Studio Olafur Eliasson

Anna Engberg-Pedersen
Kitchen and *Model room*, Studio Olafur Eliasson
Berlin, Germany
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Alex Coles: I'm particularly interested in your role in the studio because it's so specific to this studio. No other studio I've visited has someone who is so active in shaping and nurturing the discourse on the work the studio produces as a fundamental part of its activity. It also means that a critic or historian entering from the outside is pressed into radically revising their approach.

Anna Engberg-Pedersen: So I'm a productive obstacle?

AC: Yes, I guess you are. Of course, at the same time it also totally makes sense to have someone in the studio who ensures not only that the discourse on the work is kept alive but also that every opportunity to produce a catalogue is maximized.

AEP: It's an interesting point of view. I certainly wouldn't want me or us—and this is a somewhat complicated relationship in itself—to give the impression that we feel self-sufficient or that we don't want to invite others in. Anyway, this isn't really the case, I think. It's more about seeing the potential in an expanded notion of what a work of art is and can do.

AC: Have you visited other studios where people do what you do?

AEP: To be honest, I have little to compare with. Our studio currently has an archive with about six people, whose functions include publications and research, too. I organize and develop this unit in close dialogue with Caroline [Eggel], who manages the exhibitions. And we in turn balance all our doings with Felix [Hallwachs], our studio director, and Sebastian [Behmann], who is the managing architect. Then there is Olafur's school [Institut für Raumexperimente] with Christina [Werner] and Eric [Ellingsen] and all the participants—that's a somewhat independent entity and very much about knowledge production and experimental approaches to learning, to perception, and to ways of making art.

But whatever I and we do here is not as strategically planned as it might at first appear. My collaboration with Olafur began with a small conversation book we did together in Danish in 2004. Right after this I went to Goldsmiths College in London to do an MA and then returned to complete my studies at the University of Copenhagen. In 2006 I joined Olafur's studio full-time and for some time commuted between Denmark and Berlin before finally relocating to Berlin in 2007.

AC: Had your studies included some of the issues you came to be involved with at the studio in either subject matter or approach?

AEP: The MA I did in Copenhagen was a very traditional art history course with an emphasis on history. Goldsmiths, on the other hand, was important because it was much more engaged with contemporary interdisciplinary discourses. It wasn't really focused directly on art practice but on the broader context of critical theory; many applications to actual art practices had to be actively made by the student. Perhaps the key experience I had was a lab course called "The Ethics of Cultural Participation." The tutors requested that we perform our response in groups at the end of the four months rather than engage in traditional means of communication such as writing.

AC: The Life in Space seminars and publications hosted and generated by the studio come to mind.

AEP: Yes, but in these seminars, uncertainty is used much more productively. Some events have worked better than others, depending on the specific dynamics amongst the participants. I remember Sanford Kwinter's enthusiasm and his finding the situation exhilarating—he's obviously one to thrive on a setup like this, whereas others would actually prefer to carefully prepare an argument or a response beforehand.

AC: How did you arrive at the specific format for these seminars?

AEP: "Life in Space 1" in 2006 and "Life in Space 2" in 2007 were totally improvised. Both took place within the project *Your mobile expectations: BMW H2R* [2007]. We invited friends and acquaintances and people we would like to know to join us at the studio for a day full of experiments, encounters, coffee breaks ... there was no agenda circulated, just the get-together idea. By the time we arrived at the third seminar in 2008 we wanted to test a different format, so we invited some people to perform or present brief spatial propositions—what we called table-top or hand-held experiments. But they were only appetizers that should inspire the on-site thinking.

AC: To jump back a moment to when you were at Goldsmiths: it was interesting what you said about the dynamics at play there. To transfer from the traditionally monological setup of the critic and historian to a dialogical one wherein you are preparing the ground and conditions for a discourse to come is quite a leap.

AEP: Not really, not in my head at least. It comes with gradually finding your way—and in this case the way led into the organism that is Olafur's studio—and carving out a space for yourself, a platform from which you can speak. What's possible when you are on the outside is slowly

transformed as you make your way to the inside and begin to understand how the studio works on a day-to-day basis. For Olafur, the discourse on his practice is a vital part of the art itself. So in his way of thinking about the studio, archival work should be a proactive activity. Theory is practiced—it's always held against an artwork, tested. It consists of ideas or questions that inform the production of an artwork. For me, it's invigorating to be a "theoretical agent" in a space in which art is produced. I see no radical difference between the work that I do and that of one of the architects or of the craftsmen or technicians in the workshop downstairs.

I can give you a recent example of how tightly linked the testing and development of work and ideas can be. Upstairs at the school, Eric had conceived a three-day marathon with Olafur and Christina called "Space Activism." One of the participants was a landscape architect based in Berlin. During his presentation he briefly mentioned these convex black mirrors that were used in the eighteenth century by amateur painters. Olafur and I later spoke about these mirrors, called Claude mirrors, and I did some basic research on the topic, tracking down a book, etcetera. Leafing through it, Olafur then stumbled on a passage mentioning that, in some instances, obsidian, the volcanic glass, was polished and used in place of mirrors. This made him recall a recent trip with his students to Iceland where they walked through a field of natural obsidian. There was a tenuous link between the two things that we wanted to explore, and we decided to use some of his photographs from the trek for a contribution to a Paris-based journal together with a new text we wrote. His interest was in how the landscape could be calibrated by using the obsidian as a mirror, overlaying the space ahead with the reflected space just left behind. This led back to the Claude mirrors which opened onto a series of broader experiments using mirrors to investigate aspects of time, space, and motion in small films. A rather fierce renewed interest in stones is also a spin-off of this ongoing dialogue, which then includes a number of my colleagues who deal with actual

exhibition and work development. It's funny how a topic can move forward with a different trajectory without you knowing it, reflected through the work of others, and then you encounter it again, two stages ahead. Maybe it has materialized into an artwork by that time.

