resulting work, *How are you going to behave?* A kitchen cat speaks, involving pine wood module based on his kitchen and a stuffed talking cat, to the collection of the Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao. He is currently participating in the Gothenburg Biennial (until 13 November), has a show at Air de Paris and one at Micheline Szvajcer in Antwerp (both until 3 December), and next month is launching a range of knitwear and accessories with Pringle of Scotland in a pop-up gallery in the Miami Design District.

The Art Newspaper: It can be tricky to get a handle on the multiple Gillick manifestations from your sound piece at the Göteborg Biennial based on Volvo's working practices to the painted aluminium version of Guy Debord's chess-variant, *Game of War*, recently installed at the Irish Museum of Modern Art in Dublin. Then there's the two exhibitions on new films and abstract structures that opened in Paris and Antwerp last month. Can you give us some entry points?

Liam Gillick: There's a deep binarism in the work that used to concern people, but the division has now become very clear. There's this constant unresolvable battle between the idea of a commitment to a rigorous abstraction which is also mixed with this other component that's about the idea of production, how things get produced and how things acquire meaning. This is incredibly important and generates all the longer narratives and examination of structure.

The term "post-utopian" has been bandied round in connection with your work. Is that helpful?

It's not straightforward as just taking an earlier form and reconstructing it, it is more based on the idea of discounting certain possibilities or certainties, of slightly altering or twisting the cultural DNA to end up with these forms. I've always had this interest in applied art and applied design, but not the grand narratives, not Mies Van der Rohe but more like the Greater London Council architect who did the dental centre. I'm not trying to depict those things or even borrow directly from them, but it's that kind of applied modernism, which is very rooted and grounded, mixed with this sort of unraveling of what you call the "post-utopian." I'm still interested in the problem of art-for me, the idea of what kind of art could exist and be useful is really fascinating, which is why I do it.

You've just designed a new collection of knitwear and accessories for Pringle of Scotland. How does that fit in?

It was the idea of Alistair Carr [the design director at Pringle] that we should actually make objects rather than clothes. So we started designing handbags. The whole thing ballooned and now we are making a whole range of things from little wallets to large bags. I am testing a lot of my theories about work and production and distribution: the intensity of work and production suits my way of thinking and matches my desire to see objects enter circulation with as little delay as possible. It is the opposite of my work with architects, which is productive for exactly the opposite reasons.



## THE ART NEWSPAPER

In 2009, you were selected to represent Germany at the Venice Biennale. How did you find the experience?

I really tried to continue my normal work - I didn't view it as a showcase. I wanted to do something new; I wanted to push something that's quite hard. You suffer a little bit when you do that, even if you know in the back of your mind it's the right thing to do. I left the pavilion on the day of the opening with the clearheadedness that you get sometimes after a breakup or after something's gone wrong, or after you've just witnessed an accident: It's not elation of satisfaction, it's the feeling that you know that this is the only thing you could do, but it's not going to achieve a certain satisfaction. It's my constant dilemma that I'm interested in setting up critical discursive structures and when you do that you are going to get a critical and discursive response, yet that's also quite punishing in a way. That's the perversity of my method.

You graduated from Goldsmiths in 1987 and are part of that very high-profile generation that went on to put British art on the map in the early 1990s. How important was your time at Goldsmiths in shaping you as an artist?

Oh, Everything! Because at that point you were coming into contact with people in their early- and mid-40s who disagreed with each other. The usual situation is that there's a solid core of jobbing tutors and then there are people who float in and out, but Goldsmiths was an incredibly divided school that was run by people with differing ideas who would argue them out in front of you. Michael Craig-Martin, Richard Wentworth, Jon Thompson were the three key ones. I just thought that this was normal, and it suited my way of thinking perfectly.

This runs counter to the now legendary status of 1980s Goldsmiths as some kind of training ground for cool, sassy artistic wunderkinds... The problem with Goldsmiths is that over time the stories have got too simple and too clear, whereas the whole point of Goldsmiths was that it was incredibly unclear and incredibly questioning how things are valued. People assume there was a coherence to it, but there was absolutely no coherence- and that's obviously why it was so successful. It was one of the few educational environments that mirrored the peculiarities of the idea of contemporary art. Which of course always more and more subjective and more and more dispersed and capable of absorbing almost anything. It's a perpetual paradox: the more you try and find the edge of it and step outside of it, the edge just moves further away, or you are absorbed. This is why Goldsmiths was an incredible contemporary art place, whereas a lot of other places were still dealing with the legacy of modernism and not dealing with their time.

Although you've been shortlisted for the Turner Prize [in 2002] and have had many shows in the UK, your affiliations both personal and professional seem resolutely international: you live in New York, teach in American universities and show more widely throughout Europe.

I was interested in conceptual art as a student which- even though in the 1980s it was only ten years ago- was viewed as the past and felt like another country. What was fascinating for me was not so much the work itself or trying to reproduce the work, but the realisation that these people were still around and still working.

You've had a long association with Lawrence Weiner.

When I met Lawrence Weiner in 1987, or 1988, it was extraordinary because he treated me like another artist and not like an indulged student (of course I realised later that he does this for everyone and it was not that I was particularly special). This was the start of a hardcore, ongoing discussion that was not based on emulation, but that maybe we had similar working methods. It fitted my combination of delusion and distraction that I needed to find a context where people were less sceptical, or at least more curious, about the fact that my practice didn't seem to be resolved. Then, by the early 1990s, I was working with a lot of international "homeless" artists such as Philippe Parreno, Dominique Gonzalez-Foerster and Jorge Pardo- we were this stateless, mongrel band and the things I got out of Goldsmiths I found a way to realise as an adult. Not what to do, but how to look for a way to work. My internationalism is for a reason, but it does not exclude the place where I am from. My work was brittle and I needed to find places with a context as complex and fragmented as my own. To do this I had to become permanently displaced. If you look at the contemporary situation, it has turned out that I wasn't the only one.



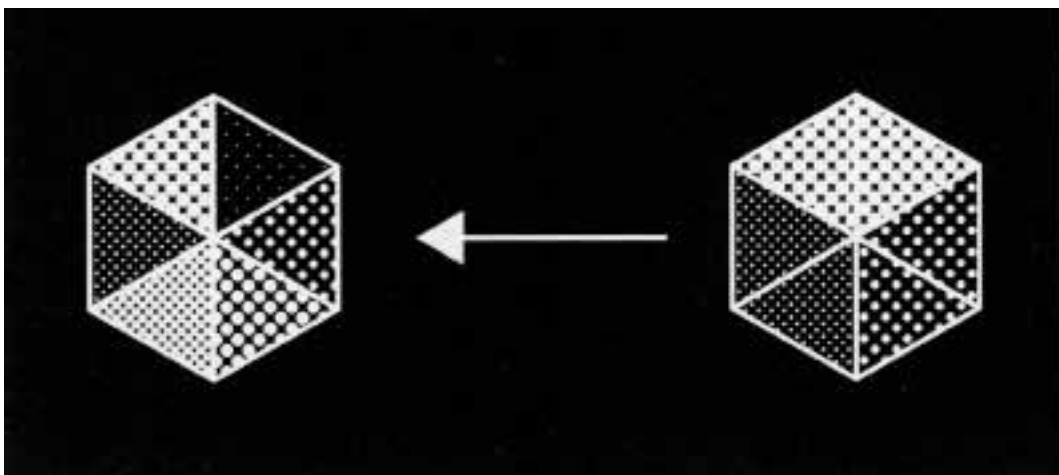
From left to right:  
Status following closure,  
2008; How are you going  
to behave? A kitchen cat  
speaks, Venice Biennale,  
2009 Construcción de uno  
(a prequel), 2006, at the Tate  
Triennial

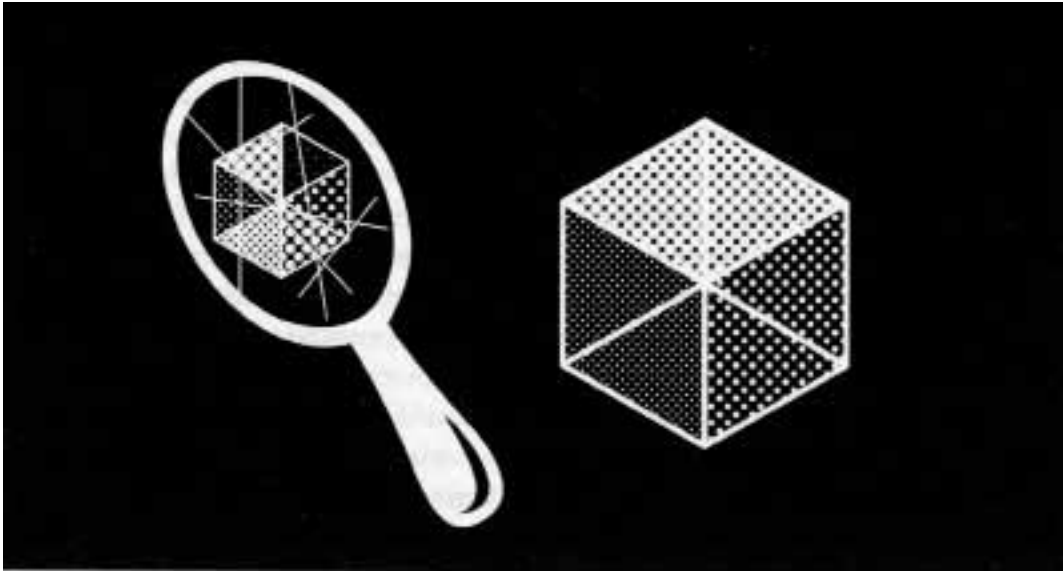
**CASEY KAPLAN**  
121 WEST 27TH STREET  
NEW YORK NY 10001  
TEL +1 212 645 7335  
FAX +1 212 645 7835  
WWW.CASEYKAPLANGALLERY.COM  
INFO@CASEYKAPLANGALLERY.COM

Lind, Maria, ed. "Abstract," Micro-Historias y Macro-mundos Vol. 3, Mexico: Instituto Nacional de Bellas Artes y Literatura Reforma y Campo Marte, 2011, p. 157-166



By making the abstract concrete, art no longer retains any abstract quality, it merely announces a constant striving for a state of abstraction and in turn produces more abstraction to pursue. It is this failure of the abstract that lures and hypnotises—forcing itself onto artists and demanding repeated attention. The abstract draws artists towards itself as a semi-autonomous zone just out of reach. It produces the illusion of a series of havens and places that might reduce the contingent everyday to a sequence of distant inconveniences. It is the concretization of the abstract into a series of failed forms that lures the artist into repeated attempts to “create” the abstract—fully aware that this very act produces things that are the representation of impossibilities. In the current context this means that the abstract is a realm of denial and deferment—a continual reminder to various publics that varied acts of art have taken place and the authors were probably artists.





The creation of an art of the abstract is a tautology. It cannot be verified independently. We have to accept that the concretization of the abstract is a record of itself. It points towards something that cannot be turned into an object. But there—in front of us—is this non-existence. Even further this non-existence in concrete form can take up a lot of space, supposedly pure colour and variegated form. The grander the failed representation of the abstract becomes the more striking the presence of failure—at the heart of which is a very human attempt to capture an unobtainable state of things and relationships to the unknowable. The abstract in art is a process of destruction—taking that which cannot be represented and forcing it into an incomplete set of objects and images which exist as a parallel lexicon that form a shattered mirror to that which cannot be represented. There is nothing abstract about art that is the result of this destructive desire to create an abstraction. It is a process of bringing down to earth that which continues to remain elusive. It is this search that connects the desire to create abstraction with utopias and is at the heart of its neo-romantic ideology. It is the basis of the symbolic politics of abstraction and its parallel course as marker of hope and ultimate failure. It is the process of attempting to reproduce the abstract that causes the truly abstract to

retain its place just out of reach.

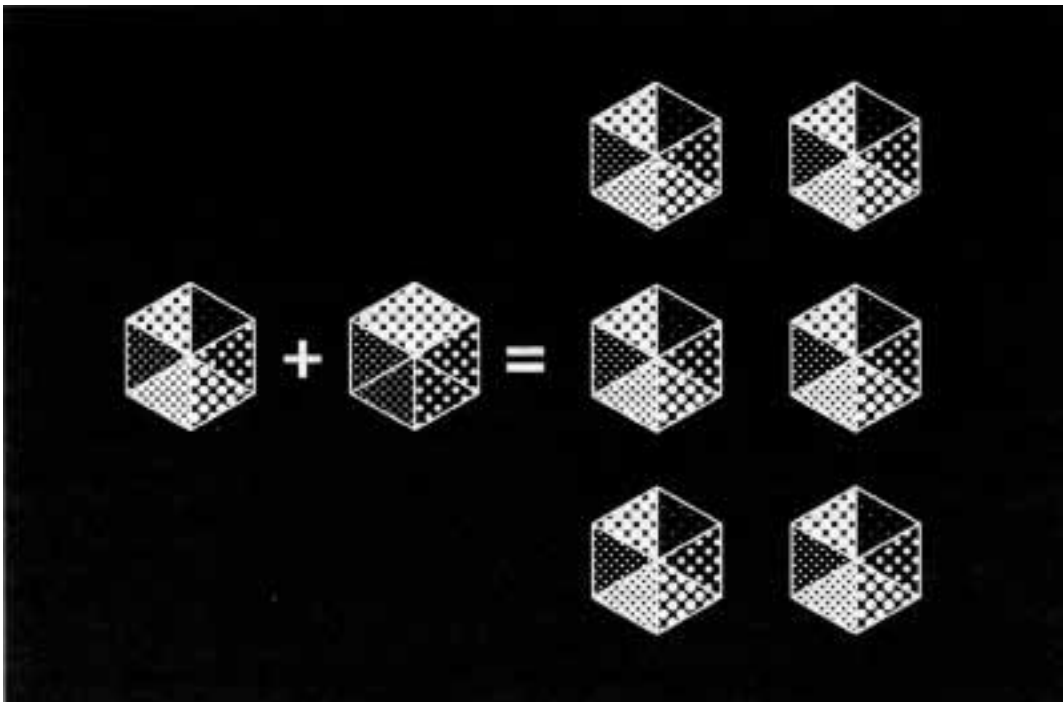
The abstract therefore—in the current aesthetic regime—always finds form as a relational backdrop to other activities, terrains and interactions. By destroying the abstract via making it concrete, the ambient and the temporary are heightened and become an enduring associative abstraction that replaces the lack in the artwork. The abstraction that is produced by abstract art is not a reflection of the abstraction at the start of the process. The making of a concrete structure produces further abstraction—the art object in this case is merely a marker or waypoint towards new abstraction. Tackling the job of producing something concrete through a process of abstraction neither reproduces abstraction nor does it provide us with anything truly autonomous. It produces a lack and points towards further potentially endless processes of abstraction. It is this potential endlessness—that remains productive while reproducing itself—that is the key to the lure of abstract art. The procedure of producing abstract art does not fill the world with lots of abstraction—despite appearances to the contrary—instead it populates the space of art with an excess of pointers that in turn direct attention towards previously unaccounted for abstractions. This is at the heart of the lure of the abstract—this explains why artists keep

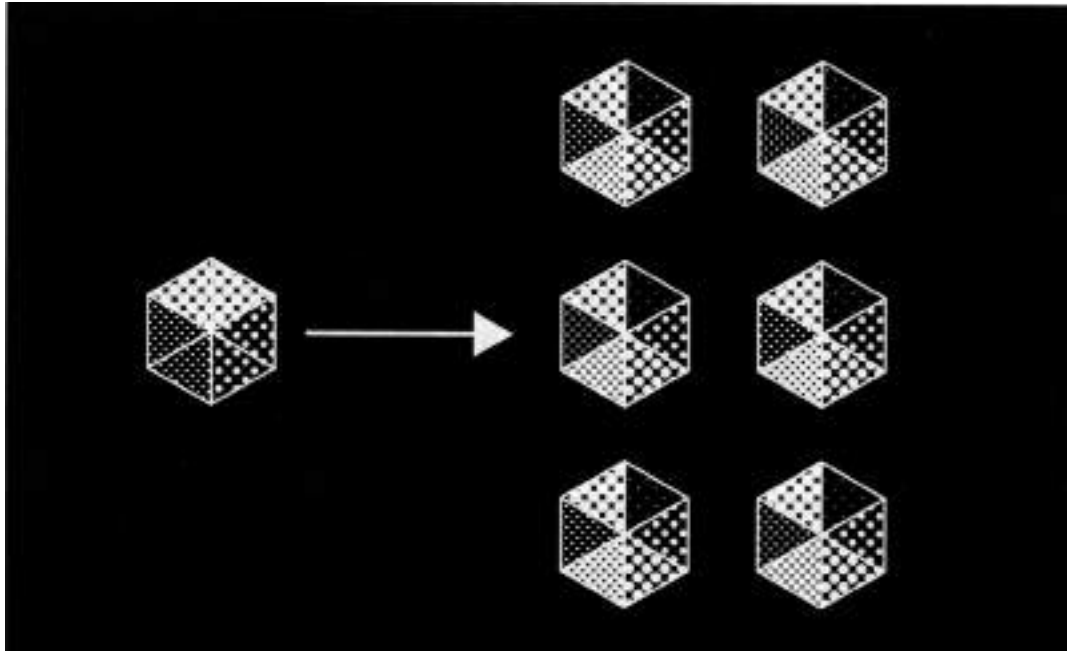
returning to the elusive zone. Abstraction is not the contrary of representation—a recognition of which is the key to understanding the complete failure of Gerhard Richter's work for example—rather abstraction in art is the contrary of the abstract in the same way that representation is the contrary of the real.

Concrete structure in this case also lacks. It does not hold a functional role within the culture beyond its failure to be an abstraction. The concrete structure becomes a marker that signifies art and points to all other art as structures that contain excessive subjectivities. Abstraction in this case has little to do with minimalism or formalism. Yet it can easily become either of these things with just a slight tweak in any direction. The intention to create a minimal or reductive gesture, object or environment requires a suppression of abstraction towards the deployment of materials that may or may not be in balance or sync with their objectness. This is not the same as the creation of an abstract artwork. The desire to develop a minimalist practice is a denial of the abstract and an attempt to concretize the concrete. Through this process there is the demonstration of a desire to

ignore and go past the failure of abstraction. It is through minimalistic gestures that artists attempted to cut out abstraction's failure of transformation and invited us instead to focus on what we imagine is a material fact or set of facts about a material within a given context. The emergence of an identifiable minimalist practice more than forty years ago, while attempting to avoid the problem of abstraction, failed to truly trouble the problem of abstraction. Minimalism highlighted evasion. The minimal created a series of half-facts all of which continued to allude to the abstract of art. This explains the spiritualisation of the minimal in the contemporary context, its interchangability and absorption into the aesthetic of the wellness centre and the kitchen and the association of truth to materials with truthy relationships to cosmic, pick and mix spirituality.

The failure at the heart of the abstract is its enduring critical potential. The demonstration of the concrete brings down metaphors, allusions and other tools that can be deployed for multiple ends to a set of knowable facts. Any attempt to represent through art will always deploy a degree

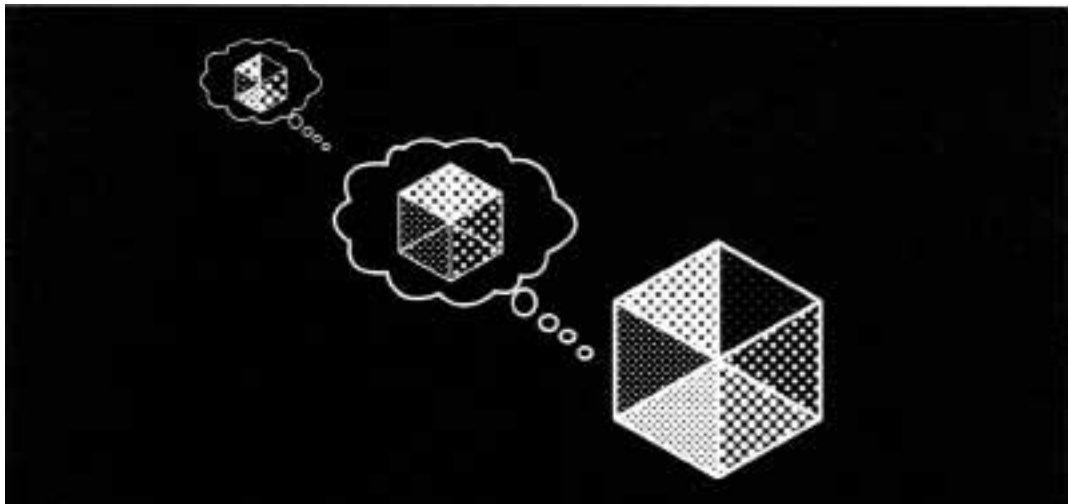
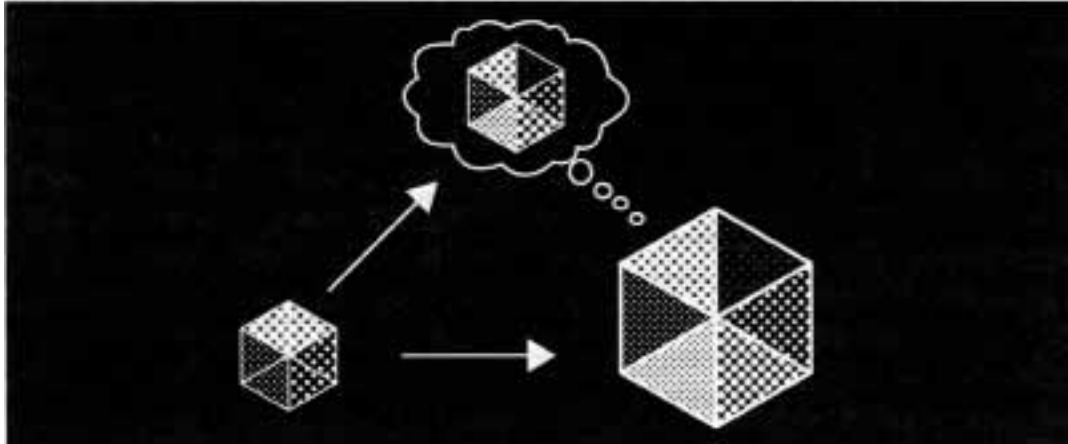
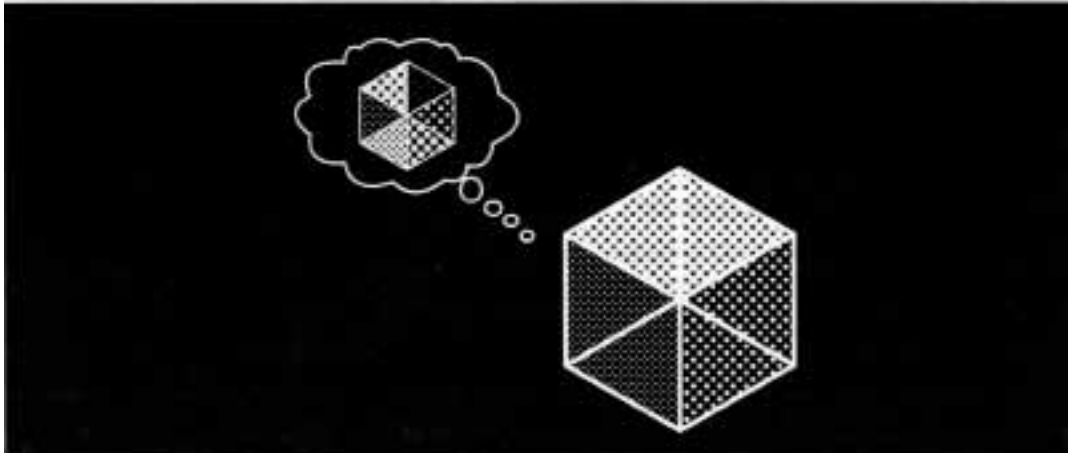
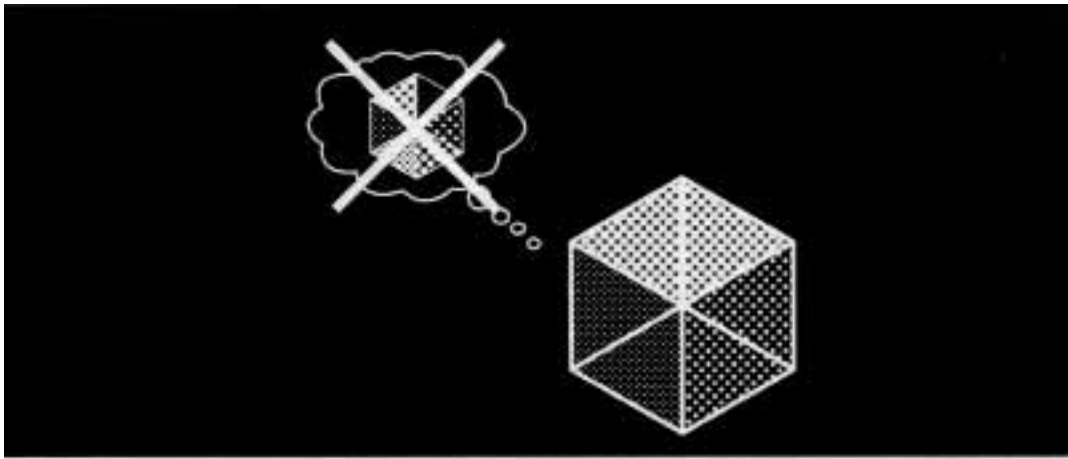




of artifice—this is not a moral judgment, just a state of things. The failed abstract reproduces itself. It does not point to anything other than its own concrete form. Its concrete presence replaces the attempt to pin down the abstract and becomes a replacement object that only represents the potential of the abstract. This process of looking at replacement objects is one of the most provocative aspects of some art in the twentieth century. The presence of replacement objects as key markers within the trajectory of twentieth century modernism is what provokes confused and sublime responses. It is not the forms themselves that have this essential quality. The search for ever more “true” abstraction merely created and continues to create more replacement objects that scatter the globe as reminders of the failure of the concrete in relation to the abstract. This replacement function explains why the concrete in relation to the abstract is so vulnerable to being deployed for ends other than the progressive and neo-transcendental. The earlier concretization of the abstraction of corporate identity via the creation of logos and smooth minimal spaces can be viewed

in parallel to the failure of the abstract in the late modern period—particularly in the US.

So the endurance of abstraction is rooted in this desire to keep showing the impossibility and elusiveness of the abstract. At the same time it reveals the processes of manipulation that take place within unaccountable realms of capital—the continual attempt to concretize abstract relationships and therefore render them into a parallel form that can be more easily exchanged. Where in the past the concrete was created from the abstract of the corporate now these processes of concretisation have moved into every realm of the “personal.” The abstract art produced alongside such a period is a necessity. Forming a sequence of test sites to verify and enable us to remain vigilant about the processes of concretisation that take place around us in the service of capital. The transformation of relationships into objects via a mature sensitivity to a process of concretisation is tested and tracked when the most vivid current artists deploy what appears to be abstract but is in fact a conscious deployment of evasive markers.



CASEY KAPLAN  
 121 WEST 27TH STREET  
 NEW YORK NY 10001  
 TEL +1 212 645 7335  
 FAX +1 212 645 7835  
 WWW.CASEYKAPLANGALLERY.COM  
 INFO@CASEYKAPLANGALLERY.COM

# frieze

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Recent artist books, magazines and journals 2011



# Word Play

Why a growing number of artists are turning away from image-making to writing and performance *by Dieter Roelstraete*

A couple of weeks ago, I witnessed two consecutive performances by artists who think of themselves as visual artists – that is to say, as makers of images, first and foremost. They were fine performances, if a tad visually underwhelming, as the makers had clearly meant them to be. Both involved the artists either standing rather rigidly or moving about very deliberately and reciting texts, which were either read from a badly lit piece of paper or hauled from a visibly untrained memory. That such ‘textual’ non-events should have taken place in a well-regarded art institution known for its beautiful architecture and occasional forays into spectacle (i.e. visual pleasure) didn’t strike me as particularly surprising. Rather, it’s symptomatic of a general condition afflicting cultural production in these times of instant image inundation that an ever-growing number of artists are visibly anxious to extricate themselves from. Having taught at a number of art schools, I am now used to being asked, upon entering a young artist’s studio, to either read or listen to work as opposed to simply look at it – indeed, ‘looking’, in its old-fashioned sense, is very often left out of the equation entirely.

In most cases, listening to work means listening to the artist’s deliberately listless and unaccompanied voice (monologue), to fragments of speech (either polyphony or cacophony), to people idly chatting (dialogue), or to hearsay (gossip, rumours, secrets, things whispered rather than exclaimed and certainly not written down). The narrative and the vocal are the two defining parameters of this trend; some of the artists whose work can be directly associated with this ever-expanding speech bubble include Ian Wilson (the granddaddy of it all), Tris Vonna-Michell, Imogen Stidworthy, Tino Sehgal, Falke Pisano, Susan Philipsz (whose Turner Prize interviews revolved around her not being a sound artist), Karl Holmqvist, Simon Fujiwara and Roberto Cuoghi. The resurgence of critical interest in Wilson’s radically dematerialized practice cannot be considered outside the context of the aforementioned phenomenon. It’s a sonorous landscape circumscribed by the spectral regimes of ventriloquism (Asta Gröting’s video cycle from 1993–2004, *The Inner Voice*, comes to mind, as does Jeff Wall’s 1990 photograph *Ventriloquist at a Birthday Party in October, 1947*) and charisma (think of the gold-coated Joseph Beuys explaining paintings to a dead hare), ruled by the myth of

the indomitable immateriality, so easily reconfigured as 'criticality'. The central claim here is that hearsay – words softly spoken into the ether (again, there is not a lot of yelling in this kind of work) – resists commodification. Other chimerical forms that crowd around the authority of the vocal chords evoke 'a voice and nothing else', to paraphrase the title of *A Voice and Nothing More* (2006) by Slovenian cultural theorist Mladen Dolar, who observed 'the voice as a vehicle of meaning, a source of aesthetic admiration, and an object that can be seen as the lever of thought'. All of this relates to drones, mantras and nursery rhymes (e.g. repetition and conjuration), to prophecies and orations (the evangelical preacher being something of an improbable paragon here), to hypnosis and the talking cure (the couch is often a very important piece of furniture in the studios of the aforementioned art students), to political rhetoric ('speechifying') and the theatre of pseudo-academic lecturing.

Reading an art work often means reading the scripted versions of all of the above: scripts have become a big deal among an emerging generation of artists, where theatre and the related arts of the stage seem to have replaced film (one of the dominant paradigms of much '90s art) as the reference frame of choice. (This shift is, of course, more complex than can be thoroughly explored or theorized in these pages, but the textual or literary nature of theatre is only one factor in the attraction it now seems to hold for younger artists, the other being its live character and guarantee of something 'real' taking place.) It's telling that one of last year's most talked about exhibitions in New York was Marina Abramovic's retrospective, 'The Artist is Present', at the Museum of Modern Art, during the entire run of which the artist was indeed present. Eight years ago, the defining event would probably have been Matthew Barney's 'The Cremaster Cycle' (1994–2002) – how things have changed. A theatre stage has replaced a cinema; live performers accosting visitors have replaced projections. It's worth recalling here the key argument of Jacques Derrida's *Of Grammatology* (1967): that the Western tradition of a 'metaphysics of presence' is built on the primacy of the spoken word over the written word. Very often today reading a work of art means looking at writing (the renaissance of collage does not just concern pictures, but also text), leafing through books, journals or stacks of photocopies and marvelling at the archaic aesthetic of the typewriter. I have long suspected that the enthusiasm evinced by many younger artists for the more obscure marginalia of 1960s and '70s Conceptual art – such as deciphering painstakingly handwritten stories on crumpled pieces of paper that are then stuck to the wall, or reading the very same handwriting directly on the wall – is linked to the movement's fondness for the typewriter, the primary source of the typography fetish that Benjamin Buchloh referred to as the 'aesthetics of administration'.<sup>1</sup>

No matter how immaterial the claims of these various practices may sound, both written and printed matter are often at the heart of it all. However, there was a time, in only 2004, when this state of affairs appeared incongruous enough to occasion the publication by Revolver of a book titled *Now What? Artists Write! Now*, the genre of writing-by-artists, presided over by the shining examples of Robert Smithson, Dan Graham, Donald Judd and Agnes Martin, is fast becoming a flourishing niche market. Indeed, the increased interest in narration (fiction, alternative historiography, memoirs and even poetry) has done wonders for the spread of bibliophilia in an era consumed by the fear of the book's apparently inevitable end, which has been declared in tones ranging from the apocalyptic (Nicholas Carr's *The Shallows: What the Internet is Doing to Our Brains*, 2010) to the plainly ecstatic (Clay Shirky's *Cognitive Surplus: Creativity and Generosity in a Connected Age*, 2010).

## The genre of writing-by-artists presided over by the shining examples of Robert Smithson, Dan Graham, and Agnes Martin, is fast becoming a flourishing niche market.

Much like decades ago, when it became a refuge for more adventurously minded film- and documentary makers, the art world has now become one of the few places where the culture of the book continues to reign relatively unchallenged, seemingly impervious to the curse of Kindles, iPads and e-books. While artists seem to be consuming as well as producing more books than ever before, more art magazines are being published today than at any time in recent history and the seemingly limitless demand for content to fill the cosmic expanse of Cyberia has meant that there has never been so much writing about writing, publishing about publishing, talking about talking or language about language. (See for instance, the appearance of 'speciality' journals such as *The Happy Hypocrite*, *Dot Dot Dot*, and *F.R. David*. Other artists, art collectives and publishing ventures that occupy positions of some importance in this unruly landscape are Fiona Banner, Paul Chan, Keren Cytter, Liam Gillick, Antonia Hirsch, Julieta Aranda and Anton Vidokle's *e-flux Journal*, Seth Price and the collective *Continuous Project*, and Lili Reynaud Dewar's magazine *pétunia*.)

'Words don't come easy' they used to say back in the early '80s when, in Europe at least, art movements such as the *Neue Wilden* in Germany, the *Transavanguardia* in Italy, and *New British Sculptors* reigned supreme and words in art did not count for much. But that was a long time ago: never before, it seems, have words come more easily to art – that is to say, to artists. Why? One factor that has contributed to this recent development is the increased demand for literacy (both of the literary and theoretical variety) that has become an essential ingredient of art education. A certain professionalization of the artist's trade as a result of the increasing pressure for art academies to become more academic has entered the picture.

Art has been reconfigured as research to meet the demands of the information-and-knowledge economy, which has meant that artists are now routinely expected to be at home in various discourses in ways unimaginable to earlier generations, who very often chose art as a way out of language. Eloquence in the contextualization and/or defence of one's work is now simply *de rigueur* – nothing more, nothing less. No wonder then that there is an incessant demand for talk in both art schools and the art market. (It has become increasingly difficult to imagine an art fair without an accompanying talks programme. I, for one, must admit to having spoken at more art fairs than non-profit art institutions last year). Thus, there is now a hypertrophy of art practices that centre around talk and an excess of art production that appears to 'merely' consist of a voice, and nothing else. As the art market cannot allow itself to lag behind too much, it has devised ways in which all of this friendly art banter, appearing as it does as the horizon of radical, forward-looking art practice, can be turned into a source of potential profit.

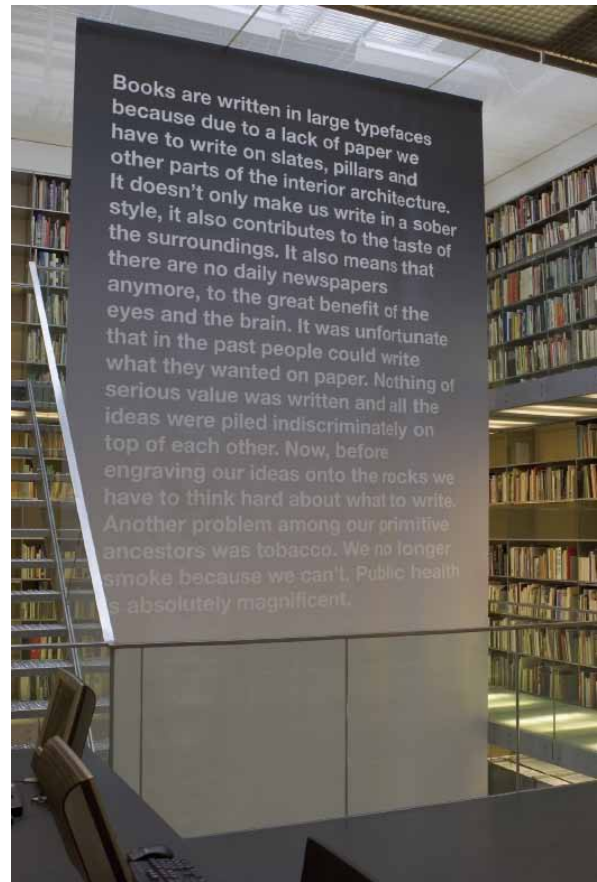
Finally, the whiff of anachronism and obsolescence that surrounds the art of the book has turned out to be a potent attractor, triggering many an artist's instinct to come to the rescue of cultural phenomena that are either marginalized or threatened with extinction. Much art of the last decade has been melancholy and nostalgic,

Eloquence in the contextualization and/or defence of one's work is now simply de rigueur - nothing more, nothing less.

obsessed with both the past and its archival residues, and as the book is transformed into a historical artefact, an artistic cult of care is beginning to accrue around this last of the great models of a modernity that has become redefined, in the course of the last decade, as our antiquity. And what could be more ancient and archaic – and thus more alluring – than the art of storytelling?

To return, by way of conclusion, to my observation about the problem of instant image inundation: there is a growing sense among many artists and curators that in order for art to extricate itself from our culture's dramatically devalued image economy it needs to retreat into language. Ironically perhaps, whereas words now seem to come easy to art, images, for a variety of reasons (one being that they have become so cheap) no longer do. For a long time, 'Art & Language' was the name of a problem as much as a conceptual art collective, but in recent years, it has become the name of an alliance, cemented around the duty of remembering when everywhere else the hypertrophy of image production seems to be predicated on forgetting – an annihilation, of sort. If art has become the privileged site for the telling and retelling (i.e. the preserving) of histories, it is primarily because history itself is disappearing amidst the maelstrom of its visual record.

**Dieter Roelstraete**  
is a curator at Museum van Hedendaagse Kunst Antwerpen in Belgium and an editor of Afterall. He lives in Berlin, Germany.



Liam Gillick and Edgar Schmitz. Inverted Research Tool, 2006. Installation View Van Abbenmuseum, Eindhoven.

1 'Conceptual Art 1962–1969: From the Aesthetic of Administration to the Critique of Institutions', Benjamin H.D. Buchloh, October, vol. 55. winter, 1990, pp. 105–143

2 The reference to the 1982 European hit record 'Words Don't Come Easy' by a French pop star F.R. David is not, of course, unintentional: F.R. David is also the title of a journal, published by De Appel arts centre in Amsterdam, that 'focuses on the status of language, writing and text in contemporary art practice'. I was, until recently, involved with it.

CASEY KAPLAN  
121 WEST 27TH STREET  
NEW YORK NY 10001  
TEL +1 212 645 7335  
FAX +1 212 645 7835  
WWW.CASEYKAPLANGALLERY.COM  
INFO@CASEYKAPLANGALLERY.COM

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SUMMER 2010

UP IN THE AIR

The latest project from *world-renowned artist*  
**LIAM GILLICK** has *people looking up--WAY UP.*

STORY BY STEVE BURGESS  
PHOTOGRAPHY BY HUBERT KANG

Some weeks before the opening of the new Fairmont Pacific Rim, two people happened to be standing on the sidewalk, looking up at the facade. Wrapped around a corner of the downtown Vancouver skyscraper are letters forming a long sentence that's repeated on floors five to 22 of the 48-storey structure: "lying on top of a building the clouds looked no nearer than when I was lying on the street."

Down on the sidewalk, one bystander turned to the other. "Looks pretty cool, eh?" she said.

The man shrugged. "Um, sure. I guess so," he mumbled. "It's okay."

"What could I do?" Liam Gillick says later. "I didn't want to be an asshole."

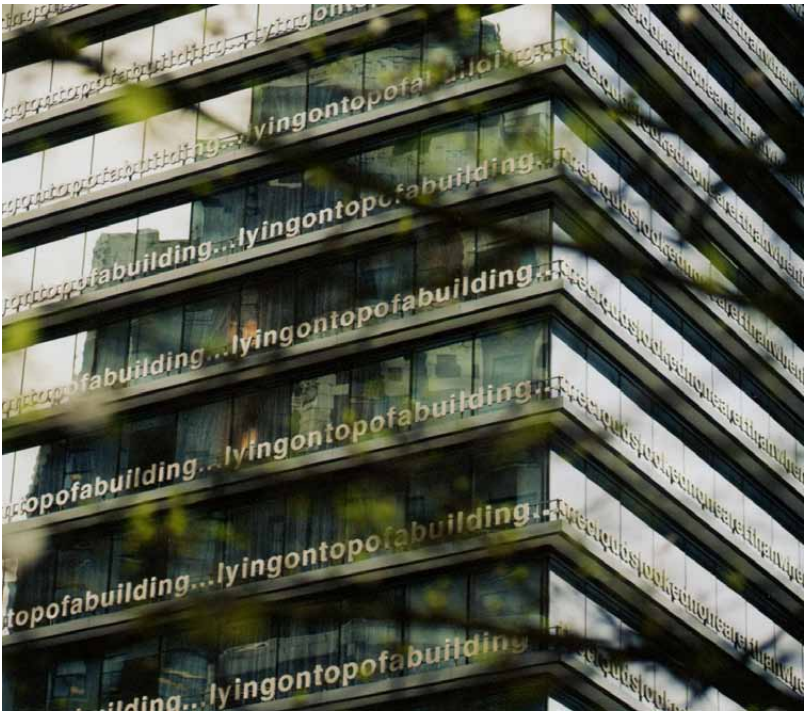
That anonymous woman can be forgiven for putting Gillick in an awkward situation. She could hardly have known that the guy hanging around the sidewalk that day was responsible for the artistic flourish they were both admiring. Still, as they say back in his old London stomping grounds, Gillick was well chuffed. "It was nice, yeah," he says, grinning.

Gillick's enigmatic work has been lifting gazes at the corner of Burrard and Cordova for months now. And as the story suggests, he is perfectly happy to let those eyes stay on the work while he quietly sneaks off for a cigarette. He may have been a former classmate of determined art-world super-celebrity Damien Hirst, but the two men obviously learned different lessons about personal brand management. "It's a different thing than what I was interested in," Gillick says. After being selected by Fairmont Pacific Rim's search committee, Gillick decided on the nature of his installation shortly after his first visit to Vancouver. "It's a very striking city. The idea of using the text came to me within an hour of being here."

The Fairmont Pacific Rim is something of a statement itself. At over 800,000 square feet, the hotel/condo development is one of the city's largest. It's yet another design from architect James Cheng, already reigning champion of downtown







ABOVE: Liam Gillick's Fairmont Pacific Rim installation.

Vancouver courtesy of the Shaw Tower and the even-more-towering Shan gri-La.

Gillick worked with Cheng and his team, and found them almost frighteningly cooperative. "I got the impression if I'd said, 'Let's turn the building upside down,' they might have said 'Sure,'" he says.

