A Text Collage

Originally published as ‘Olafur Eliasson: A Text Collage’, in *Take Your Time*, vol. 2: *Printed Matter* (Cologne, 2009), pp. 82–89.

> Everything is, I believe, situated within a process – everything is in motion, with a faster or slower speed, and everything is coloured by intentionality. This is the case when we talk about comprehensive systems, like an entire society or the development of an international search engine on the Internet, but it is also applicable when we are dealing with something personal, such as how we perceive a given space, right here and now, or how we will be interacting with another person tomorrow. All these relationships are evolving; all are in motion – they are not merely situated in the midst of their own time, but are rather of their time.[1]

The question is, in what direction are we moving? A simple answer is, into the future, forwards. Because of our cultural heritage, we take certain spatial principles for granted: for instance, that the future lies in front of us. But temporality is obviously not as linear as that. The Aymara people, living in the Andes, apparently see the passing of time in the opposite way to our standard conception: they see their immediate past in front of them; the future lies behind. Imagine facing the past instead of the future. This would have serious consequences for our spatial navigation.

> Bergson writes of "movement, which is reality itself". This is movement in the widest sense: of process, of change. Space, then, cannot be a static slice orthogonal to time and defined in opposition to it. If movement is reality itself then what we think of as space is a cut through all those trajectories; a simultaneity of unfinished stories. Space has time/times within it. This is not the static simultaneity of a closed system but a simultaneity of movements. And that is a different thing altogether. . . .
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> Space has its times. To open up space to this kind of imagination means weaving time and space together. You can't hold places (things, anything) still. What you can do is meet up with them, catch up with where another's history has got to "now", and acknowledge that "now" as itself constituted by that meeting up. "Here", in that sense, is not a place on a map. It is that intersection of trajectories, the meeting-up of stories; an encounter. Every "here" is a here-and-now.'[2]

> This experiment involves the placing of books on the table, one by one, beginning with George Kubler's The Shape of Time: Remarks on the History of Things (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1962):
> "Of arts and stars. Knowing the past is as astonishing a performance as knowing the stars. Astronomers look only at old light. There is no other light for them to look at. . . . However

> fragmentary its condition, any work of art is actually a portion of arrested happening or an emanation of past time. It is a graph of an activity now stilled, but a graph made visible like an astronomical body, by a light that originated with the activity." (p. 19)
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> Actuality is when the lighthouse is dark between flashes: it is the instant between the ticks of the watch: it is a void interval slipping forever through time: the rupture between past and future: the gap at the poles of the revolving magnetic field, infinitesimally small but ultimately real. It is the interchronic pause when nothing is happening. It is the void between events. (p. 17) [3]

> The new affiliation I would therefore propose for Eliasson's work is with the baroque. By this I do not mean seventeenth-century painting and sculpture – or, more pertinently perhaps, architecture – but a sensibility that never went away, only moved underground when more classical tendencies took over. It is a baroque we have seen reemerge with Gilles Deleuze and "his" Henri Bergson (the latter also a favorite of Eliasson's). Baroque is the name of a relationship between subject and surroundings, or reality, that is neither relativist nor nominalist but literally engaging. Considering the work as baroque requires a sense of history that breaks through the linearity of evolutionism, and is instead anchored in memory. This opens the way to the political in this art – the sense that subjects must engage with their environments, neither detached nor immersed but active, on innovative, creative, and responsible terms.[4]

Memories and expectations are important parts of one's encounter with art. Even though memories present stories of the past, they can be proactive, influencing one's expectations – just as your expectations can be retroactive and colour your memories. Or as Lewis Carroll brilliantly put it: 'It's a poor sort of memory that only works backwards.' Memories, feelings, and expectations have spatial connotations: they act in space, or better, they co-produce our conception of space. Space cannot be defined without including our experience of it. And singular experiences have an impact on the shaping of collective spheres. I think there's an important socialising potential here.