AC: The different facets of the studio's activity are often linked but also become more distinct once they get to a certain stage when the knowledge that comes with a discipline—especially architecture—kicks in. What you do by necessity very much connects them all because it is discourse-based, and discourse is common to all disciplines. That means your position, even though it transforms in different situations at different times, must, by necessity, be an interdisciplinary, or even a transdisciplinary one.

AEP: It's intriguing to hear you try to verbalize what it is we are doing [*laughs*]! This activity is implicit to my everyday work and seldom explicitly on my mind. The things I do don't happen by design but rather in response to what the studio is doing. I continuously ask myself what I can contribute within a given situation—to add to the complexity of the questions being asked.

AC: Is there still a structure in place where there are definite disciplines between which dialogue can take place?

AEP: This is a theoretical discussion that actually has little to do with everyday life and work here, but let's theorize by all means. For Olafur, I guess, it's important to explore various fields of research in order to extract knowledge or a certain vocabulary that he can bring back to art, so to speak. What we do is essentially art and what we are borrowing from other fields—words, molecules, whatever—we insert into art practice, transforming them and putting them to use in a way that expands what we are producing in the field of art.

For instance, when thinking about the communication of the Serpentine Gallery Pavilion [2007, with Kjetil Thorsen] we could highlight that extraordinary situation of an artist working in the field of architecture, almost like an architect—the "art and architecture" question—but we might equally well jump right to the question of what this "content machine," to borrow a term from Hans Ulrich Obrist, was doing, in the park, with its public program, used by the many drop-by visitors—inline-skaters driving down the ramp, people reclining in the terraced interior where floor and walls built one continuous movement ...

I myself am not a strong fan of either the interdisciplinary or the transdisciplinary. I am enough of an eclecticist to see potential in both positions and intuitively move between them as I see fit. We need disciplines and the knowledge they produce, discretely or semi-discretely. It's great that they cultivate different sets of questions and facts and concerns—the friction can be tremendously productive. But we also have to be agile enough to move more fluidly beyond borders.

AC: I'm thinking on my feet here, but surely the overriding factor that defines something is its context and how this plays out against its internal fabric? As a practitioner who works within the primary traditional framework of art—commercial galleries, museums, etcetera—then what is produced is perceived as such. But when a discipline has been contorted and expanded to such a degree through an artists' perpetual play with the language and contexts of other disciplines then surely there is no discipline to return to any longer—just frameworks that constitute contexts that are now outmoded.

AEP: Micro-systems can still emerge in which a position can be assumed—not a system that necessarily has internal stability for all eternity, but just enough to allow you to operate now and a little ahead in time. Then it becomes about how you connect these micro-systems to one another. And that, in turn, is a question of identity and self.

AC: That's an eloquent way of putting it.

AEP: Sometimes you just feel a border between disciplines, without being able to really explain it further.

AC: In relation to these notions of the interdisciplinary and the transdisciplinary, while spending time in this studio I find it very difficult to interpret the activity—despite all discourse to the contrary—as just art.

AEP: "Just" art?!

AC: By just I mean in the sense of it singularly being art—of it being art before anything else. Almost immediately, my mind slips towards other disciplines and their contexts.

AEP: So what are we really doing in your opinion?

Caroline Eggel
Model room, Studio Olafur Eliasson
Berlin, Germany
July 6, 2010

Alex Coles: I know you are one of the longest standing members of Studio Olafur Eliasson. Could you tell me a little about your academic background, how you came to meet and work with Olafur, and what the studio was like when you started?

Caroline Eggel: I finished my studies in art history in Zurich with a thesis on Fischli/Weiss's work in 2000. While working on an artists' film program for BüroFriedrich the following summer, I had the pleasure to meet Thomas Demand who introduced me to Olafur, with whom he shared a studio. By that time Einar Thorsteinn was collaborating on a few projects with Olafur and Pat Kalt organized the studio. We then started to set up a more professional environment in order to work closely with Olafur on the projects on a daily basis and to free him from administration and coordination concerns. There was a bunch of freelancers producing the actual works, testing and collaborating with some Berlin-based companies. Only when Sebastian started in 2001 were we really able to establish a studio-based production. This changed the work method quite substantially.

AC: How has the way decisions are made changed since you first arrived at the studio? A number of your colleagues have mentioned how things are much more professionalized now and that Olafur is less directly involved because of the pressures on his time.

CE: To my mind, Olafur is always directly involved when it comes to artistic decisions. Time pressure has been an issue from the beginning, since he is always busy and was always keen to think about several projects at the same time. But there is of course a limit as to whom he

can be in contact with. There was a time when he was personally involved with everybody at the studio, simply because there were fewer colleagues. And as the number of projects increased and more people arrived, certain groups were formed to collectively work on specific projects. This means that the "side effects" of the conception and production of the artworks rose as well: the archive, publications, organization took a lot more attention and needed care. Since all these circumstances were well arranged, you could certainly call this professionalization! Olafur was always very conscious of all the details that happened beside the real work. Nothing ever was a coincidence. But this shift evokes other sorts of communication: now we are forced to internally discuss things more effectively. When I work with Olafur on an exhibition, I mediate all kinds of information to the different teams: I speak to the architects planning the works; consult Biljana [Joksimovic-Große], who has been taking care of the archive for several years, in order to think of references; pragmatically organize with the planning architect Myriam [Thomas] a convenient setup and method to draw, test, and experiment in the studio, corresponding to the particular concepts of the works; develop a platform for tests together with my colleagues in the workshop; and begin a dialogue with Anna [Engberg-Pedersen] to connect the ideas.