Gillick may not have turned the Fairmont Pacific Rim on its head, but he nonetheless feels his work might subtly undermine its foundations. "There's something about the text that is a little bit resigned, melancholy, and also a little bit critical," he says. "Saying that no matter how high you make the building, the sky is no nearer than when you're lying on the street--to me that's a kind of politics. It's about forms of address. Who is speaking to whom? Is that me saying that? Is it some guy in a bar? Or is it the corporation saying it because they're going to build it twice as high next time?"

Liam Gillick was born in a London suburb in 1964. His Irish grandfather was a coal miner. "It sounds more romantic than it should. It's actually a well-paid job," says Gillick.

"Growing up with an Irish Catholic name, I was never bullied in school. I always thought it was my natural charm, but I realize now they were worried about having their knees blown off."

Despite early dreams of becoming a crusading lawyer, Gillick took a detour into the art world, enrolling at Goldsmiths' College in London in 1984. Gillick and his schoolmates shared a dream. "The decision we all made as students," he says now, "is that we were going to leave art school and become artists."

It's not quite as obvious as it sounds. The most famous products of British art schools have always tended to be rock stars. The Rolling Stones, Pink Floyd, Roxy Music, and numerous other pop music giants emerged from the art-school scene. (Gillick's own classmates included "half of Blur," he says.) It was a reflection of the fact that, rather than fostering future artists, British art schools had long been the catch basin for creative misfits not cut out for the usual upper-crust professions. "You'd see some of these people like Jagger and Ferry--they used to turn up at our openings and take an interest," Gillick recalls. "There was no way for them to continue their art-work--they would help make it possible for us to stick it through."

He has realized his ambition of an art career. But the path of the modern professional artist is not a straightforward one. Some of his ideas for public art have been developed thanks to the luxury of near-certain failure. "I spent three or four years in the late nineties/early 2000s doing speculative projects [along with other work]," he recalls. "They'd pay you a little fee for an idea. And you knew you were never going to get [the commission], because it would go to the local artist from Monchengladbach or wherever. But you could spend your time thinking about this real place that was not a gallery and not a museum. It was a kind of school. It was a way of avoiding that big problem artists have--I am often trying to avoid the feeling that there's a direct relationship between what I do and being paid. It gets in the way."

"The big problem for me," he admits, "was when someone would turn around and say, 'Okay let's do it.' And I'd think, 'Oh shit!' That's when the stress starts, and the anxiety. I'm much more interested in pre-production and post-production than in actually doing the thing."

These accidents do happen. Self-effacement notwithstanding, they have happened for Gillick with some frequency. One prominent example is the new Home Office in London's Marsham Street, headquarters of British bureaucracy. "That became an incredible learning process, working very closely with an architect [Sir Terry Farrell] for three years who wasn't that interested in contemporary art," he says. "By the end of it, we had almost swapped roles, where he would have a lot of conceptual ideas and I'd be the one saying, 'No, no, we need to look at the way the structure is functioning and the way we're sending the stress down the pillars.'"

His collaboration with Farrell, completed in 2005, resulted in the look of the building, including a multicoloured glass canopy and a giant entrance screen made up of geometric designs, providing extra visual impact to Farrell's low-rise modernist design. No one looking at the building would be likely to identify Gillick's contribution as a separate artwork, which is exactly the way Gillick wants it. "I have to find a way to make these things normal," he says. "Not like a big event, not like a groundbreaking object. Increasingly in the modern age, art has become someone to look at. That's quite a recent phenomenon. Usually art was a backdrop for another activity--praying, or thinking, or admiring someone's grandparents, or even trying to understand a war or a battle."

“It’s very different from the Anish Kapoor artwork in Chicago [Cloud Gate, a.k.a. the Bean, a mirror-like stainless steel sculpture in the city’s Millennium Park], where you’ve got this big centrepiece, and people go to it and get photographed with it, and it becomes a marker. I’m very interested in what you might call the ‘disinterested viewer.’ I want to make work that is a backdrop to daily life.”

So then, how about the big blue raindrop created by Berlin-based artist group Inges Idee for the plaza of the new Vancouver Convention Centre? “Well, I think you need these things in combination,” Gillick avers. “I would never speak badly about a big raindrop.”

He is willing to offer an opinion on the hot local issue of government arts funding. Although this particular project is corporate, Gillick believes government support of all the arts is crucial. “You can’t rely on private corporations to do it. It’s really easy populist politics to cut back on arts.”

Liam Gillick may be hype-averse, but developers and architects who commission such projects like to get attention for them. The unveiling of the new Fairmont Pacific Rim facade featured the expected reception, press releases, and news cameras. Gillick knows it’s part of the job. But still. “I was one of these people in school, if the teacher asked me, ‘What’s two plus two?’, my mind was blank. So there’s this feeling of wanting to work in a more public space, but not necessarily while everyone’s staring at me.”

It’s not all bad, though. The Fairmont people have not overtaxed him, and there have been local delights. “Ian Wallace came to the reception, and I’m a big fan,” Gillick says. “He’s someone who has influenced my work. That’s part of why you do it.”

Gillick was not present for the actual installation of the steel letters. “Once I had established a relationship with the people doing it--it was done [assembled] in B.C.--once it was clear they understood how to execute the idea, I wanted to leave them alone,” he says. “The last thing they need is for me to turn into that teacher who stands there and asks, ‘What’s two plus two?’ They need to find their own way to achieve what needs to be done.”

Besides, Gillick believes it’s best if he stays away. “I’ll compromise before anyone else,” he insists. “There’s this stereotype of artists as free and uncompromising. But when they ask me, ‘What should we do?’ I’ll be the one who says, ‘Well, let’s make it half the size, or use cardboard.’”

“My component is part of the building. It’s not unique or special. They need to take care with the bathrooms and take care with the artwork. It all needs to be executed properly.”

Gillick describes his obsession as “the semiotics of the built world. Which sounds kind of pretentious,” he admits. “A good example is the column I used to write for an Australian magazine. [The column] was called ‘Lobby.’ I meant it in the political sense of lobbying, and also the idea of the lobby as the place where the corporation rebrands their identity or tries to make a kind of interface. I was always wanting to hang out in the foyer of the ational Theatre or a big insurance company.”

The Fairmont Pacific Rim project--a lyrical phrase constructed from stainless steel and wrapped around a skyscraper--seems to represent an odd juncture of poetry, visual art, and architecture. It reflects the man. Gillick’s art practice incorporates many forms, including writing, installations, architectural collaborations, and music. He has also published an extensive body of critical writing on other art. So planning for this project was not just a matter of writing a catchy phrase. “I’m actually drawing the building with the text on it,” he explains. “I’m not just drawing the text. I spent a lot of time looking at the plans for the building and working with 3-D modelling.”

Since the mid-nineties, Gillick has been based in New York with his wife, artist Sarah Morris, and their seven-year-old son (“who has somehow developed a New York accent, even though neither of us has one”). His body of work marks him as one of the most successful young artists of his generation. And yet Gillick’s desire to create works that will become a seamless part of everyday life rather than stand-alone objects has perhaps resulted in a lower profile, certainly when compared to his most famous classmate.

Damien Hirst is the most notorious of the 1980s Goldsmiths’ alumni group, and Gillick says it was not by accident. “He always wanted to be famous, and worked very hard at it. And it worked. It’s very Oprah Winfrey. He works his nuts off because he wanted to be like that. What’s fascinating is that almost every idea that he’s done, he spoke about in art school 20 years ago. And he’s been doing them ever since. It’s something, to have that degree of self-possession.” Considering Gillick’s aversion to hype, his own work also seems to flow naturally from his personality. He can even cite a theory about this. “Barbara Kruger, a very interesting American artist, wrote an article saying that all male artists are either creeps or assholes. And I think he’s an asshole and I’m a creep,” Gillick says with a grin. “We represent the two edges of the Goldsmiths’ years.”

As he said after encountering that stranger on a Vancouver sidewalk, Gillick doesn’t want to be an asshole. He just hopes you might look up once in awhile, near the corner of Burrard and Cordova, and say, “Wow--that looks pretty cool.”

**“There’s this feeling of wanting to work in a more PUBLIC space, *but not necessarily* while everyone’s STARING at me. “**

CASEY KAPLAN  
121 WEST 27TH STREET  
NEW YORK NY 10001  
TEL +1 212 645 7335  
FAX +1 212 645 7835  
WWW.CASEYKAPLANGALLERY.COM  
INFO@CASEYKAPLANGALLERY.COM

# Liam Gillick

## Three perspectives and a short scenario

October 10, 2009 – January 10, 2010

**This exhibition is an unconventional mid-career survey of Liam Gillick's work, which explores the relationship between art and the social, economic, and political systems that organize contemporary life. Like other artists of his generation who emerged in the late 1980s—such as Angela Bulloch (British, b. Canada 1966), Philippe Parreno (French, b. Algeria 1964), and Rirkrit Tiravanija (Thai, b. Argentina 1961)—Gillick uses strategies and techniques that invite the viewer to participate in the artwork. His works in various media include architectural sculptures made of colored aluminum and Plexiglas, published and unpublished texts, large-scale installations and public works, and graphic design. He uses these and other media and formats to create literal or figurative areas that allow for the exchange of ideas and heighten awareness of how social space is constructed and used.**

Typically a mid-career survey exhibition begins with the display of finished objects created at the beginning of the artist's career, progresses through the artist's body of work, and ends with a presentation of very recent works—all selected and arranged by a curator in collaboration with the artist. However, rather than represent Gillick's history as an artist in this conventional way, each presentation of *Three perspectives and a short scenario* has featured elements determined by the artist as well as unique contributions from each host institution. Gillick's contribution, which has remained consistent throughout the various presentations of the exhibition, includes a network of screens and carpet, a film summarizing his career, a display case of his graphic design materials and published works, and posters. At Witte de With Center for Contemporary Art in Rotterdam, the Netherlands (January 19-March 24, 2008), the exhibition also featured projects

by emerging artists, and the Kunsthalle Zürich in Switzerland (January 26-March 30, 2008) presented re-creations of Gillick's impermanent and performance-based projects. Here at the MCA, the exhibition will feature a sculptural installation in the gallery ceiling. These varying components represent the three perspectives of the exhibition title, while the "short scenario," a theatrical presentation scripted by Gillick, took place at the Kunstverein

Museum of  
Contemporary  
Art  
CHICAGO

München in Munich, Germany (September 27-November 16, 2008). Thus, the exhibition varies in its approach to assessing the development of the artist's work over the past two decades. In each case the individual roles played by the artist and the institution are explicit, rather than the result of behind-the-scenes negotiations and decisions, and allow the host institutions to examine different facets of Gillick's work. This aspect of the exhibition reveals the particular priorities or inclinations of the curators in terms of their relationship to the artist's body of work as well as their understanding of the audience's expectations for exhibitions presented at their respective institutions.

*The elements of the exhibition determined by Gillick include the following:*

## Film

This film presents an overview of the sculptural objects, public projects, museum and gallery installations, performances, publications, and other works Gillick has created since the beginning of his career. The text that gradually appears, starting with the phrase "This documentary is the last chapter of a book," is taken from the artist's unfinished and ongoing projects *Factories*

*in the Snow and Construcción de Uno - Construction of One.*

Based on Brazilian studies of Scandinavian car production, these narratives construct a scenario in which former workers at a defunct factory return to the site and begin to reorganize it. They reflect the concern throughout Gillick's work with how economic and social systems—a factory, for example—order everyday life as well as his interest in alternatives to these systems. The soundtrack of the film is a steady rhythm similar to the drumbeat in the song "She's Lost Control" by post-punk band Joy Division—an allusion that relates to the industrial sensibility of the black slatted screens that define the space (see **Screens and Carpet**). In addition to the film's visual summary of his career through photographic reproductions, the text suggests the importance that stories and narratives play in the development of Gillick's work as well as his tendency to unite his many projects through various components.

## Vitrine

Fabricated from the same material as the black slatted screens, this large display case was created by the artist and features posters, books, prints, and editions that he has designed. Among the items on display are publications such as *Erasmus is Late* (1995), *Big Conference Centre* (1998), and *Literally No Place* (2002), which represent a key dimension of Gillick's work: the development of stories and texts that run parallel to and inform his creation of physical objects and installations. Gillick does not consider these items as peripheral or complementary to his work as an artist but rather essential to it, emphasizing his keen interest in redefining how applied arts such as graphic design and architecture are considered in relationship to the visual arts.

## Posters

Two ink-jet prints presented in the gallery suggest different issues and concerns that are key to understanding Gillick's work. The drawing featured on one of the posters refers to figures in Latin American political cartoons that typically represent the oppressed everyman. The image serves as a subtle and indirect reference to Gillick's inherently political interest in how the social structures put into place by those in authority affect our everyday lives. He also sees this figure as a sort of mascot for the exhibition, suggesting on a smaller scale how major events such as the Olympic Games or the World Cup are typically personified by similarly symbolic figures. The other image is a reworking of a 1976 poster by Herbert Kapitzki (German, b. 1925) for the International Design Center in Berlin. Kapitzki was a member of the influential Ulm School of Design in Germany, which was active from 1953 to 1968. These designers' stripped-down use of color and form, and their dedication to social awareness can be seen as direct influence on the concepts as well as the visual style and approach of Gillick's work.

## Screens and Carpet

While survey exhibitions characteristically focus solely on the work an artist created in maturity (traditionally the work an artist makes after formal training), Gillick represents his interests prior to pursuing art as the focus of his life with the black slatted screens and gray carpet. These early interests include the modern architecture of postwar Europe; a desire to see the expression of that architectural style in the airports, highways, and city centers of the United States; and the graphic design of post-punk rock music-particularly the album covers that Peter Saville (British, b. 1955) designed for bands such as Joy Division and New Order. These sculptural elements represent Gillick's new work, while simultaneously looking back at a moment that predated his formal beginnings as an artist, fostering a more complete understanding of the range of interests and influences that inform his work.

*Curator Dominic Molon selected the following element to represent the MCA's institutional perspective on Gillick's work and career:*

## Ceiling Installation

The 576 white panels that have occupied the ceiling grid of the gallery since the building opened in 1996 have been replaced by colored Plexiglas. This installation revisits presentations by Gillick at Frankfurter Kunstverein in Frankfurt, Germany (1999), and Tate Britain in London (2002), where similar alterations were made to radically alter the social experience of the gallery space, suggesting how it might become a site for active discussion and conversation rather than passive contemplation.

**CASEY KAPLAN**

121 WEST 27TH STREET  
NEW YORK NY 10001  
TEL +1 212 645 7335  
FAX +1 212 645 7835  
WWW.CASEYKAPLANGALLERY.COM  
INFO@CASEYKAPLANGALLERY.COM



*Liam Gillick*  
**Three perspectives  
and a short scenario**

OCTOBER 10, 2009—JANUARY 10, 2010

British artist Liam Gillick asks more than he answers. Since emerging in the late 1980s, he has routinely questioned how and why systems of social and political authority have shaped our cultural environment.

Like other artists of his generation, such as Dominique Gonzalez-Foerster, Philippe Parreno, and Rirkrit Tiravanija, Gillick creates works that extend the legacy of conceptual art by using strategies and techniques that incorporate the viewer as a potentially active, engaged participant. This unconventional mid-career survey, the largest US presentation of the artist's work to date, explores the roles of artists and museums in presenting an exhibition.

*Three perspectives* is divided into two parts, with one half determined by the artist and the other half by the curator. While the artist's half has remained consistent from venue to venue, the curators' "perspectives" have ranged from the inclusion of other, more emerging artists' projects in Rotterdam to the presentation of Gillick's more ephemeral works in Zurich—and at the MCA, a site-specific installation by Gillick that will replace the white glass panels of the gallery ceiling with opaque and transparent multicolored Plexiglas.

The MCA will also present a concurrent exhibition of works from the MCA Collection by Gillick and other artists, including Jenny Holzer and Donald Judd, as well as another collection-based exhibition curated by the artist himself.

*MCA Curator Dominic Molon, who organized the MCA presentation of Three perspectives, spoke with the artist about his development as an artist as well as past, present, and future projects.*

**Dominic Molon:** When you chose Chicago as the one city in the United States where this exhibition would be presented, you cited its history of applied design and architecture as a factor in that decision. How do you see your work in relationship to that history?

**Liam Gillick:** I have always been interested in the gap between modernist art and the history of applied modernism, with its various "post" forms. This exhibition was specifically developed for Zurich, Rotterdam, and Chicago. These are all places where modernist design was deployed actively in the city both as a way to try to make things better and to signify modernity and exchange. None of these are "capital" cities but they have each been major centers of trade for their respective nations. While they have deepening historical roots, they are essentially modern in outlook.

**DM:** You've mentioned that aspects of the exhibition were inspired by your interests prior to your formal art training. What were some of those interests?

**LG:** When I was thinking about how to put together some form of retrospective, I was struck by the fact that for my generation it is often hard to locate any originating moment. I realized that a key turning point in my work was actually rooted in a moment before I thought about art as the focus of my life. And that realization informs the look of the exhibition: a combination of a fascination with the modern architecture of postwar Europe; a longing to see the expression of that in terms of infrastructure in the US—in the airports, highways, and city centers; and an interest in post-punk graphic design, particularly Peter Saville's work for Factory Records. These influences are the show's aesthetic DNA. So the exhibition is also a portrait of the artist, a combination of old and new, stories and material facts, traces from the past and pointers toward the future.

**DM:** When *Three perspectives* and a short scenario was presented at the Witte de With in Rotterdam, projects by other, more emerging artists were included as part of the exhibition. You are also an adjunct professor at Columbia University in New York, where you are directly involved in the artistic development of your students. How do you see these artists either extending or departing from aspects of your work?

**LG:** As the feminist theorist Juliet Mitchell pointed out, children are influenced as much by peers and siblings as they are by their parents. The same is true at Columbia. It has been a wonderful experience meeting such a diverse and complex group of young people over the last 12 years. My role is to try to get them to talk and think about how to be an artist now. The question of what they do is not something I try to overly influence. They teach each other. They fight against what I represent. We find a way to have a discussion but



I am not trying to influence them in any way other than encouraging them to find new models of practice and to find a way somewhere under the sun, as Lawrence Weiner used to say. They depart from what I do in radical ways but they also depart from each other. It has also been a challenge to try and reinvent my role at every moment. That is the key to how I approach things there: radical inconsistency.

**DM:** You studied art at Goldsmith's College in London in the late 1980s. Were there instructors or other, already established artists or even fellow students who had a significant impact on your development as an artist?

CASEY KAPLAN  
121 WEST 27TH STREET  
NEW YORK NY 10001  
TEL +1 212 645 7335  
FAX +1 212 645 7835  
WWW.CASEYKAPLANGALLERY.COM  
INFO@CASEYKAPLANGALLERY.COM

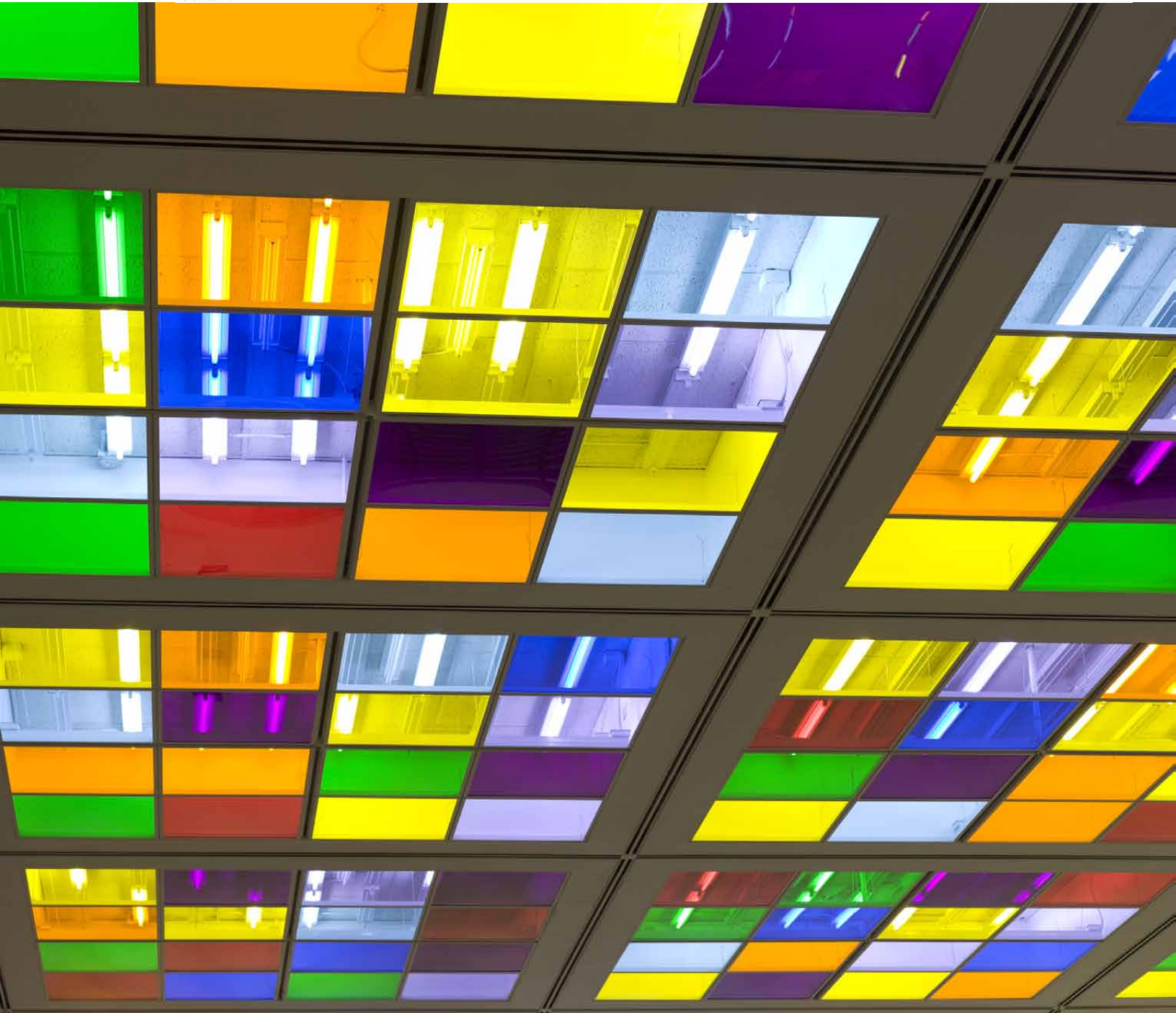
# ART PAPERS

FAILURE  
OF CRITICISM:  
THE GILLICK CASE

ENGAGEMENT  
ERDAĞ AKSEL:  
MEMORY'S PHANTOMS

THRESHOLD  
TO THRESHOLD:  
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# You Couldn't Describe the Gaps as Windows.

## *Liam Gillick visits Chicago.*

TEXT/ANTHONY E.ELMS

"We live in a time in which the language of creative thought has been appropriated by the most dynamic corporations, so it is often hard to identify the points at which artists become clear markers in society."<sup>1</sup>

Chicago's Museum of Contemporary Art (MCA) was the final stop for Liam Gillick's mid-career survey *Three perspectives and a short scenario*. Reading the scant three local reviews, the exhibition invited two responses: snide observations of Gillick's personal charm and smart attire--as if to be gentlemanly dressed makes the artist suspect, and more to the point, as if this mattered--or remarks on the difficulty of understanding Gillick's works without reading his writings--followed by dismissals sans reading.

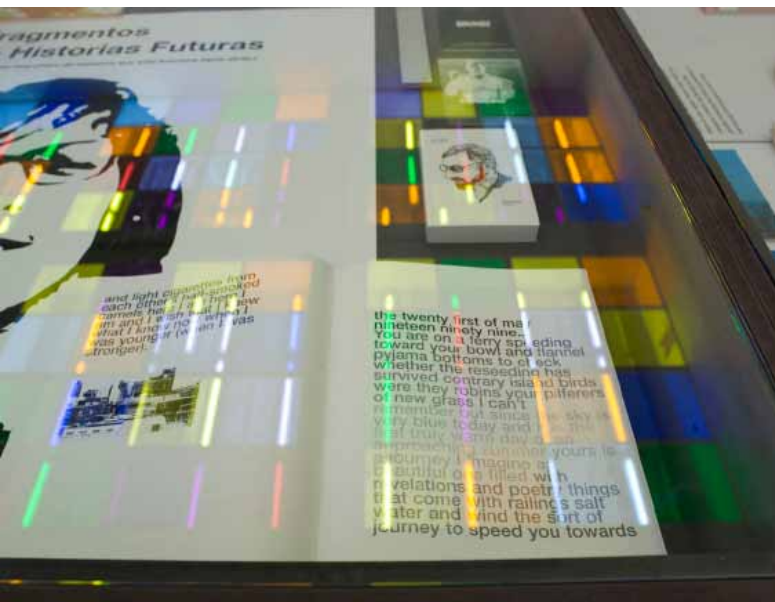
It does not matter that the reviews were negative or equivocating at best. Nor was the point that ignoring Gillick's charming ways and doing homework leads one inevitably to praise him. Rather, what mattered was that this major project by Gillick could provide a chance to deal with the work of an artist whose impact is being increasingly felt in contemporary discourse. Chicago was the only U.S. venue for *Three perspectives and a short scenario*. In U.S. institutions, his presence has been relatively discreet: outside commercial gallery exhibitions and event presentations, there have been only three solo museum projects. Here was a crucial moment to consider how the work, familiar perhaps in European institutions, translates stateside, where we are more familiar with him as a writer. Here was time to engage a space. A moment to linger. And Chicago's critical community abnegated this responsibility.

Exasperating in their rashness, the critical responses share a discomfort with the balance of Gillick's combined efforts. Take, for example, his refusal to craft his sculptures to clearly illustrate the narratives and critiques of the writing. Or the fact that the texts set the stage for an awareness of social spaces and the evolving relation between the future and the past, without defining a clear role for the sculptures. This critical discomfort displays two dispiriting assumptions: that art cannot have any job but to mean or represent something, and writing's only job is to explain. What Gillick does not provide is a critique of institutions. Maybe, sometimes, art and writing do, and what Gillick does offer is critical space.

"If you try and use art as a fragmented mirror of the complexity of contemporary society you might try and develop a system of art production that is equally multi-faceted and misleading and that functions as a series of parallels rather than reflections of the dominant culture."<sup>2</sup>

PAGES 34-41: Liam Gillick, installation views of Liam Gillick: *Three perspectives and a short scenario* at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago, October 10, 2009-January 10, 2010 (courtesy of the artist; © Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago; photo : Nathan Keay)





At each of the tour's venues there have been constants: six-foot-tall slatted screens, described as black but appearing dark gray, set up as a series of spaces and passageways; two inkjet prints; expanses of gray office carpeting; a film/slideshow with stilted drum-loop soundtrack; and a vitrine holding some fifty-seven examples of books, LPs, calendars, posters, and various types of editions designed by Gillick. None of his past sculptures were crated up and shipped on tour. At each venue, he asked the local curator to choose an element to accompany his givens. For Chicago, Dominic Molon chose an enlarged variation of *Applied Resignation Platform*, created in 1999 for the Frankfurter Kunstverein: at MCA it became an installation of 576 multicolored panels of Plexiglas that replaced the normal white ceiling panels. Outside the materials in the vitrine, there were no wall labels, and if there was a title for any individual element, the exhibition handout provided none. This would seem to have offered a lot to take in--and it did--but still, it initially invoked a sterile, on-the-cheap, post-punk office worker corral.

“For those who would prefer art to speak for itself, the desire to avoid mediating structures can only be achieved through the abrogation of responsibility for expressing what cannot exist within the work itself and the takeover of that role by others. The notion of ceding control is central to much artistic practice, but the expression of that abandonment will find itself expressed at some point, assuming that the work of the artist is at any moment exhibited, discussed, collected, viewed, or displayed in any form or location.”<sup>13</sup>

The MCA was the only collecting institution to host *Three perspectives and a short scenario*. Previous venues were the Kunsthalle Zurich and Witte de With Center for Contemporary Art in Rotterdam. In turn, the titular short scenario was the performance of Gillick's play *A “Volvo” Bar* at the Kunstverein Munchen, which did not present the exhibition's traveling elements. In Chicago, *Three perspectives* was augmented with *The one hundred and Sixty-third floor*, an exhibition curated by Liam Gillick from the MCA's collection, as well as *Artist-in-Depth: Liam Gillick, Jenny Holzer, Donald Judd, Sol LeWitt* curated by Molon. Gillick has always been interested in context, and while *Three perspectives* is not site-specific-whatever that threadbare term might mean in 2010--none of the local reviews even considered how this expanded context in Chicago might deflect the behavior of Gillick's *Three perspectives*.

Stepping into *Three perspectives* provided a self-consciously heightened eeriness. No sculptures? The polychromatic lighting, the spectral gray porous screens allowing you to scan the four walls and catch sight of a washed-out video projection, the flat side of the vitrine, the introductory exhibition wall credits, the modestly-sized prints in an implied hallway to nowhere, and that drum beat all telescoped an emptying confusion. Which nothing should I step to first? Of the four venues, I imagine the Chicago presentation provided the most problematic engagement. Solo survey exhibitions in collecting museums, at their very first level, communicate the value--in every sense of the term--of past objects made by an artist. If the artist is still alive, a requisite secondary narrative



will introduce us to the artist by illustrating how the newest works are a product of the growth and vibrant development that sets all the work along a path of--assured current and future--mastery. These conventions need to be set against those for solo exhibitions at kunsthallen--such as the other venues for *Three perspectives*--where we expect a certain risk, a focus on an artist's process now, though potentially based on his as-yet-undefined historical production. In a kunsthalle, the role of the objects as markers of established value is negligible. The kunsthalle seeks to set up a discursive dialogue with new terms or forms by which the exhibited work(s) may be found in the future to have claimed a critical stake. In crude shorthand: collecting museums exhibit the presence of the past, kunsthallen exhibit the prescience of the future. It is worth noting that Gillick's inclusion of the curator's intervention into his project is the opposite of the usual power dynamic for a survey exhibition in a collecting museum and even many kunsthalle projects. A solo survey exhibition in a collecting museum that includes none of the artist's signature "major" pieces, that is constructed more in keeping with the discursive model of an exhibition anticipated in a kunsthalle, will always be an ill fit.

As happenstance would have it, after visiting *Three Perspectives I* I read the catalog for U.S. artist Martin Beck's film *About the Relative Size of Things in the Universe*. In his essay, Beck quotes Klaus Frank from a 1961 book on exhibition techniques:

To exhibit means to choose, to display, to present a sample or an example. The imparting of information is the aim of every exhibition, and

such information may be of a didactic, commercial, or representational nature. Aimed at man as a consumer of products and ideas, an exhibit is meant to teach, to advertise, and to represent--to influence a person. An exhibit differs from all other media of communications because it alone can simultaneously transmit information visually, acoustically, and by touch.<sup>4</sup>

There is not the space here to discuss the larger trajectory of Frank's statement. Best to simply note that Frank was not speaking exclusively of museums. Still, the convoluted litany of terms choose, display, present, impart, didactic, commercial, representational, products, ideas, teach, advertise, represent, influence, visually, acoustically, touch--seems pitched to Gillick's direction, providing almost the perfect combination of terms to balance in considering *Three perspectives* at the MCA.

["The role of the artist is to be as vigilant about the way exhibitions are put together, mediated, and understood."](#)<sup>5</sup>

Why might a European artist actively involved both artistically and critically in short-circuiting the normal flow of functional definitions in formal and theoretical models choose to display a new structure advertised as a mid-career survey in a Midwestern U.S. museum filled with historically framed objects? That answer writes itself. And if, by chance, the answer does not commence writing, Gillick has been publishing about these relationships for roughly twenty years. Pushing out of this survey, the polychromatic aluminum structures with which he is



commonly identified in gallery displays made space for materials considered to be of secondary importance for someone of Gillick's stature and success as an object maker: books, graphic design, editions, disposable ephemera. The vitrine not only made space for these materials, but it gave them a place of primary importance, bestowing the value of the development in Gillick's practice on materials generally thought valueless or of less consequence to collecting museums and the collectors who largely sustain them. Of course, the materials were presented beyond reach and preserved under glass. But most of these books are readily available at modest prices, and his writing is easily accessible online. If the darkly humorous texts and pithy proclamations that could in fact be read on the posters, prints, tote bags, and book covers were not satisfying enough, there, in the same gallery space as the vitrine, was a film that unfolds as a photograph slideshow of works spanning Gillick's career, which an oblique narrative slowly fills, sentence by sentence, until the images are ultimately obscured by words. This story presents three nameless individuals as they reform the factory where they work, alternately changing the structure of their labor, their diets, their groupings, and their capability for productivity. It is compelling, not difficult; it explains neither the photographs in the film nor *Three perspectives*. Certainly the writing may be elusive and promiscuous in affect at times. Gillick's writing

style in this film approximates that of J.G. Ballard, the late British author of speculative fiction, if Ballard had been interested in the social space of production rather than technology's psychological role in modernist sociology and, in particular, the normalization of pathologies. Reading Gillick's narrative gave reason to choose to spend time with a place seemingly emptied.

Gillick's exhibition set-up was undeniably aggressive, in a manner one generally identifies with his writing and polemical presentations rather than his sculptures, to the benefit of *Three perspectives*. The insistent mechanical drumbeat, the lack of seating for the film, the vibrant portion of visual incident laid flat under glass in a vitrine, the corralled dead ends, the palpable grayness--it cannot be stressed enough--all created smokescreens to be navigated. In recent memory, only one other exhibition at the MCA has dared to take such a forceful and totalizing position toward the visitor on both critical and formal levels: Jenny Holzer's masterful *Protect Protect*, 2009. This makes it even sadder that the MCA all but ignored Gillick's *Three perspectives* in spite of two accompanying exhibitions mounted by the museum. Looking for publicity information for the three exhibitions was a test in futility. Ads, banners, invitations or posters were missing or miniscule at every turn. Once you found *Three perspectives*, the scant photocopied handout--which on three visits had a copying defect rendering a section the entire length of

the paper smudged, distorted, and in places nearly illegible--hardly imparted a feeling that, beyond the curatorial choice, this institution was in full support of the exhibition or displayed any trust in its viewers.

"Sometimes I think that I am making work that operates best in relation to other structures and other art rather than standing alone. Maybe the work even functions best if you stand with your back to it and think about something else."<sup>6</sup>

The inclusion of four Gillick sculptures from the MCA's collection in the ancillary *Artist-in-Depth* presentation sadly diluted the pressurized rupture generated by the lack of sculpture in the survey exhibition. Sited across the atrium from *Three perspectives*, it issued a hedging of bets, as it were. Most tellingly, the placement of Gillick's sculptures close to Donald Judd's reminded me that, though Gillick's works are often compared to Judd's, Gillick's approach has more in common with Judd as furniture maker, interior architect, and exhibition designer than Judd the sculptor--not to its detriment. Then, why is Gillick's work always discussed in relationship to minimalism? Why is it so rarely--if ever--seen in relation to the British arts and crafts movement, the Bauhaus, or any theory/practice workshop that conceptualized social relations while dismissing functional forms of the past in order to invent aesthetic forms with which to influence a redefinition of the future?

A little over a month into the run of *Three perspectives*, a brilliant addition opened in two adjacent galleries: *The one hundred and Sixty-third floor*, a selection of forty-three works organized by Gillick. This was the most surprising and eclectic display of the permanent collection in many years. It rested largely on works not regularly seen in the MCA's collection exhibitions, and works by artists not often exhibited together at MCA. This grouping combined artworks which Gillick selected because he identifies with the artists or sees them as significant, and pieces that, in his view, reveal something distinct about the MCA's collection and its formation. With a few exceptions, the works were hung alphabetically by the artist's last name. Instead of the usual interpretive didactics, the wall labels for each work were written by Gillick: pithy, hilarious, and terse statements crafted by editing descriptions culled from an MCA curatorial department internal binder that tracks the museum's activities and exhibitions by year. These rewritten texts were linked with the works by simply synching up the chronology to the alphabetized artist list. For instance, Acconci, the first name in the exhibition, is coupled with 1967, the first year of the MCA's history, and so on. This tactic both highlighted the museum's factual exhibition history and the subjective nature of any historical narrative drawn from the display of a subset of objects selected from any collection. As such, I am tempted to assign tactical importance to the



which the year corresponded to the year of the object's making was for U.S. collective Group Material, and the only artist represented by more than one work was the Belgian Marcel Broodthaers. Both were unwavering in their attempts to submit institutional spaces to critical discomfort through devilishly playful display techniques and political maneuvers.

**"The work is not an installation and it is not site-specific but thinking has been applied to a specific place or set of concepts and vice-versa."**<sup>7</sup>

The title, *The one hundred and sixty-third floor*, alludes to the height required to return Chicago's bragging rights as home to the world's tallest building. Looking to the skyline, Chicago was undoubtedly an important U.S. center for the development of mid-twentieth-century international-style modernism, and as such should hold obvious attraction for Gillick, given his interest in utopian structures and the struggle between planning and speculation in the development of modernist ideals and aesthetics. Gillick's projects have never been advertised: Interactivity! Functionality! Social work! More accurately, he combines a broad cross-section of activities, theories, and structures that clearly display a relation to problem solving and a search to find productive, critical voicings. The point isn't to use Gillick's structures; it is to consider the type of problem--or solution--that their construction implies. He uses applied theory, applied systems, applied design, and applied display without stated representational goals or functional benchmarks. You might say that Gillick is a vertically integrated producer given the evidence of *Three perspectives*. It may be difficult to consider the combined actions, theories, and structures of social relations that Gillick references in relation to his built projects if you consider them solely in terms of the specificity of minimalist sculpture. But it isn't when you consider the physical effect of an asymmetrical bus shelter and a steel and glass airport corridor, and the results of commercialized lifestyle marketing on public space and speculative financing on production sites. Additive conjunctions are Gillick's stock and trade.

To think Gillick's three exhibitions at the MCA in relation to Frank's assertion that "an exhibit is meant to teach, to advertise, and to represent: it helps to consider what this can mean for an artist who rankles against illustrating ideas, representing past solutions, and mirroring functional spaces in his applied practices. The answer would be that, taken together, these exhibitions taught the use of parallel--never entwined--constructions for critical exceptions that destabilize definitions, advertised that material reality is not made solely from materials, and represented the importance of producing a use for the uselessness in the past to generative effect. Three perspectives took the risk to put these concerns forward in an actively misleading frame, asserting that this was more sensible than constructing a narrative that would anchor the reasonableness of these concerns in a navigable row of more or less successful markers made through the years. In rethinking his history by displaying the applied designs--books, posters, and so on--of his practice, he asked us to question what behaviors our built environment both asks of us and insinuates into us. For example, what are we to make of a museum survey exhibition using applied designs to set us in a direction, causing us to arrive in delay, ap-

plied thought in hand, faced with designs, their functionality just passed, and the sculptural hidden in plain sight? As Gillick's film puts it: *This documentary is the last chapter of a book*. In turning his back on this narrative, Gillick offered a different story, a ventriloquist's act with the MCA's own institutional voice. Ultimately, the overcast feeling orchestrated amidst the *Three perspectives* screens, followed by the release in *The one hundred and sixty-third floor*, was not so different from the disorientation any number of us have encountered as we try to find our way in a nondescript convention center or state university en route to a presentation. The difference is that Gillick wants you to acknowledge some responsibility for the implications in your disorientation, to think what purposes are hidden in functional demarcations. What he has always refused to do is to remind you why you came to be here in the first place.

**"I am interested in a populated environment, but not overly defining the relationships we are expected to play in relation to those environments."**<sup>8</sup>

Gillick represented himself as expected, in keeping with what anyone with a passing familiarity with his writing and exhibitions might anticipate, beyond his approach to the execution of the exhibitions. He may have come off as gruff a time or two, but he did set the terms for his own survey, curate a group exhibition, write wall labels, speak to classes, give a lecture, take part in a public discussion, record an audio tour, make himself available to the press--including interviews with bloggers and for a podcast--and bring the tallest building in the world back to Chicago. In response, some who expected the privilege to engage with Gillick on his visit to Chicago clearly responded in the manner they thought these actions deserved. Let's paraphrase the question Gillick asked with his 2009 Venice Biennale German pavilion exhibition: *How are we going to behave?* It seems without consideration.

#### NOTES

1. Liam Gillick, "The Semiotics of the Built World," *The Wood Way*, London: Whitechapel Art Gallery, 2002, 81.
2. Liam Gillick, "Berlin Statement," *How are you going to behave? A kitchen cat speaks*. Deutscher Pavilion LaBiennale di Venezia 2009, Rotterdam: Witte de With Center for Contemporary Art, 2009, 99.
3. Liam Gillick, "The Binary Stadium: Anton Vidokle, Intermediary or Locus," *Anton Vidokle: Produce, Distribute, Discuss, Repeat*, Berlin and New York: Sternberg Press, 2009, 50.
4. Klaus Frank, *Exhibitions/Ausstellungen* (New York/Stuttgart: Praeger/Verlag Gerd Hatje, 1961) quoted in Martin Beck, "Sovereignty and Control," *About the Relative Size of Things in the Universe*, London and Utrecht: Four Corners Books and Casco - Office for Art, Design and Theory, 2007, 55.
5. Liam Gillick, "The Semiotics of the Built World," 82.
6. *Ibid*, 81.
7. *Ibid*, 86.
8. Liam Gillick, "Berlin Statement," 102.

Anthony E. Elms is an artist, the editor of publications for White Walls, and assistant director at Gallery 400 at the University of Illinois at Chicago. Most recently, he participated in Cosey Complex organized by Maria Fusco for the ICA London.



**CASEY KAPLAN**

121 WEST 27TH STREET  
NEW YORK NY 10001  
TEL +1 212 645 7335  
FAX +1 212 645 7835  
WWW.CASEYKAPLANGALLERY.COM  
INFO@CASEYKAPLANGALLERY.COM

# ARTFORUM

Liam Gillick  
MUSEUM OF CONTEMPORARY ART, CHICAGO  
Sean Keller  
April 2010



View of Liam Gillick, "Three Perspectives and a Short Scenario," 2009, Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago. Photo: Nathan Keay.

NO ONE CAN DENY Liam Gillick's ambition. Here is an artist who wants to take it all on: global capitalism, corporate identity, product design, institutional critique, modernism and its aftermath, Minimalism and its aftermath, literary conventions, the linearity of time itself. The forms of Gillick's engagement are equally diverse, including sculpture, installation, print, video, and curatorial projects, as well as prolific writing of criticism, manifestos, and fiction. All of this is guided by an unresolved combination of the Marxist desire to explain everything with a single system (centered on economics) and a post-Marxist realization that no system can ever achieve this goal. And so Gillick often emphasizes the gaps within systems, or what he has described as "the peculiar sense of disorder that accompanies any visit to an apparently well-ordered bureaucratic setup."