> Today, it is actually no longer possible to understand notions of space, volume and surface, without the notions of speed and maximum acceleration. Likewise and conversely, it is not possible to grasp the notion of the speed of light, without the notion of space, and not just time. Since speed is not a phenomenon but the relation between phenomena, the composition of acceleration and deceleration speeds is in no way a question of time, or exclusive temporality, but of space-time,

> and thus of relativity – and the same applies to the at once geophysical and geometric notions of PROXIMITY.
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> The near and the far have thus undergone sea changes since the acquisition of the "speed of liberation", that of those waves of reality which now convey our topicality – political, economic, artistic. . . .
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> Whence the recent reversal of the albeit fundamental notions of inside and outside, interior and exterior.
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> So the extreme speed of waves has become a milieu, a kind of TERRA INCOGNITA to be discovered, where the GLOBAL is the interior of a finite world – the world of planet earth – and the LOCAL is the exterior of this geophysical globality, in other words of everything that can be precisely located here and there, of everything that is IN SITU.[5]

Slowing down is great. This is not in the banal sense of taking it easy, of simply not rushing about. The Danish choreographer and dancer Steen Koerner embodies the necessity of slowness, being a slow-movement expert himself. If you move in slow motion, the world proportionally speeds up around you and meanwhile you begin to understand your body as a kind of architecture; a toolbox with which to create space. Right now, we are making film tests exploring this fact.

> According to the Oxford English Dictionary, the word cinematic is derived from the French cinématique, meaning "the geometry of motion." Eliasson's spatially transformative projects involve geometry as well as optics, while also conveying an indelible sense of filmic event and narrative. This is due to the fact that projections are not just images induced by light but also by the imagination, closer to the workings of mise-en-image than to mere retinal impressions.[6]

> Now, at a time when the idea of "virtual reality" is indifferently associated with innovation and creative possibilities, it is important to insist on a more precise sense of what "virtual" means: following the philosopher Gilles Deleuze, the virtual designates that which is not yet seeable, explainable, representable in terms of already existing concepts or expectations. Thus the actualization of the virtual must involve the creation of invention of the unforeseen, the emergence of an event that is not deductible from the conditions which preceded it. To cite Aldous Huxley: "Our perception of visionary objects possesses all the freshness, all the naked intensity, of experiences which have never been verbalized, never assimilated to lifeless abstractions". Clearly, so-called electronic virtual reality is just the opposite: its synthetic images are fully derivable from algorithms and simulation models which necessarily preclude the disclosure of anything not already formalizable.

> In this sense Eliasson's work is about a field of events in which nothing objective is produced, in which conditions are set in play to allow a zone of virtuality to hover at the edge of actualization. It is a question of mobile and non-hierarchized relations between spectator, apparatus and milieu – elements out of which a non-identifiable and non-localizable phenomenon coalesces and subsists.[7]

I think this question about actualisation is really interesting. It could be the actualisation of feelings, atmospheres, or meaning, for instance, in the exchanges between artwork (or experimental set-ups, as I have sometimes called my works), participant, and space – whether a museum or a public space. This topic connects to a different issue that has kept me somewhat occupied: to find an appropriate translation of the German term Umsetzung. The dictionary offers a row of possible terms: 'conversion', 'realisation', 'transformation', 'transposition', 'transfer', 'externalisation'. But 'actualisation' is, I think, also an option. I am particularly interested in this concept because it points to the performative qualities of a space, for instance. Spaces have intentions inscribed into them – by the architects, and through the spaces' histories and functions. But also users bring their own intentions, particular behavioural patterns, needs, and expectations to a space when entering it. The reality of a space is an actualisation of this plethora of intentions, their interaction and friction.

> The question is how to understand such immersive situations. I'm not sure that immersion here stands in opposition to reflection. . . . I think the very appeal to immerse yourself is a very strong aspect of your work and it gives people a distinct sense of the fact that there is, actually, available yet somehow "unframed" or "unformatted" time in the work and that one might want to engage with this time.[8]

The challenge is to be immediately engaged with a critical distance.

> Our constructions of nature change throughout the course of history, parallel to social, ideological, technical, and other changes. Physical structures themselves are not free from social determinations and socialized possibilities, because the apparatuses of perception and measurement determine which physical structures we recognize, as well as what we recognize as physical structures. Often, cultural models appear natural to the individual, such that they are falsely believed objective characteristics of our natural environment.[9]

> Previously, models were conceived as rationalised stations on the way to a perfect object. A model of a house, for

> instance, would be part of a temporal sequence, as the refinement of the image of the house, but the actual and real house was considered a static, final consequence of the model. Thus, the model was merely an image, a representation of reality without being real itself. What we are witnessing is a shift in the traditional relationship between reality and representation. We no longer progress from model to reality, but from model to model while acknowledging that both models are, in fact, real. As a result we may work in a very productive manner with reality experienced as a conglomeration of models. Rather than seeing model and reality as polarised modes, we now view them as functioning on the same level. Models have become co-producers of reality.[10]