AC: Would you say that the studio is a community? If so, how has this community developed over time?

CE: In the sense that we are working together, almost all of us already for several years, the studio forms a community. This provides a certain spirit that enables us to collaborate. But this community exists within a bigger community of Berlin-based artists, of internationally established artists, and of the larger world. The studio consists of individuals who also create communities themselves. And it seems crucial to me to highlight the fact that the studio and Olafur benefit from the diversity of individual skills and attitudes. Even if there is not much fluctuation in

the team setup, relations are constantly changing. Making exhibitions, for example, brings together all the activities in the studio, practically but also intentionally.

AC: Can you tell me about your precise role in "Innen Stadt Außen" at Martin-Gropius-Bau [2010], and how this worked in relation to the other people involved with the exhibition—including Sebastian, Olafur, and the exhibition's (publicly acknowledged) curator, Daniel Birnbaum?

CE: I was working closely with Olafur on the concept of the overall show, including different outside projects, the exhibition at Martin-Gropius-Bau, the individual new works, a film, and the catalogue. We started the process with conversations between Olafur and Daniel concerning the role of Berlin and life within the city, and subsequently involved Sebastian to realize these ideas by both choosing existing works and producing new ones for the show. Each of us played a substantial role within this process of bringing thoughts into being. I was basically anchoring Olafur's and Daniel's intentions in a dialogue that embraced various practical issues and was then communicating them both to the institution and our studio team. Martin-Gropius-Bau has a special structure, inasmuch as there is no curatorial team based in the museum, so we took these roles upon ourselves. As appointed curator, Daniel brought these ideas into a format that was suited for display and mediation inside the museum, while also reaching into public space. We intensified this format through the catalogue—a project that I also managed. Together with the graphic designers, we transformed it into a real portrait of contemporary Berlin rather than just a documentation of the project. This required me to not only be facilitating communications between Olafur and the designers in order to bring the ideas behind the catalogue into form but also actively participating in the dialogue with material with which I'm very familiar. Everything that happened at the studio at that time influenced the progress of the ideas behind the exhibition in some way.

AC: Did the school's experiments and walks play a role in this?

CE: Absolutely. Everything that takes place in the studio and the school influence the current exhibition planning—and vice versa. I am working on a program called "Gray Sheep" where students from the school are involved, as well as the artists who are working in the studio. It forms a small platform that in a very direct way consolidates what is happening around Olafur's studio. It offers a dialogue with a broad scope but in a small format. This exchange activates reflections on art production and representation, which are both crucial to my position and helpful to the life of the studio as well.

Eric Ellingsen
Model room, Studio Olafur Eliasson
Berlin, Germany
July 8, 2010

Alex Coles: The idea of a series of studios for the students participating in the Institut für Raumexperimente set within the larger studio of a professional artist is intriguing. Had you been working on some of the seminars with Olafur Eliasson prior to setting up the school in 2009?

Eric Ellingsen: Kind of. I was still teaching full-time in Chicago and part-time in Toronto. Olafur suggested that we collaborate on the school. We met while I was a graduate student, and I think sometimes Olafur finds students more interesting to talk to than professionals. That led to him writing the introduction to a book on models I was editing. This in turn led to me doing Étienne-Jules Marey-like experiments at his Serpentine Marathons in the summer of 2007, and being invited to two of the Life in Space seminars at the studio. Olafur and I, and sometimes Anna [Engberg-Pedersen] too, had these get-to-know-each-other-better conversations over Skype between Chicago and Toronto and Berlin. Olafur and I then began doing Skype conversations for a few hours every Thursday for a few months in the fall of 2008—basically, trying to feel out if this project would be right for both of us. Olafur puts a lot of time into the framing of why we do things in the Institute. And even though Olafur's role isn't always so visible you can feel it in the way the themes the school explores create multiple overlaps and connections with his own work. Focusing Olafur for an extended amount of time by taking his schedule hostage and spending one or two consecutive twelve-hour days a few times a semester just talking about the Institute is crucial. They afford us the time to ask numerous questions, including, why something is or isn't working, how we can be more responsible to an experimental agenda, how to not simply fall into the habit of repeating things that work, etcetera.

In January of 2009, two months before the Institute opened, I spent eight days in Olafur's studio brainstorming, generating a bunch of mock curriculums and courses. At this point, we talked a lot about the name of the school and began collecting a list of possibilities. The list was long: space this, time that, process everything ... so many ideas. But how to be incredibly well focused while not also being overly fixed and predetermined? How to brand but not commodify an identity which would compromise where the participants might generate their questions and differences from? I was still working with a lot of the traditional ways you structure a school and curriculum so it took some time for Olafur to maneuver me away from that [*laughs*].

AC: Your background is in architecture and urbanism?

EE: Yeah. I have master's degrees in architecture, design, landscape architecture, and classical philosophy, and so am comfortable teaching across these areas. I have a small architectural practice, too, but it's really just an experimental platform. An expanded sense of spatial practice has always intrigued me—hence my interest in what Olafur was doing. Over the course of 2009 I was still freelance teaching and it wasn't until the summer of that year that I began to get a real feel for things. At this point I sensed that there was some role I might be able to play in the future of the Institute.

The emotional, educational situation which comes from participating in the Institute is intense: for the most part, each student wants to be a student and to work as a professional artist at the same time. They want to be autonomous as an individual but they are also part of this interesting collective. It also means that the reason someone might be interested in them is perhaps not up to them but because of their being a part of an experiment by a famous artist who brings all kinds of attention to the Institute—like yourself writing about it in a book. There are other art education experiments you could have chosen, but you

picked this one because part of Olafur's art is how he structures and negotiates his studio which the Institute is now a part of. At times, this results in an identity crisis, while at other times it creates a smoothness into which we actively curate friction.