It is no surprise, then, that a "midcareer retrospective" of Gillick's work could not be just that. Instead, this rite of passage was reworked as "Three Perspectives and a Short Scenario," a sequence of three varied shows at the Kunsthalle Zürich (spring 2008), the Witte de With Center for Contemporary Art in Rotterdam (spring 2008), and the Museum of Contemporary Art in Chicago this past fall and winter; and an event at the Kunstverein München (fall 2008). Each of the three "perspectives"

featured an installation of black horizontally slatted screens and gray carpet; a block of vitrines that resembled converted Donald Judd sculptures, containing graphic-design work and books; a video summary of Gillick's work along with text from ongoing writing projects; and one or two posters. The screens, made of MDF and at once suggesting office partitions, library shelving, and IKEA furniture, were arranged to define loose subgalleries within each show. The "short scenario" in Munich was a performance titled A "Volvo" Bar (recently revisited as a series of prints at Casey Kaplan in New York), which took place on a gray carpet among a different group of screens.

Each of the "perspective" venues also included a unique piece of programming: in Zurich, reenactments of early works; in Rotterdam, a program of shows by other artists. In Chicago, this supplement took the form of a separate exhibition, "The One Hundred and Sixty-third Floor: Liam Gillick Curates the Collection." The title mockingly suggests a fictional level that would surpass the 162 floors of the Burj Khalifa in Dubai, thereby allowing Chicago to once again have the world's tallest building. For the exhibit, Gillick paired works from the museum's collection (arranged more or less alphabetically) with labels that each included a year from the museum's history (1967–2009, but not the year of the corresponding work itself), excerpts from the museum's internal records (again unrelated to the work), and, lastly, the actual object information for the work. The result was less institutional critique than curatorial dada, opening up an enjoyably speculative space between object and label, as well as an unsettling gap in intentionality. (For example, is the combination of "1974," "Propaganda. The east is red. Life size super realism. Eight musical performances. A holiday playground. Theater, dance, puppets, mime and magic," and John Baldessari's 1987 Three Eyes [with Gold Bug] purposeful? Meaningful?)

In the main gallery, Gillick's own works were the semiotic equivalents of Apple products (which appear prominently in his 2008 video Everything Good Goes): Embedded within the sleek exteriors were remarkably intricate and far-reaching systems of meaning. Take, for example, one of the two posterlike prints that seemed to serve as icons for the exhibition (the only items hung on the walls, they were aligned with the entrance). What one saw was a square black field recalling an album cover (not incidentally, as we will see), within which rested a geometric pattern of squares and rhomboids, each given a distinct, slightly cool color. The pattern read as a set of rectangular volumes performing synchronized optical flips between concave and convex. Above these figures were four words in white lowercase sans serif: deferral, detour, discussion, and documentary. The overall effect was of a vaguely nostalgic institutional or corporate identity. As such, the work generated mood but not much immediate meaning.

The exhibition wall text and brochure provided clues to what lay behind the surface, noting that the graphic was a "reworking of a 1976 poster by Herbert Kapitzki (German, b. 1925) for the International Design Center [IDZ] in Berlin" and that Kapitzki was associated with the famous Ulm School of Design, the most direct postwar German successor to the Bauhaus. Following this lead—likely only after one has left the exhibition—one stumbles upon an entire field of associations that are indispensable for a full understanding of the object and of Gillick's practice in general. Founded in 1968, the IDZ describes itself as "a communications platform connecting business, society and culture"—a latter-day Werkbund pursuing that particularly German reconciliation of commerce and culture through quality. Kapitzki's original poster (not reproduced anywhere in the show) features the same geometric construction in different colors, but a far more didactic text. Translated, it reads:

Design should optimize functions, make transparent, visually transport, make comprehensible, make manageable, represent aesthetically, make economically effective; not conceal, decorate, ornament, imitate, corrupt, level, plagiarize. Design not as seeming reality but as an integral component of objectifiable reality. Design between seeming and being.

In place of this manifesto of transparency, Gillick gives us only his four dithering d's as watchwords for the exhibition. Here, as in much of Gillick's work, references to the forms and ideologies of modernism are simultaneously embedded, deflated, and concealed within an object that relies on visual abstraction and verbal opacity to frustrate access to the sources that underlie its meaning. The goal seems to be a dense, even mystified, iconology of modernist design requiring a hermeneutics of its own.

Given his obsession with institutional structures, Gillick has an oddly casual approach to the ways in which the sources and references behind his work are—or are not—communicated. In Chicago, for example, it was left to curator Dominic Molon to provide clues in the exhibition's supplemental material. Within such a highly theorized practice, this gap suggests that Gillick may consider the specific references to be necessary only to his own productive process and that he intends reception to take place on a more ambiguous, even atmospheric, level. And yet he does not actively suppress the revelation of these references, so he might intend for them to trickle out via "discussions" such as this very review.

Perhaps the sparest example of this strategy is the percussive sound track that projected from a ceiling-mounted speaker toward one corner of the gallery. Its nearly uniform rhythm suggested a factory environment similar to that described by the text projected nearby, taken from two of the artist's ongoing writing projects, *Factories in the Snow*, 2006, and the unpublished *Construcción de Uno—Construction of One*. The museum's information sheet and a published interview with Gillick add far more specific references. We learn that the audio is meant to recall the drum track of the 1979 Joy Division song "She's Lost

Control,” creating a half joke about control and industrial production that resonates more deeply with the projected text. The Joy Division reference is further meant to evoke the album covers of Peter Saville, graphic designer for Factory Records, who was himself influenced by “the cool, disciplined ‘New Typography’ of [Jan] Tschichold,” an important advocate of modernist typography and design in 1920s Germany. This is, then, the audio equivalent of the geometric poster: the apparently meaningless thump, thump, thump, thump standing in for a very specific line of associations that carries us deep into Gillick’s obsession with modernism and its legacy.

Above this all hovered the show’s single grand gesture: the glowing, candy-colored ceiling grid that Gillick created by simply replacing the museum’s standard white light covers with a random pattern of brightly tinted transparent ones. The result was a large-scale version of the gridded “discussion platforms” that are Gillick’s best-known works—a fittingly retrospective gesture linked to the poster’s suggestion that the entire gallery should, or could, become a Socratic space. Yet while the architectural impact of the intervention was strong—revealing the conduit and fluorescent fixtures usually hidden above the ceiling while focusing attention on this plane and its rationalizing grid—the effect was, again, not directly critical but ambiguous. The gallery’s white box was not so much challenged as repurposed.

But to what end? Gillick’s work should be distinguished from the more overtly participatory practices of an artist such as Rirkrit Tiravanija. The fact that Gillick creates works called discussion platforms does not mean he intends anything so direct as for them to be places to talk. Indeed, his slick aesthetic suggests the opposite: His works function more as chilly icons of unrealized interaction than as vehicles for interaction itself. Writing about the ambitions of more utopian work, Gillick has said, “My interest is far more grounded and potentially disappointing than this. And could be described as an ongoing investigation of how the middle ground of social and economic activity leaves traces in our current environment.” “Three Perspectives and a Short Scenario” effectively captured this interest in the physical traces of graphics, objects, and environments. Generated by complex reflections on both grand themes and specific precedents, the real strength—the truth, even—of Gillick’s practice lies in his capacity to produce things and places that mirror and distort the opacity of contemporary markets, economic and artistic alike. Which is to say that Gillick’s practice intentionally remains representational, not operative. Or, as the reductive sound track suggests, no one here has lost control.

Sean Keller is an assistant professor at the Illinois Institute of Technology.

CASEY KAPLAN  
121 WEST 27TH STREET  
NEW YORK NY 10001  
TEL +1 212 645 7335  
FAX +1 212 645 7835  
WWW.CASEYKAPLANGALLERY.COM  
INFO@CASEYKAPLANGALLERY.COM

# ARTFORUM

## **"La Suite"**

**AIR DE PARIS**

**32, rue Louise Weiss**

**September 3–December 23**

With no theme or one-liner (other than an invitation to free exercise of memory and association), one could easily call the strategy employed in this group exhibition "montage curating." But then again, isn't curating all about montage? Perhaps the answer is yes, if the viewer is allowed to complete the process. With a punch of semiotic paranoia, one can easily draw connections between artists here with similar names and color schemes in their works. Take, for instance, Lili Reynaud-Dewar's shamanistic drum installation and Lily van der Stokker's reflexive kindergarten painting, which comments on its own "ugliness." There are also affinities between M/M's "stool-letters" and Benoît Maire's video installation *Interrupting Jacques Lacan*, 2009. The gallery's staff extracted the letters LA SUITE from M/M's work *Just like an ant walking on the edge of the invisible*, 2009. And for his burlesque reenactment of a 1972 lecture by Lacan, which was famously interrupted by a Situationist militant, Maire has asked the same activist to intervene again by filming the reenacted event. The clash of discourses in the video reverberates in a young woman's Sisyphean building of a continuously falling castle of bricks.

This humorous half-idealistic, half-defeatist work is brilliantly echoed by Liam Gillick's video *Everything Good Goes*, 2008. The passive-aggressive piece, a shot over a desk, depicts a hand on a mouse and a computer program that together seem to be creating a three-dimensional model of the occupied factory from Godard's *Tout va bien* (1972). Inhuman production conditions in factories have here been replaced by posthuman machine work, all echoed in a voice-over—a long monologue delivered via the phone that sounds as if it came from a moon landing. The work is nearly funny in its postutopian self-referential circuits and yet highly uncanny, obliterating all promising flavors from the discourse of the next.



View of *"La Suite,"* 2009. Foreground: M/M, *Just like an ant walking on the edge of the invisible* (detail), 2009. Background: Liam Gillick, *Everything Good Goes*, 2008.

- *Sinziana Ravini*

**CASEY KAPLAN**

121 WEST 27TH STREET  
NEW YORK NY 10001  
TEL +1 212 645 7335  
FAX +1 212 645 7835  
WWW.CASEYKAPLANGALLERY.COM  
INFO@CASEYKAPLANGALLERY.COM

**Liam Gillick****Deutscher Pavillon****53. Esposizione Internazionale d'Arte  
La Biennale di Venezia 2009**

A catalogue designed by Liam Gillick and with a foreword by Nicolaus Schafhausen contains a full version of the public lectures given by the artist in Berlin, Frankfurt and Cologne, the full speech of the cat and extensive photographic documentation of the work. The catalogue is published by Sternberg Press.

The model of the Arnold Bode pavilion (anodized aluminium, 26x30x12 cm) is a limited edition of 25 and available at the price of € 5.000,00. Each edition is accompanied by a certificate of authenticity signed and dated by the artist. For more information or ordering please contact: [info@deutscher-pavillon.org](mailto:info@deutscher-pavillon.org)

In October 2009 Liam Gillick will have a solo exhibition at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Chicago and at the Austrian Museum of Applied Art/Contemporary Art in Vienna. In April 2010 he will present a solo exhibition at the Kunst- und Ausstellungshalle der Bundesrepublik Deutschland, Bonn.

Two new publications will be available in June 2009:

Liam Gillick, All Books, Book Works, London

Meaning Liam Gillick, MIT Press, Cambridge/London

The exhibition at the German Pavilion is commissioned by the Federal Foreign Office and realized together with the Institute of Foreign Cultural Relations (ifa). The main sponsor is Hugo Boss. Further partners are the Goethe-Institut, AXA Art Insurance and Witte de With Center for Contemporary Art, Media Partner is Deutsche Welle TV.

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LIAM GILLICK: Artist

NICOLAUS SCHAFHAUSEN: Curator

EVA HUTIENLAUCH: Project Manager

KATHRIN LUZ: Press and Public Relations

MARKUS WEISBECK: Graphic Advisor

NATASA RADOVIC: Assistant Venice

CHRISTINE KAISER: Project Assistant

THOMAS HUESMANN and Mixedmedia Berlin, PAUL VAN GENNIP and Witte de With Center for Contemporary Art, Rotterdam: Technical Realisation

**Contact:**

Eva Huttenlauch  
Deutscher Pavillon  
c/o Witte de With Center for Contemporary Art  
Witte de Withstraat 50  
3012 BR Rotterdam  
The Netherlands  
Tel. +31104110144  
Fax+31104117924  
[info@deutscher-pavillon.org](mailto:info@deutscher-pavillon.org)

**Press contact:**

Kathrin Luz  
Kathrin Luz Communication  
Uibecker Str. 11  
50668 Kbln  
Germany  
Tel +49 (0) 221 9235987  
Fax +49 (0) 221 9235988  
[presse@deutscher-pavillon.org](mailto:presse@deutscher-pavillon.org)

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**Press Information**

**Wie würden Sie sich verhalten?**  
**Eine Küchenkatze spricht**

**How are you going to behave?**  
**A kitchen cat speaks**

Liam Gillick at the German Pavilion, 2009

We are pleased to announce Liam Gillick's work for the German Pavilion at the 53rd Venice Biennale.

For more than a year Gillick has been travelling, researching and developing his project in continuous dialogue with curator Nicolaus Schafhausen. Making extensive use of computer modeling of the existing German Pavilion and following a long period of work on site in Venice the final questions for Gillick circle around models of social behaviour and the problem of how to create new forms of address within loaded ideological sites.

Crucial components of the exhibition were determined during the final installation days. However, the first step of the process was the fabrication of an edition in the form of a model of Arnold Bode's 1957 proposal for a new German Pavilion.

For the final work, the pavilion is not obscured or hidden. Both the inside and outside of the building can be seen and examined. It has recently been painted white, as part of the general maintenance of the building and Gillick has left it this way. A simple table and bench designed by the artist are sited outside for use by the pavilion team. Every room of the building is open. No part of the pavilion has been closed off or used for storage.

Strips of plastic, like the blinds used to keep flies out of a room, mark the entrance and two emergency exits of the pavilion. Inside, a kitchen-like structure has been constructed from simple pine wood. Lacking in appliances the "kitchen" exists as a diagram of aspiration, function and an echo of applied modernism that resonates in opposition to the corrupted grandeur of the pavilion, which was designed without lavatories, kitchen or any area to rest. The cabinets puncture the doorways leading to the side rooms. The kitchen is in tension with the logic of the building. You could even say it is a legacy of functional modernism that exists to work against the ideology of the pavilion architecture.

Gillick has transferred his own daily working environment - his kitchen used as an improvised studio - to the German Pavilion. Sitting for months in his kitchen with his son's cat he considered the question "Who speaks? To whom and with what authority?" while the cat tried to disrupt his work. After re-visiting the replica of Margarete Schütte-Lihotzky's Frankfurt Kitchen at the Museum of Applied Art in Vienna - which has long been an important marker of applied modernism within Gillick's practice - he looked for a solution as to who should occupy his Venice kitchen.

For the final work Gillick - with his studio team in Berlin led by Thomas Huesmann - has created an animatronic cat that sits on top of one of the kitchen cabinets. The cat fights against the echo in the building and tells us a circular story of misrepresentation, misunderstanding and desire.

With this in mind the pavilion becomes a site for a self-conscious circling story that never ends. The cat is in the kitchen, the children are in the kitchen.

"I don't like it," the boy will say.

"I don't like it," the girl will say.

"I don't like you," the cat will think.



**Liam Gillick**  
**Deutscher Pavillon**  
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**Curator's Foreword**  
**Nicolous Schafhausen**

The material manifestation of Liam Gillick's work is concentrated as much in rhetoric as it is in his objects, installations, writings and lectures. The work often demonstrates an uncanny ability to translate complex and abstract social situations into visual mise-en-scènes.

What's important to me is that Liam Gillick employs art as a medium, which is to be understood through its transformations and aporias. For the past twenty years, his work has grappled with the functional mechanisms and the failure of postindustrial social models. Apart from the works, numerous texts have been produced in which he investigates the construction of history as well as the claims and reality of social utopias. These texts create a conceptual framework for the work itself; rather than direct illustrations of the texts, instead they offer up possibilities: the possibilities contained within a "what if" scenario. The questioning of the present tense in the conditional is not targeted towards revision but rather towards delineating unrealized potentials. How would the social situation be today if the past were based on a small, yet decisive change in the course of events? What makes a "Gillick" is its approach to similarly staged questions from slightly shifted perspectives. It's not about the final answers and theses but the formulation of counter-arguments.

From the outset, Liam Gillick questioned the apparent absence of "function" of the German Pavilion. Also the question of how to handle the fascist semblance of its facade was one that arose quite quickly. Had it never occurred to anyone before to restore the pavilion to its original form, which had been remodeled - after Hitler's and Goebbels's visit to the Biennale in 1938 - into a monumental staging of the regime? Why did all of the postwar renovations only serve to consolidate the reviled status quo of postwar Germany?

In fact, there had been a proposal for the reconstruction of the pavilion and from no one less than Arnold Bode, the founder of documenta. Acting on his own volition, in 1957, he approached the Federal Foreign Office with plans to remodel the building. It was a consciously minimal proposal which foresaw that its prominent columns should be built into the walls, transforming the portico into an interior space. Independent from the exhibition itself, Liam Gillick implemented Bode's plans by building a model of the never realized version of the pavilion, that is to say, placing it into a "what if scenario."

For Gillick, Bode's alternative pavilion contains nothing less than the idea of another Modern - and not in relation to the Venice Biennale and its idea of national representation. The reasoning behind Bode's proposal reads today like an appeal for an ethical architecture that invokes Modernism as a project of the Enlightenment: "With its cold, antihuman representation, this typical 'epigonebuilding' of the Nazi era excites the insurmountable aggression of the visitor. Its incomparable, and for all purposes, failed interior oppresses the visitor, humbling him before the exhibited works. It contradicts all humanity, which the Federal Republic of Germany attempts to prove with the displayed works:

Such thoughts, indebted to Modernism, are crucial to Liam Gillick's artistic practice: what significance do postwar utopias have for the models of the future? Or to cite the title of one of his texts, "Should the Future help the Past?" - a text in which Gillick describes the scenario as "a constantly mutating sequence of possibilities: One adds a further mutation to that and the result is out of control. The radius of action is shifted, and everything changes. It concerns our globalized present just as much as the discrepancy between the ideals of Modernism and the reality of the modern "real".



**Liam Gillick**

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In the German Pavilion one meets a cat and a kitchen. The latter is inspired by the Viennese architect Margarete Schütte-Lihotzky's 1926 design of the Frankfurt Kitchen, whose functional form was intended to optimize household workflows. The first prototypes of today's built-in kitchen were integrated into more than 10,000 public housing units in Frankfurt. The Frankfurt Kitchen brings many things together: a Taylorist-oriented work organization, an emancipatory model for domestic activities, a design owed to international Modernism and to social-utopian concerns in general. The cat lives in the kitchen. It speaks from the present and fights against the echoes of the building's interior. Its history is one of misrepresentation, misunderstanding and desires. Thus, the pavilion becomes a location for endless self-circulating histories that - in the end - represents our history as well.



CASEY KAPLAN  
121 WEST 27TH STREET  
NEW YORK NY 10001  
TEL +1 212 645 7335  
FAX +1 212 645 7835  
WWW.CASEYKAPLANGALLERY.COM  
INFO@CASEYKAPLANGALLERY.COM



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LIAM GILLICK

PRACTICAL CONSIDERATIONS

AN INTERVIEW BY SAUL OSTROW

*For over 20 years, Liam Gillick has addressed the question of how art has been used to advance a broad range of social and ideological agendas, and to subvert and exploit the material and political structures that order contemporary life. During this time, he has developed a situated practice, one that is site specific in both conceptual and physical terms. Having no studio other than his laptop, Gillick determines what he will do at a given location by employing "scenario thinking," a methodology that permits him to focus on how the contingencies of a given site corporate headquarters, institutional space, the public domain—offer differing opportunities for him to exercise his relational and comparative critical processes. The works that result subtly underscore the indeterminacies and uncertainties that inform both Gillick's own practice and the forces that sustain a collective or social reality.*

*In 1996, Gillick—along with Jorge Pardo, Rirkrit Tiravanija, Philippe Parreno, Pierre Huyghe, Carsten Holler, Christine Hill, Vanessa Beecroft and Maurizio Cattelan—was included in French critic/curator Nicolas Bourriaud's exhibition "Traffic" at CAPC Bordeaux in France. In his essay for the show, Bourriaud coined the terms "relational esthetics" and "relational art" to describe the strategies of these artists, whose works he understood to be resisting the closure and instrumentality of standard accusatory social critiques by instead probing social relationships. The highly charged program for "relational art," which takes the whole of human relations and their social contexts as its subject, would appear to be at odds with the minimalist sculptures made from colored Plexiglas and aluminum (they recall room dividers, bookshelves, storage units) for which Gillick is perhaps best known, though they amount to only a portion of his diverse production.*

*Indeed, there seems at first to be little that is critical about Gillick's installations of these "sculptures," which reference the work of Sol LeWitt, Donald Judd and Dan Graham, and seem more concerned with mixing the classic modernist principles of*

*De Stijl and Constructivism with Pop-ish color and a corporate esthetic. But by installing these sculptures so that they have a precise spatial relation to one another, and through the titles he gives to each series and the individual works within it, Gillick seeks to expand our reception of the works to include a consideration of issues of production, distribution and consumption. In other projects, Gillick employs graphic design, wall painting, architectural and curatorial interventions, films and animation, art criticism, novellas and collaborations with artists, architects and writers, all to create situated works that reference and reflect the social, ethical, political, and ideological conditions and dilemmas that circumscribe art, artist and audience, and-by analogy—society as a whole. He has also published a number of books that function in tandem with his artworks.*

*Born in 1964, Gillick graduated from Goldsmiths College, University of London, in 1987. Having shown extensively in Europe and the U.S., his first major solo show in London, "The Wood Way," appeared at the Whitechapel Gallery in 2002. That same year he was a nominee for the Turner Prize. Today, though seemingly constantly traveling, he lives and works in New York. In January 2008, a retrospective, "Three Perspectives and a Short Scenario," opened at the Witte de With, Rotterdam, and the Kunsthalle Zürich. It will travel to the Kunstverein München in September 2009 and to the Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago [Oct. 10-Jan. 10, 2010]. This interview took place in the artist's New York apartment in the early spring, just as Gillick was preparing to leave for Venice, where he will be exhibiting in the German pavilion at the Venice Biennale.*

**SAUL OSTROW** How is it that an Englishman who lives in New York ends up in the German pavilion at the Venice Biennale this year?

**LIAM GILLICK** Well I think to a certain extent it comes down to changes in curating that have happened in the last 20 years. The fact is that I'm part of a generation of European artists who really

move freely across the borders of Europe, and this also happened to coincide with a new generation of curators who maybe in the past might have become writers or critics. To a certain extent I'm viewed by curators as representative of that generation. I've worked in Germany a lot, and I've shown in Germany more than any other place. I also think it's a bit of a test, like a moral or ethical game. A little bit like saying, okay you feel so comfortable here, you feel it's such a generative and productive context, what happens if we actually put you in such a symbolic situation? Will you just carry on like normal or are you going to have to change something? So, to a certain extent, it's a test.

**SO** Nicolaus Schafhausen [curator of the German pavilion] is based in Rotterdam?

**LG** Yes. And that's quite interesting. The relationship historically between the Netherlands and Germany is quite complicated, to put it mildly. Nicolaus was viewed with some skepticism when he arrived in Rotterdam to direct the Witte de With, and understandably so. Here you have someone coming to Holland from a very well-funded—I mean they're both well-funded—and historically complex cultural terrain. [Schafhausen had been the director of the Frankfurter Kunstverein.] There can be some tension, but I'm quite impressed by the way he seems to function there without becoming what you could call a typical person who goes to live in the Netherlands because they want to become part of a certain model of liberal society. He's not that. He's still trying to keep some antagonism there, a little bit.

**SO** He hasn't become polite.

**LG** No, definitely not.

**SO** And you first knew him as an artist?

**LG** Yes. I met him as an artist. That background does make him rather different from most other German curators who are on a high level. Curators' salaries were linked to an academic scale, so that if they don't have a doctorate in art history

Right, Liam Gillick unlocking the door of the German Pavilion during his April 2009 visit



Gillick's snapshot of the German Pavilion

they don't get paid properly. Nicolaus comes from a more improvised and mutable background—he started as an artist and then opened a private gallery, Lukas and Hoffmann, and he showed people like Olafur Eliasson and Henning Bohl when they were young. It was a rather self-conscious Cologne gallery in the early '90s. Later, he took over a space in Stuttgart called the *Konstlerhaus*, which is a bit like a non-profit; it's much less of an institution and more of an equivalent to something like *White Columns* in New York. *Konstlerhaus* always operated at a slightly different level. Nicolaus doesn't come from an academic background. But he has a very precise relationship with artists and he likes artists. Maybe that's a stupid thing to say.

**SO** We all know curators who just like art and would rather the artists go away.

**LG** Absolutely. The artist for those curators is an impediment to the trajectory of critical theory. What's crucial to understand about my relationship with Nicolaus is that it has always been rather fraught.

I think that's the case partly because he was an artist and because he's been in so many situations where I have been. There's an assumption that long-term relationships always mean conspiracy or collaboration, whereas, in fact, in personal relationships there's a kind of frustration. I think that Nicolaus views some of my trajectory as being a parallel life he could have had, and vice versa. And he's very conscious of the dangers of it, the delusions of it, the weaknesses and strengths, so he's often trying to put me into situations that are quite difficult. It's like giving someone a gift that's a pain in the ass.

**SO** You worked with Nicolaus at Witte de With. Has it become more collaborative with you two? Is it a call and response relationship? Does he throw this challenge at you?

**LG** No, but you know that feeling you get when there's a hidden agenda. You do a show and you work with someone, and people have certain modes of behavior that indicate a degree of freedom, for example, and gradually that's moderated by whether they really like that work you did then, or they're really interested in

this aspect of your work, and that's what they really want to put across. You gradually work out with this person the hidden agenda, and you either fight against it or you don't, or you let it wash over you. The weird thing about working with Nicolaus is that he does not do any of those things. And sometimes he'll even disappear.

**SO** Is that the reason why, when we first exchanged e-mails, you still didn't know what you were doing for Venice?

**LG** Yes, but now that it's me who's doing the "disappearing," I'm making him anxious, because I have a basic framework and a structure that I can describe a little bit, but it's absolutely incomplete at this stage. I have decided to leave many aspects unclear until the last minute. If it has to be a secret to others, then it ought to be a secret to me, too. We started to work in April. So I can turn it around. I think he's conscious that people often try to give me a context, or they give me a job, or they have, say, an understanding of a dichotomy that might be in the work that they want to be there—extend one side of it, or reduce another one, or resolve it, or something, whereas with him, it's interesting. He has a kind of strange ambition for someone to do something new, which in a way seems quaint, the idea that you could do something new.

**SO** So this becomes an opportunity for you to extend your work?

**LG** Yes, every time I've worked with him I've done something that's been a major shift in the work. But he has not manipulated me into doing that; he has somehow created the productive environment where I end up stuck, or I end up thinking. I enter into a different critical relationship with my own work, and strangely enough he does that through offering a very complicated idea of anything being possible.

**SO** What has become imperative with the pavilion, with it being Venice, your own work and this relationship with Nicolaus?

**LG** I had to ask myself a lot of questions that I think people have always asked themselves in the postwar German art context, but also as someone who has happily worked there for 20 years. I definitely suffered because I want to do something serious, but I can't make a parody of being serious. I mean, what's serious? But I think my work's reasonably serious anyway. I've been invited because of what I do, so if I suddenly make this whole project an exception to what I do, as it were, then that's not why I was invited. But the question is, is this an exception? So is this the moment when you knock down the building, and you start again?

**SO** That's been done.

**LG** Well one of the early ideas I had, which I still like, was when I went to look at the building in October last year. It's a bit like buying a used car-I'm not really sure what to do on these site visits. There's an architect who looks after the building-he's a very nice, elegant German architectural historian-and he is the guardian of the building. So I'm wandering around, and I looked at the floor, and I said, can I drill into the floor. What about these bits here? What's behind that? And he said, well, we'd rather you didn't drill into the central room floor because it's new-ish, but in the four side rooms you can do what you want. And I thought, that's a really odd thing to say, because surely it's normally the other way around-you can't touch the original floor but you can touch the new one. And then I realized that Hans Haacke hadn't dug up the whole floor in 1993. It's funny how much that's an enduring myth. I even read it in a magazine the other day. But he only dug up the central room. I thought, well, as an exception maybe I should step outside the normal, rather convoluted track of my work, and just call Hans Haacke and say, do you want to finish the job? And we'd go over to Venice together, and dig up the rest of the floor that Hitler and Mussolini walked on. And that would be a serious project, maybe not one for me but there could be some logic to it. Because whatever you think of Hans Haacke, for a lot of people that's seen as a very important work after the Berlin Wall. It's the first postWall statement, and it's a troubling one. It's partly saying even though the wall's come down and even though things are getting fixed there's still a big problem. Do you see what I mean?

**SO** At least in my reading, your work never enters that symbolic realm.

**LG** No. But it did occur to me that maybe it should. Maybe this is the exception. I thought, I'll talk to my dealer in London at Corvi-Mora Gallery. He's Italian, and I said to him, if I wanted to knock down a building in Venice, how difficult would it be? And he said, in the winter time, everything's possible. Someone gets the wrong papers ... everything could be done.

I know it's very rude to be a guest and then smash up the room. But, you know, you have to think about all these possibilities. If this is so bad-and every German critic and journalist who

has talked to me has only asked me initially about Nazi buildings-and if it's such a horrible symbolic site, maybe something should be done about it, and it shouldn't be tolerated. When I was there in October, I looked around and I thought, if I knock down this one, then I better knock down the British pavilion, too, because it looks like a colonial building in a way. It's got a lavatory, it's got a kitchen, it's got all the things you'd need to survive when the natives are surrounding the building. Then I thought, well I'd better knock down the Italian pavilion as well, because that's real Fascist architecture, not just renovated. And you wouldn't know where to stop. If you took it to its logical conclusion it would be horrific. What I did instead is I asked a rhetorical question in a way, because I half knew the answer. I got a reply from the guy who looks after the Documenta archive, and he said there was a plan by Arnold Bode, the guy who started Documenta. Bode designed a building in 1958 to replace the original German pavilion. But because money was tight and it was a difficult time, what he proposed was to use the basic concrete framework of the building-it's actually a modern building underneath all that stuff-and turn it into a standard postwar German modernist building. So the first thing I did for the whole project was make a 3D computer model from Bode's drawings. I'm working on producing what's going to end up being an edition. It's kind of a red herring in a way, but it's an edition that for the first time builds an actual model of this building that he wanted to do.

**SO** Then what we're talking about is a scale model?

**LG** Yeah. The edition of Bode's proposal will be about 50 cm by 50 cm [roughly 19 1/2 inches] by 30 cm [nearly 12 inches].

**SO** It's an object.

**LG** Exactly, a thing. But that's a good way around the problem sometimes. What you do is you imagine. What if I didn't have to deal with all of these questions everyone is asking me, especially in Germany, about this Nazi building? What if, in 1958, they'd done another building that looked just like the Scandinavian pavilion? Would it have been any different? Would Joseph Beuys have been the subject in 1976 of an amazing series of photographs of a man who looks absolutely devastated standing in a rubble-strewn building,

attempting to do something? Would Richter's portraits in 1972, which are very precise and very stark within this rather churchlike building, have been there? None of this would have been there. It would have been a double-level kunsthaus. None of this has got anything to do with what I'm doing in the end, but I found it productive in a strange way to start by doing something that isn't really what I'm known for.

**SO** So the first imperative was the history.

**LG** It was more of a slightly belligerent response to repeatedly being asked what I think about showing in this building. Sometimes, to be a bit glib, I'd say you know I've shown in Fascist and Falangist buildings all over Europe. I've shown in Malaga in Spain; I've shown in the Haus der Kunst in Munich. I'm an expert at showing in these kinds of spaces, along with all the other people who have shown in them.

**SO** What's interesting here is doing away with the building. A kind of erasure.

**LG** What I thought I would do is to switch off the building. How do you switch off a building? Well, I'll be surrounded by Steve McQueen [in the British pavilion], Mark Lewis [in the Canadian pavilion], and Haegue Yang [in the Korean pavilion]. Maybe I can just join these people and make a film, too. That's a good way of switching off the building. You don't have to see it-you walk in and it's dark, there's nothing there. I haven't talked to anyone about this before. Partly because of you asking to do this interview-I started to think, how can I control the sound in a building like this, which would be a dark building. So I looked at various sound-proofing techniques and different sound-baffling structures to break up the sound rather than carpeting the place. I don't see people lounging around on the floor or feeling too comfortable. It's just like that Kippenberger painting with the title *With the Best Will in the World I Can't See a Swastika*. I found myself up in the middle of the night doing renderings on the computer of this sound-baffling system that I'd worked out for the walls. It involved my standard lexicon of geometric hard-edged applied modernism, and I was looking for swastikas in the shadows that were being cast in the gloom and I thought, I have to stop, I'm losing my mind, what am I doing? So after working on it for months, I abandoned this attempt to switch off

## VENICEPREVIEW

a science-fiction film, because in the postwar period the one thing Germans can't do is make a science-fiction film. It doesn't exist-maybe it cannot exist. I started to think, what can I do that cannot be done in Germany? If they invite a fellow European to do something, what can I bring and show them how to do? So I embarked on this process of thinking somehow it's possible to make a very complex and serious science-fiction film without any actual planning, or a crew, or script. I went to Chicago, bought a camera, this fancy camera, and filmed the snow. I thought if I do enough establishing shots I'll end up with something. I even came up with a title-it would be episodic, 10 episodes, 12 minutes each, and it would be called Trick City. It just seemed like a good name for a science-fiction film.

**SO** A sequel to Alphaville.

**LG** Yes, that's exactly right. When I'd exhausted the Greek alphabet and the word "stadt," I realized I had to move on to a different thing, so yes, the Trick City is like the Alphaville of 2009. I even scouted out Roosevelt Island. The primary master plan was done by Philip Johnson. You've got the American who was influenced by European high modernism but somehow is a complicated character with rumors about his past and all the complicated stories. Then you've got this attempt to make a kind of European style instant housing project. It's the most European part of New York that I've ever been to. But again, it's not my work. And-then, of course, I thought, I should just not do it. I should say I'm sorry, I can't. I have no ideas. Why not? This would be quite interesting. You send out an e-flux announcement saying, the German Ministry is pleased to announce that Liam Gillick has no ideas.

So I ended up writing, which is often the way I work through things. I wrote a long text that I gave as a talk in Berlin in March. Given several of the things I'd said about Nicolaus being a very complicated but very generative noncollaborator, I'd had some pressure to do the typical contemporary thing, which is create a series of panels, or discussions, or something around an event. I kept slipping into becoming a different person. I had good ideas for other artists for the pavilion. I realized part of the problem was this looming discourse, and there's this notion that

I'm supposed to be interested in discourse. But it doesn't mean I want to have one. It doesn't mean I want to be programming one. Then I said, I'll do one event, and I'll try to account for myself, I'll try to talk about what I'm interested in, in a very simple way, and that unlocked a lot of things.

**SO** Readers of your work can range from those who don't like it at all, who consider it opportunistic in how it moves about, to others who see it as highly political but can't identify how. In my reading, it's an attempt to understand the difference between coming from discourse and being part of discourse.

**LG** I completely agree. I need a context to work within, so what seems to be opportunist is in a strange way a correct reading, because in fact the work didn't evolve and then find a site-it evolved alongside the sites and the contexts. Also, I don't think every artist has to deal with their biography, but I come from a background of strong identification with Irish Republican politics, which is full of subterfuge, misleading statements. It's not imbedded in my way of seeing things, but when I'm told that the correct way to be a politically conscious artist is to have transparency throughout everything you do, I'm not sure that I think that every politically conscious activity is surrounded and best served by transparency. So while I have moments of clear positions, they're often muddled by this distrust of transparency, distrust that the good artist and the good political artist is always a transparent artist, who will always reveal sources, desires and needs.

**SO** How do you think the politics of Venice will come to circumscribe you, or is that a consideration?

**LG** I never think that national pavilions are that interesting, frankly.

**SO** No, I'm not talking about that. I'm talking about the notion of English artist, German pavilion, this curator.

**LG** It's not a radical move, frankly. I mean if you really wanted to do something, there are people or groups or individuals within the society who would have much more symbolic capital by doing this. It comes back down to this question of, can I just continue like normal? Maybe this is a big problem. Maybe it means that the German self-conscious postwar agonies are being marginalized. Or maybe this is a difficulty, and if it is, it doesn't necessarily

fix anything. For sure, it's got nothing to do with fixing anything. And I'm not a group of Kurdish activists, where I'd have a daily need to be on the street, an urgent political requirement to function in a certain way.

It's more about, if everything seems to be fixed, and everything seems to be rolling along very nicely, and every few weeks another new space opens, and we all welcome Angela Bulloch and Olafur Eliasson and Jonathan Monk to come and hang out and live in Berlin and cycle around on their bikes and have a good time, what happens if you put someone like me in the German pavilion? Does it mean that this is all fine? That the new Berlin life is all fine? That everything has been working out just great, and this is just another German building?

I'm not sure. I'm convinced that what will happen is that ... I don't know what will happen. That's the answer. I'm surrounded by questions. One thing is for sure: one thing that's very interesting and very productive about working in Germany for years has been the fact that people ask questions. So for an artist like me who started with no vision, deliberately in a way, and no ideas, in a strange way-lots of ideas but no idea, singular-it's been very productive to work in a context where people ask questions. And then also when you respond, they might return to the question again, but in new form. Let me put it another way. One of the first questions I had from a mainstream journalist in Germany was, "when you win the Golden Lion for Germany, how will you feel?" Such a great question. And of course I revealed my background by saying, "I didn't know it was a competition." And they looked slightly horrified when I said it. But you know, the biggest danger is to be sucked into what is a very possessive and very serious cultural context.

**SO** Okay, so given that you decided not to make the sequel to Alphaville, what comes next as a possibility?

**LG** Well, I can't be too precise about it, but ... I'm very interested in the history of applied art and the his-

Gillick: Developmental, 2008, painted aluminum and Plexiglas, four elements, each 11'10" by 47V by 3Va inches. Courtesy Casey Kaplan Gallery, New York





View of Gillick's Mirrored Image:  
A Volvo Bar, 2008. Courtesy  
Kunstverein Munich.

tory of applied modernism. I became very interested in Margarete Schutte Lihotzky [Austrian architect and designer, 1897-2000], the woman who designed the Frankfurt Kitchen. Schutte-Lihotzky lived in Russia, she was a good Communist and a good Marxist, and she did good work. She designed a kitchen to make life better. She designed kindergartens. There's only one book about Schutte-Lihotzky in print, containing the drawings and the thinking about the avant-garde that I find interesting. It shows you how to use a kitchen. There's something everyday in this, and I think in a way this is a great anti-Fascist book. Now, it's not a great anti-Fascist book in the way the anti-Fascist collages are great, but it is because it claims the domestic in a different way.

I'd always joked with people about the fact that in a Fascist building there's no toilet, there's no bathroom. And in fact the German pavilion technically is not up to code for a German public building. It has no rest area for workers, no lavatory, and nowhere to make tea and coffee and keep the beer, and so on. So I went through a number of other deracinated Michael Asher possibilities, like getting the budget and giving it to a bunch of contractors in Italy, and

**SAUL OSTROW** is chair of visual arts and technologies at the Cleveland Institute of Arts.

just giving them a little list that says it needs a toilet, it needs a rest area, bathroom, but without specifying what to do and just seeing what happens. I'd arrive in Venice and who knows, they might have done a very nice thing. But in fact the answer is to stop thinking about art in a way, to stop thinking about the recent history of German art, and stop thinking about what gets done in that pavilion, and start thinking about it as a working environment, and what had been done in the past to make things better, and how they'd failed or succeeded. So that's where we are. That sort of brings us up to the beginning of April. I'm making a workshop there to a certain extent. I've worked with a fabricator in Berlin for the last 10 years, and we work very closely on things, but we hardly ever meet. Basically they're all heading out on Apr. 12, and we'll convene in Venice and we'll start to work. There is a belief that the pavilion idea has to be embargoed until the last second, because somehow there's this myth that they open the doors and everyone gasps when they see the Bruce Nauman video, as if they didn't know what it would be.

This is really counter to my working method. The worst thing is that you're not supposed to talk about it until it happens, until the morning

of the 3rd of June. People have said things like, "How are you going to deal with this?" or "What project are you working on?" But they view it as an exceptional moment, so I'm trying to find a methodology that allows me to still have ideas. If I'm not allowed to really talk openly about it, I can talk about some ideas. We've rented apartments in Venice, and amongst us we'll create our own kind of semi-commune, where ideas can be generated and can be executed quite fast. A lot of people e-mail and say, oh you must be really deeply stuck in working on Venice and so on. And I say, oh yes, I am. Because I am thinking about it. But the question really is how do you find a working method or a working, productive context within which ideas can be produced? And that's really the key. It doesn't help you to know whether you'll arrive and there'll be no building, or there are great toilets, or a large number of rather mute, corrupted formalist artworks. I became truly free-in fact I'm not stressed at all-when I realized the problem wasn't what to do, because if I'd asked myself over the years, what should I do, I probably wouldn't have done half the things I've done. I would have done a different kind of art.

# the singularity problem

**Why is Liam Gillick,  
year-old British artist,  
representing Germany  
at this years 53rd  
Venice Biennale?**

by **Steven Henry Madoff**



**Liam Gillick is one of the most visible artists in the world today whose art is fixed on subjects of capitalism, social instability, and the possibilities that instability offers.**

THERE IS A BREATHTAKING SCENE at the beginning of Jean Luc Godard's anarchist film from 1967, *Weekend*. The camera tracks a seemingly endless car pile-up. Wrecks are abandoned. Children and adults pass the time in games of catch, others shout in frustration, and as the scene ends the corpses of car-crash victims are laid out on the side of the road without the slightest interest, let alone sympathy and sadness. The film's heroes are en route to murder one of their parents and take their money, and the film reaches its climax in an orgy of half-farcical cannibalism, which thymes in Godard's mind with capitalism. The profligacy and soul-emptying greed of the modern state is worthy of one thing only: flames and ruin.

A little more than 40 years later, no film is more savagely to the point as the juggernaut of global capitalism tumbles in free fall, imploding as it goes. Yet capitalism's epic meltdown brings new possibilities, and Liam Gillick is one of the most visible artists in the world today whose art is fixed on the subjects of capitalism and other modern forms of social organization, along with social instability and the possibilities that instability offers. He is no less insistent on interrogating political society than Godard, but he moves in the opposite direction: not toward polemical condemnation and closure, but toward polemical open-endedness.

This month Gillick, who is 45, mounts the world stage in a somewhat bewildering, ambiguous, and altogether typical fashion. A Englishman of Celtic lineage living in New York, he is representing Germany in its Fascist-era pavilion designed by Albert Speer on the grounds of the 53rd Venice Biennale-though he isn't German nor has he ever lived for any

length of time in Germany. Nicholas Schaffhausen, the curator of the pavilion and a previous collaborator with Gillick, chose him. And in doing so he embraces a philosophical and political position utterly in keeping with Gillick's mind and practice: subversive, dead serious, and entirely playful in the ambition to liquefy the rigid matter of social and political structures. Here is one of the artist's core beliefs: Authority of all kinds and social bureaucracies in particular, whether of the state, the community, or the corporation, are meant to be disassembled and reassembled and disassembled over and over again. Gillick is an absolutist of antiabsolutism.