In Matter and Memory (1896) Henri Bergson stated: 'Does not the fiction of an isolated material object imply a kind of absurdity, since this object borrows its physical properties from the relations which it maintains with all others and owes each of its determinations, and consequently its very existence, to the place which it occupies in the universe as a whole? Let us no longer say, then, that our perceptions depend simply upon the molecular movements of the cerebral mass. We must say rather that they vary with them, but that these movements themselves remain inseparably bound up with the rest of the material world.'[11]

> For Latour, existence is always without essence, because the conception about essences, as he writes, is rooted in a scraping away of the relations within which the existence makes its appearance. For this reason, he also dismisses the traditional differentiation between, on the one side, the acting subject and, on the other, the passive object (or space): It is not only objects or spaces that are formed by subjects; subjects are also formed by objects and spaces and the creative moment first comes into being by acknowledging such a dissimilarity and such a dissemination.[12]

> It's . . . productive to think about objects as quasi objects that create a quasi we – we start to negotiate how we address the object and ourselves with it, and learn that our actions have consequences for our understanding of the object. To open space for a quasi understanding of things means to support differences. And quasi as concept is at the same time against indifference. The quasi laboratory produces a non-normative resistance to indifference.[13]

> Contrary to common belief, the [eye] does not generate the behavior, but is generated by it. And yet without the appropriate

> organ, no behavior could ever become manifest (there can be no actual walking before there are legs). We need to accept the idea that behaviors may exist first as latencies that exert pressure on existing material patterns, while the patterns then mutate and "innovate" in turn to absorb and express the pressure of these latent behavioral fields. All that we humans are capable of, that is, our exquisite sensitivity to what occurs within and outside us, is a distillation and reorganization of the environments we have ancestrally been part of.[14]

> It is no coincidence that problems of temporality play a crucial role in any attempt to come to grips with subjectivity; a long line of writers has located anxiety elicited by time at the very heart of the subject. Commenting on the Kantian idea of the "self-affection" of time as the most original form of self-awareness, Merleau-Ponty concludes, "It is of the essence of time to be not only actual time, or time which flows, but also time which is aware of itself." This turning back of time toward itself, an original temporal fold, traces out interiority and represents the very "archetype of the relationship of self to self." This original form of becoming a subject can only be grasped as a kind of architecture of time.[15]

Subjectivity is ultimately temporal. Only by acknowledging this can we negotiate our own identity and the world. If we lacked an immediate relation to time and changeability, we might revert to a view of our surroundings as being natural and static. Time is a tool with which to navigate the world; it makes us grasp that the subject is causally intertwined with its surroundings. This causal relationship brings to the fore the notion of responsibility – it cultivates feelings of community. Social cohesion is a dynamic force – it is never simply evident, never simply a fixed 'we' nor an exclusive kind of identity based on nationality, religion, etc. The philosopher Jean-Luc Nancy sees individuality and community as being equally important; being in the world is always a being-with. Being singular plural.

> In "The Distribution of the Sensible" the French philosopher Jacques Rancière outlines an approach to politics and aesthetics that focuses on "the manner in which the arts can be perceived and thought of as forms of art and as forms that inscribe a sense of community." Every artistic articulation involves a distribution of shared experience and is thus a figure of sociability or community.[16]

> Given that the activation of the viewer has long been thought to have an emancipatory dimension – sparking an awareness that can be applied to life and politics – what happens to that potential when it is also the locus of the operations of mass-media

culture? It has been noted that "in the seventies and eighties, we lived in a society of spectacle, in the nineties in the society of participants, and we are now developing a 'society of interactors'". If so, how can the promise of individual human agency offered by both Eliasson and the museum remain a critical or oppositional stance?

These are among the most important questions facing contemporary museum and artistic practices, and the directions taken in response to them will reflect critically on the integrity, credibility, relevance, effectiveness, and import of the role of visual arts in society well into the future. While the answers are being grappled with right now, it is clear that they necessitate neither railing against consumer culture nor attempting to break clean from it (an impossible and in any case undesirable notion, for it is too important to be left alone). Rather, they center on the quality of engagement that the museum and art can offer.[17]

The revolutionary practices of Mao and Marx have played out into revolutionary states which have done much to discredit the perceptions and reasons and hopes on which they were built. They have left us, strangely disoriented, in a new pre-revolutionary state. Is that not why Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's insistence upon the role of sensation speaks so strongly to us? Is not Olafur Eliasson grappling again with the eternal contradictions in . . . the origin of the light, in the perceptions of the people around us? Is not this situation familiar?[18]

We constantly negotiate or stage ourselves, and one state isn't necessarily better than another. It's a matter of friction. To open and close is a potential mechanism with which we can evaluate ourselves and the world around us; we can create, or co-produce, our own reality. Of course there are exceptions, but I do think that the responsibility for how the world is constituted is to a large extent in our own hands.[19]

To me, one absolutely central point is that reality is continuously produced – it is never simply out there (or in here). One could say that my studio is a machine that produces reality; a building produces reality; a parliament likewise – and so do books.