AC: Christina Werner, who runs the course with you, just said something interesting to me: that it was easier to write the school's curriculum at the end of the semester rather than at the beginning.

EE: Yes, that's right; Olafur says this all the time. But I think it goes back to what I was saying before: it's not a curriculum but more a way of thinking and doing. I mean, how does one really experiment anymore? How do you know the experiment isn't a fake, something scripted to look like it generates something novel? And what is an experiment? How does one start or end one? The word experiment is in our name so we better have something that lives up to what we say we are! It's one of the reasons I'm teaching a course in the Institute this semester called "Experiencing Experiments." The class looks traditional, in that there is a syllabus, and we meet at set times and do readings, but it's structured in a very particular way. The main characteristic of it is that we literally do what we are talking about. If we talk about seeing, then we will have a dinner class in the dark while talking about it. Many universities wouldn't accommodate this degree of flexible uncertainty because they would want to know the content ahead of time. But we are trying to coproduce the content together, as Olafur might say.

AC: Besides the structure and content of the curriculum, one thing that's so distinctive about the school is its relationship to the larger studio. While there are various buffers in place, there seems to be a healthy degree of feedback between the two. Obviously, many of the themes the curriculum explores coincide with Olafur's own interests, but would you say these actually drive the school's curriculum?

EE: This structure also includes the University of the Arts [Universität der Künste (UdK) Berlin]. The whole thing is a super interesting spatial experiment in its own right. We are in the structure of the university and above/near/in an artist's studio. Christina and I have offices in both spaces—in the studio on the first floor and in the back of the Institute on the third floor. Then there is also how the students percolate through to the studio, mostly using the kitchen as a zone of exchange, which can create informal overlaps. All these spatial dynamics are both abstract and literal, a representation of what we believe in and a very real thing because of the way we have to move around the building and through Berlin to even get to it in the first place. And then there are all the visitors, some as collaborators or friends of Olafur, some as coproducers, which help us to articulate what we do and why, like yourself.

The complexity of Olafur's studio is something impossible to see at once, even though everywhere you look it's right there in front of you. We try to create a loop, where the energy put in by Olafur is rewarded with the generation of more energy that can be fed back into his studio. This proximity to the studio makes what we're doing very special—the relationship is very important to what we do. Of course Olafur is keen to stress that the course is by no means about producing successful professional artists who imitate his model. Another good thing about the proximity to his studio is that it puts the students in the world rather than outside of it. Olafur's studio is a chamber of ideas available to the students to participate in.

AC: And the UdK? What's their precise role?

EE: They legitimate the experiment by awarding art degrees. The university allows us to experiment from inside something that is perceived as a producer of art students. The university gives us the opportunity to be what we are rather than an autonomous experiment taking place above an artist's studio.

A great thing about Olafur is that he's able to pinpoint where people will be most effective in the overall structure of things and how their particular interests and skill-set can extend his studio model. This makes for a very creative environment. Olafur is also comfortable allowing experiments and paths to be pursued that he wasn't previously interested in. At times this must be hard for him because he has to surrender control; but it can also lead to quite remarkable things happening.

AC: That can in turn energize him.

EE: Yeah. As it evolves and grows into something, I think the school is becoming his most important art project [*laughs*].

AC: I wanted to ask you about that. Do you sometimes feel as though you're in one of his works?

EE: Yes and no. On the one hand, the Institute is a matter of relationships, of the unexpected neighbors that change the neighborhood of ideas. To a large degree, this methodology is shared and informed by how Olafur choreographs his art practice. But as I see it, one of the main differences is that everyone in the studio is working for Olafur, while in the Institute, Olafur is working for the university. The work he does in the studio certainly informs the Institute, and the students wouldn't want to be here otherwise. Olafur's art is so much about how he does his art—literally, the art of framing the conditions for the coproduction of his work.

AC: What are your hopes and ambitions for the school?

EE: The Institute has the responsibility to try and really affect the way art education is thought about today. It goes back to what I was saying about the Institute being a model of how to simultaneously think and do—not as some form of agenda to cut and paste, but a model of how to compose questions, answers, and criticality together. The model is

impossible to reproduce because it is so personalized, built from the living material of Olafur's professional and personal relationships, from the people he is interested in and who are interested in him. This should not be overlooked. So it's not something that a department can purchase. It enables us to generate an environment where the invited guests can allow themselves to brainstorm with us about why they do what they do. This is the only real way to coproduce new knowledge in the moment—from the present energy and interests particular to a situation. It's special, but not something to romanticize about or mystify. Hopefully, it's a situation out of which the participants in the school—the students, grantees, Olafur, myself, Christina—can generate change.

AC: I guess it may take some time for the school to have a broader impact: but this is no bad thing. What's the school's main communication tool?

EE: That's a good question. It's something we are currently working on, and it's something we will have to learn how to do by fighting to create the time and resources to do it. The most important thing is first to get the people who are involved with the school to totally believe in something beyond what's happening on the second floor of Olafur's studio. What's hard is that this also has to be achieved at the same time as it is being communicated and done. For now the website is one way. But something more akin to a living archive will need to take place—another issue we share with the studio.

And there are the collaborations we have established with three other institutes, including SciPo [Sciences Po, Paris], the ETH [Eidgenössische Technische Hochschule, Zurich], and the GSD [Graduate School of Design] at Harvard. The first is with Bruno Latour and his students—half artists, half cultural theorists. The ETH collaboration is with Günther Vogt's class, a landscape architecture class. And the third is with Sanford Kwinter and his class of architects and theorists. All these collaborations are super interesting. Rather than simply sitting and listening to famous

people think out loud, we are trying to coproduce experiments with them and their students.