Working primarily with language (critical essays, fictions, wall texts) and minimalist sculptural installations, Gillick has had more than 80 solo exhibitions in Europe and North America since 1989 and has

**"I want to find the moments of flicker where ideologies and forms break down into a multiplicity of potentials."**

published scores of texts—a broad sampling of which were collected in his *Proxemics: Selected Writings 1988-2006*. He is long associated with the group of artists gathered by the French curator Nicholas Bourriaud in his 1998 book *Relational Aesthetics*, which attempts to lasso artists as diverse as Philippe Parreno, Dominique Gonzalez-Foerster, Jorge Pardo, Carsten Holler, and Rirkrit Tiravanija. Bourriaud summarizes their practices as essentially an art that draws people into improvisational dynamics that engage them collectively, blurring the lines between an object-based art and a communal expression that is in itself the work of art. You would think that an art of communal expression might foster a sense of transparency—a value largely esteemed in social relationships.

But Gillick's notion of the communal and of social relations in general goes another way. For him improvisational dynamics are symbolic of a greater sense of instability and oscillation, a certain fuzziness blooming on the boundary. He assumes the role of what the literary theorist Wayne Booth has called the "unreliable narrator," a trickster whose imagination favors unlocking rules and rearranging borders—witness his presence in the halls of Germany. A social theorist in a fabulist's coat, or perhaps the other way around, he applies this idea of creative unreliability, of destabilization, to speculations on the way that societies behave in relation to economic, social, and political pressures—and the ways they might behave were the rules and the circumstances canted to one angle or another.

His particular fascination is with the invisible middle—the place where most of humanity lives; the realm of largely unexceptional life, with its quiet, small pleasures, burbling below the frequencies of cognitive dissonance, even if its corporate homogeneity has the creeping pallor of beige. The invisible middle has a pathos, too, of the life passed over, of never coming into focus really, though this existential vagueness offers the promise of improvisation as well, of finding ways now and then to slip out of the frame, off the grid, into an emancipatory moment of self-determination and self-organizing collaboration. He speaks frequently of recognizing the key elements of difference and collectivity in contemporary life. Of course, the risk of creating representations of this invisible middle in texts and installations is that the work may seem too much like its subject, too chilly or undefined. The fluent ease with which Gillick shifts between voices in his texts, between levels

of rhetoric and tone, and the abstraction of his sculptures, with their invocations of earlier formalist art and the content of postwar American abstraction which is now conventionally implicated in the exercise of imperialist power, only make this art more slippery. That is the challenge of getting what Gillick's work is about. But his opacity, his strategy of difficulty, is also his point.

Gillick's prose employs a curious abstractness that lies like a veil over its particulars of commentary and storytelling. At the beginning of one of his most ambitious and crucial texts, the 2000 "Literally No Place," which debuted with a show of the same name at the French exhibition space Air de Paris, he begins in the perfect pitch of picaresque fiction with what is in essence a long speculation on the idea of the commune. "They turned in the ravine and climbed to the top of a bank, just to see the place again." But within paragraphs the language shifts to more critical observations, describing the commune of his characters as a place "where their sense of ethics and conscience can be collectivized, where they can be both pulled together and gently teased apart." And quickly Gillick's prose shifts again to a staccato stream of something that lies purposefully and uneasily between criticspeak, sociology, national security analysis, and a bland corporatism: "It is a loose connection that permits exposure of shifts in strategy toward appropriation of better conscience-based and ethically driven ideas. Not countercultures but the appropriation of an ethical language with a collective and fractured sense of progress."

The effect is unnerving, and unnerving in the specific tradition of high modernism's creed of fragmented consciousness that Gillick is heir to. The fragmentation of modernism was a representation of a world shattered by cataclysm and overwhelmed by the advent of technological speed and the unassimilable density of global information. Difficulty and opacity are the hallmarks of a central strain of modernism, particularly literary modernism, from James Joyce to Gertrude Stein to Paul Celan and beyond, and Gillick is not finally a visual artist but a literary one. While he is often described (and describes himself) as an artist, critic, writer, and designer, all his work is in service to its stylized narrative arc. The discursive in both definitions of the word as reasoned argument and wandering digression are crucial to his narrative strategy.

The density of layers in Gillick's practice is only increased by a third narrative element he often adds: words as sculpture. In the tradition of his friend Lawrence Weiner, he considers words as they're applied to surfaces gallery walls or facades—as sculpture in itself. And then there are numerous word pieces, such as *Complete Signage* and *Four Levels of Exchange*, both from 2005, that are three-dimensional, to be seen in the round. In both cases, these hybrid, sculptural words fuse the terms of the two other media, resembling things in the world and things in the mind; words as objects that have a physical presence, a relation to their functional use as everyday signage, and the abstract presence of language, streaming and free, an essence of the intellect.

Not surprisingly, Gillick has made the declaration that he has a suspicion of transparency as the only correct way to expose "the machinations of the dominant culture." In its place, he applies a kind of blockage to continuous comprehension. The effect is often a mischievous blandness underneath which lies a rich undecidability touched by moments of tenderness for the foibles of human need. There are many routes to follow in his narratives, which are rife with suggestions of flexibility, negotiation, and invention. He speaks of them as "scenarios," schemes that layout the what-ifs of social and economic order, of what he calls "functional utopias." Witness his most recent exhibition in New York at the Casey Kaplan gallery, in 2008, with its amusing but ultimately earnest proclamation for a title, "The State Itself Becomes a Super Whatnot." The title was a variation on a theme inscribed on the gallery's walls, of which other variants served as titles for earlier shows in London and Milan: "The Commune Itself Becomes a Super Srate" and "The State Itself Becomes a Super Commune." The sculptures were brightly colored in Gillick's signature manner. They had the pristine formalism of classic Minimalist works by

*Status Flowering Closure*, 2008  
Powder-coated aluminum, transparent colored Plexiglas  
78 3/4 x 118 x 12 in.





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**recent closure of the plant**

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ÖVNINGSKÖRNING (DRIVING PRACTICE PARTS 1 - 30), 2004

Water-cut, powder-coated aluminium

30 elements

Exhibition view, Milwaukee Art Museum, Milwaukee, WI 2004

Donald Judd crossed with Sol LeWitt, perhaps, a pastiche of high modern industrial geometries in a more sophisticated version of the palette of LEGO blocks. Their construction was precise. Their visual message was of rational structure, of material clarity. Yet the willful equivocation of these different scenarios for social order provided a riddling contrast to that clarity. To find as a third category a “whatnot” is to offer that ludic open-endedness again: neither hierarchical state nor the egalitarian ethos of the commune, but a shapeless, unidentifiable social entity.

“A lot of my work is derived from how to get around the singularity problem and instead find multiple sources” as starting points for the work, Gillick has said. “I want to find those moments of flicker where ideologies and forms break down into a multiplicity of potentials.” That flicker is Gillick’s door that opens onto alternatives in which society’s mechanisms of production and exchange find routes toward compromise that enliven its people and allow them what the social thinker Jürgen Habermas calls “arenas for individual selfrealization and spontaneity.”

Consider Gillick’s *Reciprocal Passage Work* (2003), a subtle intervention in a London passageway lined with shops, between two public streets and with gates at either end to be closed and locked if the commercial tenants wish. Gillick often uses colored Perspex or Plexiglas in his work, and here he covered the passage’s overhead lights with it—the slightest inflection can shift the terms of commerce’s rule toward creative individual agency and emancipation. But so slight was his touch that it was much like penciled notes in the margins of a book. It was a barely visible commentary in relation to the weight of the text, and yet its interpretive gravity is like ripples spreading outward from the smallest stone dropped into a pool: invasive, effective, and (however briefly) transformational. The idea that resonates from the work is once again the possibility of a parallel view, a redistribution of small nuances of private energy that tilt in their own ways against unitary power. This is Gillick’s means to create what he called in that significant text “Literally No Place” “a speculative situation, where speculation alone replaces other collective action. Speculation as collectivism.”

The theme is common over Gillick’s career, though *Reciprocal Passage Work* is exceptional for its missing complement of a text. Since his first exhibitions in Europe, the codependency of meanings projected by his interdisciplinary marriage of texts and objects has been a way for him to elicit that sense of what could be called ambivalence, a multiplicity of meanings. He intends to leave his reader-viewers with a sense of ambiguity that notes what he calls “soft” ideologies, meaning the pervasive and often ambient ways in which the influence of commercial, corporate, and political agendas slips into our lives.

Gillick swings his texts on the hinge of these flickers and ambiguities, on the softening and blur of hard rules imposed from authorities above, so that his art flashes alternating moments of authenticity and artificiality, analysis and speculative fictions, continually proposing that there is no single determinate factor that guides new social engagement and alignments, but many—just as he claims there is no universal reader of his work (or anyone else’s), only segmentations of readerships that cross over one another. The ambiguities of the work are his fruitfully unstable ground, his terra infirma, that germinates the hermeneutical strategy of

unending interpretation, of a certain inexhaustibility of the text dependent on each individual reading that resolves the work or simply leaves it unresolved and open. By Gillick’s lights, this territory of the unrectified proposition is where administrative order and legislative imperatives are thrown into the air.

There’s a nostalgia in all this for the revolutionary élan of May 1968 and the Situationist idea of the derive of Guy Debord’s notion of drifting from routine in order to restructure experience. They hang above Gillick’s art like tutelary spirits, hovering over his use of words and objects as the means of slippage, upheaval, of resistance to the singularity problem. Yet for all the bright colors and the briskness of his texts, they also have a melancholy and worry about them of the missed or thwarted chance, as if they were “born under the sign of Saturn,” as Walter Benjamin described himself, “the star of the slowest revolution, the planet of detours and delays.” One night this past winter, Gillick and I sat in a cafe on the Upper East Side of Manhattan. Bearded and quickwitted, he was

relaxed but fidgety, with the manner of someone in constant need of nicotine. He was unsure of what he would do in Venice (and weeks before the opening he was still saying his plans were unfixed). Many e-mails between us about his work had brought him to offer a friendly warning that night, a rebuttal to all this talk of ambiguity, which he

followed up with another note.

“Don’t get hypnotized by the parallels and layers in the practice. Focus on what’s said and made.

There’s very little ambiguity in the work,” he argued, and then ran down a list.”

*McNamara*, 1992, predicts the collapse and apology of a former car executive running a war. ...

*Erasmus Is Late*, 1995, plays with the notion of time slippages within the context of ‘the day before the mob becomes the workers.’

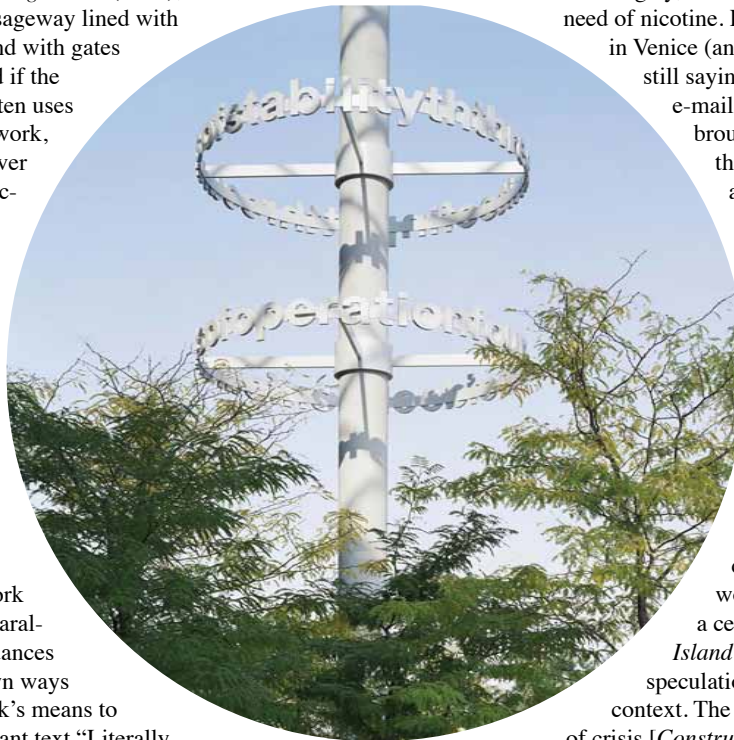
It’s about the last moment for a certain kind of revolution. *Discussion*

*Island*, 1997, concerns how planning and speculation can be determined in a neoliberal context. The most recent work looks at the notion

of crisis [*Construccion de Uno*; 2005] in a culture where there is [supposed to be] no crisis. Somehow that

seems familiar in the current situation, no?”

It all sounds convincing in a glossing way, but like so much else in Gillick’s art, the intriguing part is that this is merely part of the story. He has an appetite for ideologies, and ideologies have an appetite for generalizations. The invisible middle, or the “critique of the middle ground,” as he puts it, is open and shifting enough to be the perfect centrifuge for his ideological concerns—a maze of ideas to snare his viewer readers. He said it himself: “Certain things work as lures or attractors, while other things hold you away in a web of text.” So be careful when you enter Gillick’s zone. There is always the risk, as Dante said at the start of the *Divine Comedy*, that in the middle way we find ourselves in dark woods. Dante had Virgil to guide him through them. But we have a guide whose every strategy is to query and destabilize, to produce, “new relationships rather than clearly definable results,” as he once said. In Venice, as we step into the echoing hall of Speer’s bullying architecture, we will be in the clever hands of Liam Gillick, social inquisitor, eraser of borders. Our smiling, unreliable narrator.♦



**CASEY KAPLAN**  
121 WEST 27TH STREET  
NEW YORK NY 10001  
TEL +1 212 645 7335  
FAX +1 212 645 7835  
WWW.CASEYKAPLANGALLERY.COM  
INFO@CASEYKAPLANGALLERY.COM

## Press Release

### Artists in Focus #7

#### Liam Gillick. Executive Two Litre GXL

<b>Press Breakfast</b>	Tuesday, 20 October 2009, 10:30 a.m.
<b>Exhibition Venue</b>	MAK Permanent Collection of Contemporary Art MAK, Stubenring 5, 1010 Vienna
<b>Exhibition Term</b>	20 October 2009 – 21 March 2010
<b>Opening Hours</b>	Tues MAK NITE© 10:00 a.m.–12:00 midnight Wed–Sun, 10:00 a.m.–6:00 p.m., Mon closed

“Artists in Focus #7” at the MAK Permanent Collection of Contemporary Art is devoted to the British artist Liam Gillick, born in Aylesbury in 1964. His work moves about the interface between theory and practice, and it includes contributions to the genres of sculpture, architecture and design, as well as writings on art. Gillick makes use of a broad spectrum of materials and approaches in creating his module-like objects. The exhibition “Executive Two Litre GXL” – this title refers to the auto industry of the 1970s – consists of three voluminous works which interplay defines an interior and an exterior space.

The starting point for this exhibition is provided by the work “Layered Impasse Screen” (1999), an item on permanent loan from the MAK Collection of Contemporary Art, whereas the multi-part installation “Prototype MAK Production Pavilion (Housed in the Countryside)” (2009) was planned specifically for this exhibition and constructed on location at the MAK. An important role in the development of this flexibly variable modular installation is played by architecture of the space. In his work here, Gillick refers to the architectural models by important contemporary figures from the MAK collection while also integrating the exhibition space itself into the construction he has built, which is defined by the support structure for the room’s ceiling.

He shapes this exhibition’s installation into two unequal parts consisting of interconnected units, which, in their overall conception, form an idealized pavilion of recurring elements. The main part of the work is grouped around the stairwell in the exhibition space, resulting in a temporary, self-contained structure. The second group of units, which is separate, is employed as a bracket for the sculpture of his, which is part of the Collection of Contemporary Art. The overall installation is conceived such that two or more freestanding parts give rise to a self-sufficient object. These combinable units hover somewhere in between art and design, and can make possible various spatial situations.

Gillick creates a further architectural level via a minor intervention in the space. For the third work in the exhibition, “Contingent Wall Plates (Housed in the City)” (2009), the artist had a number of preexisting elements in the room replaced by varnished aluminum, allowing a series of seemingly arbitrary geometries to create an outsized tension within the space. The conception of these artifacts underlines Gillick’s interest in the changeable status of an aesthetic object between applied and visual functions.

In his works, the artist intervenes in special locations in order to stimulate thought in the observer. Gillick’s interest is in the system of a constructed and planned world which reveals itself in various scenarios and formations, as well as in key exponents of societal, economic and political developments. He uses construction, color and location in order to activate the history of modern and contemporary culture and art.

Liam Gillick lives and works in London and New York. He was involved in the MAK Gallery’s exhibition “Dedalic Convention” in 2001, which he developed together with 16 international artists. Gillick is a contributor to the German Pavilion at this year’s 53rd Esposizione Internazionale d’Arte – La Biennale di Venezia. He was nominated for the Vincent Award at the Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam in 2008, and he was also nominated for the Turner Prize in 2002. Gillick has been represented by numerous solo exhibitions at important institutions including the Palais de Tokyo (Paris) and the ICA (London) in 2005, The Museum of Modern Art (New York) and The Power Plant (Toronto) in 2003, Whitechapel Gallery (London) in 2002, Frankfurter Kunstverein (Frankfurt am Main) in 1999, and Villa Arson (Nice) in 1998.

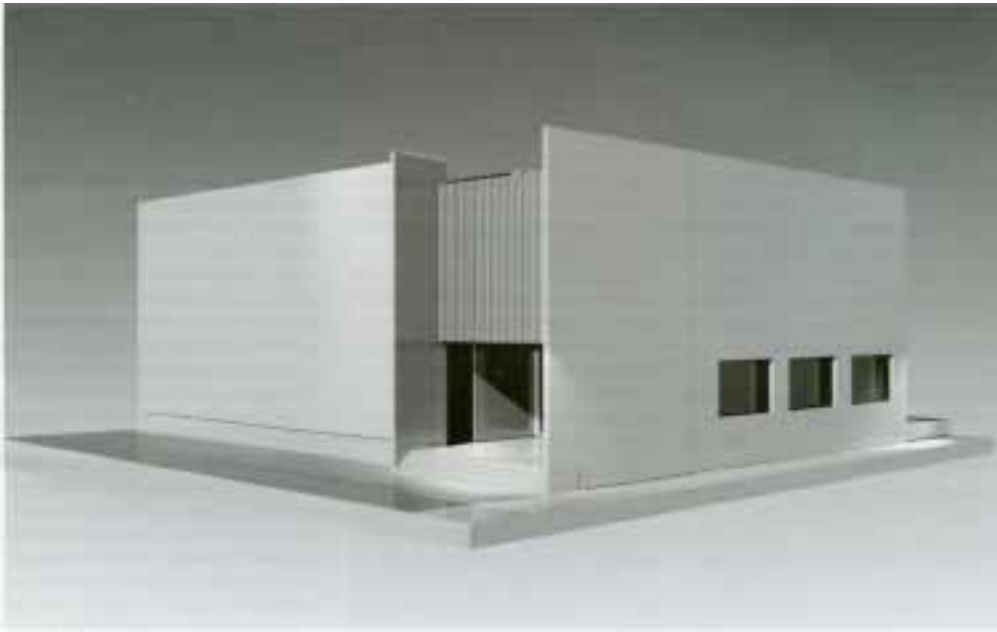
“Liam Gillick. Executive Two Litre GXL” is part of the “Artists in Focus” series, which pursues a trailblazing concept aimed at repositioning the MAK Permanent Collection of Contemporary Art. Following “Franz Graf. Final Song First”, this is now the seventh exhibition to make the following appeal to the public: the series entails the room of the Collection of Contemporary Art being dedicated to various individual artists represented in the collection for periods of five months each; the work of the artist at hand is integrated into the existing collection as an emphasis. “Artists in Focus” provides an important impulse for necessary new purchases and/or donations by potential sponsors. This creates new perspectives for the collection’s expansion and enrichment, both of which have become impossible objectives because of the MAK’s precarious financial situation, a result of its having been transformed into a public-law academic institution. Having already presented “Rainer, sonst keiner! Overwritings”, “Alfons Schilling. Sehmaschinen 007”, “Padhi Frieberger. No Art Without Artists!”, “Franz West. Sit On My Chair”, “Lay On My Bed. Applied Art”, “Heimo Zobernig. Total Design”, “Franz Graf. Final Song First” and “Liam Gillick. Executive Two Litre GXL”, “Artists in Focus” will continue in 2010 with further individual presentations.

CASEY KAPLAN  
121 WEST 27TH STREET  
NEW YORK NY 10001  
TEL +1 212 645 7335  
FAX +1 212 645 7835  
WWW.CASEYKAPLANGALLERY.COM  
INFO@CASEYKAPLANGALLERY.COM

> INTERVIEW

Liam Gillick interviewed by John Slyce

# Recuperating MODERNISM



John Slyce: *SHALL WE BEGIN BY LOOKING AT THE RETROSPECTIVE? How did things come together at the Kunstverein in Munich? I understand you staged a play?*

Liam Gillick: *The Munich aspect of the show is really the production part of the retrospective project.*

Everything else - in Zurich and Chicago and Rotterdam - had a somewhat dark quality, and I didn't get my hands dirty or get deeply engaged in the execution of the structures. In Zurich, and Chicago and Rotterdam I gave back 50% of the space to each institution to deal with and use to address the work over the last 20 years. For Munich I thought it would be a good reflection of my practice to make one part of this retrospective absolutely production-orientated. And, of course, a play is literally a production. It's the aspect of the retrospective where I asked for certain elements to be put into place, including people - I worked with 15 actors. I had a basic outline of what this play would be and I had a basic structure in the gallery, but beyond that I didn't know the precise details until I got there.



Liam Gillick, A Volvo Bar Kunstverein Munich

That's taken me back, really, to my original way of working, which is a developed form of the Seth Siegelaub idea of sending artists to shows and not art. I put myself into the position I was in back in 1990 when I'd go to Nice and I'd work out what to do when I got there. It put me somewhat on the spot. I had to find a way to stage a play - in German.

JS: To produce a production in a post-production mode?

LG: Yes, exactly. It went on for two months or so, a longer run than a lot of real plays get.

The idea was to use the play as a way to introduce various characters I have worked with over the years. I've often used the idea of the person who carries a narrative, or carries an ideological component within the work, and in this case I saw each of the characters in the plays potentially having multiple functions. They were, in a way, a group of people that I might have worked with over the year (or certain curators and artists), but at the same time they were also all one person and they were also all me.

JS: And what is the historical time of the play?

LG: It is set on the day of the birth of the main character, not a birthday but literally the day of birth. But it is also set in the present, in a bar next to a Volvo factory hence the title A Volvo Bar. Some of the locations are also the Kunstverein itself. So the director's office, for example, is one of the locations - not literally; it is just one of the places that gets talked about. The basic outline is: there's a bar next to a Volvo factory and a man arrives on the

day and a man arrives on the day of his birth and interacts with various characters in the bar. They describe power relationships and locations which are the location of the play: the Kunstverein in Munich and at the same time the discourse is generated from the perspective of a bar in Sweden.

Structurally, it makes perfect sense in relation to my work - the idea that you are both forced to address the current surroundings (because that's where the work is), but you also have to accept, at some level, that the focus of the work is displaced. So you have a doubling of reference points in relation to the site and this causes tension that mirrors the way my work often functions. There's a concern, sometimes, in the way that people deal with the physical work that I make - that the work doesn't match my rhetoric, or the work doesn't seem to match the words. I've always wondered in which period of history art has literally matched what was said about it, in a precise way. I mean, that's what is interesting about art: the attempt to constantly redescribe the artwork, or redescribe what it is doing.

JS: Can we look more closely at the issue of avoiding the transparent message or direct access in the meaning in the work. I've never had the sensation that there's a mismatch or disconnect between word and object in the work. In fact, that's the relationship set up. Can you talk about your wish to avoid that kind of transparency, even as far back as 1990 when you were looking at documentary forms?

LG: There are very clear reasons for this ap

parent avoidance. On an idealistic level, the only way you can use art is as a fragmented mirror of the complexity of contemporary society and you try to produce a system of art production that is just as multifaceted and potentially misleading, based on a series of parallels. This was my main revelation at art school - the idea of art production as a series of parallels. Michael Craig Martin used to talk about the idea that instead of his work having a style within a trajectory of late Modernism, he - the artist - would be the common factor in his art. This would free him up; allow him to do many different things. Now, of course, his work has become more consolidated and recognisably his - but initially it jumped around a lot.

Yet, if you emerged during a period of difference - of revised forms of identity and new understandings about relativism in relation to cultural meaning and social structure - then of course you wouldn't be happy with just saying, 'Well, I'll be the common factor and I'll let the work find its own way.' You must also dissolve a little bit, too, as an author. While the work is always heavily authored up to a point, the sense of responsibility for authorship, or the level of authorship, is questionable. The location of the art moment does not reside with my consistent presence. It can exist at different moments within the work.

In early Modernism you can see a quite urgent exchange between the process of modernity and the critical reflection of Modernism but, as time goes on, these processes get further and further apart. And it's that gap that I'm interested in: the gap between modernity and the critical potential of Modernism and Postmodernism.

And that's how I might end up designing a shelf, for example, which is what I have been doing recently. It is not because I'm interested in design alone, and it is not because I'm interested in art and architecture. It is because the act of designing a shelf has a very particular meaning if you are operating in this gap between modernity and Modernism. This explains a lot about the work, I think.

I always used to say that I was more interested in Anni Albers than Josef Albers, and this remains true. I am more interested in the applied forms of Modernism, the attempt to have a much more functional role in relation to daily life; but I also want to operate in an art context. I don't want to operate in the textile world or in the world of applied art. I was quite influenced even as a student -by Swiss

artists like Richard Paul Lohse, who might make posters for the public transport system and produce reductive abstract paintings, both as equal aspects of his practice. This seemed extremely interesting to me: the idea that you could operate in a terrain where it might be normal for you to be doing these different tasks but operating from the perspective of being an artist.

People describe me - as they did during the Vincent Award at the Stedelijk Museum the other day - as, 'critic, writer, designer, artist'. And I think this is odd because these things they are referring to are all part of my art production. The problem, historically, is that this might be a big claim to make. So I don't necessarily mean it in a profound way. I just mean that my artistic practice includes these approaches as different forms not supplemental activities.

JS: Yes. But it is a condition of that polymathic existence that people have to understand what one does- if you do multifaceted things - as a hyphenated kind identity. Maybe it is related to the problem of why people feel that they have to "get it", or at least should be able to "get it" that there should be a one-to-one relationship with what is before the viewer - whether that be Liam Gillick as artist or the work that Liam Gillick produces.

LG: Just for the sake of argument, if you try to describe what art could be - drawing only on extremes of artistic practice now - and you cut out all the bits that are ambiguous and annoying the extremes would be a kind of transparent documentary form on the one hand, and a form of super self-consciousness, super subjectivity on the other. When I meet with my graduate students in New York, for example, they seem to be loosely divided into these contemporary camps.

JS: Neither pole of the art practices you describe dodges the problem of "getting it."

LG: Yes, because I make use of both strategies, in a way. There's an acute super subjective element to the work and there is also an extreme clarity about certain things, but the work as a whole is not intended to fulfill either of those two extremes of contemporary art fully. It steps a little outside simple binarism.

I've just been writing a text about the idea of the discursive as the basis of dynamic art production in the last few years. I think this is a better way of describing relational practice than talking about some kind of interactive or social component. The idea that art comes out through negotiation, not through sitting alone at home with a piece of paper and how this discursive potential of art can be sustained over time.

JS: I think there's more access to the subject

ive content in your work through your writing. Maybe the real interest of this play is that it will make visible, in a non-writerly exactly those kinds of writerly activities and subjectivities. It strikes me as a kind of Erasmus Is Late proposition, but as a play, not directly as a text.

LG: Yes, and it has shifted to the recent past because I am looking at the idea of 'the moment' that could have been - the ultimate postwar moment. For example, take a random date like June 17, 1974, when the mode of production in the Volvo factory was perfect, when the idea of new forms of teamwork hadn't yet turned into a form of flexibility that led inevitably to redundancy. I am interested in 'setting' my work on the day before this all dissolves into a neo-liberal farce.

So my play is set on that day. It is set on an ideal day in Sweden when Calvinist, good, hard working low church values have produced a system that is viewed as exemplary, as a way of retaining forms of honest capitalism, good production, teamworking and flexible working practices. But the action takes place in a bar. And they don't have bars at Volvo factories. I've been thinking about this a lot recently, the idea that certain modes of thinking and certain modes or models of art production even curating and critical writing - are really deeply steeped in some of the postwar structures that led to Volvo's teamwork and flexibility. Starting at playgroup, through to the way you're taught to work in team at school and on to the workplace with its projects and projections. I am trying to look again at some of these questions. If we assume that the post-war period is a completed moment - historically

- then how do we reengage with the better aspects of ameliorated working conditions? How can we continue to work in a discursive manner if its basis merely prepared everyone for redundancy? Can we find a way to accept difference and work collectively?

JS: Those are fundamental and very heavy-questions. How would you describe our strategy or approach to posing - let alone answering such questions?

LG: Most of my work on this question came from looking through Brazilian academic paper about progressive working practices in Scandinavia, which tells you quite a lot about my working method. In a fairly undirected way, I just read South American academic papers about innovations in Volvo car production in the 70s. The work was made while thinking about

Liam Gillick *Quarter Scale Model of a Social Structure for a Plaza in Guadalajara* 2005



>>The only way you can use art is as a fragmented mirror of the complexity of contemporary society and you try to produce a system of art production that is just as multifaceted and potentially misleading. This was my main revelation at art school -the idea of art production as a series of parallels.

these things. Sometimes works are produced under the influence of thinking about something when I made them, though this influence never manifests itself in a direct, didactic way.

JS: Yet it doesn't come forward as a decoy? Many practices position work as research, but what comes forward is fundamentally a decoy that even sends you back to the original research, only to spiral off somewhere else.

LG: Yes, but in the press release for my show in New York - I quite enjoy writing press releases, they're getting more and more ludicrous - I mentioned some of this stuff and in the more mainstream reviews of the show, of course, people simply didn't get it. I didn't say that it was an exhibition illustrating the conditions of car production in Sweden in the 70s - far from it. I said the work was made while considering these ideas—that's a totally different thing. Even then, however, you are faced with shiny metal objects and overreaching statements, which in my mind is quite a precise parallel to car production and consumption.

JS: What is the function then of the original research material, or even a press release, or critical writing on the work by yourself or others, if not an extension to the experience of the art?

LG: It is interesting. There's always a subtext in the work - and it is not just in my work, I think you see it in the work of some of the other people of my age - there's a mixture of clarity and ... almost a petulance at some levels. It is connected to a fear of being sucked into an instrumentalised art practice. It is a suspicion of being sucked into a responsible Habermasian art practice that is all to do with everyone having perfect information and contributing to an even-handed dialogue

about how to produce a better society.

I am also interested in artistic autonomy. I think that people like myself, who were born in between the end of the Second World War and the fall of the Berlin Wall, saw a lot of other things happening that made us not entirely 100% sure about anything. The period or the IRA, the Red Brigades and the permanent threat of nuclear annihilation led to a distrust of transparency. It was a time of subterfuge and conspiracy and the last thing you might want to do is telegraph your intentions to the dominant culture by merely parroting or mirroring the worst of it. We wanted to make use of other products or the postwar period as social spaces and spaces for art and so on, but not necessarily to go along with that completely. We wanted an interventionist strategy, whereby sites both literal and metaphorical could be appropriated. Production would be the focus or critique, not consumption.

I wanted to look at all this and to make the complexity of the built world and its manipulation the subject of the art. And I think that's true throughout my work from the beginning - even when I was collaborating with Henry Bond in the early 90s on documentary photos in response to daily updates from the Press Association. We used our self-consciousness about our backgrounds, gender, appearance and access to higher education to get into dosed events. We didn't want to separate ourselves from the production of events within society in a postmodern way. We were always silent at these events. We never asked any questions. I remember at the time thinking that we were not happy to just go away and make art that was purely an ironic response to the ecstasy of communication or the imploded quality of signs within the culture. We were very conscious of the fact that things were still being decided. Countries were still being formed. Govern-

ments were still collapsing. People were still getting poorer. Other people getting richer. People were still being jailed for their beliefs. We wanted to go and check.

As artists we did not take up the accepted role in society, which was to go away and be involved in increasing diversity and increasing production of difference. Instead, we wanted to go - for a short while - to what might be called the centres of power and to see who was still there and how they were working. And of course we found that the power structures were rolling along quite nicely thank you and hadn't succumbed to the 'matrix.' We were also of course following on from people like Allan Sekula and others, who had already been working in this way for a long time. But we were doing it without the structural integrity that they might have had in connection to critical theory.

JS It's important to clarify that you were not attempting to reinvent a documentary mode. LG No, not at all.

JS: Nor to facilitate the implosion of Modernism.

LG: No, and it is very significant that at the time Henry often viewed himself as a photographer, and not as an artist using a camera in order to carry out an agenda. He had an interest in, and knowledge of, the history of photography - of modern photography - and this was crucial. But of course he is also an artist with specialist knowledge and we spent a great deal of time arguing about art while attending a video link between Bill Clinton and the TUC or waiting for ELO in the Soviet Embassy. We wanted to be there at nine o'clock in the morning at the PLO Headquarters in London finding out what was happening, so we needed a photographer - and we had one, as it were.

I'm not trying to totalise the work. I've tried hard to avoid a clear trajectory. But I do think there are some common and recurring factors within the work, and they are connected in equal measure to some scepticism and to some enthusiasm for the products of the postwar period.

JS: Do you think that this mode of life is signalled through these elements of soft modernism that you access in your room.

LG: Yes, because I'm interested in applied modernism. But the thing that doesn't get talked about very much is the idea of autonomous art. Obviously this is a big area, but I'm interested in the potential of art as an exception within the culture. I'm also interested in the production of something that does not necessarily carry enormous claims within its resolved structure, but still occupies a similar



Liam Gillick and Henry Bond Cosmonauts 1990

territory to things that, in the past, have done that.

I have always been interested in how to be an artist when you don't have any ideas at the beginning - or when you don't have any work to show. I didn't see why that should be an impediment to being involved in the art world or functioning as an artist. The same thing applies to this retrospective. Because the further you go back with some of my work the more unclear and collaborative it gets, and the less you're going to find an originating moment - which is normally what you need for a retrospective. Just because there is no original revelation or breakthrough doesn't mean I can't have a retrospective, but I want one that looks at things structurally rather than historically. I still retain an interest in the art system. The systems of art dissemination and the spaces for art interest me just as much as the spaces for building a Volvo 2.40. I view them as another form of construction within the society that also needs to be looked at.

JS: As spaces structured by capital?

LG: The machinations of global capital and social structures, in my adult life, have been centred on capitalising the near future and the recent past. This has been a constant subject of my work. If you can find a way to recuperate and recapitalise the recent past, you're onto a winner. If you can keep recuperating the recent past, you can get closer and closer to the present and find a way to really send it again - just after it has happened.

This is not about nostalgia. It is literally about recuperating and reorganising. And, of course, the near future is also the terrain of contemporary capital and contemporary organisation, which is why they don't bother building a new building anymore unless there's a real boom. Instead you renovate the foyer or you re-signify the building but you leave the structure the same. You can exchange spaces this way. These are the terrains that I'm really interested in. How the near future is controlled in a chaotic, displaced socio-economic environment.

Even the work with Henry was about getting a fax from the Press Association at nine o'clock saying that at eleven o'clock today Margaret Thatcher is expected to resign. We already knew that the press - with Henry and me tagging along - were going to gather in two hours' time to wait for her to resign. And it is that speculative zone - and a reclaiming of it away from people who use speculation purely to capitalise on things in an antisocial way - that I remain interested in, stretching those two hours into something more complex. I didn't see why only certain people should be left alone to address ideas of projection, speculation, and the near future. I realised that this could be the subject of my

work.

JS: Those are the strategies that lead, in some way, to the criticism of your work as being corporate.

LG: I can understand that. As a student I

>>The interesting thing about Venice is that it tells you more about the curator than it does about me. Being selected to work in the German Pavilion is a gesture by the curator Nicolaus Schafhausen to make a point.

was always a big fan of Donald Judd's artworks. I've read the reviews from the time he was working and of course he was constantly criticised for echoing late Modernism and for being conveniently in sync - or even in cahoots - with the aesthetics of corporate modernism. I'm very conscious of that. It's a proximity that I want. It's not a mistake. For the last ten years I've lived in Midtown Manhattan - that's what I look at every day. I operate in proximity. The work doesn't necessarily sit comfortably in the spaces that you would it should do, nor does it necessarily sit comfortably with a reductive late-Modernism like Judd and Carl Andre and so on.

JS: Can we talk about the Venice Biennale? What is your take on being thrown into the national model of the pavilion just as national brands decline?

LG: Well, my first shows were as the Berlin Wall was coming down and I was on the boat as quickly as possible. I made use of the European context as the last of the old soldier presidents and chancellors were trying to leave it as they'd imagined it - to put it back together again for the first time, as it were. I was very conscious of that negotiation between President Mitterrand and Jack Lang, the way they decentred cultural policy. I was also conscious of the legacy of the federated model of Germany. These were very generative terrains for me to operate in. It meant a lot to get away from a centred culture and go to places that were decentred, where they have repetition and multiple iterations of similar things.

The interesting thing about Venice is that it tells you more about the curator than it does about me. Being selected to work in the German pavilion is a gesture by the curator Nicolaus Schafhausen to make a point. In the recent coming together in Berlin of a new international art community and a consolidated identification of a new German art

that is complex, professional, successful and public, there have been people who decided to operate within that system without living there - Living there - being a resident - does not make you a German artist. What do we do with the people who operate within this terrain without living here? What do we call them?

I think for Schafhausen, this question of whether you live somewhere is one of the complicated issues of instrumentalised post-war society building. The desire to accept the people that come and live among us is a very strong drive of progressive people in Germany - that we accept our Turkish or Kurdish brothers and sisters as our neighbours and that they should be here and be welcomed. Yet I think he was trying to confuse things even further. The correct thing to do would be to ask a Turkish or Kurdish German art collective to do something. But to ask a straight white Anglo-Saxon man to do something means I have to take on board the idea of showing in this building on behalf of another country, I have to ask myself questions about how to continue. Maybe I have to ask myself questions I should have been asking all along. It is a test and a challenge that I cannot answer with my symbolic presence alone. I have to do something. But on another level the invitation does reflect something precise. The very fact that it is tolerable, or it can even be done, shows that in the last 20 years there has been a shift. You could say that, in a way all the major pavilions of Germany since 1960 have really been about the postwar period. But maybe now ... it is not that we think that the past is hidden but that to continue in that trajectory might become parodic. To put Neo Rauch in the Pavilion or Jonathan Meese they're both artists who are deeply attractive to the system - would be to continue the endless renegotiation of the postwar period: in Rauch's way, by jumping backwards to a kind of pre-war condition on

an allegorical field in the middle of nowhere between Frankfurt Oder and Lodz, and, in Meese's way, by both parodying and making fun of earnest postwar performance art while forcing us to keep remembering something.

I'm thrown into that still-quite-tense discussion. And of course Berlin, for example, is also peopled by a large number of successful, well known, non-German artists who choose to live there. But I'm not one of those either. I think it is a deliberate act on the part of the curator and is a test. It's like: 'You've worked here a lot and you've continued to be productive here, so here's another German space, see if you can continue in these conditions. Here's a 1938 Nazi building. Are you going to have a discussion or something? What are you going to do?'

And of course the problem now is showing in Italy. This is difficult. If you want to be really tough, you do something about Italy, now. While I was in Venice for the architecture biennale, there was Lega Nord rally on the waterfront. So while looking around the German Pavilion, I could hear someone ranting about immigrants and gypsies - and this is disturbing. So, whether it is a situation where I can continue as normal, or whether this has to be an exception is very hard to say. This is why I think they asked me - because I have to make a decision about how to function. In a way. I have to ask myself whether I should emphasise the interest I have in the legacy of modernist autonomy that I don't think is complete - an almost Adorno-like belief that you should continue to produce a form of heightened art, a kind of melancholic art of refusal and abstraction - or do you use it to try to continue a dialogue in a place that maybe requires a little silence?

Liam Gillick, German Pavilion, Venice Biennale, June to November; Three perspective and a Short Scenario continues at MCA, Chicago October and MAK, Vienna October. Forthcoming publication Allbooks, An Anthology of writings, Book Works, London this June.

John Slyce is a writer and a critic based in London

CASEY KAPLAN  
121 WEST 27TH STREET  
NEW YORK NY 10001  
TEL +1 212 645 7335  
FAX +1 212 645 7835  
WWW.CASEYKAPLANGALLERY.COM  
INFO@CASEYKAPLANGALLERY.COM

# MODERN PAINTERS

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CASEY KAPLAN  
121 WEST 27TH STREET  
NEW YORK NY 10001  
TEL +1 212 645 7335  
FAX +1 212 645 7835  
WWW.CASEYKAPLANGALLERY.COM  
INFO@CASEYKAPLANGALLERY.COM

## ARTFORUM MARCH 2009

### “theanspacewhatever”

SOLOMON R. GUGGENHEIM MUSEUM,  
NEW YORK  
John Kelsey

**MAYBE WE’VE FINALLY GIVEN UP** on the “old realism of places,” as Gilles Deleuze put it. In his book *Cinema 1: The Movement-Image* (1983), he used the term *espace quelconque*—“whatever-space” or “any-space-whatever” to describe the cinematic image of undone space that, however shattered or blurred it may be, is also a space of pure potential. It could be a wasted urban void or a shaky zoom into the luminous screen of a Macintosh. It is a postwar feeling of lost coordinates, a certain anonymous emptiness. It is a space that could be “extracted” from the familiar state of things embodied in a place like the Guggenheim Museum in New York, leaving us even more floating and detached than before in the great rotunda. It is both ruined and fresh.

The discourse that supports the work of the ten artists included in “theanspacewhatever”—Angela Bulloch, Maurizio Cattelan, Liam Gillick, Dominique Gonzalez Foerster, Douglas Gordon, Carsten Holler, Pierre Huyghe, Jorge Pardo, Philippe Parreno, and Rirkrit Tiravanija, artists who were routinely grouped together in exhibitions in Europe throughout the 1990s but had never before been collectively presented in an American museum—links their practices to notions of promiscuous collaboration, conviviality, “relational aesthetics,” openness, and the exhibition as medium. While such claims are typically inflected with a radical if not utopian promise that sounds even less credible today than it did ten years ago, it should be said that, in their own statements, the artists themselves have been more ambivalent about the emancipatory possibilities of contemporary creative networks and exhibitions that emulate pubs, kitchens, laboratories, island holidays, or open-plan

offices rather than product showrooms. Still, a long decade of effort by the artists and curators who populate this exhibition and its catalogue went into producing the feeling of a legitimate, international, hyperactive, jet-set avant-garde for these times—one that put the dream of the self-organized community back at the center of its project. It spread everywhere, seeped into institutions

(from which it sometimes seemed to lose any distinction), and spiraled calmly down the drain of the Guggenheim. At the bottom, Cattelan’s Pinocchio floated facedown in a pool of water (*Daddy Daddy*, 2008), a Disneyfied version of a hard-core neorealist ending to this collective story—a false ending that greets you upon entering the show.