1 Olafur Eliasson, 'Vibrations', in *Olafur Eliasson: Your Engagement Has Consequences; On the Relativity of Your Reality*, ed. Caroline Eggel and Olafur Eliasson (Baden: Lars Müller Publishers, 2006), p. 59.

2 Doreen Massey, 'Some Times of Space', in *Olafur Eliasson: The Weather Project* (London: Tate Publishing, 2003), p. 111.

3 Molly Nesbit, 'Old Light' in *Olafur Eliasson: Life in Space 3; 09.05.2008*, ed. Studio Olafur Eliasson and Zumtobel AG (Dornbirn: Zumtobel AG, 2008), pp. 10:18–10:21.

4 Mieke Bal, 'Light Politics', in *Take Your Time: Olafur Eliasson*, ed. Madeleine Grynsztejn (San Francisco: San Francisco Museum of Modern Art; London: Thames & Hudson, 2007), pp. 156–7.

5 Paul Virilio, 'An Exorbitant Art', in *Olafur Eliasson: Colour Memory and Other Informal Shadows*, ed. Caroline Eggel and Marit Woltmann (Oslo: Astrup Fearnley Museet for Moderne Kunst, 2004), pp. 85–6.

6 Klaus Biesenbach and Roxana Marcoci, 'Toward the Sun: Olafur Eliasson's Protocinematic Vision', in Grynsztejn, *Take Your Time* 2007 (see note 4), p. 183.

7 Jonathan Crary, 'Olafur Eliasson: Visionary Events', in *Olafur Eliasson* (Basel: Kunsthalle Basel; Schwabe & Co AG, 1997), unpaginated.

8 Ina Blom, 'A Conversation between Ina Blom and Olafur Eliasson', in Eggel and Eliasson, *Your Engagement Has Consequences* 2006 (see note 1), p. 175.

9 Christa Steinle and Peter Weibel, 'Editorial', in *Olafur Eliasson: Surroundings Surrounded; Essays on Space and Science*, ed. Peter Weibel (Graz: Neue Galerie am Landesmuseum Joanneum; Karlsruhe: ZKM Center for Art and Media Karlsruhe; Cambridge, MA: MIT, 2001), p. 14.

10 Olafur Eliasson, 'Models are Real', in *Olafur Eliasson: Your Mobile Expectations; BMW H2R Project*, ed. Martina Kupiak et al. (Baden: Lars Müller Publishers, 2008), pp. 227–8. Previously printed in *Models/306090 Books* Volume 11, ed. Emily Abruzzo et al. (New York: 306090, Inc., 2007), pp. 15– 25.

11 Henri Bergson, *Matter and Memory* (New York: Zone Books, 1999), pp. 24-5.

12 Marianne Krogh Jensen, 'With Inadvertent Reliance', in *Olafur Eliasson: Minding the World*, ed. Olafur Eliasson and Gitte Ørskou (Aarhus: ARoS Aarhus Kunstmuseum, 2004), p. 121.

13 Olafur Eliasson, 'Q: Quasi', in *Studio Olafur Eliasson: An Encyclopedia*, ed. Olafur Eliasson and Anna Engberg-Pedersen (Cologne: Taschen, 2008), p. 333.

14 Sanford Kwinter, 'Eyes in the Heat: Speculations on the Predatory Foundations of Perception', in *Olafur Eliasson: Chaque matin je me sens different, chaque soir je me sens le même*, ed. Angeline Scherf (Paris: Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, 2002), unpaginated.

15 Daniel Birnbaum, 'Heliotrope', in Grynsztejn, *Take Your Time*, p. 140.

16 Ibid., pp. 133–4.

17 Madeleine Grynsztejn, '(Y)our Entanglements: Olafur Eliasson, the Museum, and Consumer Culture', in Grynsztejn, *Take Your Time* 2007 (see note 4), p. 21.

18 Molly Nesbit, 'I am the tiger', in Eliasson and Ørskou, *Minding the World* 2004 (see note 12), p. 144.

19 Olafur Eliasson, 'F: Friction', in Eliasson and Engberg-Pedersen, *Studio Olafur Eliasson* 2008 (see note 13), p.150.