We'll learn to effectively communicate what we do only as we do more things. But our main way of communicating so far has been rumor. This is actually quite powerful. We did a three-day space activism marathon with around eighteen architects, artists, activists, urbanists, historians, and skate park designers. We organized professional BMX bikers, park tours, mountain climbers, slack-liners, and a graffiti artist to literally move differently in the Institute, to occupy different spaces at different speeds. On the first day, the professional activists intercepted a small group of us—about fifty students and participants—and conducted a five-hour drift through Berlin, starting at the Institute and ending at a flak tower elsewhere in the city. This group of fifty was pooled from various international university programs across art, architecture, and landscape design. None of them had been formally invited but somehow found out about it. We tried everything during the five-hour walk from food experiments to Situationist-like detours. During one experiment on a Berlin bridge we all tried simply to walk 100 meters in three minutes, then 100 meters in exactly one minute. Everyone was keeping time differently and came up with a different strategy of when to slow down and when to speed up. The only rule was not stopping and not going backwards. It was great: a small experiment in a bigger experiment. We spoke about the various neighborhoods in Berlin in relation to squatting and gentrification, to the urban infrastructures like railroad lines, which were designed to be near the ammunition turrets, which in turn lined up the housing and the streets in a certain way. And all the while the park tours and BMX bikers talked about the city surfaces as affording different speeds and movements. Anyway, then we all went back to our respective bases and spread the word. Rumor is a powerful tool.

The school is called the Institute for Spatial Experiments because being here—inside the larger studio—really involves the students conducting

a spatial experiment every day as they negotiate their way through Berlin and around it once they are here. One thing that really interests me is the way Olafur conducts his own spatial experiments by choreographing himself around the studio and allowing it to in turn choreograph him. I know he has this history in breakdancing, but for me this is one of the best dances I've seen him do [*laughs*]!

Frank Haugwitz
Painting atelier, Studio Olafur Eliasson
Berlin, Germany
July 7, 2010

Alex Coles: From the quick chat we had at lunchtime, I understand that you started working with Olafur in 2001.

Frank Haugwitz: Yes, at that time he was sharing a studio space with Thomas Demand. There were just six of us working with Olafur then—Caroline [Eggel], Pat [Kalt], Anja [Gerstmann], Einar [Thorsteinn], Sebastian [Behmann], and I.

AC: What projects were you working on at the time?

FH: I was in charge of what we were calling "the workshop," but that really only comprised a few tools. One of the first things I worked on was the color memory room [*360° room for all colors*, 2002] for the show in Paris at the Musée d'Art moderne de la Ville de Paris. Slowly we began to acquire more machinery as the projects became larger and more demanding. First we installed a wood workshop and then a metal workshop, which we combined in one space in the cellar. Once we arrived at the new studio in 2003, we separated them.

AC: At this earlier stage was it just you fabricating the works on your own?

FH: Sebastian and Einar would help too.

AC: So you were the first person to really set up the in-house production facilities for the studio?

FH: That's right. But quite soon after, Jan [Mennicke] and Christian [Uchtmann] joined the team. It's been important to produce a lot

in-house so that Olafur can be very involved and gain a large degree of control, seeing that decisions in the production process can have consequences for the artistic ideas too.

AC: At lunch you mentioned that your background was as an interior architect. Did you study in Berlin?

FH: No, in Trier in the southwest of Germany, where I trained as an architect and interior designer. Then I went to Helsinki for a year and finally in 1995 came to Berlin. To begin with I had my own architecture office in the city. Then I worked as a carpenter. It was during this time that Sebastian called and said, you must come and work with us at the studio! So I did.

AC: How did you know Sebastian?

FH: From childhood.

AC: So before joining the studio you had already made the transition from design to fabrication?

FH: It wasn't really a transition—the school I went to specialized in art and industry, so they had all the machines you can imagine.

AC: Was it odd after working in a design and architecture environment to do the same things but from within an art practice instead?

FH: No, really it was quite similar, especially within Olafur's practice.

AC: One thing that interests me about the studio's trajectory is the way it has gradually embedded so many of the techniques and tools it requires into its very structure. This has obviously been quite a slow process but nevertheless there is quite a clear pattern. Do you still fabricate or do you manage while others do it?

FH: No, I still fabricate. Whereas before I did most things myself, now we have specialists for the different machines and materials we work in.

AC: How does the design process work? Does Olafur or someone else do a drawing which is then interpreted by a designer and made into a drawing and a prototype?

FH: It really differs from one project to the next. Usually there is an assignment of sorts, some idea coming from Olafur which can be more or less explicit. He makes a sketch, we discuss it, and decide on a course to pursue in the workshop; down the line the results are then discussed with him. If he thinks the work needs adjustment or more radical reworking, we do another round.

AC: We're currently sitting in the painting atelier, surrounded by meticulously rendered color wheels, executed in oil paint. When did they begin?

FH: We had already begun some in the Invalidenstraße studio. As Olafur was planning for the Chicago exhibition ["Take your time: Olafur Eliasson," Museum of Contemporary Art, 2009], he said he needed 360 paintings! So we turned the former studio into a painting shop and this is where it really began.

AC: Why do you think it's so important that these color chart blocks are hand painted in oil when so much of the other work is premised on a much speedier fabrication process?

FH: We've traveled a long road to find the colors we are using now. The current palette is the sixth generation of pigments that Olafur has selected with Finn Brandstrup, a color pigment specialist in Denmark, who is mixing the colors for us. The selection is made intuitively by Olafur, and is based on the color spectrum and different color wheel systems. The scale is then developed with the team in the painting shop

that we have set up on the fourth floor.

AC: Is there no way these colors could be technologically generated? Somehow they look so electric.

FH: You just wouldn't get the degree of precision and depth in the color that way.