It’s usually at the very moment when an idea like “community” is on the verge of extinction that it becomes so obsessively evoked, even fetishized, in the art world. Echoing historical models such as Fluxus, but more sedately, and responding to contemporary influences such as institutional critique, but with a softer and more with-it attitude, the artistic strategies championed by curators such as Nicolas Bourriaud, Hans Ulrich Obrist, and Maria Lind de-emphasize the finished product in favor of discursive situations, whether these be Plexiglas “discussion platforms,” shared meals, semifictional texts, participatory “scenarios,” or films based on conversations. Such scenarization and programming of social intercourse within art projects and institutions has brought frequent accusations of formalism, if not cynicism, against certain of these artists (see *October 110* [2004]). And it’s true that in the whateverworld, discourse goes hand in hand with design and decor. In the Guggenheim, for example, one encountered Gillick’s floating powder-coated steel texts (INFORMATION HERE, A CONTINUATION, etc.), which attempted to have some Broodthaersian fun with the fact that the museum is also a system of signs and commands (theanspacewhatever signage system, 2008). Gordon contributed stick-on fragments of banal verbiage (NOTHING WILL EVER BE THE SAME) around the rotunda, viral advertising style (*prettymuch everywordwritten,spoken,heard,overheardfrom 1989*

... , 2006/2008). Both of these preserved a distinctly ‘90s look, with all-lowercase lettering drifted in a lot of empty white. Parreno’s cartoonish, white-on-white illuminated marquee over the museum’s entrance, although blank, posited spectacle-paradoxically, and in a typically “relational” move—as a site of potential communication (*Marquee, Guggenheim, NY, 2008*). Blanking out some free space in the heart of the entertainment complex can be a disruptive gesture, or it can be another way of saying that whatever space is no longer a place to announce anything.

The show achieved a certain “badness,” and a certain self-consciousness around the possibility of a flop (especially following the opening salvo of Parreno’s marquee), which defused the old question of whether the work was utopian or complicit, of whether open works and promiscuous collaboration are part of the solution or part of the problem today. At the Guggenheim, the liberal democratic call for free speech, or the relational proposal of open conversation as art, was answered by the glaring silence of not-great design or replaced by free floating words that articulated no other possibility beyond the neutrality of metropolitan spectatorship—passively distracted, anonymously addressed, mildly amused, often bored. Free because unassigned to any particular subject, these whatever-words were also devoid of any recipe for action, collective or otherwise. On the ground floor were racks dispensing free copies of the *Wrong Times*, a happily low-budget newspaper documenting the history of the *Wrong Gallery* (founded in 2002 by Cattelan, Massimiliano Gioni, and Ali Subotnik) and the many collaborations and conversations that took place under its semifictional auspices. After the *Wrong Gallery* agreed to curate the Berlin Biennial in 2006, decisively dropping any pretense of autonomy from

This page, from left: View of “theanspacewhatever”, 2008, Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York. From top: Liam Gillick, theanspacewhatever signage system, 2008; Liam Gillick, Audioguide Bench, Guggenheim, NY, 2008. Photo: David Heald. Rirkrit Tiravanija, *Chew the Fat*, 2008, mixed media. Installation view, Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York. Photo: Kristopher McKay. Opposite page, from left: Angela Bulloch, *Firmamental Night Sky: Oculus.12*, 2008, LEDs, neoprene, animated program, hardware. Installation view, Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York. Photo: Kristopher McKay. Pierre Huyghe, *Opening*, 2008. Performance view, Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, October 24, 2008. Photo: Kristopher McKay.



bad, wrong, and empty may also hide strategies for evading critical death traps and professional sclerosis. They became ways of undoing the Guggenheim moment and the pressures of containment here, of side stepping achievement. Anyway, being right is a terrible way to end up, in a museum.

Besides discourse, functional seating is another trope common to many of these artists' projects, and in "theanspacewhatever" bodies could park themselves on Gillick's handsome S-shaped benches (*Audioguide Bench, Guggenheim, NY, 2008*), on a beanbag chair in Gordon and Tiravanija's graffiti-decorated video lounge (*Cinema LiberteilBar Lounge, 1996/2008*), or on pillows in the carpeted area where Tiravanija's two-hour-long 2008 documentary *Chew the Fat* was playing. (Holler's bed, fitted with black silksheets and presented within a hotelroom-like installation, presented another place to kick

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**Bad, wrong, and empty may hide strategies for evading critical death traps and professional sclerosis. Anyway, being right is a terrible way to end up, in a museum.**

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back, but this was available by reservation only, for paying overnight guests [*Revolving Hotel Room, 2008*].) If seating is how a socially minded artwork installs the humans who are meant to complete it-as in Tiravanija's reconstitution of his East Village apartment as a public hangout inside the Kolnischer Kunstverein in 1996-extra chairs here were stand-ins for a micro-utopian possibility that was largely banished from "theanspacewhatever." Sitting, on a beanbag in an installation in a biennial may have been a novel experience for art viewers in the '90s, but in New York in 2009, after paying fifteen dollars at the door, one couldn't help but count the whatever minutes ticking by, wondering what had become of sociability in the city. An open seat, like a blank marquee, is a vacancy as much as an invitation, and anyway the downward pull of the ramp' was stronger. An event programmer and an urban planner lurk behind every relational artist, and these practitioners proposals to reappropriate

common space were always elaborated in a strict and conscious relation to the fact of functionalized, policed space. It was never either/or. It was always brief glimpses of the one within the other.

At times, one had the feeling that this show had been copied and pasted, dragged and dropped, into the museum. There was a disconcerting ease, an almost dilaed-in feeling, and the impression that a laptop screen was always hovering between artist and viewer. A lot of the art was screenlike, too-for example, Bulloch's illuminated starscape installed on the ceiling high above, which was less a trompe l'oeil sky than a cathedral-scale screen saver (*Firmamental Night Sky: Oculus.12, 2008*). Pardo contributed an installation of intricately laser-cut partitions along one length of the ramp, a topology of veneers that viewers had to navigate on their way down (*Sculpture Ink, 2008*). Gonzalez-Foerster used a blank white scrim to screen off a section of the rotunda, with nothing behind it except the piped-in sound of trickling water, affording the viewer a brief walk through the ambience of a New Age relaxation tape (*Promenade, 2007*). Some areas of the exhibition were left yawningly empty of art or of anything save a snippet of Gordon's vinyl dialogue. The holes that were designed into the show, giving it a loose, work-in-progress feel, were either spaces of Deleuzian pure potential or far-off echoes of Michael Asher's empty galleries, or maybe just moments of empty-handedness, and as retinal as anything that might show up on a screen.

*Chew the Fat*, which appeared on multiple screens, presented an extended, serial group portrait of the participating artists (joined by nonparticipants such as Elizabeth Peyton and Andrea Zittel). The video dares to expose certain behind-the-scenes truths about this creative milieu: the physical bodies, the way they talk, where they reside, how they treat their employees, what they eat-the lives of the artists. It is a highly demystifying maneuver, and a generous one. Some sequences are edited to reveal what is common to everyone here-for instance, a certain hunched-over attachment to titanium PowerBooks (the video could work as an ad for Apple). The artists also share the general condition of no-longer-emerging, and we see how it looks to inhabit a forty-something body in a

polo shirt, in the comfortable environs of one's business-hippie lifestyle, with so many projects in progress on the screen. They talk of buying real estate, sometimes even calling their homes artworks. There are brief road-movie-like moments as artists shuttle from home to studio. Pardo appears with a big glass of red wine and even cooks a whole pig on camera. Gillick whistles along to the Clash in his sleek home office while working on the cover of an upcoming book. Gonzalez-Foerster strolls alongside a Parisian canal, commenting that these days she prefers to be alone. What *Chew the Fat* reveals is the fact of individuals: how they happen and how they, too, are the product of today's vanguard practices (and discourses). Here Tiravanija risks exposing the not always joyful anonymity that surrounds each artist, their common separation. Noticeably absent from *Chew the Fat* is Cattelan: Never appearing on camera, he is evoked by the other artists via anecdotes. He manages to exist almost purely as discourse and, so, was the exhibition's only escape artist.

"Theanspacewhatever" also included programmed performances and film screenings in the Guggenheim's theater, as well as some off-site works and discussions. In the rotunda, Huyghe staged a work called *Opening, 2008*, in which viewers wandered the darkened museum with strap-on headlamps, an event that took place three times over the course of the show. Huyghe is the artist who in 1995 founded the Association of Freed Times, conjuring up Situationist calls to "never work." This gesture of appropriating free time for collective use was ambiguous insofar as it was wedded to a contradictory decision to legally register AFT with the local police. "Theanspacewhatever" started there, on the clock and on the record, and then tried to unwork its way out again. •

*"Theanspacewhatever," organized by Nancy Spector, was on view at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, from Oct. 24, 2008, through Jan. 7, 2009.*

JOHN KELSEY IS A CONTRIBUTING EDITOR OF ARTFORUM



CASEY KAPLAN  
121 WEST 27TH STREET  
NEW YORK NY 10001  
TEL +1 212 645 7335  
FAX +1 212 645 7835  
WWW.CASEYKAPLANGALLERY.COM  
INFO@CASEYKAPLANGALLERY.COM

## **LIAM'S (NOT) HOME**

### **ON LIAM GILICK AT THE GERMAN PAVILION OF THE VENICE BIENNIAL 2009**



**Ever since curator Nicolaus Schafhausen announced to invite British artist Liam Gillick to exhibit at the German pavilion during this year's Venice Biennale this decision sparked an ongoing controversy. At the opening in June, Gillick surprised with an installation which equally disappointed those expecting the artists's familiar forms and colours as well as those anticipating explicit references to the history of the exhibition building designed by Albert Speer.**

**A closer look at the highly referential work of Gillick, however, unearths a critical dimension articulated in the monologue of a talking cat. Listening to it one could learn about the historical utopia of community a modernist kitchenette could hold against it's own initial aspirations.**

It would appear to have become a widespread assumption in recent years that any truly ambitious work occupying the space of the German Pavilion in Venice's Giardini will somehow have to address the troubled history of the building itself. The expectations accordingly were high when, in early summer 2008 curator Nicolaus Schafhausen announced his choice of British artist Liam Gillick to represent Germany at the 53rd Venice Biennale. Schafhausen's selection angered conservatives, eliciting protests from Walter Bornsen, culture spokesperson for the Christian Democratic Union- who condemned the decision to have a non-German artist, and one moreover with few significant ties to the country, in the national pavilion- and from the Bundesverband Bildender Künstlerinnen und Künstler (National Federation of Visual Artists) - which asked whether Germany hadn't a single artist who could represent it before the world's audience for culture. But generally, the assump

tion was that this foreign artist would bring his outsider's perspective to the ideologically charged architecture of the Venetian pavilion in order to explore its history from a novel angle. Hopes were that Gillick - with his longstanding concern with changing models of society and failed social utopias and his elaborately designed installations made up of colored screens and text panels - would produce a work in the line of a conceptual forebear like Hans Haacke; the fact that 2009 marked the commemoration of the sixtieth anniversary of the founding of the Federal Republic only heightened such beliefs. The artist himself had encouraged such speculation, remarking in an interview soon after his selection:

“My main challenge may be to work through [the Pavilion's] history-laden and complex space. All my work deals with the ideology of the built world. I prefer to work in complicated environments, and this one is definitely the hardest so far.”<sup>1</sup>

So there was a palpable sense of disappointment when the German Pavilion opened this past June. Passing into the pavilion through a curtain of colored plastic strips with which Gillick has marked the entrance one enters a decidedly domestic scenario: a seemingly endless sequence of built-in kitchen cabinets along with a central bar, fixtures that are at least as reminiscent of inexpensive home furnishings as they are of modernist functional design or Minimalist sculpture. This is what we might call a very different, rather subdued palette for the artist, who is better known for his fashionably sophisticated use of aluminum, Plexiglas and MDF. But it is also an evocation of a very different setting as well: if Gillick has typically mimicked the late capitalist workplace, whether in its corporate or manufacturing guise, here he has chosen the home, if in a rather anomic form. A choice driven home by a final surprise: on top of one module sits a stuffed, gray tabby cat, which speaks in an English that echoes through the Pavilion's spaces. Nowhere is there in view an overt examination of the loaded history of the Pavilion, and the monotonous presentation - with its repetitive, white-tinted modules - becomes easy to overlook amid the clamor of the Biennale, where there is no shortage of more entertaining visions of the domestic to be found, for instance in the nearby Danish and Nordic Pavilions.

Little wonder that critics have found Gillick's installation to be “hyper-intellectual, as always”, “unfortunately quite brittle and heavily tainted with brooding theory” and so forth.<sup>2</sup> And yet, compared to much of his earlier work, the Venice installation - entitled “How are you going to behave? A kitchen cat speaks” - is rather light on text, making its arguments through visual demonstration. We might say that two levels of meaning are quickly apparent, which correspond to two differing “alternative modernities”, those counterfactual “what-if” scenarios favored by the artist. At a first level, the kitchen cabinet he has designed propose an alternative to the lofty architecture of the Pavilion; in fact, we learn from the information sheet that these modular units were

inspired by Margarete Schiitte-Lihotzky's famous “Frankfurt kitchen” - a 1920s prototype of democratic design. In this rationalized kitchen might be posited a modernity that provides a counterpoint to the National Socialist architecture of the Venice Pavilion. If the austere, white building symbolizes the ideal of a purely representational architecture of totalitarianism, then the Weimar-era kitchen could stand for a democratic functionalism. The Viennese architect's kitchen, designed in 1926 for working-class apartments, stood for pragmatism and modernity. So a “good” Weimar modernism (bright, well lit, practical) is opposed to the anti-modernism of National Socialism (cheerless, gloomy, impractical), and the heroic life of Schiitte-Lihotzky - a Communist Party member who joined the Austrian resistance movement in 1940 - is opposed to the craven collaboration of many architects with the Nazi regime.

But this would represent a paltry insight if taken alone. Gillick superimposes upon this first level another contradiction internal to modernism itself, opposing design - what he calls “applied modernism” - to the sanctioned realm of the fine arts. In a talk at the Hamburger Bahnhof in February 2009, he described how: “I always used to say that I was more interested in Anni Albers than Josef Albers. I am interested in applied forms of Modernism, the attempt to have a more functional role in relation to daily life yet I want to do this while primarily operating in an art context - an undermining of exquisite values ...”<sup>3</sup>

So there is a reversal of values within the history of modernism itself, a turn toward those practices within the avant-garde that sought to concretely transform life praxis through the production of what Gillick has elsewhere called “functional utopias”<sup>4</sup> (although we might note that the distant echo of Minimalism present in the installation, and more specifically of Donald Judd's wood modules and sculptural furniture, suggests how difficult some of these dichotomies are to sustain.) Taking up Schiitte-Lihotzky's kitchen could then be read as participating in a project of reexamining “those aspects of progressive modernism that leave a functional trace in the culture”, a project that is not simply one of historical recovery, but that aims, as Gillick has said, “to reintroduce those elements of the modernist project that could still sit in opposition to the ravages of unchecked modernity”.<sup>5</sup> That such aims owe a profound debt to feminist theory, and more concretely in this case to the work of a woman architect, should also be acknowledged.<sup>6</sup>

But this also presents too neat a reading of the Pavilion, for when one enters the installation it is hardly the Frankfurt kitchen that comes to mind, but something rather closer to the prefabricated fir modules of Ikea. It is the postwar fitted kitchen that is evoked, not its interwar model, and this is a fundamental distinction; Gillick confronts us not with Schiitte-Lihotzky and the socialism of Weimar modernism, but with the more problematic post-1945 reception of that earlier moment. “How are you go

ing to behave?" is, in many respects, a work that addresses itself to the particular role a "household" or "domestic" modernism played in the fashioning of a West German cultural identity. The centrality of Germany in the history of early twentieth-century industrial design - from the Deutscher Werkbund to the Bauhaus - is well known, but it is only more recently that cultural historians have excavated the crucial tasks postwar industrial culture was assigned as an agent of economic recovery, social reform, and even moral regeneration. This triumph of international modernism was, as Paul Betts has argued, inseparable from the context of Cold War politics.<sup>7</sup> Something of this dynamic was taken up by Gillick in preparation for the Venice installation, when in the course of his research he uncovered a 1957 plan by Arnold Bode, founder of Documenta, to tear down the German Pavilion and replace it with a new structure. Gillick's "Proposal for a New German Pavilion" reproduces that design as a small, anodized aluminum architectural model, released as a limited edition in January 2009; in place of the representational architecture of National Socialism, Bode advanced an architecture of modesty, a classic 1950s-era modernist building that sealed the portico and columns behind a blind wall, and featured an asymmetrical facade and whitewashed brick. This proposal, whatever its intention as a corrective to the interval of National Socialism, must also be seen as a product of Cold War liberal consensus and the mythos of the end of ideology - including those progressive, socialist ideologies that had frequently motivated the originators of modernist architecture. Gillick is as concerned with pointing toward the problematic embrace of a depoliticized modernism by the Federal Republic in the 1950s and 60s as he is toward the undeniably "humanist" aspects of this design.

"How are you going to behave?" enacts a return to these last moments of modernism, a time just prior to the arrival of Gillick's generation, born as it was in the early 1960s - or perhaps it would be more accurate to say that the pine wood landscape of the German Pavilion evokes the domestic setting of this group's childhood. By the time of Gillick's maturity and the onset of a regressive postmodernism, much design along with the much of the rest of modernist architecture would be considered a social failure.<sup>8</sup> He mines that terrain in each of its ambivalent legacies for the present, on one hand taking out its redemptive possibilities, as we have seen, while on the other recognizing it as a foundational moment for the current opacity of our public and private realm alike. We could call it a landscape of erasure, where the traces of the emancipatory politics of the interwar period have been effaced, and this amniotic terrain is surveyed by the "kitchen cat", a life-size animatronic being. The cat is a fantastically kitsch element, an unexpected and much appreciated departure from the artists' usually cool aesthetic approach. "Very cynical but never mean", it is clearly a stand-in for the artist himself, Gillick as the Cheshire Cat, a trickster who speaks to all the Alices gathered

below. He serves as an oracle, telling a circular story about visitors who call on him, and about children who come to see him again and again; it is a tale, in Schafhauser's words, of "misrepresentation, misunderstanding and dire".<sup>9</sup>

But the kitchen cat also serves very concretely as a counterpoint to the rationalization of the home otherwise evident in this work. For even Schütte-Lihotzky's Frankfurt kitchen, which aimed to raise the status of the working-class housewife to the level of household "engineer", appears to us today as a further step in the industrialization of the domestic sphere, transforming the kitchen, once a seat of sociability, into a silent factory for the reproduction of the means of production. Schütte-Lihotzky's design had, after all, radically reduced the space devoted to the kitchen and had moreover placed it away from the social hub of the house, isolating the woman-worker. The kitchen cat offers a different vision; he holds in his mouth a crumpled piece of paper, on which appears a medieval woodcut (likewise, reproduced on the cover of the exhibition catalogue). The print shows a large round table around which a motley group - priests, noblemen, commoners of all ages - have gathered to share a communal meal: a pre-modern kitchen, in other words, before it became functionally separated from the social and symbolic uses. Philippe Aries famously wrote of the "rigid, polymorphous social body" of the old society, with its promiscuous mixing of people: "The movement of collective life carried along in a single torrent all ages and classes, leaving nobody any time for solitude and privacy. In these crowded, collective existences there was no room for a private sector".<sup>10</sup> Gillick's cat, a thoroughly twenty-first century denizen of the kitchen (informed by Google News and Le Monde Diplomatique), nevertheless asks us to look beyond the present, and even the recent past, of modernity, asks us to consider what we have lost in the course of societal and aesthetic modernization. This is the melancholic undertone of the artist's otherwise bright and clean installation. No answers are proffered in this (non-)home, only the continual circling around the question: "How are you going to behave?"

#### TOM MCDONOUGH

Liam Gillick, "How are you going to behave? A kitchen cat speaks", German Pavilion, 53. Esposizione Internazionale d'Arte, La Biennale di Venezia, June 7 - November 22, 2009.

#### Notes

1. Liam Gillick, quoted in: Uta Baier, "Biennale Venedig: Der Brite Liam Gillick und die deutsche Kunst", in: *Welt Online*, Jun 23, 2008; accessible at: [http://www.wlt.de/kultur/article2134730/Der\\_Brite\\_Liam\\_Gillick\\_und\\_die\\_deutsche\\_Kunst.html](http://www.wlt.de/kultur/article2134730/Der_Brite_Liam_Gillick_und_die_deutsche_Kunst.html).
2. See respectively: Georg Imdahl, "Verkopft wie immer. Liam Gillick", in: *Kainer Stadl-Anzeiger*, June 3, 2009; and Nicole Büsing/Heiko Kia, "Culture. Di Einbauküche mit Katze und der Apfelkuchenduft", in: *freiePresse*, June 9, 2009.
3. Liam Gillick, "Berlin Statement", in: *icolaus Scha01ausen* (ed.), *Liam Gillick. Deutscher Pavilion La Biennale di Venezia 2009*, Berlin/ New York 2009, p. 100 [pp. 22-23 for German].
4. Cliff Lauson, "Separate But not Marginal. A Conversation with Liam Gillick", in: *Third Text*, 22, no. 2 (March 2008), p. 276.
5. Lauson, "Separate But not Marginal", *loc. cit.*, p. 276.

CASEY KAPLAN

121 WEST 27TH STREET  
NEW YORK NY 10001  
TEL +1 212 645 7335  
FAX +1 212 645 7835  
WWW.CASEYKAPLANGALLERY.COM  
INFO@CASEYKAPLANGALLERY.COM

LIAM GILLICK: NEEDLESSLY DIFFICULT? EM-BARRASSINGLY simple? A curator's artist? An artist's curator? A post-conceptual-intellectual crowd-pleaser? It's hard to stun up an artist whose work feels simultaneously so familiar, casual, and playful, and at the same time so considered, political, and obtuse. Gillick, who was born in 1964, is probably most recognized for his handsome color-coded Plexiglas and aluminum sculptures often found in public spaces (such as his facade of London's Home Office headquarters). But what you see is not always what you get. And these seemingly elementary freestanding grids and lattices are but the tip of the iceberg in the 45-year-old artist's hefty output. His work also takes the form of wall drawings, wall texts, furniture, facades, books, plays, films, and more--all of which more often suggest possibilities rather than illustrations. I was a fan before I met him in 1998, shortly after I moved to New York. Now, he's a friend. So how could Liam Gillick, an artist who never seems to catch his breath, be having a three-part mid-career survey already? And what is he doing representing Germany at the 53rd Venice Biennale? The answer (to borrow a signal Gillick trope) is why not? and what if?

MATTHEW BRANNON: Interviews are complicated because they have so much to do with setups.

LIAM GILLICK: You should do this one like Charlie Rose, by asking the question and then having the answer within the question. [laughs]

BRANNON: Well, one way I thought we could start is by talking about how we met. I was a student at university, and you were a visiting artist, so that would have been in 1998.

GILLICK: You were then in your second year at Columbia.

BRANNON: I believe it was my first year. I remember I had already given up painting and wasn't sure what to do next. I was making those "installations" of office spaces. And you were the first person who I didn't need to defend what I was making to. Most of the faculty and students didn't even consider that kind of work art.

GILLICK: It was really obvious to me that the questions or problems that you were having with art were interesting. They seemed to be positive problems.

BRANNON: Good problems to have ...

GILLICK: Yeah. But it was very hard for me because I'd always resisted teaching as a job. I liked the idea of being there and being connected, but I was very irresponsible, in the sense that I would look for certain people who were interesting ... At that time, you were the most interesting person there--maybe because you were having the same productive problems that I was having.

BRANNON: So now you're on the verge of your first major U.S. retrospective in Chicago and, of course, you're representing Germany in the Venice Biennale. I think this is something we should talk about because it teases the idea of what it means to be mid-career. What will looking backward mean for you? There are definitely expectations, both personal and public. And then it's also inevitable that certain backlashes await you ...

GILLICK: How about just tolerance and warm accep-

# LIAM GILLICK

lives near the United Nations, which might explain why an Englishman who calls New York home is representing Germany at this year's Venice Biennale. Gillick's art is universal.

by MATTHEW BRANNON

tance? I'm a really tolerant person who accepts lots of things. [laughs] Philippe Parreno and I used to say this to one another: "It's not a competition" It's true that my generation has tried to get into situations in order to avoid critique. One of the phrases that used to get knocked around a lot was the notion of the "non-critiqueable," which was the idea that you could temporarily avoid that moment of judgment. I mean, the fact is that the show in Chicago and the one in Venice are both a continuation of what I've been doing, except that they'll be viewed more by people who haven't thought about the work very much, or who feel quite correctly that someone is telling them that they ought to take the work seriously, or that it's supposed to be good. What's funny is doing interviews in Germany. They've mostly been very nice and earnest and serious, but two of the questions I've been asked have really stood out. One is, "What makes you the best?" That was a question I got from the evening newspaper in Munich. Another question from a newspaper was, "When you win the Golden Lion for Germany, how will you feel?" And I thought these two questions perfectly sum up the situation I'm in--because, of course, my work has been an elaborate attempt to avoid questions like, "What makes you so good?" or "What is the idea behind the work?" They're the wrong questions, in a way. The question of how you might feel in terms of winning the Golden Lion and those kinds of things is completely irrelevant. Which is not to say that when Bruce Nauman wins the Golden Lion for the U.S. he'll feel any different--he'll also feel like he just does his work and looks after his horses and has been trying to quietly do the right thing for the last 40 years ...

BRANNON: I guess it's very revealing of who I am that, as an artist, I generally focus on my critics--of which I'm probably the harshest.

GILLICK: I know--me too. I never believe people who say that they don't read the stuff. I read every-

## Interview

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thing. I read a snide five-line exhibition summation in Time Out. I read all of it ... I'm going to get us some more wine.

BRANNON: IS there a pause button on this recorder?

GILLICK: NO, we don't need to pause it. I'll be right back ... We've just got to make sure the red light is still on.

BRANNON: Can I record you from there? No.

GILLICK: [from a distance] Probably not. You okay for a drink?

BRANNON: Yeah, I'm good ... So I was thinking about your voracious output, and it reminded me of Woody Allen, who supposedly has three films going at any one time: one which is in the theaters; one which is being shot; and then one which he's currently writing. Supposedly, Woody has done this for 30 years, and he swears that he's never looked back. He swears that he hasn't seen Annie Hall [1977] since he first showed the film.

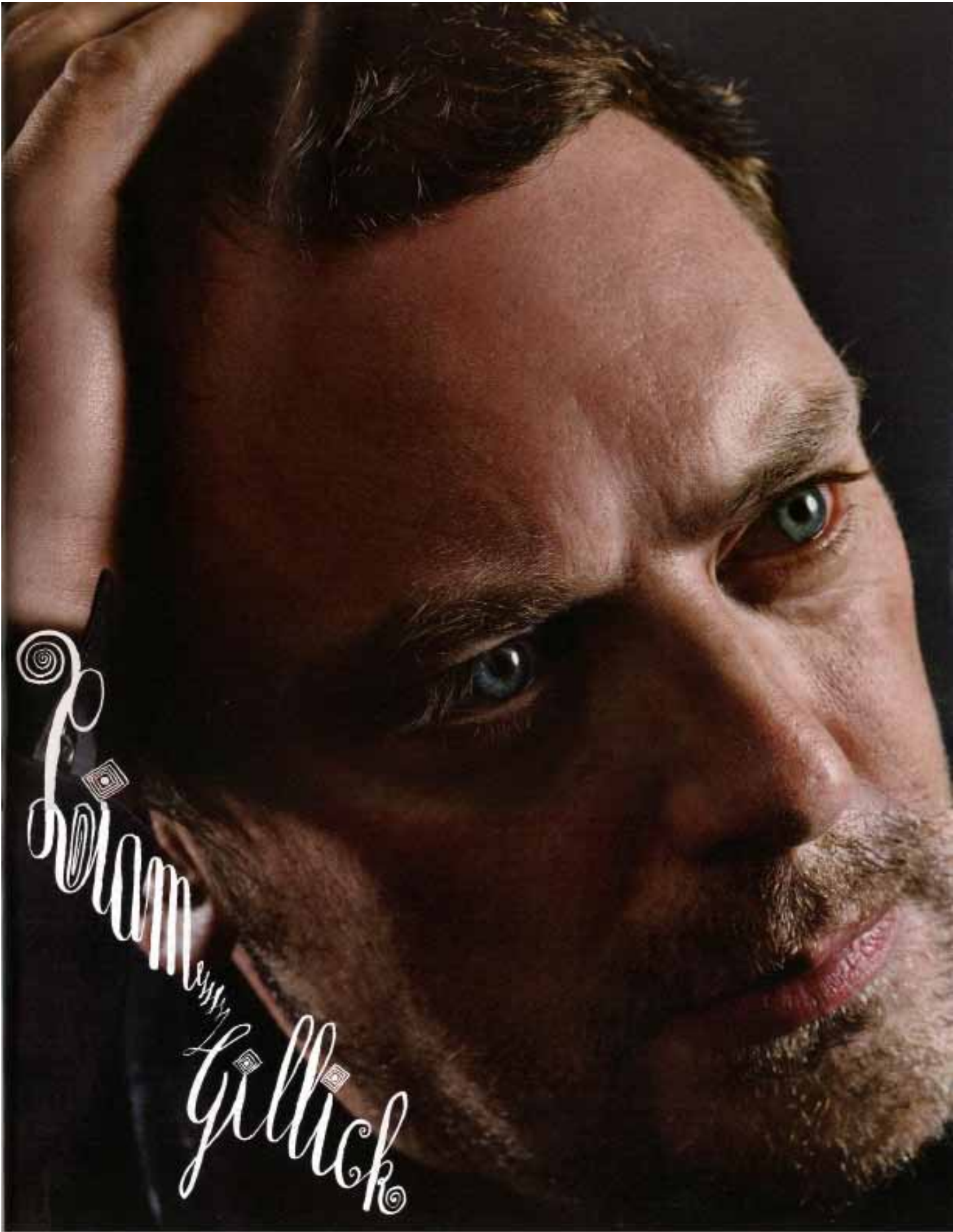
GILLICK: Well, I think sometimes Woody ought to look back a bit more ... But, you know, I identify with that completely. I did an exhibition in 2000 in Kitakyushu in Japan and, because I knew that the exhibition would never get out of Japan and no one would ever hear about it, I called it "Woody."

BRANNON: I remember that one.

GILLICK: Maybe I told you about it. It's very odd because I think that most people who make reference to Woody Allen concentrate on what he has actually done, but I was quite interested in his methodology, the way he keeps moving on to the next film relentlessly. I identify with that way of working, and I also recognize it as a weakness maybe. So in the little catalogue, I actually put at the very back an appendix of all of the films that Woody Allen had done up to that point.

BRANNON: Having this three-part retrospective is not the most comfortable position for you, because you're someone who is very self-conscious about what it means to have a retrospective.

GILLICK: Yes. I mean, I don't see why I can't have one, although it doesn't necessarily make sense ... It's related to what I think I identified in your work at Columbia, which was a feeling that you didn't accept what other people were doing but that you didn't have any other ideas either. [Brannon laughs] I had that feeling, definitely. When I left art school, I didn't know what to do, and I didn't have any ideas. I didn't have a vision. But I didn't accept that I should just leave the art world to other people. I think when people struggle with the problem of trying to understand the art world as an idea, they misunderstand it. They think it's a world of visionaries or opportunists. But it also includes people who want to take part in this cultural exercise but don't have the required stuff--they don't have the ideas or the production. It's the same thing with this idea of retrospective. There are a couple of classic models of the retrospective. One is the Lawrence Weiner model. He's an artist who is really interesting, and there's a moment in his body of work where there's a breakthrough. So you can always do a retrospective of Lawrence's work because you can say, "This was the day he had an idea, and he did something." And the alternative model would be the Gordon Matta-Clark model, where you can say,



“Well, there’s no original idea, but here’s a photo of something happening somewhere else at another time, here’s a fragment of evidence of something that happened, and here’s a sculptural object.” And all of that is problematic for me. A lot of our understanding about the retrospective, or the origins of the artist, are based on Christian myths. They’re based on transubstantiation—the idea that water turns into wine or that something happens. And, of course, I’ve worked all my life to try to avoid those things. So, of course, you’re going to have a problem doing a retrospective of my work. Everyone will look around and say, “Well, where’s the moment where something happened?” And my intention has always been that people will ask that about themselves or actually look at the work and try to understand what it might be about. Then you can see real differences. But we’ve been in a period where critics have either been near-philosophical, which is quite good, or they’ve been hacks.

BRANNON: Maybe we should start with hacks...

GILLICK: I mean, I like hacks. I find them interesting. What they do creates this daily comparative Mad Money idea of how the art world is going.

BRANNON: Something I learned early on at UCLA is that there’s a difference between the first read of an artwork and the second read. You want the first to be very accessible—and perhaps even generous—and then you want the second to be more frustrating, more productive. And this is actually the reverse of what I see in a lot of art today. It tends to be that the first read is very confusing, as in wacky or dirty ...

GILLICK: I think that’s a perfect way of looking at it. In the mid-’90s, in France, I had a show at Air de Paris, and they said, “Some man wants to talk to you” So I said, “Okay, I’ll go meet him.” I went to the bar on the corner, and there was a nice-looking old man sitting there drinking a drink, having a cigarette. He didn’t speak very good English, and we tried to muddle through in the mixture of languages, and then he looked around and said, “I have a question: Is it okay to like your work?” And I said, “Well, of course it’s okay to like my work.” He went [gasps and puts glass down on table] and shook my hand and then just left. He’d been suffering from this feeling that there was something that he couldn’t get from the work—he was visually attracted to it, and he knew it had something to do with modernism, that it had something to do with these ideas about finishing and projection. But he didn’t want to know anything about that. He wanted to know, from my perspective, if I was making a dogmatic work that was very didactic, or if it was okay to just like the work. I think that was a kind of great breakthrough for me because I realized that that question was urgent in a way ...

BRANNON: Okay, I have some cheap questions for you. Just answer yes or no: Do you have a Porsche cell phone?

GILLICK: Right.

BRANNON: Yes?

GILLICK: Yes.

BRANNON: Can you change a spare tire?

GILLICK: Yes, of course.

BRANNON: Did you name your son after Orson Welles?

GILLICK: NO.

BRANNON: DO you make entire shows on your laptop?

GILLICK: Yes.

BRANNON: Have you ever been to Los Angeles?

GILLICK: NO.

BRANNON: Did you once open for Gang of Four?

GILLICK: Yes.

BRANNON: I’ve often been given the career advice to not wear too many hats—which, of course, has just encouraged me to wear other hats, such as being a writer, being a curator, or just doing anything outside of the definition of an artist ... What’s the question here?

GILLICK: Well, what do I think?

BRANNON: [laughs] Are we really so constrained?

GILLICK: NO, but that has made me anxious, too. Of course, I remember when I first met you, being much younger than you are now, and people worrying about me at that time. They’d actually say, “I worry about you ...” [laughs] But I always knew exactly what I was doing. I have to say, though, there have been times when I’ve thought, not that I’m worried about what you’re doing as an artist, but that you could be so good in so many contexts that you could easily slip away from the problem of making art—which, in the end, is a problem, whether you like it or not. It’s like a philosophical problem.

BRANNON: My definition of art is whatever an artist calls art. Us speaking could be an artwork—us sitting in the near-dark in your kitchen beside the dirty dishes and smoking, me thinking of what to say next ...

GILLICK: Sure.

BRANNON: Making your bed could be a piece of art, and writing a book could be a piece of art. You could also write a book that’s not a piece of art, but that is a book, and it could be a book that was written by an artist ...

GILLICK: Absolutely. Your definition of art—which is, if I say it’s art, then it’s art—is kind of the basic definition of modern art, right? But something that I thought fairly early on was, Okay, what if I say this is a book, but I still want it judged and valued within the terms of art? In fact, when I did a book, I wanted it to be understood as a book—not as an artwork as a book, or as a book as an artwork, but as a book. I had this problem in a group show at the Lisson Gallery in London in ‘95. I’d just published *Erasmus Is Late*, and I didn’t want it to be stolen, so I designed an enormous table and put the book in the middle so that people couldn’t reach it. For me, this was just a perfect example of my mentality. The table exists because it’s a way of stopping people from stealing the book, so it’s a pragmatic thing because it’s a well-

*“People  
who were  
born  
years  
before us  
have no  
concept of  
us at all.  
I don’t  
know  
why, but  
we were  
really like  
orphans”*



designed table. I haven’t turned a table into a work of art, but if you want to buy the book and signify it as an artwork, then it goes very well with this enormous table, which stops your bourgeois friends from getting their grubby fingers on it. I remember Adrian Searle [the British art critic from *The Guardian*] walked into the opening and said, “Oh, I understand ... So I have to read the book to understand the table.” And I said to him, “Well, I don’t know about you, but I don’t need to read a book to understand a table.”

BRANNON: Do you ever have any anxiety about art?

GILLICK: I remain interested in the potential of art, except I’ve always been more struck by applied modernism than high modernism. It’s partly because of feminist theory and being brought up in the ‘70s, with questioning who is speaking, and why, and what authority they’re carrying. And I think these are good things, and that I learned to look elsewhere for my sources. But I’m also operating in the gap—and I think you are, too—between the trajectory of modernity and the trajectory of modernism. So what people think is design is not design—it’s my attempt to engage with the trajectory of modernity.

GILLICK: Now, the problem with all this is that people could say, “Well, so what? That’s very nice. Once more, we’re at the end of ideas, or the end of history, or the end of productiveness, and it leads to a kind of self-conscious collapse ...” But I don’t think that’s true. I think the work then becomes political or philosophical—it becomes about what you think of the profound questions of daily life.

BRANNON: Americans are obsessed with this idea right now. We are at war. We have a young president. This has created an impulsive and anxious state. It’s either the end of times or we need to have the answer immediately.

GILLICK: But the U.S. has always been a contradiction. It’s always been a deeply protectionist, institutional place, where you’re not allowed to smoke, and you’re not allowed to do this, and you’re not allowed to do that ... And then, on the other hand, it’s completely libertarian in a way. So it’s got this weird mixture of being incredibly authoritarian and incredibly open at the same time. I go back to something that Philippe and I also used to say to each other: I’m a passenger, not a customer. In Europe, there’s been such a semiotic game with the language and the relationship between individuals and the states. In the early ‘90s, following the high years of deregulation in Britain, they started to refer to people on the train as customers. So the train would stop at the station and they’d say, “We’d like to apologize to the customers for the delay.” Now, everyone thinks that America is this kind of evil, consumer, capitalist culture, but if they announced on the subway tomorrow, “We’re sorry to our customers,” then there would be a kind of uproar. But in Europe, this has already happened. So when it comes to my work, what people in the U.S. have to understand is that there is sometimes a deep political content that’s rooted in this postwar reconfiguration in Europe. I’m still a foreigner in America. I’m someone who’s bringing nuanced stories from somewhere else that will always be harder to take. But I’m at least given the space here to articulate some of these things.

BRANNON: Everyone’s favorite topic right now is how the economy will affect the art world. So how will it affect it, for better or for worse?

GILLICK: Contemporary art might have a difficult time. I’ve noticed that I don’t use that term anymore. When I talk about contemporary art, I mean other things. “Contemporary art” for me is now a kind of historical term that describes the 40 years between the



Berlin Wall going up and then coming down. I'm not sure who will come up with a better term to describe art right now, but I think contemporary art is actually done for.

BRANNON: [laughs] Did I say contemporary art?

GILLICK: No, I did. But you were asking me about the art market. People think that the art market is about opportunists and hedge-fund managers getting broken art, but what really happened is that there was a new configuration of bourgeois values in the U.S. and an acceptance among the bourgeoisie of contemporary art as an idea. Now, that doesn't mean that I'm rejecting "contemporary art" as a term because I think that bourgeois people are horrible. As Lawrence Weiner once pointed out, the bourgeoisie are the only people who want to help me. The enlightened bourgeoisie are the only ones who ever buy anything, look after it, and don't ask for a discount. They want to look after you. But at some point the bourgeoisie reconfigured how it identified itself in relation to art, and what's ironic is that this has happened right at the time when there's a crisis in credit. So, to a certain extent, it's a bourgeois crisis ... Now everyone thinks this is going to result in a battle between artists and galleries, but the demands on the bourgeoisie have really come from the development of nonprofit spaces and the New Museum and Artists Space and White Columns. They've helped build this bourgeoisie and made them feel included, but they've also drained them. People make simple-minded comments about the hedge-fund people and the dealers, but you also have to look at the behavior of the institutions. They have been complicit in that process because, as an artist, it's been clear that the price of art has nothing to do with you--it has to do with an idea of what the market will tolerate. These institutions have earnestly and honestly thought, "We'll push it for the future because these are good times right now, and we can charge this much ... It all goes toward the functioning of the school, and if

we've got any extra, toward the endowment, and--in the future--that will be good for somebody." And this is an argument that no one has actually transcended ... I'm going to go pee. [Brannon laughs] I've never done an interview after four glasses of white wine.

BRANNON: Okay, before you go, I want you to tell me whether or not the following people or things are over-rated. You can answer yes or no. Firstly, Martin Kippenberger?

GILLICK: No.

BRANNON: Marcel Broodthaers?

GILLICK: NO.

BRANNON: Jenny Holzer?

GILLICK: No, funnily enough.

BRANNON: Peter Saville?

GILLICK: Yes. [laughs] Definitely.

BRANNON: Daniel Birnbaum?

GILLICK: Yes. Definitely.

BRANNON: Francesco Bonami.

GILLICK: No, because I've always wanted to be his friend.

BRANNON: Pornography?

GILLICK: NO.

BRANNON: Young artists?

GILLICK: NO.

BRANNON: Yourself?

BRANNON: Certainly. [laughs]

GILLICK: The trouble with a lot of these things, of course, is that it depends who's making the judgment. The biggest problem for my generation is that people who were born years before us have no concept of us at all. There's a massive gap. I don't know why, but we were really like orphans. Those people competed against us--they hated us and fought for things--and yet they had no interest in our work. No one born in the 1950s took much interest in my generation, and all we've done is try to fix it by talking to the people who came after us ... I don't hang out with anyone who is 10 years older than I am, but I hang out with a lot of people

who are 10 years younger. It doesn't make me good--like a good person hangs out with younger people--but it must have to do with something they encountered. I was eager and interested.

BRANNON: There are interesting 25-year-olds. Not many, but a few ... I think that both of us make very polite work ...

GILLICK: [laughs] Now I'm going to be tough. You know who makes polite work? People like Thomas Hirschhorn. People who clearly represent the fancy idea of the Swiss designer of what looks like arty work because they're polite enough to play the role. They're invited to play it. With you or with me, you're not sure, because there is deep content in the work that is extremely nasty and difficult to deal with ...

BRANNON: Well, when I said polite, I meant that its form could potentially be very pleasant. I often think of it in terms of tact--the art of revealing potentially stressful information. Not that all of my content is dark ...

GILLICK: It's impolite as an artist at someone's house to go to bed at nine o'clock in the evening. Or say, "I'm leaving now!" That would be impolite. [laughs]

BRANNON: Yeah, of course people are disappointed if you're not entertaining--and to be entertaining often means to be drunk.

GILLICK: And don't forget to leave your fully curated discussion panel at home.

MATTHEW BRANNON is an artist living in New York. His work is currently on view at David Kordansky Gallery in Los Angeles, Baibakov Art Projects in Moscow, and at the ICA in London. His solo exhibition, "Iguana," opens this fall at The Approach gallery in London.

**CASEY KAPLAN**  
121 WEST 27TH STREET  
NEW YORK NY 10001  
TEL +1 212 645 7335  
FAX +1 212 645 7835  
WWW.CASEYKAPLANGALLERY.COM  
INFO@CASEYKAPLANGALLERY.COM

# GUGGENHEIM



## **THE WRIGHT OPENS IN NEW YORK'S GUGGENHEIM MUSEUM**

(NEW YORK, NY - December 8, 2009)—Celebrating the 50th anniversary of the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum's Frank Lloyd Wright-designed building, The Wright, New York City's newest restaurant, opens to the public on December 11, in the famed museum. Named in honor of the great American architect, the intimate Upper East Side destination is located in an elegant and modern architectural space that is sure to dazzle trendsetters, fine diners, art lovers, and world travelers. Additionally, a site-specific sculpture by British artist Liam Gillick was commissioned for the space, creating a truly unique dining experience.

### **The Art**

In summer 2009, the Guggenheim commissioned British-born artist Liam Gillick (b. 1964) to develop a sculptural installation for The Wright. Gillick navigates across a broad range of disciplines, developing his ideas through texts as well as object-based installations. His commissioned work, *The horizon produced by a factory once it had stopped producing views* (2009), traces the restaurant's distinct architectural space. Conceived as a sculpture that can be expanded or contracted to fit any designated space, this piece comprises a sequence of horizontal planks of powder-coated aluminum mounted to the walls and ceiling; a similarly constructed transparent screen marks the entrance to site. The resulting room-size installation creates a modular skin on the interior's surface, its parallel beams meant to be understood, according to the artist, as "a series of horizons."

The horizon reflects Gillick's interest in "modes of production rather than consumption" and is part of an ongoing narrative begun in 2004 that centers on a future post-capitalist society. With this work, Gillick invokes the horizontal vista as a space where visitors can reflect and discuss how the built environment structures and patterns everyday lives.

*The horizon produced by a factory once it had stopped producing views* (2009) was purchased with funds contributed by Restaurant Associates and the International Directors Council of the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, and is a partial gift of Casey Kaplan and the artist.

CASEY KAPLAN  
121 WEST 27TH STREET  
NEW YORK NY 10001  
TEL +1 212 645 7335  
FAX +1 212 645 7835  
WWW.CASEYKAPLANGALLERY.COM  
INFO@CASEYKAPLANGALLERY.COM

# Art Review:

Summer 2009

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Liam Gillick  
German Pavilion

**ARTREVIEW:** Details of your project for Venice are under wraps, but what were your first thoughts about how to deal with the novel situation of being first nonresident, non-German artist to represent Germany?

**LIAM GILLICK:** I don't think that Steve McQueen thinks he is representing Britain. This is one of the strange things about this situation. Suddenly I am in the position of an excessive degree of representation. Normally we think of the German artist as a choice, not a representation. But one of the problems I have to deal with is this shift from a nomination, as it went, to a near symbolic presence. The effect of this has been whatever you might correctly call the art equivalent of mood swings. Radically differing thoughts about how to approach things. Doubt. Irritation. Delusion. All the things I don't really want and that get in the way of finding a way to be productive. Kasper König, director of the Museum Ludwig has been a little critical of my confession that I have found it difficult. He is from immediate Postwar generation for whom it seems, from what he says, that this is a straight forward thing. In some ways this is very encouraging. However, it does not make the anxiety any less real.

**LG:** I know, I know. Well, I think that you have to remember that the curator, Nicolaus Schafhausen, has a lot of autonomy to make his own decision about the artist. In this case I think the critique of the institution of the Biennale is via choosing me to try and work with this building. One thing is for sure. I am not going to cover the facade or turn it into a discursive cafe. Tobias Rehberger will do a much better job in the newly functioned Italian Pavilion. The question in the end for me has come down, surprisingly enough, to strange questions that are quite alien to my normal methodology: "Who speaks?" "Who do they speak to, and under what restriction or notional freedoms?" I realized that the building itself is not the problem. It all comes down to modes of address. At the beginning I thought it might be possible to "turn off" the building and then get on with something else. Maybe a science-fiction series, which I initially titled Trick City, once I had gone through the whole Greek alphabet combined with the word Stadt. But this is not a moment to deploy projection in such a speculative way. I am going to keep the final manifestation of the exhibition open as long as possible and make the final

decisions in the last days before the opening. This has become my method in this case. A desire to suspend the moment of exhibition rather than project a sequence of speculative scenarios.

*Interview by  
J.J. Charlesworth*

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**CASEY KAPLAN**  
121 WEST 27TH STREET  
NEW YORK NY 10001  
TEL +1 212 645 7335  
FAX +1 212 645 7835  
WWW.CASEYKAPLANGALLERY.COM  
INFO@CASEYKAPLANGALLERY.COM

**LIAM GILLICK**  
**“THREE PERSPECTIVES AND A SHORT SCENARIO”**  
**26 JANUARY - 30 MARCH 2008**

We begin our program in 2008 with a retrospective of work by the British artist Liam Gillick. The exhibition entitled ‘Three perspectives and a short scenario’ will be shown from 25 January to 30 March at the Kunsthalle Zurich.

This Zurich retrospective is embedded in a multipart exhibition project that links times and places, that chooses concepts and works from the oeuvre of the last twenty years and translates them into a form that does without any kind of work-accumulating survey. At four geographically separate institutions the attempt will be made to provide an insight into the artist’s highly diverse oeuvre via various exhibition formats, objects on exhibit and architectural interventions.

Liam Gillick’s work breaks through the genre- and media-specific boundaries of the visual arts. He undertakes architectural and structural, spatial interventions, creates minimalist objects, as well as graphic works and wall paintings. Another important aspect of Gillick’s production is his extensive literary activity: along with essays, he writes reviews of his fellow artists, is the author of fictional futurist visions and historical “re-interpretations”. Beyond this he composes film music, creates theatre-like scenarios or takes on the role of an exhibition organizer. In all its forms of expression, his work is an ongoing study of structures that mould our cultural and political reality. He uses these as a “vocabulary of forms”, examines history as to its alleged progressive suggestions for designing and moulding societies and sets them up for debate as potential utopian models.

For his objects and installations Liam Gillick uses mass-produced materials, such as aluminium, chipboard and Plexiglas. The modular objects that result define areas in rooms or are arranged into room-filling installations, whereby Gillick in his work always takes into account the structure and the significance of the exhibition rooms themselves.

One year separates the parallel exhibitions at the Kunsthalle Zurich (25 January to 30 March) and the one at Witte de With in Rotterdam (19 January to 24 March) from the opening of the retrospective at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Chicago, January 2009. Between the exhibitions in Europe and the U.S., a new “Scenario” will be produced, performed and filmed in the summer months of 2008 at the Kunstverein Munich (June to August). In this play the different protagonists and collaborations that have influenced the artist’s work will be studied and presented.

The spatial and thematic structure of the two parallel running exhibitions in Zurich and Rotterdam will have a uniform conceptual premise: a poster of a comic figure, one created for each institution, will greet the visitor in the foyer. A specially designed architectural structure made up of dark grey partitions will lead the way through the exhibition parcours. The visitor is guided to the heart of the exhibition: tabletop vitrines filled with the artist’s personal archive, as well as a movie projection.

The film shown there is Gillick’s first documentary and is a new formulation of his entire work, based on documents of his projects from 1988 up to the “unitednationplaza” project in Berlin that he has just recently finished. Gillick replaces the format of a retrospective with a film on his own art career. He transforms the presentation of works, which otherwise document an oeuvre, into a cinematic piece that represents a

tautological meta-level of the work interpretation, namely as a documentation of the production of the artist by the artist/author himself.

In both institutions, Liam Gillick leaves an area blank and defines it as an “institutional zone”, which he hands over to the curatorial team of the respective institution. This gesture can be understood either as magnanimous or provocative. In any case it is meant to demonstrate the division between the responsibilities of the artist and the institution regarding the organization of an exhibition.

In this institutional zone at the Kunsthalle Zurich, a sequential survey of the less-known, ephemeral and conceptual works will be shown in consultation with Liam Gillick. To set it up this way was a decision that resulted from intense discussions with the artist on the definition of the general institutional practice and the view of the Kunsthalle Zurich that institutional reality is considerably defined and varied by the work of the exhibiting artists. In addition to brief presentations of the conceptual pieces and ephemeral works, special events, such as readings and symposia, will thematize the collaborative and discursive elements in the work of the artist. The detailed program of this retrospective within a retrospective will be announced in the exhibition rooms themselves, as well as on our current homepage.

A comprehensive catalogue that includes critical analyses of Liam Gillick’s work will evolve over the course of the year and be published for the opening at the MCA in Chicago, with contributions and documents from all the participating institutions. Liam Gillick (\*1964, UK) lives and works in London und New York.

Liam Gillick has had important solo exhibitions at the following institutions: 2005, Palais de Tokyo (Paris) and ICA (London); 2003, “Projects” at the Museum of Modern Art (New York) and The Power Plant (Toronto); 2002, Whitechapel Gallery (London); 1999, Kunsthaus Glarus (Glarus) and the Frankfurter Kunstverein (Frankfurt); 1998, Villa Arson (Nice) and Kunstverein Hamburg (Hamburg); 1997, Le Consortium (Dijon). 2002, nomination for the Turner Prize. Liam Gillick has been nominated for the 2008 Vincent Award of Amsterdam’s Stedelijk Museum.

**Kunsthalle Zurich thanks:**

Präsidialdepartement der Stadt Zürich, **Luma Stiftung, Stanley Thomas Johnson Stiftung**

**Events:**

Please check our website for up-to-date information.

**Catalogue:**

A catalogue is being published on the occasion of the opening of Liam Gillick at the MCA Chicago in Winter 2008/09.

**NEW: SPECIAL GUIDED TOURS FOR FAMILIES:**

Sunday, 9 Mar, 1.30 pm (Brigit Meier). For children from the age of 6 accompanied by-at least one adult.

**CASEY KAPLAN**

121 WEST 27TH STREET  
NEW YORK NY 10001  
TEL +1 212 645 7335  
FAX +1 212 645 7835  
WWW.CASEYKAPLANGALLERY.COM  
INFO@CASEYKAPLANGALLERY.COM

TEN CONTEMPORARY ARTISTS INVITED BY THE GUGGENHEIM TO COLLECTIVELY FORMULATE AN EXHIBITION OF INDIVIDUAL SITE-SPECIFIC INSTALLATIONS OF NEW, SELF-REFLEXIVE WORK FOR THE FRANK LLOYD WRIGHT ROTUNDA

ARTISTS INCLUDE: ANGELA BULLOCH, MAURIZIO CATTELAN, LIAM GILLICK, DOMINIQUE GONZALEZ-FOERSTER, DOUGLAS GORDON, CARSTEN HOLLER, PIERRE HUYGHE, JORGE PARDO, PHILIPPE PARRENO, AND RIRKRIT TIRAVANIJA

Exhibition: theanyspacewhatever

Venue: Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, 1071 Fifth Avenue, New York City

Dates: October 24, 2008 - January, 2009

Media Preview: Thursday, October 23, 2008, 10 am -12 pm

(NEW YORK, NY - March 14, 2008) During the 1990s a number of artists claimed the exhibition as their medium. Working independently or in various collaborative constellations, they eschewed the individual object in favor of the exhibition environment as a dynamic arena, ever expanding its physical and temporal parameters. For these artists, an exhibition can comprise a film, a novel, a shared meal, a social space, a performance, or a journey. Using the museum as a springboard for work that reaches beyond the visual arts, their work often commingles with other disciplines such as architecture, design, and theater, engaging directly with the vicissitudes of everyday life to offer subtle moments of transformation.

What is most striking about this loose affiliation of artists, each of whom emerged during the early 1990s and now boasts strong, independent careers, is that they periodically and randomly join forces to create a variety of projects ranging from co-directing films, to purchasing the copyright for a Japanese Manga character and franchising her image, to initiating a land reclamation project in rural Thailand. The Guggenheim Museum has extended an invitation to a core group of ten artists—Angela Bulloch, Maurizio Cattelan, Liam Gillick, Dominique Gonzalez-Foerster, Douglas Gordon, Carsten Holler, Pierre Huyghe, Jorge Pardo, Philippe Parreno, and Rirkrit Tiravanija—to collectively formulate a scenario for an exhibition, one that will reflect and articulate the unique nature of their practice. Organized by the museum's Chief Curator, Nancy Spector, in close collaboration with the artists, the exhibition will seek to present a genealogy of their shared history through a site-specific installation of new, often self-reflexive work created on the occasion of this project.

Support for theanyspacewhatever is provided in part by The Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts, Etant donné: The French-American Fund for Contemporary Art, and the Grand Marnier Foundation.

The planning process began in the fall of 2004 and through a series of regular, open-ended discussions, the conceptual structure of the exhibition was determined. Instead of producing one, jointly created meta-project for the show, the artists have chosen to each produce an individual, site-specific work or selection of works for the museum's Frank Lloyd Wright rotunda. In many cases, their projects are retrospective in nature, capturing their own individual histories and reflecting on their past collaborations with various members of the group, while leaving open the possibility of realizing new ones during the

run of the show. The exhibition will exist in both space and time; many of the works on view will reveal themselves sequentially and others will change throughout the duration of the project. Performances and film programs will form an integral part of the installation.

### The Exhibition's Title

Suggested by Liam Gillick, the term "any-space-whatever" is used by French philosopher Gilles Deleuze to describe a cinematic trope of essential heterogeneity—a "singular space" in the film defined by multiple perspectives in which linkages among constituent parts may be made in an infinite number of ways. Therefore, the "any-space-whatever" is a filmic realm that represents a "locus of the possible." In its application as an exhibition title, the term suggests the idea of a coherent space comprising multiple and shifting views that nevertheless coalesce to invoke the idea of pure potentiality.

### The Installation

theanyspacewhatever will be the first large-scale exhibition in the United States to examine the dynamic interchange among this core group of artists, a many-sided conversation that helped shape the cultural landscape of the past two decades. The artists will each contribute an individual project creating simultaneous, coexisting layers that will intersect and overlap in the museum's spiraling rotunda. The following is a partial list of projected works, which may expand, evolve or change during the ongoing preparations for the exhibition:

Angela Bulloch will transform the museum's ceiling into a "night sky" surface studded with LED constellations. This canopy would be suspended beneath the rotunda's skylight, enveloping the space in a perpetual nighttime.

Liam Gillick plans to intervene in the museum's signage and visitor service systems, including ticketing, directions, didactics, and seating, subtly re-orientating visitors' experience of the space and the exhibition itself.

Dominique Gonzalez-Foerster will exhibit *Promenade* (2007), a seven-channel sound installation will "tropicalize" one of the ramps of the rotunda. In collaboration with Ari Benjamin Meyers, she will also present a live orchestral performance in the museum's Peter

B. Lewis Theater, on an ongoing basis during the run of the exhibition. This project is an elaboration of the work she presented in *Il Tempo del Postino*, an experimental, time-based "group show" organized by Philippe Parreno and Hans Ulrich Obrist for the Manchester opera house, as part of the Manchester International Festival in July of 2007.

Douglas Gordon will exhibit a number of his most important video, photographic, and text pieces in reverse, in a stylized "rewind" of his career. For example, *24 Hour Psycho*, (1993) - a frame-by-frame elongation of Alfred Hitchcock's 1960 masterpiece - will be shown backwards, in 24 hour sequences for which the museum will remain open to the public.

Carsten Holler is creating an operative, full-service hotel room in the rotunda, which would periodically host guests overnight at the museum. The *Revolving Hotel Room* consists of 3 superimposed turning glass discs mounted onto a fourth one which also turns at very slow speed. One disc has a king size double bed, one is for working and make-up purposes, and one has a wardrobe/minibar. The guests will have access to exhibition when no other

visitors are present, in addition to the unique experience of sleeping within the museum. The room will be on view during museum hours.

Jorge Pardo will present silk-screened prints created by the other artists participating in the show, which will be produced by a press he is launching in his studio in collaboration with master printer Christian Zickler.

Philippe Parreno plans to invite a comedian to perform a monologue in the Guggenheim's rotunda that will describe a number of Parreno's unrealized projects. The museum will be periodically open to the public at night during the run of the show. An old-fashioned movie marquee will be installed outside the museum to announce and reflect this nocturnal activity during the day.

Rirkrit Tiravanija is creating a documentary film that will provide a perspective on the 1990s by interviewing the circle of friends and artists he was associated with throughout the decade. Entitled *Talk. Talk.*, this feature-length film will comprise in-depth interviews with artists such as Elizabeth Peyton, Matthew Barney, Gabriel Orozco, Sarah Lucas, Pipilotti Rist, Janine Antoni, Olafur Eliasson, and Andrea Zittel, among others, as well as with each of the artists in the exhibition. Videos from the project will be shown on monitors on the ramps of the rotunda, with the capacity for the viewer to select which segment to watch. An edited version of the film will be screened in the Peter B. Lewis Theater.

Additional programming: In a joint program with the Whitney Museum of American Art, the Guggenheim will present a series of screenings that will showcase the work of Anna Sanders Films, a production company based in Paris, founded in 1997 by Pierre Huyghe, Dominique Gonzalez-Foerster, Charles de Meaux, and Philippe Parreno.

The Wrong Gallery, an ongoing curatorial project by Maurizio Cattelan, Massimiliano Gioni, and Ali Subotnick, will participate in the *theanyspacewhatever* exhibition. The gallery, which initially operated in a tiny exhibition space behind a glass door in Chelsea and has since maintained an itinerant presence in institutions such as Tate Modern and the Whitney Museum of American Art, will introduce another selection of artists to the project in a format yet to be determined.

#### Catalogue

The exhibition will be accompanied by a fully illustrated catalogue featuring over 30 texts by scholars, critics, and curators, most of whom have shared in the artists' individual and collective histories. The catalogue will include an introductory overview by Nancy Spector, essays devoted to the individual practice of each artist, and a series of concise texts focusing on pivotal group shows, organizations and collaborative projects. These multiple points of view will elucidate the group's fluid social, intellectual and creative exchange, coalescing into the most comprehensive examination to date of its critical cultural impact. Topics in this section include: *No Man's Time* (Villa Arson, Nice, 1991), *M/M* (founded 1992), *Backstage* (Kunstverein in Hamburg, 1993), *Hiver de l'amour* (Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, 1994), *Lost Paradise* (Kunstraum Wien, 1994), *Moral Maze* (Le Consortium, Dijon, 1995), *Mobile TV* (Le Consortium, Dijon, 1995-98), *Association des temps libres* (1995-), *Permanent Food* (1995-), *Vicinato* (1995) and *Vicinato 2* (1999), *Traffic* (CAPC, Musée d'Art Contemporain de Bordeaux, 1996), *Moment Ginza* (Le Magasin, Centre National d'Art Contemporain, Grenoble, 1997), *Anna Sanders Films*

(1997-), The Land (1998-), 6th Biennial of the Caribbean (1999), No Ghost Just a Shell (1999-2003), What If (Moderna Museet, Stockholm, 2000), The Wrong Gallery (2002-), Utopia Station (2003-), All Hawaii Entrees / Lunar Reggae (Irish Museum of Modern Art, 2006-07), and Il Tempo del Postino (2007).

The distinguished roster of catalogue authors includes Michael Archer, Jan Avgikos, Daniel Birnbaum, Ina Blom, Stefano Boeri, Francesco Bonami, Nicolas Bourriaud, Xavier Douroux, Patricia Falguieres, Hal Foster, Massimiliano Gioni, Michael Govan, Dorothea von Hantelmann, Jens Hoffmann, Chrissie lies, Branden Joseph, Emily King, Tom Morton, Molly Nesbit, Hans Ulrich Obrist, Beatrix RUF, Stephan Schmidt-Wulffen, Barbara Steiner, Rachael Thomas, Eric Troncy, Giorgio Verzotti, and Olivier Zahm.

#### Education

A full schedule of educational programs will be presented under the auspices of the Sackler Center for Arts Education during the run of the exhibition. For further information, call Box Office at 2124233587 or visit [www.guggenheim.org/education](http://www.guggenheim.org/education).

Admission and Museum Hours: \$18 adults, \$15 students/seniors (65+), children under 12 free. Admission includes audioguide. Saturday to Wednesday, 10 AM to 5:45 PM; Friday, 10 AM to 7:45 PM. Closed Thursday. On Friday evenings, beginning at 5:45 PM, the museum hosts Pay What You Wish. For general information call, 212 423 3500, or visit [www.guggenheim.org](http://www.guggenheim.org).

#1086

March 14, 2008

#### FOR ADDITIONAL INFORMATION CONTACT:

Betsy Ennis, Director, Media and Public Relations

Claire Laporte, Associate, Media Relations

Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum

2124233840

E-mail: [publicaffairs@guggenheim.org](mailto:publicaffairs@guggenheim.org)

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**CASEY KAPLAN**

121 WEST 27TH STREET  
NEW YORK NY 10001  
TEL +1 212 645 7335  
FAX +1 212 645 7835  
WWW.CASEYKAPLANGALLERY.COM  
INFO@CASEYKAPLANGALLERY.COM

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

LIAM GILLICK: *THE STATE ITSELF BECOMES A SUPER WHATNOT*

OPENING: THURSDAY, MAY 8, 6:00 - 8:00PM

EXHIBITION DATES: MAY 8 - JUNE 14, 2008

GALLERY HOURS: TUESDAY - SATURDAY 10 - 6 PM

Casey Kaplan is pleased to announce 'The state itself becomes a super whatnot', the fifth solo exhibition at the gallery of artist, Liam Gillick. In a practice that employs specific materials and multiple modes of production, Gillick examines how the built world carries traces of social, economic, and political systems.

Since 2004, Gillick has been presenting lectures, writings and artworks that relate to a body of work titled "Construcción de Uno (Construction of One)" - most notably as a central figure in the unitednationplaza and night school projects in Berlin, Mexico City and the New Museum in New York. Taking the form of a constantly reworked potential text, it comprises a series of theoretical and fictional narratives that evolve from Gillick's research of past and present evaluations of the aesthetics of social systems by focusing on modes of production rather than consumption. The framework for the project derives from Brazilian research into Scandinavian car production. In his notes, a group of workers return to their abandoned workplace in order to rethink eco-political exchange and to experiment with alternative production methods.

'The state itself becomes a super whatnot', is descriptive of the next twist in the narrative and designates the gallery space as a site for the testing of rhetoric and potential exchange simultaneously. In the exhibition, dual wall progressions, screens, and corrals relate to the architectural structure of their surroundings and are potentially regarded as a result of the communal, alternative production models devised in the scenarios. Each work reflected in another, the Plexiglas and painted aluminum structures produce competing color schemes: monochromatic red, evoking many political and cultural symbolisms, versus their multi-colored opponents. Twin wall texts that announce the title and its reverse - 'the whatnot itself becomes a super state' ....., mark the site of the exhibition as an extension of the complex processes of democratic deferral and infinite sub-contracting that underscore our current processes of exchange.

Gillick's work engages with emergent consensus cultures, objects as context, and time as material. It is within this theoretical framework that Gillick's exhibition produces a designated place for critical interaction.

Liam Gillick is nominated for the 2008 Vincent Award at the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam, and will create a major new body of work for the forthcoming Guggenheim exhibition 'theanyspacewhatever' in October 2008. In January of 2008, the artist's retrospective, 'Three perspectives and a Short Scenario', opened at the Witte de With, Rotterdam and the Kunsthalle Zürich, Zürich; it will continue to the Kunstverein Monchen, Monchen in September 2008; and is scheduled to open at the Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago, Chicago in October 2009.

FOR FURTHER EXHIBITION INFORMATION PLEASE CONTACT THE GALLERY.

NEXT GALLERY EXHIBITION: NOT SO SUBTLE SUBTITLE, JUNE 19 - AUGUST 1, 2008, CURATED BY MATIHEW BRANNON

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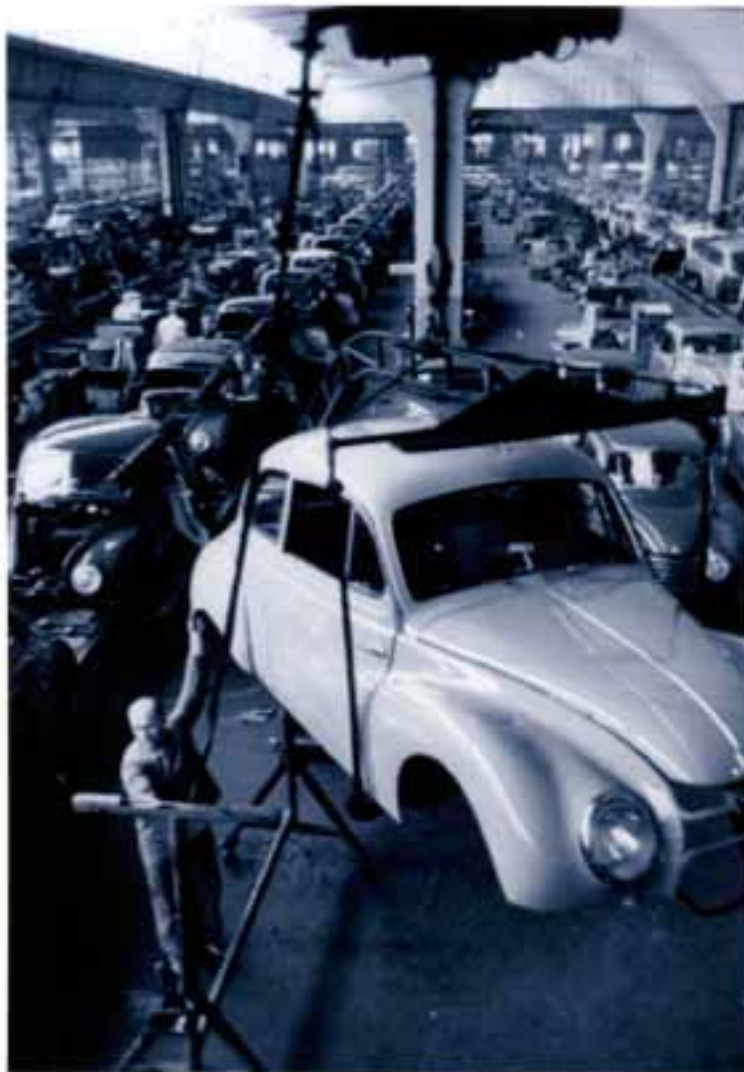
CASEY KAPLAN  
121 WEST 27TH STREET  
NEW YORK NY 10001  
TEL +1 212 645 7335  
FAX +1 212 645 7835  
WWW.CASEYKAPLANGALLERY.COM  
INFO@CASEYKAPLANGALLERY.COM

# ARTFORUM

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## The Difference Engine

LIAM GILLICK



A 1954 Opel car being manufactured by KkW Auto Works, Düsseldorf, December 1, 1953. Photo: Ralph Crane/Getty Images.

**1968 IS NOT JUST A SYMBOLIC MOMENT** or subject for academic study: Students were massacred, peasants were slaughtered, political figures were removed by force. And for the past forty years, we have witnessed the reassessment of those events, such that the progressives of that time have often been attacked precisely because they undercut stable value systems throughout society. Or, more specifically, because they demanded that difference—the specificity of histories, identities, and desires—be acknowledged at all times. They believed that difference could and should be the primary marker of a creative and democratic society, to which end they claimed solidarity with others and developed new forms of meta-identification. Yet here it becomes clear why we might want an issue of Artforum on the occasion of the anniversary of May '68 as opposed to say, the anniversary of the end of the Second World War or that of the collapse of the Berlin Wall: The revisions of 1968 were both institutional and personal in nature. Amid a postwar, cold-war situation defined by class-ridden, hierarchical stasis (punctuated by explosive but isolated expressions of defiance), some individuals believed that a better set of human relationships would emerge from the permanent reassessment of positions, rather than from any singular event. That is what was fought for: a multiplication of sensitivity and doubt. And so 1968 extends beyond its boundaries, reaching out in both directions, past and future, at the same time that it cannot be discussed in political or aesthetic terms alone.

In fact, 1968 was the last instance of major change within the art context, supplying us with the critical tools we still use today. When we consider the battles over various models of theory and practice that have taken place since, it is clear that every reassessment of artistic or institutional activity has been intimately connected to precise changes from that earlier time. And so it is likely of no small significance that, for those of us who grew up in the 1970s, our earliest curators, critics, and editors were the same people who had experienced the hopes and struggles of 1968—those individuals, in other words, who recognized that the same sense of obligation and desire to alter a deeply unjust society also demands a complete rethinking of art's status and function within it. The sustained, self-conscious, critical thinking required for action in the world was necessarily a condition for action in art; both modes of address depended on a new awareness of postcolonialism and feminism, as well as on a revised understanding of the relations of production in the face of increasing corporate power. Many institutional frameworks in art today might attempt to veil this fact, yet all of them reflect an implicit recognition of the lessons of this earlier period nonetheless. The most established museums have education programs dedicated to reaching out to multiple publics. Indeed, even the troubled recent discussions about art markets are rooted in debates initiated some forty years ago: Questions of quality are agonized over, the terms of reference are mutable, and it is hard to find a clear correlation between market exchange and artistic significance. The multifaceted language required for negotiating these configurations was arrived at in the years following '68.

Because 1968 was supposed to be about engaging real structures and not vague promises, the emergence of a new art at that time revolved around asking precise questions about organization and exchange. From that point on, a structural rethinking of cultural connections would have to be taken into account in order to understand any “work.” Lawrence Weiner is exemplary in this context. His practice, essentially defined in that year with *Statements*-a sixty-four-page book containing descriptions of twenty-four works, both “general” and “specific” in premise-proposed a way to image new relationships between objects and objects and between objects and people. The artist grasped the profound potential of a praxis (rather than practice) pertaining to multiple specific locations rather than to the physical presence of an art object alone. In avoiding determination by any particular place or physical requirement, Weiner made a point about all art. At the same time, he was also putting forward a horizontal approach in keeping with the breakdown of cultural and social hierarchies.

This points to another complex legacy of 1968: a shift in our attention from relationships among human beings toward those relationships between all human beings and the environment. Ecology is now the “acceptable” terrain for political activism, even while the green movement was developed by key ‘68 figures. (For instance, former German vice chancellor Joschka Fischer, who played a crucial role in bringing green politics to the center of power in Europe, had been a member of the group Revolutionary Struggle in the late ‘60s.) Understandably, few artworks from 1968 anticipate this move from political to environmental consciousness, and those that did so seem prescient only in retrospect.



Joe Goode, *Calendar of Los Angeles Artists and Their Cars*, 1969, offset print on paper, 22 1/2 x 14".

Consider an apparently innocent, celebratory project executed by Joe Goode in 1968 in Los Angeles, for which he took photographs of friends in their vehicles and then used the images as the basis for a calendar. The endeavor now seems an indirect but consequential addition to the more direct actions of the time. For Goode does not claim to be at the center of the action. He isn't on the steps of the National Autonomous University of Mexico or on the streets of Paris. Rather, he merely shows Larry Bell, Ed Ruscha, James Turrell, and others in their trucks and cars (there are at least two Porsche coupes). The calendar-modest, precise, and produced by the artist-is a representation of fact and function, a display for the merging of art and the everyday, featuring a specific community as a contingent artwork. As such, it is a work that revolves around exposing "relationships as context" and has an immediate and pragmatic use value: Despite the lack of progress reflected in Goode's choice of artists (all men, all white), his project both reveals the general mood of the time and, as a functional representation-a marker of the near future-points to a novel set of concerns. On the one hand, the images suggest a degree of contentment during a moment of profound change; but on the other, they suggest that even artists living in the soft glow of Californian smog, aware of radical changes under way, thought it necessary to reassure everyone that there would be a 1969 at all. After all, the car-that great symbol of postwar affluence-had by that time become an object of protection and destruction at once. Automobiles were being torched and used for barricades on streets throughout the world. Those radicalized in 1968 would turn to the car factories of the '70s as potential sites for raising class consciousness and bringing about revolution. (Notably, Fischer himself worked at German carmaker Opel part of General Motors since 1929-as an activist on the production line.) Since then, car production and acquisition have remained contested sites of nationalist projection; have represented notional freedom in the face of an increasingly controlling state; and have continued to be aesthetic markers of tastes and values-all while enduring as sites for class struggle and identification in the face of corporate consolidation and the rise and fall of state support. Today, car production is, even more than ever, deeply ingrained in our anxieties about the planet and yet remains a stylized projection. \*

1968 also taught us to be profoundly skeptical about the notion of specific turning points and singular histories: Self-consciousness extended to a questioning of all apparently significant historical events, whether the traditionally celebrated discovery of an already inhabited land or the previously accepted dates of a revolutionary moment or other cultural achievement. More significant than the matter of history in the wake of '68, however, is the question of time. As artist Philippe Parreno has suggested elsewhere, it would have been better if the progressive forces of the past had expended more effort occupying time rather than space. For if the Left occupied the universities and the factories, then the Right nonetheless always seemed to have time on their side. After all, didn't President de Gaulle merely wait for May '68 to blow over? (Similarly, didn't Prime Minister Thatcher carefully time her showdown with

British coal miners fifteen years later?) In fact, a paradoxical influence of 1968 in the cultural sphere is a result of its very alteration of human relationships and abandonment of concrete institutional representations of stability: Conservative institutions were perhaps no longer uncontested centers of power or sole possessors of meaningful discourse-but they were still free to continue as before. Correlatively, in the art context, one notes that efforts to provide alternative structures were always presented in the form of space rather than that of time. Indeed, alternative became synonymous with space, a zone strictly for temporary occupation.\*\*

It is ironic but not surprising that a destabilization of power-brought about by challenging accepted histories and by the self-consciousness of actors within the cultural field-would lead to a general shift to the right in the political mainstream. Questioning hierarchies led to anxieties, opportunism, and genuine fear as traditional sites of production in the West were dismantled, and more zones of daily life (including the ecological field, with its emergent markets in carbon credits and green technologies) became absorbed within speculative models of exchange. Yet all this activity-which coincided with the end of the Soviet system and the growth of so-called consensus politics-has still taken place within a context where the necessity to recognize multiple identities and parallel histories has generally been accepted by all sides in developed parliamentary democracies. In art, this key dynamic and concept have led to a context that is, as Donald Judd predicted it would be, increasingly "specific." (For every artists' collective that offers information in lieu of a fourth estate no longer meeting its obligations, there is a small painting of a unicorn basking in the light of three glowing suns.) This matter is at the root of many anxieties about the legacy of 1968, because in some ways it is the most profound expression of difference: Post-nineteenth-century art has always been marked by a refusal to accept standard forms of representation and assessment; a deep skepticism of consensus is embedded in the modernist project of critical reflection, and yet this allows for an endlessly increasing ideological diversity (and what we might still call enlightened celebration of the other), since collective doubt finds articulation in multiplying expressions of the personal and the overtly political. The promise of 1968 is a system of systems that are mutually expressible even when some appear to transgress the more controlling model of third-way political consciousness. The project is inevitably incomplete. Closure is a denial of critical potential and means a return to "reality," and we don't need to read Gyorgy Lukacs to know where that project ends up. But even just twenty years ago, I didn't imagine that we would currently be wondering about poorly represented demographic difference within art exhibitions or looking at the same old systems of structure and control-that the notion of working collectively might still be problematic to assess within art school systems or that art fairs would have become a dominant model of exchange.



**The Latin Quarter after a night of fighting between students and riot police, Paris, May 1968.** Photo: Bruno Barbey

\* Goode's calendar established the timetable for a complex set of future semiotic negotiations that arguably peaked in art with Richard Prince at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum in New York almost forty years later.

\*\* The anxiety attending this restriction on alternative spaces of the '80s and early '90s was taken explicitly as the subject of Christian Bernard and Eric Troncy's 1991 exhibition "No Man's Time" at the Villa Arson in Nice, France, which featured Pan-eno's short video *No More Reality II (La Manifestation)*, from the same year. Depicting a large group of seemingly unattended children carrying banners and chanting, "No more reality," the piece can be read as a collective projection to an earlier period, when the articulation of desire within the cultural frame might not pertain solely to the pragmatic reallocation of space.

## TEXTE ZUR KUNST

**INA BLOM**

**THE LOGIC OF THE TRAILER**

**Abstraction, Style and Sociality In  
Contemporary Art**



If Modernism still sought to postulate a notion of abstraction that was meant to be based on the idea of aesthetic self-reference, abstraction under the conditions of post-Fordism and of immaterial production can be conceived of as a category involved in all areas of society. Influenced by the paradigm of information in the post-war era, abstraction was increasingly recoded as design - as the manipulation of technologically produced surface phenomena, which correspond with the deterritorialization of capital under the banner of globalization and with a biopolitical logic that aims at the productivity of an aesthetically stylized life.

Artists such as Liam Gillick and Tobias Rehberger no longer address abstraction as the principle for the creation of distinct minimalist objects, but rather try to create through design spaces for open social interaction, whose actual use is to be constantly redefined within the situation of the exhibition - without necessarily producing relational-aesthetic models of community. Considering a notion of abstraction thusly reformulated, would a redescription of that which is commonly subsumed under the term "social art" be appropriate? And what can "abstract" art under the current conditions of electronic media networks and design actually mean?

It is January 2008, and the latest trend in the world of publishing is the subject of some news

paper debate. These days, apparently, more and more authors and publishing houses are posting so-called book trailers on YouTube: movie-style clips that visualize the key elements of a book's narrative through a fast-paced mix of still and moving images set to booming music and voiceovers. In fact, the only thing to tell the viewer that this is a book trailer and not the trailer for a film or a television mini-series is the tendency to here and there show glimpses of printed pages, illustrations and cover designs. Authors are easily confused with actors: in the trailer for "The Shirt

Deal", a perky Stephen J. Cannell walks through the fictional "set" of his mystery novel as he recounts its plot, his "author look" no doubt part of the set design program.

As far back in media time as 2004, an exhibition project by Liam Gillick apprehended this deft merge of previously separate media realms. Expanses of dirt brown carpeting, molded into heaps and folds, created a sort of landscape in the Micheline Szwajcer gallery in Antwerp, but this just seemed to be the setting for the key event. At the far end of this carpet-landscape a 7-minute trailer for the updated version of French sociologist Gabriel Tarde's 1896 science fiction novel "Underground (Fragment of Future Histories)" was displayed on a 1969 Brionvega Cuboglass television set.<sup>7</sup>

At first glance it seemed like a straightforward promotional event: a book had been published; now the sales apparatus was activated. But this event was also a work of art. In fact, it was a work whose penchant for obliqueness or hermeticism opened a dialogue with the question of abstraction in art as well as with the notion of the increasing abstraction of social relations under late capitalism (according to Theodor Adorno, the reality to which abstract art responds). The objects of Adorno's analysis were quite literally all present: on the one hand a literary text - an

instance of human creativity and reflection — captured by the promotional logic of the culture industry. And on the other hand the cubes, rectangles and squares of high modernist abstraction — only this time domesticated as stylish design objects for social usage, apparently devoid of all potential for radical transcendence. The radically cubical Brionvega TV set was one such object, as were the shiny new examples of Gillick's so-called "discussion platforms", the minimal-style canopies of aluminum and colored Plexiglas that seem to furnish so many of his installations.

And yet, this work's specific brand of obliqueness breaks with the very terms of abstraction presented above. Its own forms or strategies of abstraction should, first of all, be understood as situational or site specific. The site it brings forth is nothing less than the new world of total design, the intensified processes of "life-aesthetics" or self-styling that form the basis for the specific alignment of governmental and capital interests in contemporary biopolitics and its post-Fordist forms of production. The work should then be seen as an intervention in the elusive continuity between artistic, aesthetic and social forces established by a politics that capitalizes on mental and bodily processes, the forces of sensation and affects. And in turn its insistence on obliqueness may be seen in terms of the revised understanding of dominance and resistance that comes with this politics.

The updating of Gabriel Tarde's sociological/fictional novel had been done by Gillick: in 'a conscious decision to "support" the logic of globalization exemplified by the 1904 English translation (and so not even consulting the French original), a few minor changes to this text were made. Mentions of Cinematography - the big novelty in Tarde's days - were for instance systematically exchanged with "video". But Gillick's updating also pertained to the design solution for the book. Now this vintage piece of utopian imagination was framed by his habitual play with colorful modernist/constructivist style languages, complete with sans-serif typeface all through the main text - as if to underscore the essential "modernity" or "actuality" of Tarde, the basic requirement for his commodification. The final book product was displayed on one of the carpeted heaps: the room was, in fact, an elaboration on the concept of the stylistically apposite book fair stand or press conference environment.

The question was only what this environment was actually supposed to promote or present. At first glance the book trailer basically seemed to animate the book design, rather than any narrative the book might contain. The glossy black cover was dominated by a pattern of thick pastel colored lines that might easily be interpreted as beams of multicolored light moving through dark space. And on the TV screen similarly luminous multicolored text fragments from the book danced their little dance to midi-files of medieval sounding flute music - much the way graphic design on TV generally ballets around in honor of some coming attraction (as in the intro to any

news show). But "design" did not stop there. For here even the TV-apparatus was a highly conspicuous

style icon, chosen as if to support the style of both book and trailer. Entirely cubical and encased in shiny metallic on every side except one, the Brionvega is advertised by one of its purveyors as "more than a television set" since "when it is off it is hard to know what exactly it is". It is therefore also an "absolute clear sign", "desirable even before you know what it's used for";<sup>2</sup> In fact, the TV set used to display Gillick's book trailer had all the hermetic glamour of the 1960's minimalist cubes - the objects that were at once the epitome of modernist abstraction and instances of the same abstraction turned inside out, transformed into a projective space of social relations.<sup>3</sup> By the same token the Brionvega also evoked all its ambivalent connections to the world of interior design, the moment when Minimal Art slides into minimal style, when the most radically impersonal art objects in history turn into signifiers of personal taste. This is, incidentally, also the moment where the conveyor belt model of industrial mass production evoked by minimalist serialism and standardization, seemed to give way to a post-industrial production of subjectivity that is largely driven by media-apparatuses: the Brionvega quite simply seemed fraught with all these social/aesthetic shifts. Which is probably why it was used for this particularly slick exhibition display-cum-media event, alongside Gillick's "minimal-style" discussion platforms". Under the lamp-like halo of color they produce (this time dirt-brown to match the carpet) discussion or socializing of some sort is supposed to take place - an activity that is, however, never actually realized. Again, what seems to count is the evocation of the shift from the transcendent abstraction of classic modernism to the immanence of today's social or relational art practices, the supposed immediacy of "interaction", "exchange" or "togetherness". Yet, in the end, it is precisely the meaning of "the social" that is contested with Gillick's operations of abstraction.