AC: What's your overall sense of how design and fabrication process have changed as the studio has gained in scale and complexity?

FH: The studio has become more and more professional during the last ten years. Everything has to be organized to ensure that all deadlines are met and the number of people working here now requires a different model of organization and communication. It has become more of a precise, finely-tuned machine—there used to be much more flexible time available in which to have discussions with Olafur. Now these are often reduced to a few minutes—decisions are rapidly made. There are so many people and projects that it almost has to be like this. But it's still a delightful challenge to be a part of this complex, high-flying structure orbiting around Olafur, which is the result of his unique personality.

Olafur Eliasson
Model room, Studio Olafur Eliasson
Berlin, Germany
July 7, 2010

Alex Coles: When I first wanted to write about the studio, your particular studio presented a problem because there was such a mature discourse on it already. Coupled with this, there is Anna [Engberg-Pedersen's] role as someone who nurtures more discourse from within the studio, thus forcing someone in my position to radically alter his or her approach. What at first seemed like possible obstacles soon became part of the way I began to think about approaching the studio. But I want to start this dialogue by asking you about how your studio setup has evolved since the beginning.

Olafur Eliasson: [*A long pause*] My father was an artist and in his studio there was a somewhat obsessive collection of things he found on the beach, such as driftwood, plastic buoys, stones, shells, and so on. He worked as a fisherman, so a lot of what he collected was connected to the ocean and the harbor. While he would not necessarily know what to do with these things, he would bring them back to the studio and begin building sculptures with them anyway. The studio felt like a fantastic place in which to experiment and explore, a place that had a different definition of rationality.

When I concluded gymnasium I instantly applied for art school. I wasn't accepted in the first round, so I worked in my apartment, which at this point was 90 percent art and 10 percent living. I remember that for a friend of mine at the time the complete opposite was the case, but I could live like this in relative comfort. It's difficult to explain without romanticizing somewhat, but this way of living worked for me.

Or one can enter this discussion from a different angle by saying that, in

the beginning, I had no ambitions of shaping a space that would be recognized as a home. Perhaps this is the closest we come to the beginning of my studio.

When I moved to Berlin, I lived in a shared apartment. In 1995 I moved in with two fellow artists: one was a painter called Johannes Kahrs, the other was Thomas Demand. We found a loft in Rungestraße, relatively close to Alexanderplatz. Unlike the other two, I decided to live in the loft as well as use it as my studio. I kept a little space at the back for my things and in the rest—some 400 square meters—I went to work. Frequently, I was joined by one, two, sometimes even three people, who would help me out a couple of days a week. At the time, I didn't speak German so well, and I certainly couldn't write it, so I needed assistance with even the most basic things. There were periods with no money coming in which meant no assistants at all. Then, as I began to show more and more, the studio grew. Soon there was a team of five people continuously working with me: one was Sebastian Behmann, another Caroline Eggel. From back then I've developed a quite strong culture of connecting people to the studio.

AC: How did you meet Sebastian?

OE: He was recommended to me by my friend Thomas Demand, following a project that Sebastian assisted him with.

AC: Since Sebastian was one of your earliest collaborators in the studio and his role is so vital today, I'm particularly interested to know how your dialogue with him began. To move from a situation where you are responsible for practically every aspect of your output to a situation where you start to coordinate other people surely requires a shift in your perception: not so much of what you do but how you do it.

OE: There was never really a distinct moment in which I decided I was

going to stop doing things myself. Decisions about the structure of the studio were always content driven. In this sense, the studio has evolved very organically—there has always been a good balance between input and output. I think there is a tendency to focus on its structure and form when talking about its development. But this seems a little abstract to me. The studio is never a primary topic, but more of a side product, and if I do think about it, this always happens through content-related concerns. The studio basically exists in order to produce art—its end lies outside itself. It may be interesting to you as an object of study, but it doesn't really have a life of its own. I might be wrong, of course, but understand me right: the content that we are working with is what defines the form of the studio. But this is obviously also a generalization since form can fuel content as well.

The sheer machinery of the studio can be immensely efficient, and there are situations where I try to avoid us working ourselves into a cul-de-sac precisely because of this. Deadlines and demands from galleries and even museums can temporarily bracket visions. In the position I'm in now, I have to persistently cultivate my sensibility, otherwise I would go numb. But fortunately the studio is also quite self-critical.

When I began collaborating with people in the mid-1990s, I was interested in the dematerialization of the art object and the consequences this had. I wanted to add a dimension of cause-and-effect to phenomenological questions by introducing an understanding of space where, one could claim, the contract between the space and the person in it—the spectator or user—could be renegotiated. In other words, I was trying to reconsider the rules with which the subject and object continually reconstitute each other. In a way, I was quite obsessed with this, but I wasn't able to verbalize it to a sufficient degree, obviously not being an expert in phenomenology. So when I wanted to know more, I would invite people into the studio who did know. My friend Daniel Birnbaum, for instance, would help me verbalize—and thus understand—the spatial "equations"

I was working with. I would then take what Daniel had said to Sebastian and a further conversation would develop about how to define the type of space I was thinking of, still without us actually making a sculpture and bearing in mind that an empty space is, of course, always constructed. In response, Sebastian might suggest introducing a back door to a particular artwork that would be kept open in order for people to see what was going on in the work. Then I would maybe propose that people should enter the work through this back door and so on. The sensitivity to the content that Sebastian has as an architect would prove to be crucial. Collaborating with Caroline, who is an art historian and curator, was equally inspiring because she is sensitive to the impact curatorial intentionality has on a work. Between the three of us, together with the people pulled in from the outside, we created a strong work relationship that maintained a healthy balance between form and content. The teamwork inspired a certain degree of confidence and I knew that together we could explore many possibilities in art. From there the studio took shape.

AC: In the case of many practitioners I've spoken with, the sense is that in the beginning there was one—themselves—and only later there were more. What you are saying is that from very near the beginning there was always more than one; in other words, at the beginning there was a dialogue. One way I interpret the trajectory of your studio is that the things you needed to sustain this dialogue—and so achieve the projects you were working on—have been successively incorporated into the fabric of the studio. This has meant that the studio is constantly fluid and changing, and that by now there is also a certain density as to what constitutes the studio.

OE: I basically find it inspiring to look at something and think about it with other people. If I try to explain a certain idea to Daniel, for instance, I start looking at it from his perspective and this inevitably changes what I say. With someone from my workshop it is a different situation where

other ideas develop. This back and forth between looking at something for yourself, by yourself, pondering the issue, and then looking at it from the plural point of views of the team, of friends, knowing from where they speak, knowing and evaluating through the glasses with which they see, is very inspiring. A kind of shared, felt looking develops.

On a more practical level, I should say that I handed over a large chunk of the studio management to others some years ago. When I hire people to work with the archive, I want them to take the lead on communicative ideas and be excited by constantly questioning what the function of an archive is and exploring its proactive potential. This means that I have been able to prioritize producing art and step away from driving these areas forward while still participating in the discussions that interest me.

The same goes with the organization of the work: other people handle the planning of forthcoming projects and gather the necessary material. I have handed over as much as possible and try to be only a little involved in the day-to-day running of the studio. Now my primary role is to develop the artistic agenda—which is what gives it its form. Everybody in the studio shares and respects the fact that the boundaries between logistics, practicalities, and artistic challenges are soft, that they inform each other, and we negotiate our work through this knowledge.

Actually, it's interesting to talk about all of this now because I rarely do so. I think one other thing is important to mention: due to the nature of the work I'm doing, the methodological principles at play keep changing. This ensures that the studio doesn't become a static entity or a non-critical machine. Every time we do something, we are presented with a whole new set of challenges. Right now we are in the first stages of putting a show together in São Paulo for the autumn of 2011. Obviously this city is fundamentally different to Berlin, where I had my last large museum exhibition ["Innen Stadt Außen," 2010]. I will be going to São Paulo a few times to get a sense of the situation and update myself on the history

and role of its museums in order to understand why they are inviting me to make a show at this particular moment in time. This exhibition puts us in a situation with different work conditions; a lot of the principles we used in Berlin have to be totally reconsidered. This keeps the studio young.

AC: By the way, I thought the Martin-Gropius-Bau exhibition was the best large museum exhibition I've seen by you. Perhaps this is because of something you mentioned before: "Innen Stadt Außen" allowed the viewer to enter the construct of each of the works from the back, so to speak, whereas in the recent SFMOMA and MoMA/PS1 shows, this didn't happen to the same degree. As a result, the glimpses you gave into the machinery of the work in Berlin were much rawer.

OE: Museums in America are incredibly efficient communication machines. For me, to communicate a work of art is to change the work of art. They rarely see it like that and tend to pre-digest works on behalf of their visitors, which is extremely counterproductive to contemporary art. I'm moving slightly off the topic, but the reason why it's interesting to slide down this little ramp is that it leads me to how the studio is also a communicative construction. The studio has a responsibility with regards to a perception similar, although obviously not identical, to that of the museum. We do not safeguard "the truth" about work at the studio. I am skeptical of such truths, really. Even though I'm the producer of the work, I'm not necessarily its author.

AC: I can see why you choose to embed your archive within the studio. It enables you to steer it in a productive direction.

OE: I also work with the archive when I make new works. I look back at earlier works and try to recall why I approached a particular problem in the way I did back then. A few days ago I had a discussion with someone about the extent to which the archive is a static mass of information piled up in a non-trajectorial way. What triggered the conversation was

my going back through the archive to look for a specific work. When I saw the photo of it, I then remembered how it was orientated in the space with regards to north and south and how it reflected the daylight on that particular day. In this case, the archive had an almost GPS-like function. The archive is performed space.

AC: You mean it's a productive space generating future trajectories through its representation of the past?

OE: Yes. The studio is not sitting in the world on a neutral platform with a neutral art history and a neutral art market. We are operating in a highly manipulative capitalistic system and it's healthy to muscle-up a bit in order to maintain a subjective and content-driven trajectory for the work. I think the studio has a fairly good sense of its own history. It is very much in dialogue with its surroundings.

AC: I also wanted to ask you about your other studios: the one here in Berlin is the macro-studio, although you also have a micro-studio in Copenhagen and a mobile-studio in Iceland. Are they all constantly in play?

OE: I don't think of there being an inside and an outside of the studio at all. Especially over the last two years, I've worked a lot with performance-driven experiments on the street, partly in preparation for the exhibition in Berlin. This made me realize that there is no significant difference between doing things on the outside and on the inside. Things are just as representational outside as they are real on the inside, but this doesn't mean the two are the same. To think of the artist's studio as somehow distancing itself or standing outside of society is a big mistake. In this sense, it's important for the studio to be demystified—and speaking with you is one way of going about this. But people tend to misunderstand this notion of demystifying the studio, taking it to mean making the studio look like a factory line or something. When I say demystify what I'm

suggesting is that one should apply the qualities of the studio to the street. If it can happen on the street, then it can happen in the studio and vice versa.

I usually insist that everything in the studio is real. It's not real in a universal way, but in a singular way—in the sense that it's real for the two of us to talk with each other now, although we both understand that this conversation is also constructed—it happens under certain conditions, with particular aims in mind. If we had a different trajectory, everything between us could be different. In fact, it is precisely our understanding of how the space and the conversation in it are constructions that makes the conversation real. To some extent, the language we use is only meaningful in the context in which it is taking place. There is a sort of contract in this conversation—in this space, between the two of us, for the purpose of your book—that makes it real. When we talk I think it's important that we understand that the methodological principles in play only make sense in this specific situation. In a different situation, things would probably be phrased differently. Now I'm probably going around in circles, but you know what I mean, and your challenge is to write something that will embrace this predicament, which I find interesting.