Put together, all these design elements, each of them essentially hermetic, each somewhat absurdly layered on top of each other, make up what might be called a style site. By a style site I mean an artistic production that presents conspicuous stylistic phenomena not as a trait of some artistic signature, nor as an indicator of the artist's desire to merge the fields of art and design, but as an object of articulation in its own right. If this is possible it is mainly because style here is presented as a point of social crisis or complexity - in fact as a "question of style" that pertains to specific social sites. On a general level, such questions of style may be discovered wherever relations between appearance, recognition and social identity are opened up - that is, whenever one tackles the difficult issue of unforeseen appearances, social phenomena that have yet to be identified. Style site works could then be seen as a variant of site-specific practices

in art, mainly related to the way such practices tend to distance themselves from formalist and historicist approaches to art.<sup>4</sup> For while style is obviously a key “question” in art historical writing, it is still mainly handled in terms of predetermined appearance or constant form - an effect of the categorizing concerns of this disciplines. In contrast, Walter Benjamin read *Jugendstil* as a symptom of the paradoxes connected with the efforts to give a recognizable public “face” to modernity: in his work *Jugendstil* is then less a “period style” than a social site.<sup>6</sup> Today, the question of the unforeseen social appearance is so to speak an inbuilt feature of the biopolitical logic of style: the desire-element in life-styling is linked to the promise of escape from definable forms of subjectivity, the notion of open-ended becoming. And so the “question” of the contemporary style site could be seen to turn around processes of desubjectivization.

This may be the reason why Gillick’s promotional work seems to obstruct access to the idea of what exactly is being presented or promoted. Instead, design appears as a quasi-autonomous object of reflection that runs in tight loops around itself. Displayed on an iconic piece of “design technology”, the book trailer is foregrounded as a format, a matter of design solutions, which in turn presents the idea of the book as an object residing within the precisely designed framework of a promotional space. It is the almost hysterical over-determination of style factors in Gillick’s work, their lack of definitive grounding, that brings out a sense of style as question or crisis of appearance, that is, as a social site. Through this operation it becomes abundantly clear that style, here, is not just a trait that adheres to some defined project or object, whether “artistic” or utilitarian, but is *itself* seen as a sort of productive machine. While most site-specific artworks open onto social practices not primarily associated with the realm of art or else with the institutional frameworks of art production and display, this work seems, rather, to play off an’s imbrication in the contemporary production of open-ended subjectivity.

And the significance of media apparatuses and technologies for this production — in particular the real-time technologies that seem to mime the dynamic flow of human memory and perception itself—may perhaps account for the emphatic association between style and televisuality in Gillick’s work.?

However, in this style conundrum, the social ideas presented in Gabriel Tarde’s fiction are not lost: they are activated, and their specific mode of utopian imagination constitutes a force that will have to be accounted for. In fact, this is where we may really start to unravel the strange connection between “sociality” and “obliqueness” in Gillick’s work. “Obliqueness” was a term used by Gillick himself when trying to place this type of work within the expanding and increasingly controversial catalogue of “social” art - more specifically its distance to the more transparent or hands-on

approaches of much activist or community-oriented artwork.<sup>8</sup> In this last category, the question of representation often seems to play a critical role: the question of how, or through what artistic/strategic means, specific groups, communities, issues and interests are represented or formalized. In contrast, works such as Gillick’s seem to leave the very framework of representation behind: with its apparently free associations between visual, spatial, textual, mediatic and temporal elements, its purported sociality cannot be mapped or located as one delimited or familiar “object”, the way a community, an issue or an institution can.

It is therefore tempting to interpret its strategies as a specific form of artistic abstraction. But again, this specific operation differentiates itself from the type of scenario in which economic abstraction is seen as the root form of all abstraction, so that the differentiating, qualitative potential of individual sensation is understood to be systematically turned into a quantifiable economic potential, a process that goes hand in hand with new forms of political instrumentality. For one thing, to accept this framework of analysis would also be to accept the fundamental problem that haunts this particular conception of abstraction.

As Tim Black has pointed out, Adorno’s denunciation of a world reduced to the abstract quantities of exchange relations may have been exemplified with reference to modern capitalism, but in actuality his analysis of reification, or the tendency to identify things with their conceptual abstraction (and thus also with their potential for exchange), moves as far back in human history as primitive animism and can not be said to be derived from capitalism specifically. In “The Dialectics of Enlightenment” this impulse towards conceptualization and abstraction is understood to originate in the need to protect oneself from the random brutality of nature.<sup>9</sup> But if it is basically the human capacity to symbolize that is the problem, Adorno’s notion of abstraction is not only a superbly formulated instance of the specifically modernist distrust of all forms of representation. It is also, by the same token, partaking in the semiotic logic of representation and the whole analytic apparatus that goes with it. Within this framework, the essence of the social, the very idea of the possibility of the social is identified with the concept of exchange and the notion of the eternal circulation of exchanges. From ritual to capital, this is the “stuff” that the social is made of; this is the proper domain of the social. And in extension of this, any conception of “social” art is bound to contend with the practices and problem of exchange - in ethical, aesthetic, political and moral terms. The problem with this analysis is the too smooth alignment of human interchange and the exchange mechanism of capital: capital becomes the principle from which everything else is derived and is placed in the default position of dominance and initiative, a position that can only be negated. Here the post-workerist position developed from Marx’s writings (by Antonio Negri, among others) presents an alternative: the

creative initiative is rather seen to reside with the workers themselves who invent new values and forms of togetherness. Capital continually works to catch up with such creativity. Likewise, the contemporary processes of desubjectivization might be seen as a continual challenge to capital rather than simply a mere effect of its “logic”. And from this perspective the new significance of style could also be approached in less negative terms: as an apparatus of social invention.

To see the connection between sociality and obliqueness in Gillick’s style site work is then to pay attention to the link between invention of sociality and operations of abstraction. Going nowhere in particular, evoking “sociality” yet supporting no communal action in the sense associated with the tradition of communal or activist art practices that extend from Wiener Actionism to Atelier Liesholt, Gillick’s style site seems to resist being understood in terms of the habitual models of exchange. In other words, its obliqueness or abstraction, its refusal of any final connection between style and purpose, or type and the recognition of objects or identities, is the result of a logic of association. Gillick perpetually traces connections between elements not normally connected - between sociological fiction and minimalist cubes, between graphic design and television signals — and these connections or associations each bring up moments of difficulty, moments where understanding stops and where thinking and knowledge meet a challenge.

As it happens, this logic of associations has its own specific purchase on social thought. It is related to a mode of thinking where “the social” is not understood as a specific domain of reality governed by a specific set of generic principles, a “context” in which non-social activities take place. The social is, rather, a principle of connectivity and productivity, something that can be traced in the surprising associations between things that are themselves not social, or in the continual bifurcation of reality that arises wherever the precise components of an object or a situation are contested, because new information, new forms of knowledge or action that result from human creativity tend to make the world more complex. And this, of course, is where the forces of Gabriel Tarde’s fiction enters Gillick’s work, since this fiction springs out of a form of sociology that was based on precisely such a logic of associations.<sup>10</sup> A fantasy of a post-catastrophic underground world where the basic alimentary needs of the remaining population are already taken care of, Tarde’s “Underground (Fragments of Future Histories)” toys with the possibility of describing social relations in other terms than those based on the always negative premises of concepts such as need-fulfillment, consumption or compensation for lack. To this end he invents a human society that can only be properly described in terms of the intensive and differentiating potential of aesthetic and affective phenomena “The mental space left by the reduction of our needs is taken up by those talents, artistic, poetic and scientific, which multiply and take deep root. They

become the true need of society. They spring from a necessity to produce and not from a necessity to consume.”<sup>11</sup>

Along with the slogan “To produce is a passion, to consume is only a taste”, the above quote also happens to be one of the key sentences dancing around in Gillick’s book trailer. These are the exact words that are dressed up as luminous television design. The trailer is obviously a typical example of the techniques of capture at work in the aesthetic industries — a device devoted to the task of exploiting the never-ending desire for the next big thing, of keeping audiences in a perpetual state of alertness. But here it also appears under a different guise. For if the assemblage-like presentations of the typical trailer format tend to work, it is precisely because they trigger forces of invention and production that cannot meaningfully be traced back to a single artist creator: the type of forces that are, in fact, central to Tarde’s alternative conception of the social and the elements through which it may be traced.<sup>12</sup> (After all, nobody cares about the author of a trailer and everybody cares about its capacity to suggest and to trigger). As it happens, a “logic of the trailer” seems to run through numerous works that seem to play off the social forces at work in contemporary design and media environments. The “Briannnnnn and Ferrryyyyyy” project of Gillick and Philippe Parreno (and a long host of other contributors) for a large part reads like a long trailer bouncing off the objects and institutions of copyright law. This is mainly because the titles, credits and other information far exceed the length whatever content this DVD project contains, but also because this content “consists of an endless array of questions, quotations and potentialities rather than any clear-cut demonstration of legal dilemmas”.<sup>13</sup> And Tobias Rehberger’s “On Otto” uses a cinema poster and trailer — normally the end stages of a film production — as the very point of departure for a cinematic production made in the reverse: the resulting film project results in a multitude of effects, except, perhaps, that of a replete cultural object. As a long list of hyper-professionals from the world of Hollywood cinema do what they know best, and yet the effect is that of a simultaneous unknowing of cinema and a reinvention of cinematic potential.

The design or style elements that loop seductively around themselves in Gillick’s trailer for “Underground” then only seem to perpetuate the logic of production or invention informing the trailer’s format itself: this particular trailer simply promotes the forces of sensation and affect that are key elements in the social construction dreamt up in “Underground (Fragments of Future Histories)”. As it turns out, Gillick’s trailer really did present the content of the book after all. For in this fictional world, superior emphasis is placed on the productive role of aesthetic creation, on a multifarious styling or designing of persons and environments. Importantly, this activity completely passes beyond the focus on monuments or products that informed life in the old world on

the surface of the earth - a world where (art) objects stood out as entities under sharp sunlight and where the social world was also mapped in quasi-objective terms, as a domain, space or structure to be grasped in its totality.

One among many contemporary works elaborating the reality of style as a social site, the exhibition promoting the updating of Gabriel Tarde then gives a sort of object lesson in the possible new role given to artistic abstraction. Neither a return to the old issues of formalism, nor a critical mimicry of abstraction as a symptom of an economic and political reality that continually escapes the grasp of its subjects, works establishing a contemporary style s'te seem to do two things at once: they obviously close in on the elusive aesthetic and affective forces at work in contemporary capital. as well as on their specific machineries of production. But in the same process they dissipate the very idea of a total izing grasp or overview of such forces, including the transcendental status given to concepts such as capital, labor and art. Promoting difficulty, hermeticism or obliqueness in the name of art is here, above all, a contribution to a sort of epistemological landslide: a call for a critical redescription of whatever it is that we call social forces.

Notes

- 1 The updated edition was published by Les Presses du Reel Dijon 2004.
- 2 See the product presentation of the Brion vega Cuboglass television set at [www.singulier.com](http://www.singulier.com)
- 3 The double character of minimalism is described by Hal Foster, *The Return of the Real*. MIT Press. 1996. pp. 35-71.

- 4 See Ina Blom, *On the Style Site: Art. Sociality and Media Culture*, New York 2007.
- 5 In his long and nuanced discussion of the concept of style Meyer Shapiro notably delivers a basic definition of style as "constant form". Meyer Shapiro. *Theory and Philosophy of Art: Style. Artist. Society*, New York 1994.
- 6 This reading of Walter Benjamin is provided by Andrew Benjamin, *Style and Time*, Northwestern University Press 2006, Pp.5-38.
- 7 This interpretation of real-time technologies is elaborated by Maurizio Lazzarato. *Video philosophie: Zeitwahrnehmung im Postfordismus*. Berlin 2002.
- 8 Liam Gillick. "Contingent Factors: A response to Claire Bishop's 'Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics...'. in: *October*, no. 115, MIT Press 2005, PP.95-107.
- 9 Tim Black. review of Frederic Jameson. *Late Marxism: Adorno or the persistence of the Dialectic*. published on *Culture Wars*, June 2007. [www.culturewars.com](http://www.culturewars.com)
- 10 This strand of sociology has extensively developed by Bruno Latour. in particular in: *Reassembling the Social*. Oxford 2005. Here he posits Gabriel Tarde as the point of departure of a form of social thinking that presents a radical break with the tradition that extends from Durkheim to Bourdieu. It breaks in particular with any notions of some sort of social totality or macro level and provides a general framework for explaining Singular phenomena.
- II Gabriel Tarde, *Underground (Fragments of Future Histories)*, Dijon 2004. p.8.
- 12 Maurizio Lazzarato has discussed this aspect of Tarde's thinking in *Puissances de l'invention: La psychologie économique de Gabriel Tarde contre l'économie politique*, Paris 2002, as well as in his introduction to the updated version of "Underground (Fragments of Future Histories)".
- 13 "Liam Gillick and Philippe Parreno talk about Briannnnnn and Ferryyyyyyy". in: *artforum*. February 2005, pp. '44-147.

## CASEY KAPLAN

121 WEST 27TH STREET  
NEW YORK NY 10001  
TEL +1 212 645 7335  
FAX +1 212 645 7835  
WWW.CASEYKAPLANGALLERY.COM  
INFO@CASEYKAPLANGALLERY.COM

With a practice that moves between installation and text, sculpture and architecture, Liam Gillick has long been invested in creating the basic situational and spatial conditions for communicative encounter and exchange. In keeping with this *modus operandi*, the London- and New York-based artist's exhibitions are often designed to investigate institutional and social relationships as well as their own structures. Aptly, then, the year long project inaugurated by this show at Witte de With is less a traditional retrospective than a series of self-reflexive shows devoted to this Vincent- and Turner-prize short-listed artist. The title of the endeavor, "Three Perspectives and a Short Scenario," illuminates its premise: After the Witte de With, a second "perspective" is offered by a show organized by Beatrix Ruf at the Kunsthalle Zurich, opening later in January; a last view, organized by Dominic Malon, will take place at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Chicago next year. In the interim, for an exhibition this summer organized by Stefan Kalmar at the Kunstverein Munchen, Gillick is establishing a "scenario": Among other events, including talks, discussions, and seminars, this "site of production" will feature the performance and filming of a play written by the artist and intended to shed light on the relationships and forms of cooperation relevant to his work. The script will be published in a book timed to coincide with the MCA exhibition, which will also present a collection of Gillick's key writings in addition to texts by art-world figures who have collaborated with or influenced him over the past twenty years. As the entire project makes clear, the processes of pre- and postproduction often play a more central role for Gillick than do his works themselves; Nicolas Bourriaud argues in *Postproduction* (2002) that this is a characteristic strategy for artists of Gillick's generation.

For the three main shows, Gillick has created architectural points of departure. Each has the same basic components: corridor like spaces constructed from dark gray dividing walls, which define - a route through the exhibition space and lead to two elements designed by the artist - a film that literally serves as a "review" of his work, documenting projects from 1988 to the present, and a number of display cases presenting objects, books, texts, and posters pertaining to Gillick's practice. The space not required for his show has been designated a "gray zone" by the artist, who has returned the responsibility for determining its use to the curatorial staff at the hosting institution. This gesture, which mirrors the shared responsibility of institution and artist in designing exhibitions, constitutes a central and certainly a playful element of Gillick's approach. Witte de With has chosen to understand it as a gesture of both generosity and provocation, and is responding by placing exhibitions of its own in the space originally assigned to Gillick's solo show. In Zurich, meanwhile, Ruf has decided to return the space to the artist once more. (As of press time, it remains unclear how the MCA will respond.)

In addition to the processes that take place before and after the creation of both work and exhibition, Gillick is interested in institutional and social power hierarchies, which he has increasingly been investigating, sometimes casually, sometimes emphatically-in his structures and, in particular, in his recent exhibitions at the Palais de Tokyo in Paris, the Museum of Modern Art in New York, and the Whitechapel Art Gallery in London. There are clear advantages to Gillick's long history of close collaboration with curators: Communication over a period of years has led to a reciprocity of influence that has had positive effects both on the artist's work and on the institutions concerned.

-Lilian Haberer

Translated from German by Oliver E. Dryfuss.

"Three Perspectives and a Short Scenario" is also on view at the Kunsthalle Zurich, Jan. 26-Mar. 30; Kunstverein Munchen, July 26-Sept. 21; Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago, Feb.-Apr. 2009.

# ARTFORUM

JANUARY 2008

## Liam Gillick

WITTE DE WITH CENTER FOR CONTEMPORARY ART,  
ROTTERDAM, THE NETHERLANDS

January 19-March 24

Curated by Nicolaus Schauffhausen



## Liam Gillick

### WITTE DE WITH, ROTTERDAM, NETHERLANDS



The first part of Liam Gillick's mid-career retrospective opened at Witte de With, acts as an inquiry into several key components of art discourse, including the role of the institution, the value of artistic collaboration and, of course, the notion of a retrospective itself. As suggested by its title, 'Three Perspectives and a Short Scenario', the exhibition takes place in four parts: three separate exhibitions (the 'perspectives') at Witte de With, Kunsthalle Zurich and the Museum of Contemporary Art in Chicago, as well as a performance element (the 'short scenario') to be held in June at Kunstverein Munich.

The work at Witte de With, established the basic framework for the two exhibitions that will follow: a robust conceptual underpinning that orders and contextualizes the core material elements that physically occupy the space. Organization is central to the notion of a retrospective, which implicitly acts as a catalogue of a given body of work, and Gillick enacts that organization on multiple levels: most immediately evident is the way he arranges the exhibition space into zones, using precision-cut MDF boards and sombre tones of grey. This division of the space is both conceptual and physical: half of the area is dubbed an 'institutional zone', to be interpreted and filled by each institution to which the show will tour. Witte de With filled this with a sequence of small exhibitions by artists - including Manon de Boer, Keren Cytter and Claire Fontaine - who were chosen without prior consultation with Gillick. Kunsthalle Zurich will use the same space to stage a series of Gillick's performative works, while the programme for the Museum of Contemporary Art in Chicago is still under discussion.

This 'institutional zone' helps delineate Gillick's own intentions for the display of his work, and the imperatives imposed upon artists by institutions. But it also allows for the expression of each organization's distinct identity and agenda, emphasizing the diversity of establishments that are herded together under the moniker of 'institution'.

The remaining gallery spaces outside of this 'institutional zone' are occupied by elements common to all three exhibitions: a pair of vitrines displaying Gillick's printed matter, from posters and catalogues to skateboards and canvas bags; a couple of posters haphazardly affixed to a corridor wall; and an untitled film offering a literal retrospective of Gillick's work. Using a PowerPoint-style presentation, the film shows photographic documentation of the artist's past work while a seemingly unrelated text accumulates line by line across the surface of the screen, to the incessant beat of the film's soundtrack.

One of the key phrases in this text is 'A desire to account for everything'. The film turns the frustration of clear documentation into a virtue. Elsewhere the exhibition is similarly concerned with resistance - persistently creating barriers between the viewer and the work at hand, whether in the panels delineating the gallery space, in the glass vitrines containing the printed objects or in the very flatness of the film screen. This consistent two-dimensionality becomes so strong that even three-dimensional elements - such as the architectural units dividing the space - bear a distinctly two-dimensional quality, resembling digital renderings as much as three-dimensional components. The effect is one of learning to see the world in two dimensions, and through the filter of the computer screen on which Gillick creates his work. Indeed, the language of clusters and networks that has long been of interest to Gillick finds its literal representation in the film, which is in many ways the core element of the exhibition. Across the screen, text gathers in pre-delineated boxes, moving in different directions and forming distinctly visual clusters. The text, which relates the story of an abandoned factory and its workers, is surprisingly melancholy. The effect is achieved as much through the slow accumulation of words across the screen as through the direct meaning of the story itself. In the context of the retrospective - however much an anti-retrospective it may essentially be - that sense of accumulation and retroactive interpretation seems indivisible from the assessment of an artistic career.

Gillick has stated that he is more interested in the production of an art work than in its consumption, but here he seems, at least momentarily, to stage the manner in which the story of production is constructed and consumed. The effect is surprisingly moving, and heightened by the rigour - both visual and conceptual - of the exhibition. For all that he resists the notion of the retrospective, Gillick remains keenly attuned to the emotional weight of meaning construed after the fact.

**Katie Kitamura**

CASEY KAPLAN  
121 WEST 27TH STREET  
NEW YORK NY 10001  
TEL +1 212 645 7335  
FAX +1 212 645 7835  
WWW.CASEYKAPLANGALLERY.COM  
INFO@CASEYKAPLANGALLERY.COM

# Art Review:

Issue 19 £4.90

'The problem with any retrospective is that there's a natural tendency to reflect on closure. And that stops discussion'

FEBRUARY  
2008

**Milan vs. Turin**  
Which one is  
really Italy's  
art capital?

**I, Dorkbot**  
The geeks who  
are innervating  
the earth

**Hungarian  
Cinema**  
Plotless,  
characterless  
and making  
a comeback

# Liam Gillick

*Now you see him, now you don't*

**Luc Tuymans**  
talks painting with  
**Wilhelm Sasnal**



New York Reviews Marathon  
**4 critics, 7 days, 104 reviews – phew!**





LIAM GILLICK

# Now you see me, Now you don't

Having been given a series of retrospectives in major museums, the British artist decided to 'regift' half of the exhibition spaces to the institutions that gave them to him in the first place. What's he playing at?

words J.J. CHARLESWORTH  
portrait NICK HAYMES

**MIAMI ISN'T THE FIRST PLACE YOU'D EXPECT TO FIND LIAM GILLICK.**

And he seems slightly surprised to be there too. The palm trees, sunshine, tanned bodies and easy, paper-thin glamour of South Beach don't quite sit right with this unstoppably cerebral artist. Gillick's complex, elliptical activity has, for two decades, ceaselessly navigated the gaps between art and curation, between the institutions of culture and the world of politics, moving between installation, sculpture, lecturing, graphic design, writing and architecture to create a sustained investigation of the structures and systems that define art's relation to our current neo-liberal epoch. The kind of questions this raises are not much on the minds of the hordes of gallerists and collectors gathered here for the week-long art-fair madness that is Art Basel Miami Beach, perhaps. But art fairs are an excuse for the artworld to get together, and Gillick will soon be speaking on a panel discussion about art criticism, before returning to a freezing New York to prepare for a year of his retrospective exhibition, *Three Perspectives* and a *Short Scenario*, starting off at Rotterdam's Witte de With, and then on to Kunsthalle Zurich, before moving to the Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago in early 2009.

Retrospective? For an artist whose work has long questioned the conventional distinctions and boundaries that define the role of the artist, and who prefers to slip continuously in and out of anyone given or fixed type of activity, the idea of a midcareer retrospective seems strangely conservative - the standard accolade bestowed on the 'important artist', the institutional pat-on-the-back that puts his greatness beyond question. Gillick is usually full of questions. So perhaps, I suggest, this is not going to be the usual type of retrospective?

Gillick grins. "It's a retrospective in the sense of being that moment where things turn and you suddenly become the subject, which isn't typically how I've tried to work. In common with many artists of my generation I use 'displacement techniques' a lot to find ways to play with time, in order to suspend the moment of focus or judgement. And although in the past I've done a lot of exhibitions, in none of them have I been the focus. So what I've done is to turn the idea of the retrospective exhibition around on itself again, and offered 50 percent of this somewhat retrospective exhibition back to the relevant curators." It's a manoeuvre typical of Gillick's approach, both slight and apparently technical, but also playfully perverse, cutting to the quick of how the artworld divides up its institutional powers - those

that dictate which artists get to be seen and which do not. So what was the effect of Gillick returning half his midcareer showcase to the institutions that had offered it to him? "It caused chaos, initially, and some mild panic," Gillick says with a laugh. "But I did it deliberately to question to what extent that generation of curators, people who are about my age, feels responsible in terms of authorship, and in terms of how they work with artists. There's often been an assumption of parallelity between artists and curators, an equality of involvement, but there's a certain point, as curators move up through an institutional hierarchy, where that idea of parallelity can't be sustained indefinitely. I wanted to problematise that idea that they could retain that parallelity continually."

Gillick's ongoing interest is in the 'interstices' of art as an institutional production, trying to locate the points where a line is supposed to be drawn between artist/author and curator/presenter. It's an approach he shares with a generation of artists and curators that emerged in the 1990s - artists such as Rirkrit Tiravanija or Philippe Parreno, and curators such as Nicolas Bourriaud, whose term 'relational aesthetics' now serves as a catch-all for artists who, like Gillick, choose to focus on the relations that exist within artistic presentation rather than accept them as given. It's a perspective that has produced a lot of discussion about the curator-as-artist, or curator-as-author. But what started out as a sort of self-critique of curatorial power among artists and curators has often slipped into an uncritical acceptance that artists and curators can easily swap roles, without acknowledging what really distinguishes making art from curating it. Think of those 'authorial' curators whose names are often more prominent than the artists they present - Hans Ulrich Obrist's Lyon Biennial last year, in which he selected selectors to select the artists, is a good example - and one notices that if the curator can become an author, it's much harder for the artist to acquire the curator's power.

For Gillick, his retrospective carries the danger of reasserting those traditional distinctions: "The problem with any retrospective", he says, "is that there's a natural tendency to assess or reflect, or assume a degree of closure. And that stops discussion, because you're naturally dealing with what was, rather than what will be. So I wanted to find a method to artificially stimulate a degree of anxiety, and begin a discussion again about this exhibition that was not focused on the work itself, and the way to do that was to say, 'By the way, you're going to have 50 percent of the space back, what are you going to do?' So instead of assuming a friendly middle-ground parallelity, it would mean that we would have to have a real discussion about a real subject." So what did the institutions choose to do with Gillick's 'gift'? At Witte de With, Nicolaus Schafhausen's team have decided that they will be showing younger artists. Gillick says he was a bit critical of this, not wanting to appear as "the nice middle-aged guys being nice to the younger artists". At the Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago, the curators have decided to use their half of the space to present earlier works by him, paradoxically creating a more formal retrospective of 'older works' next to his more provisional installation. It sounds like a curatorial hall of mirrors: Gillick holding a mirror to the art museum, as it tries to focus its attention on him. And in a final twist that takes the scenario to an almost absurd end point, Kunsthalle Zurich's Beatrix Ruf has decided to run a programme of time-based work, inviting Gillick back into her half of the exhibition to collaborate on the programme. "Regifting", he jokes, explaining the *Seinfeld*-inspired American etiquette of giving gifts that were themselves gifts in the first place.





**“The problem with any retrospective is that there’s a natural tendency to assess or reflect, or assume a degree of closure. And that stops discussion”**



But what of Gillick’s own half? For each venue he says he’s only providing four clear elements: a slatted screen structure, separating the two halves of the show but allowing viewers to see through to the other side; two posters that represent the split and the binarism of the show; a big table of what might be seen as ‘historical ephemera’, and what Gillick calls a ‘film machine’. One of the posters is a strict geometric design derived from the graphic style of the 1950s and 60s Ulm School of Design in Germany - authoritative, sober and didactic. The other is a big poster of a little man: “He was something I drew on a plane, when I was first thinking about the exhibition. This little man looks something like Venezuela’s best-loved cartoon character. It’s clearly something friendly, like from the Olympics, or some sort of potential mascot. And he represents the impossibility of trying to do the exhibition from my perspective.” The little man looks startled, worried, unsure.

It’s the ‘film machine’ that is causing him the most headaches right now. He’s busy putting together software that will generate a sort of pseudo-filmic narrative of images from 20 years of his work, a sequence that will be voiced over by a voice synthesizer that Gillick has adapted to sound like a cross between ‘a psychotic and a recruiting sergeant’. This hectoring voice will read texts taken from a number of lectures Gillick presented last year at unitednationsplaza, the alternative art school and residency programme in Berlin. Their purpose, Gillick says, was to try to work out whether it’s still possible to proceed with a discursive, critical model of practice, in a period that appears dominated by an all-encompassing social and political ‘middle ground’ - an authoritarian voice proposing reasoned speculations about what might be possible rather than unchangeable. In a period in which we’re told that the idea of politics is supposed to be over, Gillick says he’s trying to find ways to operate critically in that middle ground, trying to create situations that reflect on the provisional and the potential, refusing to accept things ‘as they are’. In one broad stroke, we’ve shifted from a cartoon figure to the widest analysis of contemporary politics, via the institutional mechanisms of staging an art show.

Gillick’s layered, multifarious, fugitive adopt the conventional role of the artist, continuously adapting and cross-referencing different positions of activity, referring art-making to a bigger intellectual project, is what makes him so difficult to pin down - to the frequent frustration of those who would prefer art and artists to stay neatly in their place. Operating everywhere and nowhere at once, slipping in and out of view - artist, curator, critic - and refusing to be pinned down keeps everything open, ready to change.

*Liam Gillick, Three Perspectives and a Short Scenario, is on view at Witte de With, Rotterdam, until 24 March. See Listings for further details.*

WORKS  
(IN ORDER OF APPEARANCE)

***Presentism***, 2005  
installation view, Cervi-Mora, London

***The Commune Itself Becomes a Super State***, 2007  
vinyl on wall, 230 x 590 cm

***A Short Text on the Possibilities of Creating an Economy of Equivalence***,  
2005  
installation view, Palais de Tokyo, Paris

Two images for posters representing the binarism in Liam Gillick’s retrospective

**All works**  
courtesy the artist and Corvi-Mora, London

**CASEY KAPLAN**

121 WEST 27TH STREET  
NEW YORK NY 10001  
TEL +1 212 645 7335  
FAX +1 212 645 7835  
WWW.CASEYKAPLANGALLERY.COM  
INFO@CASEYKAPLANGALLERY.COM

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

LIAM GILLICK:

*As You Approach the Edge of Town The Lights Are No Softer Than They Were In The Centre*

EXHIBITION DATES: NOVEMBER 4 - DECEMBER 10  
OPENING: FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 4<sup>th</sup> 6-8PM  
GALLERY HOURS: TUESDAY - SATURDAY 10 - 6 PM

Casey Kaplan is pleased to announce its inaugural exhibition at 525 West 21st Street.

*As You Approach the Edge of Town The Lights Are No Softer Than They Were In The Centre* is Liam Gillick's fourth solo show with Casey Kaplan.

The exhibition examines the interplay between built structures and theoretical constructs. For this exhibition Gillick combines new work in a range of media, surface, and scale. The structures include hanging texts, seating, low screens, wall designs and a quarter scale model of a new social space for a public plaza in Guadalajara, Mexico. Together the works combine experimental and improvisational structures with pragmatic social proposals.

Gillick's arrangements constantly move in-and-out of conceptual focus, creating close-up views and wide panoramas, both literally and metaphorically. This visual push-and-pull reflects an impulse to question the relationship between interior (personal) space and exterior (social) space.

By combining parallel forms in an open and original framework, Gillick encourages active participation and fluid exchange between the gallery space, the viewer, and the artwork. His work aims to complicate the viewer's relation to the traditional role of the art object, inviting you to turn aside from the work and become immersed in his theoretical and public projects.

Collectively, the works embody Gillick's most recent technical and artistic developments. This exhibition anticipates the artist's forthcoming narrative, provisionally titled, Construction of One (Construccoin de Uno), which outlines a new series of relationships between production and development in a post-industrial environment.

Recent solo exhibitions include: *A Short Essay On The Possibility of An Economy of Equivalence*, at La Casa Encendida, Madrid, Spain from October 2005 through January 2006; *Factories in the Snow*, at Meyer Kainer, Vienna, Austria from September 2005; McNamara Motel, The Center for Contemporary Art, at Malaga, Spain from September 2005; Presentism, at Corvi Mora, London, UK this past May; and *Literally*, The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Selected Group Exhibitions include: *Singular Forms*, Guggenheim Museum, New York, 2004; 50<sup>th</sup> Venice Biennale, Italy, 2003; *What If*, Modern Museet, Stockholm, Sweden, 2000. Recent public projects and interventions include: The new Home Office government building in London (2002-2005). Since 1995 Liam has published a number of books that function in parallel to his artwork including, UNDERGROUND (fragments of Future Histories) (2004), Literally No Place (2002), Five or Six (1999), Discussion Island/Big Conference Centre (1997), and Erasmus is Late (1995).

FOR FURTHER EXHIBITION INFORMATION PLEASE CONTACT THE GALLERY.

ART BASEL MIAMI BEACH: ART NOVA- NATHAN CARTER. LIAM GILLICK, JULIA SCHMIDT  
NOVEMBER 3D-DECEMBER 5. 2005  
NEXT GALLERY EXHIBITION: *THE PARTY*: GALLERY ARTISTS GROUP EXHIBITION  
DECEMBER 15. 2005-JANUARY 21, 2006

JEFF BURTON, NATHAN CARTER, MILES COOLIDGE, JASON DODGE, TRISHA DONNELLY, PAMELA FRASER, ANNA GASKELL, LIAM GILLICK, ANNIKA VON HAUSSWOLFF, CARSTEN HOLLER, BRIAN JUNGEN, JONATHAN MONK, DIEGO PERRONE, JULIA SCHMIDT, SIMON STARLING, GABRIEL VORMSTEIN, JOHANNES WOHNSEIFER

CASEY KAPLAN  
121 WEST 27TH STREET  
NEW YORK NY 10001  
TEL +1 212 645 7335  
FAX +1 212 645 7835  
WWW.CASEYKAPLANGALLERY.COM  
INFO@CASEYKAPLANGALLERY.COM

# The New York Times

## Art in Review

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DECEMBER 9, 2005

### Liam Gillick

*Casey Kaplan*

*525 West 21st Street, Chelsea*

*Through Tomorrow*

Despite clear-cut subversive intentions – at least in the works’ titles—Liam Gillick’s slick-looking show mostly just enhances Casey Kaplan’s sparkling new gallery space. As before, Mr. Gillick’s work blurs the line between art and design and between artistic and common labor, and conjures up a failed utopia. Two walls painted with schematic metal-gray mountain vistas and a few gray metal silhouettes suggest Bauhaus design and idealism, while the work’s title implies the deleterious effects of factory work: “The Views Imagined by the Workers After They Stopped Producing Cars.” On the floor, a four-foot square of red sparkle corralled within a black metal frame is overburdened with the title “Contained Hopes and Dreams of the Workers as They Walked Home From the Bar.” A larger square, in which the sparkle is black, is titled “Contained Production Field.”

A row of low-lying metal-and-Plexiglas screens and hanging screenlike texts (black and cut from aluminum) waver between the domestic and the institutional. They also suggest Mr. Gillick’s debts to Minimalism and Conceptualism, but remain too obscure in their meaning.

The best work in the show is “Collected Development Structures,” a quarter-scale but quite large model for a red-painted steel piece to be built in a park in Guadalajara, Mexico, sometime next year. A combination of sculpture, seating and screen that would be thrilling to come across in a public space, the piece suggests that Mr. Gillick’s art benefits from being in the world.

- ROBERTA SMITH

What is the relationship between artists and copyright law? Liam Gillick and Philippe Parreno offer some reflections on this topic in “Briannnnnn and Ferryyyyyy,” 2004, a series of short animations riffing on that old cartoon staple, the cat-and-mouse chase. Commissioned by curators Asa Nacking and Max Liljefors as part of the project “(rider): law and creativity,” the ten-episode series was first shown at the Konsthall Lund in Sweden in conjunction with a conference held at Lund and Malmö universities in November 2004. Deploying a slapstick classic, Gillick and Parreno portray art and the law as engaged in an endless chase, demarcating copyright as their new field of conflict.

Apart from the clashes between the films’ protagonists, the content is all in the fine print: The credits contain fragmented quotations about copyright issues derived from the input of an advisory group—consisting mainly of curators—that has worked with artists facing legal challenges. In one episode, music is attributed to “documenta II”; in another, the sound track is the work of “contested question of authority.” Similarly, the director could be “workshop for smugglers,” “selfknowledge,” or “free software”: all calls to arms in an emerging struggle between creativity and cash.

This work, whose collaborative origin complicates its ownership, explores how copyright could change our understanding of aesthetic autonomy. Traditionally art and the law have clashed on censorship—Western law typically protects artists’ freedom, but occasionally ethically or politically troubling works are not afforded much protection. The rise in piracy on the Web—and in legislation to prosecute offenders—has shifted art’s potential for offense from being centered on ethics and politics to questions of economics; from censorship to ownership. The radical misspelling of Bryan Ferry’s name is a strategy for turning a public figure into art without the private individual’s permission. Of course, the real cliff-hanger in this chase is whether the state will protect artists’ independence—not their freedom of speech but their right to use images for free.—JENNIFER ALLEN

## Liam Gillick and Philippe Parreno

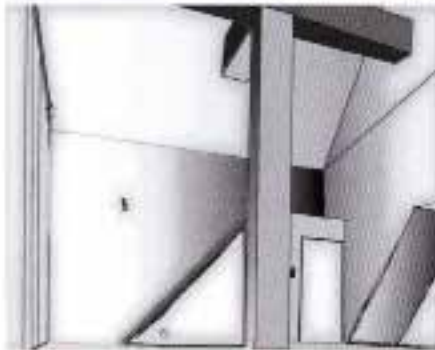
### TALK ABOUT “BRIANNNNNN AND FERRYYYYYY”

The scenario of “Briannnnnn and Ferryyyyyy”—that of the cat-and-mouse cartoon—details the attempted overkill of a potential victim who offers violent yet always inconclusive retaliation. Our take on this story begins with the realization that the cat has finally killed the mouse, leaving us in a gap akin to that between the Second World War and the cold war, or between the cold war and the so-called war on terror.

The work is intended to critique a given relationship between law and creativity. Crucially, it also makes pointed reference to problems around the fact of us having been commissioned to develop an exhibition project in relation to this issue in the first place. From the outset, we decided that working together would be a way to develop modes of refusal in relation to the assumptions at the heart of the project without resorting to tokenism or didacticism in the face of an excess of analysis or anecdote. Positioned as “riders” to the main event of the conference, we deliberately marginalized ourselves, conscious that historically disenfranchised groups have not necessarily sought the most transparent relationship with legality.

To emphasize this self-consciousness, we put together a semiautonomous group of advisers who could follow the development of the project and function in a precise relationship to the exhibition. The group consisted mainly of curators experienced in working with artists who have complex interactions with the law. Some, such as architect Nikolaus Hirsch, provided us with their own intricate and lengthy considerations of aesthetics and law; others, such as artist, curator and critic

# 1000 *words*



Peio Aguirre, directed us to various outside texts. Some responses were practical, such as the list of artists that curator Maria Lind provided; others were obviously last-minute and as vague as the invitation itself. By reproducing elements of the advice in the animations' credits, we at once acknowledged its supplementary nature and established a separate world of ideas. (The titles, credits, and other such information exceed the length of each episode.) We not only blurred authorial responsibility but integrated that blurring into the work itself.

Every part of the project was achieved collaboratively. Philippe drew the test sequences, which were then elaborated on by Ivan Orkeny, a young Hungarian artist based in New York. We edited everything together and created the titles and credit sequences as an integrated element of each episode. We are now developing new versions to be included on commercial DVD releases from Anna Sanders Films, a company founded in 1998 by Charles de Meaux, Pierre Huyghe, Philippe, Xavier Douroux, and Franck Gautherot.

The typeface used in the credits is Alien Gothic, which was originally designed by the Paris-based agency M/M for an exhibition of Philippe's work and was reused here before we told them what we wanted to do. The music at the start of each episode was originally produced to accompany the short clip that introduces every Anna Sanders release. (The clip itself is a collaborative work made by Sean Dack and Liam that has also been exhibited at Corvi-Mora in London.) The body of each episode includes new music produced while the film was being edited. The credit sequences feature a short segment of the beginning of a specific track by a specific group, presented as having been used in the context of academic research.

A number of potential legal complications thus arose in the production of the work, resulting not only from the extremely drunken condition under which the initial script was written but also from our parasitic relationship to a film company, our reuse of a font designed for another application, and our employment of music from a variety of sources. But none of these potential trouble spots proved to be straightforward, and the final effect of "Briannnnnn and Ferryyyyyy" is an excess of questions, quotations, and potentialities rather than a clear-cut demonstration of legal dilemmas.

Many artists working today—those who challenge immigration law, deal with questions of sexuality and identity, or fight the perversities of political regimes—test legal boundaries. "Briannnnnn and Ferryyyyyy" does not do this directly but has opened up a discourse in relation to the discussions that took place in the conference and, in Lund, created a point of entry to related ideas for passersby (the Konsthall is free and located on a busy public square). Copyright is an issue that artists tend to be relaxed about, as their work is protected by intellectual property law. But an artist may still choose to deconstruct his or her own protection on the one hand, and/or critique the control of ideas and information in the commercial sphere on the other. While "Briannnnnn and Ferr'fY'fyy" attempts this, it is not of}ly inconclusive but potentially infinite—or at least open to endless late-night reruns.

## Liam Gillick

### “A brief text on the possibility of creating an economy of equivalence”

Palais de Tokyo, Site de creation contemporaine, Paris, France  
January 26 to March 27, 2005

Often, Liam Gillick's exhibitions functions like a **film set** or a **display system**. Their play with **codes** of representation and the way **ideologies** shape the look of our urban spaces. By blurring the divide between the legacy of minimalism and speculative **social space**, Gillick implicates both. He sets up a sequence of parallels between modernism and the avant-gardes project for social emancipation; the postindustrial economy, contemporary art and exchange value in a post-consensus environment where speculation often takes the place of planning.

Liam Gillick works with **parallel domains** of knowledge (art, industry, urbanism and politics). He focuses on, for example, historic figures who have remained in the background (Ibuka, the vice president of Sony; Erasmus Darwin, the libertarian brother of the theoretician who discovered the evolution of species; or Robert McNamara, the secretary of defense during the Vietnam War), or **recreates recent historic events** that have passed unnoticed. Gillick elaborates tools in an attempt **to render our era intelligible**, while questioning the border between speculation and historic interpretation, **documentary and fiction**.

“Texte court sur la possibilité de créer une économie de l'équivalence” (A Brief Text on the Possibility of Creating an Economy of Equivalence), the show Gillick has come up with for the Palais de Tokyo, refers in fact to **a written work in progress** entitled “Construcción de Uno.” This book is to be published during the exhibition. The pieces in the **show figure in the three dimensions** of the exhibition space situations making up the book's story.

It recounts the adventures of a **group of laborers** who were led to run their factory themselves, with work conditions giving way to a postproduction situation. The former “producers” chose to return to their place of work and **take up the building** of ideas rather than automobile objects. One of their first tasks involves remodeling the building itself by cutting new windows in the facade. Another entails putting together **a mountain landscape** to be seen from those windows and from the long path that runs between the bar and their firm. They spend their days testing **new production models** with the idea of setting up an **economy of equivalence**, according to which one input unit would equal one output unit, i.e., an economy in which everything that is invested (physically or intellectually) would be paid back without loss or change.

*Their economic and social models seem to improve and become more and more elegant as the book progresses until we realise that it is they who have become the drained element in the process. Their energy and input into the models is increasingly supplementing the absences at the core of their theories. Yet, as may become clear, their desire to turn focus upon the question of how to fundamentally reorganise the way things are put together will have a lasting influence on others even while they eventually dissipate and dissolve into their former, now unrecognisable workplace. (Liam Gillick novembre 2004)*

Liam Gillick was born in 1964. He lives and works in London and New York.

CASEY KAPLAN  
121 WEST 27TH STREET  
NEW YORK NY 10001  
TEL +1 212 645 7335  
FAX +1 212 645 7835  
WWW.CASEYKAPLANGALLERY.COM  
INFO@CASEYKAPLANGALLERY.COM

# ART PAPERS

MARCH/APRIL 2005



## MILWAUKEE

The futuristic interior of the Milwaukee Art Museum sets the stage for **Liam Gillick's** new on-site installation, *Ovningskorning* (*Driving Practice Parts 1-30*) (September 1, 2004-September 1, 2005). This conceptual piece continues both his investigations of social and political experiments in recent history (namely, the late 1960s), and his use of language as a way to re-negotiate the boundaries between the viewer, the past and his work. While some of Gillick's projects may appear predictable and sterile, the unexpected is never far beneath his minimalist constructions and bare environments.

*Driving Practice Parts 1-30* is found in the Walter Schroeder Foundation Gallery, an expansive white hallway with curvilinear architectural elements. Natural light streams from several large portal windows, punctuating the space and accentuating its thirty archways. These architectural elements are enlisted in the piece, and inflected by Gillick's sculptural approach and predilection for a manufactured aesthetic. An aluminum black sentence runs horizontally, under each arch. Words are kerned until some transform into a mere stream of symbols. The sentences form a narrative loosely based on Volvo's auto manufacturing plant in Kalmar, Sweden. Gillick's cinematic and poetic tale begins with the following passages:

*an experimental factory  
following the recent closure of the  
plant  
the primary activity of the factory  
was to produce objects  
the methods of production were  
intended to alleviate  
what had been identified as the  
most destructive aspects of life  
on the traditional production line*

In *Driving Practice Parts 1-30*, time is both represented in narrative, and experienced physically. As the viewer walks the length of the gallery to view Gillick's piece, The passage of time is created. The narrative conveys various points in time—a beginning, middle, and an open-ended finale. Experienced or represented, however, time is non-linear. The installation can be read and performed both forward and backward. The plot is an ongoing event that could be in the future or the past. The viewer's ambulation awakens the text, experience inflects the narrative, completing the circular experience

of time and place. The Kalmar plant exists somewhere between history, reality, and our imagination.

In 1971, Volvo re-envisioned the work environment by adopting a socialist attitude toward frontline labor. It also provided autonomous and independent work group situations; employees were no longer restricted to singular functions on the assembly line. A historical parallel is subtly implied between Kalmar's avantgarde business model and the growth of site-specific and installation work. If on-site works are now common, the early-Seventies brought about a radical shift in the relationship between the artist and the museum. No longer simply the maker of works, the artist's role has continued to expand. The artist's work now encompasses a multiplicity of tasks and functions. Gillick is a critic, curator, writer, designer, and artist. If his work has been compared to that of Donald Judd, Gillick's recent projects invoke Joseph Kosuth's practice more closely. For both, the role of artist has become a changeable and malleable identity.

Gillick often recycles sections and elements from his own past works to create new installations. *Driving Practice Parts 1-30* began as a proposal to renovate Kalmar's Town Hall. Although the Volvo plant had already closed when Gillick visited Sweden, and if the Town Hall project was never completed, the ideas developed through this research have broad enough implications to be adapted to other contexts, and to reconfigure networks of experience and meaning. Gillick's work develops like a figure eight, overlapping and folding upon itself, layering history and entwining institutions in unforeseeable ways

-Tracey Fugami

CASEY KAPLAN  
121 WEST 27TH STREET  
NEW YORK NY 10001  
TEL +1 212 645 7335  
FAX +1 212 645 7835  
WWW.CASEYKAPLANGALLERY.COM  
INFO@CASEYKAPLANGALLERY.COM

# Sculpture

January/February 2004 Vol. 23 No. 1

## MATERIALIZED EXPRESSION

The Sculpture of **Liam Gillick**

by Alicia Miller

The work of Liam Gillick needs to be entered through the totality of his practice. His artwork is intimately interwoven with his work as a critic, writer, curator, and designer. What he makes for the gallery space manifests, explicates, and proposes a complex of ideas that he is concerned with in all aspects of his cultural production. He has written three novels, *Erasmus is Late* (1995), *Discussion Island/Big Conference Centre* (1997), and *Literally No Place: Communes, Bars and Greenrooms*, (2002), which cannot be separated from his sculptural and installation work. Gillick questions the relationship between the material world, especially that part of it generated by human industry, and the less tangible impulses, thoughts, and desires of humanity as coalesced into ideologies. Do we create it or does it create us? Gillick asks us to consider this from the space of the middle ground, between dissolution and resolution. In this space there is only flux, and, consequently, the effects of production both ideological and material can be considered as fluidly and flexibly maximizing the potential for interpretation. It is not easy territory to negotiate, but that is perhaps the point. There is still some chance of enlightenment and change in this space because knowing is not easily determined and pinned down.

Gillick's best known work from two series, "The What If? Scenario" and "Discussion Island," takes the form of Plexiglas and steel panels, screens, platforms, and created spaces, including wall texts, graphic designs, and random elements. This work serves to re-examine and reconfigure the accepted meanings and embedded mores of social space, particularly as it intersects with capitalist corporate culture. Gillick's works alienate us from the environments in which we are inextricably enmeshed, giving us the space to look and think again.

Gillick comes out of the generation of '80s YBAs (young British artists) that put London at the center of the art world. Though he does not share the notoriety of Tracey Emin and Damien Hirst, he is deeply respected among art world notables for the conceptual rigor and richness of his work. He was nominated for the 2002 Turner Prize for his exhibitions "Annlee You Proposes" at Tate Britain and "The Wood Way" at the Whitechapel Art Gallery. The installation of a major work at the Ft. Lauderdale airport and an exhibition at MoMA Projects in New York (both in 2003) have raised his profile in the U.S. He also created work for "Utopia Station," curated by Rirkrit Tiravanija, Hans Ulrich Obrist, and Molly Nesbitt for the 2003 Venice Biennale. Gillick lives in London and New York and is an adjunct assistant professor at Columbia University.

**Alicia Miller:** *Do you think of yourself as a “sculptor?” Though your work often takes three-dimensional form, it engages with such a complex system of social and cultural discourses that this term might seem misleading.*

**Liam Gillick:** There is a whole history of coquetry around the naming of practice. Goldsmith’s College, where I went to school, had blurred the boundaries between disciplines long before my time. So we were all playing with notions of cultural permission through the use of whatever visual tools might be appropriate at any given time. But this can sometimes repress the

*I can’t answer that question it’s a question of conscience, 2003. Painted laser-cut aluminum, 400 x 400 x 400 cm. Commissioned by the Alcobendas District in Madrid, Spain.*



relationship between objects that were historically named as sculpture and any other subsequent objects that are produced as part of cultural discourse. It is not enough to claim that your painting is “art” rather than painting, it is equally insufficient to claim that your objects are not sculptures. With my work, making objects is only one small part of a whole matrix of tools that are used to play with certain ideas about how we relate to and deconstruct the built world. Books, graphics, plans, images, films, texts—all these other elements need to be considered as key parts of what happens, but it would be a false repression of historical significance if earlier sculptural references were suppressed.

**AM:** *Much of your work engages the “semiotics of the built world” (to borrow a phrase) and the legacy of Modernism; what critique do you intend it to offer?*

**LG:** Many artists of my generation were initially involved in what I would describe as an Anglo-Saxon misunderstanding of Postmodernism. Their work was primarily involved in an ironic acknowledgment of the failure of Modernism. But it soon became clear that a number of us were involved in something more complex. I have described it as a simultaneous enthusiasm and skepticism for more utopianistic moments in Modernism. The renewed assessments of the modern that came with feminism and revised concepts of politics and identity shifted the consensus that all its products were flawed. It was certainly in the interests of corporate capitalism to dilute some of the more progressive legacies of utopian Modernism. While it would be false to imply that my work was all enthusiasm and no skepticism, I am interested in trying to sift through the functional aspects of Modernism to see which traces have managed to survive the relativism of our current situation.

**AM:** *The Whitechapel Art Gallery show “The Wood Way,” one of the exhibitions for which you were nominated for the 2002 Turner Prize, featured work from two ongoing series, “The What If? Scenario” and “Discussion Island.” This work seems to physicalize or make manifest the social systems and ideologies embedded in the built environment.*

**LG:** The two series are interlinked and hard to unravel. One came before the book *Discussion Island/Big Conference Centre* was published, and the other is intimately related to the book, just before and just after publication. The

book attempts to address some of the structural social and political implications of my earlier texts and scenarios like *McNamara* (1994) and *Erasmus is Late* (1995). I wanted to look at the notion of how the near future is controlled in a post-utopian context: to look at how the legacy of 18th-century thought produced a battle between planning and speculation. I always wanted to escape the “eureka” moment, where art is based on a revelatory singularity, and I found that the creation of a condensed core of ideas could lead to a more complex set of parallel starting points. Yet when I began the book, I found that there were some collapsed narrative problems. Initially, for “The What If? Scenario,” I attempted to create a series of backdrops and contingent structures that could shift around the emerging narrative. At one point, I put the text away completely and concentrated on addressing some out-of-focus ideas. I began to make work around the idea of discussion, negotiation, compromise, and strategy-not structures that might illustrate these ideas, but things that could designate a provisional space where it might be possible to consider and reassess such effects. This process of aestheticization of the abstract middle ground unlocked the text and allowed me to write a book without worrying about what kind of space it might be taking place in. The book runs parallel to a sequence of structures but does not describe them. Equally, the work itself spun free and became a productive series of visual markers.

**AM:** *Is there any separation between the writing and the making? Does one come before the other?*

**LG:** The two are continuous, ongoing, and absolutely melded together.

**AM:** *Are the built works intended as rhetoric?*

**LG:** Not really. The situation is more interchangeable. Sometimes the built work should be seen as a foreground element of extreme stand-alone importance. At other times, it really is a backdrop or should be seen as parallel and contingent in relation to a specific built environment. There are subtle variations in the aesthetic temperature of the work and relative status of the structures that are determined by context. There are moments when I ask a lot of the work, whether it be a pile of glitter or a large suspended ceiling. But that moment of rhetoric can implode in a second when it is placed in relation to the more complex propositions that are an inherent result of the writing process.

**AM:** *The utopian ideals of Modernist architecture seem to promise that we can build a better world—a notion fed by an almost unbearable idealism. What’s*



*Applied Discussion Platform, 2003. Powder-coated and anodized aluminum, 240 x 240 cm.*

*the relationship to idealism in your work as it comments on these utopian aspirations?*

**LG:** I am absolutely interested in idealism where it proposes a functional set of possibilities. The most interesting feature of Modernism is that most of its key elements were actually tested on some level. It is arguable that the suppression of idealism in late Modernism was historically the cause of most dissatisfaction with the results of its corruption. A junior Culture Minister in Britain claimed that my work aped the ugly ceiling of his factory canteen in south Wales in the 1960s. The truth of the matter is that if the ceilings of canteens had actually looked like my work, all of the conditions of life would have been on a parallel track to our actual history and maybe there would still be some factories in South Wales. I am not suggesting that my work has some ludicrous potential, just that it carries echoes of an idealism that was clearly corrupted through excessive pragmatism. Standard or minimum-sized apartments in Britain soon became maximum sizes; flexible structures built as community centers soon were boarded up bunkers with one way in and out. People make



*Stand Now on a Ridge, 2003. Vinyl text on wall, dimensions variable*

their own paths and find their own way, but they often do this in an environment of immediate neglect.

**AM:** *The works in "Discussion Island" and "What If? Scenario" are often titled using words that reference modes of engagement (discussion, dialogue, consultation) and intermediary spaces such as lobbies. What do these middle grounds, both physical and immaterial, hold for you?*

**LG:** These are the spaces in our socio-economic and psycho-sociological space that are somewhat illdefined. These enormous gaps can only be described with difficulty, but they need some degree of analysis if their effects are to be understood. Many artists find productive territories within a search for fundamental moments and effects. Others remain within a purely analytical play with the products of complexity. I was interested in developing a sequence of parallel relations with the areas of our life most vulnerable to exploitation and control. The implicit freedoms implied in the notion of discussion are not value free. They are hard won and offer an alternative set of tools toward making dilemmas and disagreements less dangerous.

**AM:** *Keeping your works in this state of flux seems*

*a quite optimistic stance, they are always pregnant with possibility. Are you optimistic?*

**LG:** I am not sure if it matters whether I am optimistic or not. On one level, I really am playing with tools that I am not entirely in control of; on the other, I am adding to a complex matrix of people interested in using visual art as an analytical possibility.

**AM:** *Your work has been described as "brilliantly corrupted Minimalism." Is this appropriate?*

**LG:** If you place my work next to classic Modernism, or late-modern Minimalism, it certainly spins out of any clear relationship. There are certain historical issues that I am interested in, but then again there are issues around Minimalism that artists from that period fought hard to avoid and that I have worked hard to remain engaged with.

**AM:** *Is your work political? Do you have a political ideology that you want it to argue for?*

**LG:** All art is political. It is impossible to veil the politics at the heart of any cultural production. Obviously, within an increasingly divided world, most artists would be trying to expose some of the paradoxes and problems inherent in the system. Even when art seems to be about refusal to take part in a precisely comprehensible set of concerns, it is there to prick the conscience of those who haven't got the time or energy

to devote to a deconstruction of their environment.

**AM:** *Your work walks quite a pointed line between art and design, and your practice also includes design commissions. Is there a difference for you between work done in the gallery space and work done in the public and commercial sphere?*

**LG:** There is no fundamental difference in the underlying concepts, but there is an enormous shift in the implications for the work. It seems clear that thinking about gray areas and the proliferation of nonspaces has led to many invitations to take part in thinking about how to adjust them. In many cases, however, the work actually produced only vaguely resembles the stuff done for galleries. This is because new factors emerge when you work in parallel to a city, a corporation, or an organization. Each situation or commission must be considered in relation to the broader context around 'it., I am not looking to insert my work into the realm of public art, but I am interested in inflecting each situation with a critical perspective otherwise impossible in the world of bureaucracy, planning, speculation, and consultancy.

**AM:** *Your installations often undercut coherent readings by integrating seemingly disparate elements—dirt swept into a pile and left, random objects that don't seem to fit. Is there a danger in being understood?*

**LG:** I remain interested in art as a carrier of refusal. Art can embody inarticulate pleas for viewing the world in a different order. Glitter, glasses of 7-Up, trying to match the color of Coca-Cola on the wall—all of these things should be viewed as corrective devices. They are moments when the complex narrative starts to fray and collapse. Alternately, they could be viewed as the moment of real ideas in the work, as if all the rest—the texts, the structures, and the propositions—were an incredibly convoluted way to reach a new, semi-materialized form of expression. The work is not completely resolved and has a tendency to literally disperse, dissolve, or alter form. It is arguable that artists are obliged to keep mobile and resist the pressures of relativism to explain (and therefore render exchangeable) their ideas. They are supposed to be doing more than creating souvenirs of passing thoughts; one way to do this is to keep the terms of engagement mobile and ill-defined. I am interested in the possibility of the work being passed around, but not so sure where the focus should be in any given case. If the reading of the work is too simplistic it seems that the least an artist can do is encourage the viewer to think again or review the material in a new way.

**AM:** *Color is a very important element in your work.*

**LG:** I am interested in materials that could be viewed as improved non-fundamental materials—alternatives that were developed to stone, glass, and steel. So colored Perspex, Plexiglas, and Acrylite are important for me. They are all by-products of trying to come up with a more efficient form of glass. I am working with the available range of colors so there is some kind of cross-over to the functional world of decision-making.



Installation view of "Projects 79: Liam Gillick, Literally" at MoMA QNS.

Maybe the colors are there to show that there is no neutrality. I could create simple diagrammatic representations of the abstractions I am interested in, but it is more productive to look at creating things that carry an element of attraction. There is a sense in which I am involved in an intuitive set of decisions made fast with the aid of a computer. I don't design something and then look for just the right color, I work with a range of permutations until something settles into a parallel relationship with the situation at hand.

**AM:** *What, for you, is the role of the artist in the socio-political landscape of contemporary culture?*

**LG:** Bruce Nauman's wry line about artists revealing mystic truths still has relevance, both in its playful use and its underlying half-truth, although it might seem a surprising one in relation to my work. I find a useful position playing among the paradoxes of the center ground. But my work functions best in relation to other art and structures beyond art, so it might be arguable to say that the role of the artist is to find those tiny spaces that exist in between our managed society and open them up for broad scrutiny or play and then move on. It is unclear to me whether my work is documentary or fiction. Sometimes it is both, and maybe that is a useful starting point in any examination of what I might be up to.

Alicia Miller is a freelance writer and head of education and public events at the Whitechapel Art Gallery.

CASEY KAPLAN

121 WEST 27TH STREET  
NEW YORK NY 10001  
TEL +1 212 645 7335  
FAX +1 212 645 7835  
WWW.CASEYKAPLANGALLERY.COM  
INFO@CASEYKAPLANGALLERY.COM

# ARTFORUM

DECEMBER 2003

TORONTO

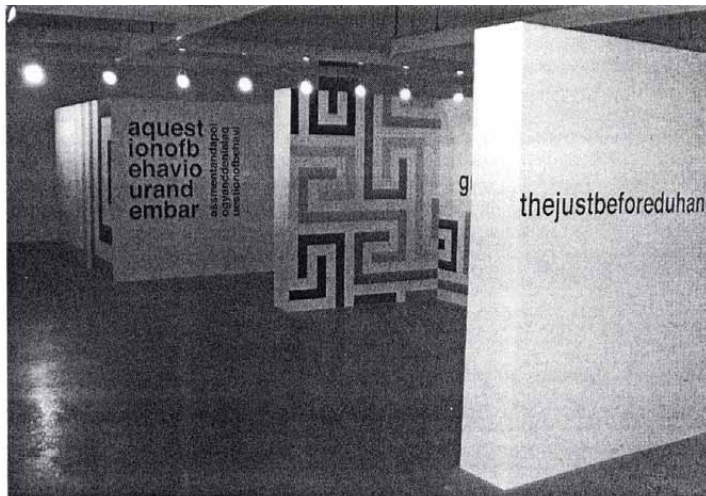
## LIAM GILLICK

### THE POWER PLANT

For the last ten years Liam Gillick has been preoccupied with the construction of the social. His spare, cerebral installations investigate relationships between artistic practice and the networked systems that establish the social realm--written language, iconography, economics, architecture, design, and, particularly, the elusive notion of "place." Gillick's work is always articulated within a retroavant-garde vocabulary of Minimalism and modernism, with explicit affinities to Donald Judd, Dan Graham, Barnett Newman, El Lissitzky, and Piet Mondrian, among others. These references to previous avant-garde practices themselves bring to mind the breakdown of borders among disciplines, thwarted social revolutions, and historical attempts to attain the ideal political condition--utopia.

"Communes, bars and greenrooms" was the latest product of Gillick's ongoing exploration of these themes. The exhibition consisted of two adjacent spaces: a low, white labyrinth and a long, high-ceilinged gallery whose floor was covered with opalescent black glitter. On the way of the former were repeating fragments of sentences, all words run together (like Carl Andre's text-pattern pieces) and printed on vinyl in a no-frills Helvetica typeface. Alongside the text were painted rectangles, squares, and representations of labyrinths in different shades of gray. On the floor were entropic traces of black glitter scattered by those who walked through the installation, whose actions made the entire situation into a dialectic of displacement (like the children in Robert Smithson's allegory of entropy, who play in a sandbox filled with white sand in one half, black sand in the other, and irrevocably mix up the two parts).

The exhibition's title and text fragments come from Gillick's recent book *Literally No Place*, which references both utopia (the literal translation from the Greek is "no place") and "literalism" as employed



Liam Gillick, "communes, bars, and greenrooms," 2003  
Installation view

in "Art and Objecthood," the 1967 essay in which Michael Fried defines Minimalism as an essentially theatrical paradigm: "The literalist preoccupation with time--more precisely, with the *duration of the experience*--is, I suggest, paradigmatically theatrical: as though theatre confronts the beholder, and thereby isolates him, with the endlessness not just of objecthood but of time; or as though the sense which, at bottom, theatre addresses is a sense of temporality, of time both passing and to come, simultaneously *approaching and receding*." It's possible to read Gillick's project as a narrative about the process of constructing utopia--an act permanently stuck (or lost) between "simultaneously approaching and receding" time. And Gillick's use of "literal," which was originally employed by Fried as a pejorative term, expresses the artist's self-conscious ambivalence about art's ability to directly affect the sociopolitical (i.e., "real") world.

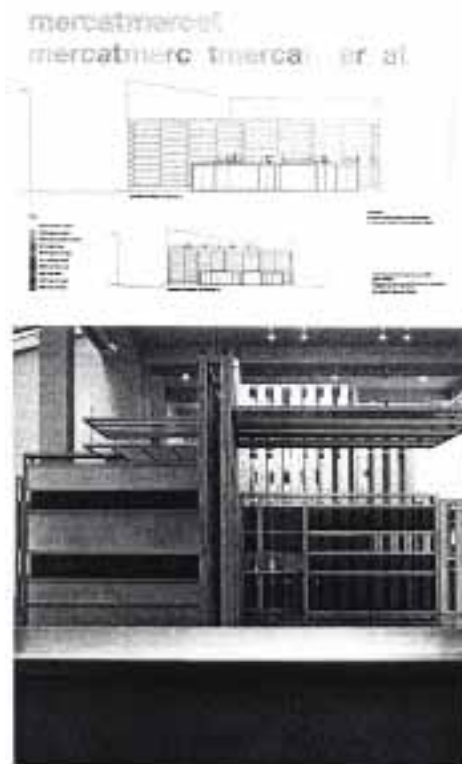
In 1967 Judd stated that "order underlies, overlies, is within, above, below or beyond everything." Although he owes a great debt to Judd, Gillick's sense of order is less idealized, less complete, intentionally theatrical, overtly social, complex, and fleeting. In a world where "Judd-like" has become an adjective to describe the latest simple, blocky design item, this exhibition raises the question as to whether Gillick is mourning the loss of an avant-garde with a social vision (i.e., an art practice that can critically affect the social realm) or if he's attempting to revive that tradition. Somehow, the answer is both.

Michael Meredith

CASEY KAPLAN  
121 WEST 27TH STREET  
NEW YORK NY 10001  
TEL +1 212 645 7335  
FAX +1 212 645 7835  
WWW.CASEYKAPLANGALLERY.COM  
INFO@CASEYKAPLANGALLERY.COM

## The Turner Prize 2002

# Liam Gillick



Mercatmercatmercatmercat 2002  
Signage for Mercado Central de Abaslos. la Vila Joiosa  
- Alicante. for Soto & Maroto. Spain  
Courtesy the artist

Installation view of The Wood Way at the Whitechapel  
Art Gallery, London, 2002

An exhibition of work by the  
shortlisted artists. 30 October  
2002 - 5 January 2003  
at Tate Britain

"I absolutely believe that visual environments change behaviours and the way people act. I'm not prescribing certain thinking - it is a softer approach than that - I'm offering an adjustment of things, which works through default. If some people just stand with their backs to the work and talk to each other, then that's good."

Through interventions into specific architectural spaces, whether a gallery, public housing estate or airport, Liam Gillick encourages people to negotiate and experience differently the environments he has manipulated. Gillick's practice is underpinned by rigorous theorising: he is as much a writer as a maker of objects. However, his work is shaped by a very visual awareness of the way different properties of materials, structures and colour can affect our surroundings and therefore influence the way we behave. His work employs the formal vocabulary of an updated Minimalism, recalling the work of Donald Judd for example, in its use of bold colours, off-the-shelf industrially produced materials, and repetitive, geometric forms. Gillick's visually seductive abstract and semi-functional elements might be a screen, a room divider, a large work table, a display case, a ceiling panel, vinyl text on a wall, or a floor sprinkled with glitter. By combinations of these he endeavours to create an intellectual as much as a physical dialogue with the viewer.

In the work *Coats of Asbestos Spangled With Mica* (2002), created specifically for the Turner Prize exhibition, Gillick pursues this desire to inform both our bodily perception of a space and our intellectual response to an altered environment. Here, the large suspended ceiling of brightly coloured Perspex panels held in place by an anodised aluminium framework dominates the entire space, transforming it into a glowing array of coloured reflections bouncing off the walls and floor. Echoing the mood that might be created by stained glass in a church, the work does not obstruct the visitor's movement within the space, but gives it energy and resonance. The title of the work is a reference to *The Underground Man*, by Gabriel Tarde, published in 1905, which describes a world in which 'the sun has gone out' and people have gone underground to create a new society of art and culture.

Gillick has commented on earlier works, 'There is something quite apparent about the idea of working with overhead panels and platforms as these tend to designate space. They withdraw from your eyeline when you are closest to them, so that they float overhead while projecting a subtle presence that alters

1964 Born Aylesbury, Buckinghamshire  
1983-4 Hertfordshire College of Art  
1984-7 Goldsmiths College, University of London  
Lives and works in London and New York

the colour of shadows. They operate quite delicately with important residual effects: Gillick does not wish to obscure the existing space, rather to articulate and redefine it. In *Coats of Asbestos Spangled With Mica* the precise geometric grid of the false ceiling, a version of the ceilings found within most offices and work spaces, reflects the ordered thinking behind the design of the galleries at Tate Britain created in 1979 by the architects Llewelyn Davies, based on a 9 x 9 m modular system. The dominating pyramidal ceiling design of the gallery is sometimes visible through Gillick's mixture of transparent and opaque Perspex, drawing attention to it while its harsh angular edges are gently softened.

Gillick's interest in how environments are constructed arises, in part, from a fascination with the way the formalist aesthetic and ideology of modernist architecture and design has informed the development of twentieth-century societies. In his writings, he comments on how late-modernist ideas of progress were applied to the problem of housing after the Second World War, only to be defeated, at least in Britain, by low budgets and bad management. Once this failure became apparent, the same thinking, often indeed by the same architects and designers, was applied to the corporate world, where the legacies of the modernist formal aesthetic are still found today in office blocks, business hotels and shopping malls. Given this state of affairs, Gillick investigates how 'planning,' that is, socially responsible ideologies, has been compromised by 'speculation,' essentially the way in which market forces determine the shape and function of a scheme or place.

Gillick's signature screens and platforms, made of aluminium frameworks and coloured Perspex panels, are reminiscent of ready-made architectural units found in both council estates and corporate architecture. Two celebrated series of works from the 1990s, *THE WHAT IF? SCENARIO* and *DISCUSSION ISLAND/BIG CONFERENCE CENTRE*, initially came out of Gillick's writings investigating the recent history of social and economic development. These texts explore the way in which peripheral events and secondary figures may influence our perception of history as much as the main characters. *ERASMUS IS LATE*, published in 1995, is centred around Erasmus Darwin, the elder brother of Charles, as he wanders in an opium-induced haze around central London in 1997, late for his own dinner party taking place in 1810. Other secondary people, such as Robert McNamara, Secretary of Defence under the US President H. Kennedy (the main character of an earlier project, *McNAMARA*, 1994) and

Elise McLuhan, mother of the writer Marshall McLuhan, wait for Erasmus as he encounters, at first hand, the effects on present day London of the social thinking and activities of his nineteenth-century era. This work displays Gillick's keen interest in time, in particular how notions of the recent past and the near future are shaped.

*DISCUSSION ISLAND/BIG CONFERENCE CENTRE* (1997) looks at the impact particular incidents can have on an ensuing sequence of events. The text examines how three people, named Denmark, Lincoln and Ramsgate, interact with their built environments, taking them through a series of related scenarios and shifting moments in time. As a way to expand and test the ideas presented in his writings, Gillick makes striking objects and installations in the form of screens and platforms designed to provoke negotiation and debate by the viewer. However, Gillick does not wish to predetermine the nature of these potential discussions so that they relate specifically to his own writings. Rather, he aims to provide a visual stimulus and trigger for ideas prompted by the works' titles, for example.

*DISCUSSION ISLAND DIALOGUE PLATFORM* (1997). or *LOCALISED DISCUSSION SCREEN* (2001). He points out, The work in the gallery is not a resolution of form and content, but is associative, discursive and parallel to text.

Gillick has consistently extended his practice into other disciplines, acting as designer, critic, author and curator. The display case presented in the exhibition, also designed by the artist, houses computer plans for recent public art projects and design work, offering a chance to encounter the breadth and diversity of his work. Gillick has always simultaneously worked on numerous plans and proposals, as varied as a new traffic system for the Porsche headquarters in the middle of Stuttgart, Germany, a new set of tinted windows for an airport in Florida, or a graphic design for a bookshop bag. His commitment to dedicated research and the energetic generation of new, interlinked ideas and proposals lies at the root of understanding his work. This belief in speculative thinking means that there will inevitably be some lines of enquiry that do not go anywhere or will reach a dead end, yet Gillick is not looking for conclusions or resolution but opportunities to experiment and play.

**KS**

**CASEY KAPLAN**

121 WEST 27TH STREET  
NEW YORK NY 10001  
TEL +1 212 645 7335  
FAX +1 212 645 7835  
WWW.CASEYKAPLANGALLERY.COM  
INFO@CASEYKAPLANGALLERY.COM

# ARTFORUM

MARCH 2001



Foreground: **Liam Gillick**, *Twinned Retraction Screens #1. and #2*, 2000, anodized aluminum and Plexiglas, ca. 7' 10 1/2" x 11' 9" x 1'. Background: **Liam Gillick**, *Renovation Filter Lobby Diagram #2*, 2000, mixed media, ca. 11' 10" x 39' 3". Installation view.

**BRISTOL**

**LIAM GILLICK**  
ARNOLFINI

Although he has shown frequently in the United States and continental Europe, this was Liam Gillick's first substantial exhibition in Britain. He therefore conceived "Renovation Filter: Recent Past and Near Future," if not exactly as a miniretrospective, then as an opportunity to indicate something of the breadth of his interests and activities. Rejecting the idea that art implies a particular function or look, Gillick's work touches on other disciplines and professions—notably design and architecture—without merely ironizing or undermining them. The desire is not to usurp the power and competencies of these disciplines and their associated professional structures, but rather to examine the processes by which those structures were assembled and fixed and, in doing so, to open them up for renegotiation.

One gallery contained examples of poster and logo design as well as *Vicinato 2*, 2000, a film made collaboratively with Philippe Parreno, Carsten Holler, Douglas Gordon, Rirkrit

Tiravanija, and Pierre Huyghe. Characteristic of Gillick's broad interest in "the language of how things are constructed, added-to, moderated, and renovated," the film shows a group of young men on a leisurely stroll in a pleasant Mediterranean setting. On the sound track a conversation takes place among several interlocutors (one with a Stephen Hawking-like computer-generated voice) concerning the potential inherent in undogmatic discursive activity. A second gallery housed two of Gillick's discussion platforms—areas of suspended ceiling that suggest possibilities for the dynamics of interaction among the room's occupants and *McNamara*, 1994, a film script giving a fictional account of events in the career of John F. Kennedy's secretary of defense. The first scene of the script has been realized as an animation that played on a Brionvega TV, a design classic from the early '60s.

A tall, L-shaped wooden screen dominated the main room. Like the screens and platforms that Gillick regularly constructs from aluminum framing and Plexiglas, it both entered and altered the space. Together with *Renovation Filter Lobby Diagram 4h and 4h*, both 2000—large wall paintings of repeat patterns derived from Celtic sources—the untitled screen provided not a focus for attention but rather what Gillick prefers to think of as a backdrop to the activities of those who use the room. The screen's open, rectilinear structure allowed it to

function as a shelving unit, among other things, and several of its surfaces provided homes for copies of Gillick's previously published texts, including *Discussion Island/Big Conference Centre*, 1997, and *Erasmus Is Late*, 1995, as well as *Erasmus Is Late Complete Prototype Manuscript File*, 1995, a stack of plain yellow A4 paper with printed top sheet masquerading as the full text of the book. Somewhere in status between blank page and finalized argument or narrative symbolic, that is, of the interesting period within which all thinking and working occurs—Complete Prototype also implicates the transition from manuscript to published book as another potentially fruitful period. This state of in-betweenness is one that Gillick cherishes. Suspicious of exclusivity on references to key figures or defining moments for their validity, he prefers to generate situations whose implications are less clear-cut. Here we were asked to focus on the unconventional ideas of freethinking, drug-taking Erasmus Darwin instead of the widely acknowledged cultural contribution of his younger brother, Charles. That terms such as "compromise" and "middle ground" frequently crop up in Gillick's discussion of his work is less a signal of hesitation or weakness than it is recognition that things yet to assume rigid form display the greatest potential.

-Michael Archer

# *Literally No Place* An Introduction

Reframed and reworked around a number of false starts and three short stories. *Literally No Place* will be a book that attempts to address the revised aesthetics that accompany certain types of softly communicated nebulous ethical shifts and exercises of conscience that have, recently left their traces around us. Re-organized socio-economic structures have sought out new homes for their mutable transfers of meaning. In doing so they have created new visualizations of activity. In this book there will be three stories which develop situations that could be described as significant and marginal simultaneously. Three moments that carefully position and then unpack specific microenvironments where the seeds of recent socio-economic revisions and reassessments could have found germination points. Three locations in a series of scenarios that were initially considered to be starting points for radio plays. Some things to be heard, not read or seen. These are some notes towards how to begin with the focus stalled and turned backwards to an antecedent for a moment.

Stuck in a commune. It was then that I turned in the ravine and climbed to the top of the bank and saw the place again. I had been gone for three days and had walked about a hundred kilometers. I felt fine. The stiffness and soreness had been walked off 'and my legs had been growing strong and my step was light and I could feel the ball of each foot pushing the earth down from me as I walked. Walden 2 by B.F. Skinner is a clunkily written vision. It is one of those superficially problematic texts that have formed a subliminal model for certain socio-economic developments and manifestations of branded activity that circulate, half-digested, around post-corporate and postindustrial environments. The idea could be re-framed as a beach towel, with the last sentence of the book printed or woven in: MYSTEPWASLIGHTANDICOUL FEELTHE-BALLOFEACHFOOTPUSHINGTHESANDDOWNFROMMEASIWALKED

The idea of a commune, or a functional campus-style workplace that can be described as a semi-autonomous self-sufficient place; isolation towards the distribution of ideas. A book and a text that could only be produced in an immediate post-war environment, an American environment that was on the verge of excessive sentimentality in place of a particular memory for socialist or Marxist potential and change. The head of the American Communist party died in the year 2000, maybe waiting for a round number before giving up. He had sent a letter

LIAM GILLICK, EXPANSION SCREEN, 1999  
anodized aluminum, Plexiglas, 24 x 144 x 12"



to Gorbachev during the late changes in the Soviet Union. Never repenting from a particularly perverse form of Stalinism, taking his style-book, even to the end, from a dour fifties model, all fedoras and homburgs and large, boxy, union built cars. *Walden 2* is a book that is somehow divorced from that ossified ideological lumpiness. A book produced in the gap between the Second World War and the first Cold War.

The projection of a place, a sketching of location, some idea of a commune, a functional rationalist commune that can really work and be productive through its focus upon the production, not just of better “things” but better “relationships.” Prescient in its gloss over what should be produced. Vague in its description of relationships between the site and nature of production and everyone else. A place that is not really sub-cultural or communistic in tone but something more complicated than that. “My step was light and I could feel the ball of each foot pushing the earth down front me as I walked.” It’s the moment of re-engagement with the land; it’s the moment when the main character expresses some belief in the world of the commune through its ability to make him feel the earth again. In touch for the first time, a Californian sense of touch, feeling the sand, not the sand of Omaha Beach but of a burgeoning desert place of Neutra Houses and exiled psychiatrists waiting for patients. *Walden 2* is a place where the trays are better designed than they were before the global conflict swept some histories away, where people are free because they cannot really communicate with the outside world, where they are free because they are stuck. *Walden 2* is a place where art is ten steps behind design, where focus on classical music is a reflection of the real values of the author, and a nice quasi-communistic touch. Any play with the idea of *Walden 2* is kind of complicated. It is no accident that the working model of the new technology companies of the late-twentieth century bore some relation to the legacy of Walden. Dusty location, flat organization and the residual potential of shady finances veiled behind initially content-free exchange and the rhetoric of functional utopia.

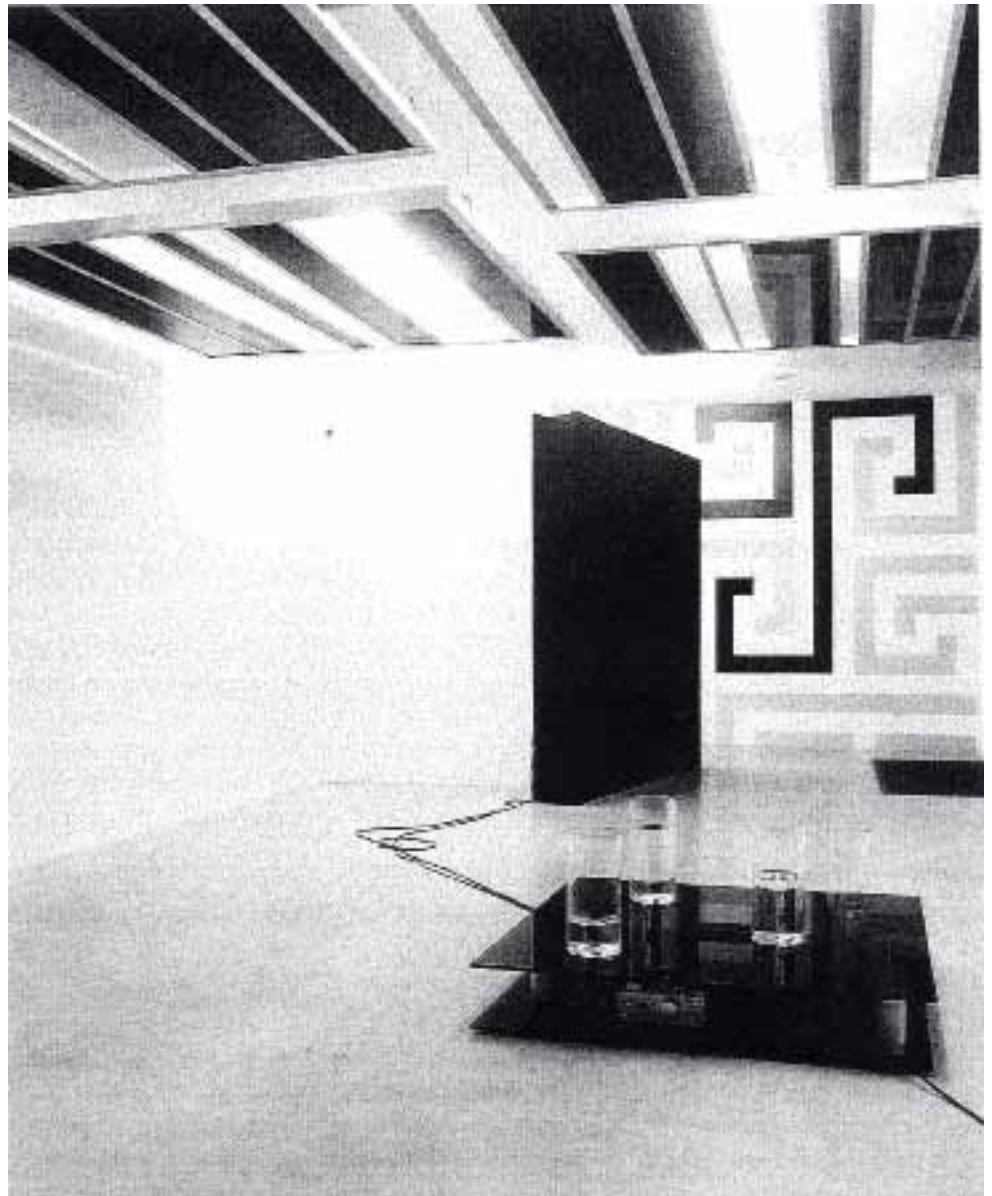
In *Walden 2* a group of outsiders join together to visit a new community and they are absolutely an American group of post-war people. They are from that moment where many were involved in action before education, the people who

are coming back from war with ultra-experience and stunted reflection. Those who have been engaged without necessarily thinking that they are implicated in what might come next. Which is not to downplay their moral imperative, but to accentuate their desire for Waldenistic potential. It is an acceptance that can only cut in after some serious skepticism and middleweight questioning. A form of utopia necessarily de-ideologized and experiential. The seriousness of their war-time actions reflects back on them only once they have returned home. A heart grabbed by a freezing hand every time it snows, reminders of huddling alone in the mountains of Italy, waiting to move forward. *Walden 2* can be transferred in time, the groups of people joining together have a functional relationship; they have a research necessity. They have a need to come and somehow project a place where they can be controlled and free simultaneously. Where their sense of ethics and sense of conscience can be collectivized, where it can be pulled together. A place that can be communal without being communist. A nostalgia point, but one that functions in a pioneer framework. The young pioneers of the Soviet model undercut by the legacy of the old (real) pioneers of the American model and the projecting towards technological pioneers of our recent past. One that provides all the potential of post-conflict reconfiguration, both literal and social.

A model for living and working, a model of appropriation; of a certain form of language. A desire for a certain lifestyle and a certain creativity without the attendant problems of control or prediction or planning. A speculative situation, where speculation alone replaces other collective action. Speculation as collectivism. You have it in *Walden 2* from 1948 as a kind of unwitting projection. It only functions as a fully formed ideal at the point of the Internet boom of the mid-nineties.

In *Walden 2* projection exists as a non-planned idea, as something that can only happen as a result of a collective desire and search for content-free research without revolution and as a result of a clumsily overwritten set of ethical revisions and shifts. This connection between the idea of a communal place that is based on desire within a rupture away from a fully planned communistic system has a fluid connection to a contemporary environment. It is a model of collectivism that challenged the Soviet model; it is a model that relied upon the presence of other models within a pluralistic, post-war American federal system. Not Federal central government, but the over-identification with a collection of semi-autonomous states and therefore semi-autonomous states of mind and self-images. "Where are you from?" replacing "Where are we going?" It's a connection that permits exposure to shifts of strategy towards the appropriation of apparently better or notionally conscience-based and ethically driven idea structures in the language of the consultant and the design detail. The use of a global-computer network that was never envisaged as a way to generate income looping round a story of a place that could never possibly be self-sufficient. The appropriation of an ethically derived language within a fractured sense of progress combined with a strange localist neo-conservative nostalgia. It is a situation that leads to ashrams and Microsoft; neo-conservatism and casual Fridays. For the small group of people living in *Walden 2* their world appears initially as a description of rationalist heaven, a perfect place, an organized place, a place that shows how things can be. The way they live through the conditions described in the book is connected to the proliferation of soft analysis; the excess of context that surrounds our contemporary decision-making; the escalation of attempts to predict a situation where prediction has come loose from the

idea of planning. Looking ahead has become a form of second-guessing wrapped in analysis, which really does plan the future but always claims to be reactive to the desires of the desired consumer. A situation where projection has begun to shimmer. *Literally No Place* will play with this completely revised sense of the relationship between the individual and place; the individual and the nature of production; and most crucially the function and use of creative thought as a fetish rather than a tool towards a paradigm shift in the relations between people and production, time-off and time running out.





LIAM GILLICK, installation view at Kasey Kaplan Gallery, New York, with *TRAJECTORY PLATFORM* (red), *LAPSE PLATFORM* (light blue), *NECESSITY PLATFORM* (yellow), *DIFFERENT PLATFORM* (orange) and *FLUCTUATION SCREEN* (back wall), all anodized aluminum and opaque Plexiglas, 2000



LAM GILLICK, DISCUSSION ISLAND MODERATION PLATFORM, 1997, anodized aluminum, Plexiglas, cables, fittings, installation view, Schipper & Krome, Berlin