AC: My particular concern is in how the different studio models I'm experiencing will perhaps trigger a more engaging type of art writing. Despite recent attempts, art writing does not have the place and presence it once had. By presence, I don't mean as a literal power base, which it certainly had at one time—this was perhaps the downside of art writing assuming a place of prominence in the art world—but rather as a creative thing. This is my selfish interest in the studio.

OE: I think that writing has to reevaluate its own sense of performance. We need to ask, how does writing perform? This is off my main track—as you know, I'm not a writer. But essentially I feel understood by a text when the writing performs something about the work rather than just

tries to decode its meaning—when what is being said is fundamentally connected to how it is being said. It's somewhat similar for me with the studio: there has to be a relationship between what is said and how it is said.

AC: To link what you were saying about the studio as a model, when you think back to [Kurt] Schwitters or [Varvara] Stepanova, do you think that the studio is a utopian type of model? By this, I mean a utopia modeled on the real.

OE: Yes and no. From within, the answer is definitely no, because the studio is simply too organic. But I can think of a couple of positions in society from where the studio might be quite utopian looking.

AC: Perhaps when you were working on the BMW project, *Your mobile expectations: BMW H2R* [2007]? I'd be intrigued to know what their perspective was on what you were doing.

OE: The truth is that I have virtually nothing in common with car designers. So the first gap I had to bridge during that project was one of language. A few seconds into our initial conversation with BMW I realized to what degree we spoke totally different languages. One of the problems is the discrepancy between the language they speak and the language they think they speak. Perhaps this accusation is unfair, but I think the designers felt we were genuinely engaging in conversation when I didn't really understand what they were saying. This is not simply to imply that they were particularly commercially minded and I wasn't. The central problem was that the designers at BMW worked with a utopian notion of the perfect car. In reaction to this, my impulse was to start with the idea of the imperfect car, or the notion that every time a person uses my car it becomes a new car. Indirectly, that is a threat to BMW's way of thinking because it means the company would have to produce a new car for every client. Interestingly, the person who was most senior in the design

team was capable of deliberating at an abstract level like this, whereas the people actually designing the shape of the car—who are obviously very sophisticated designers, probably amongst the best, since they are working for BMW—were not capable of thinking in a different way at all. What they do couldn't be further from art.

AC: Did you try and mingle your studio culture with theirs to encourage the dialogue to flow more? Did they have a temporary micro-studio within yours?

OE: I visited their offices a number of times and asked them to do different studies for me—which they would sometimes do and at other times not—and I interviewed members of their lead design team quite rigorously. At times, we had great fun and it was a big learning experience for me. I moved around freely within the company, which is much more than their own employees can do. It was incredible to see how sophistication and a certain market-driven brutality can go hand in hand. Overall, and despite the tone of what I'm saying, I was actually highly impressed. Obviously, I think BMW should experiment more and do more research, although as I understand it, amongst car companies they do more research than anyone else. Still, they do nothing close to enough. In their world, there has to be a very tight link between research and profitability.

AC: To stay on the track of these collaborative projects for a moment, particularly in relation to how the studio functions in them, when you work with an architectural practice, such as David Adjaye's, is there a commingling of studio spaces and cultures then?

OE: When I designed the Serpentine Gallery Pavilion in 2007 with Kjetil Thorsen [of the architectural firm Snøhetta] we did spend a lot of time with the team in his Oslo office. The collaboration with David was different because it was quite minimal. I simply said I needed this much light out of this size slit in a dark space. David then reacted to that with an entire

pavilion. It was more like a little ping-pong until we arrived at something suitable.

One of the most interesting collaborations for me—and one that involves the studio to the greatest degree—is the current one with the school upstairs [Institut für Raumexperimente]. Considering its importance, it's actually puzzling that it hasn't surfaced in our conversation yet. It's an entirely content-driven entity addressing questions that I am interested in, and really a crucial part of the studio right now. It's hard to imagine the studio without the school: the life of the Institute supports and amplifies the diversity of the studio and vice versa. The fundamental difference is that I often focus on where ideas come from when talking with the students about their work, whereas in the studio I mostly focus on where ideas will go and what language they live through. This gives the school a very organic and central placement in relation to the studio.

The studio is very much about setting up an inconclusive experiment—of defining questions rather than answers and knowing that sometimes an answer can take the shape of a further question and so on. But in the end I know that most of the "results" will probably end up in an exhibition or a physical project. The school is very different. I wouldn't say that we are the museum and they are the artists, but the school puts me in a situation whereby instead of asking a question I'm assisting others to question—to co-question—what they are doing. A different type of open-endedness comes from this that has a certain fragility to it. For the studio and school to be one thing is very healthy. Whether we then call everything "the school" or everything "the studio" doesn't really do justice to either. There is an enormous amount of potential here that I'm just beginning to explore. The next step could be to have an exhibition space—a museum essentially—within the studio. If I'd had more funds I would have done it as soon as I moved into this new place [at Pfefferberg] in 2008; but I'll probably end up doing it here at some point anyway. Reconsidering and reconfiguring the relationship between the studio,

the museum, and the school is something that really interests me. I have called it the ProCoKnow Parliament—where PROduction, COmmunication, and KNOWledge come together. I would like schools to have exhibition spaces and museums to have studio spaces and studios to have both. Maybe this is a good place to end this conversation for now since I'm actually twenty minutes late for a meeting where I'll encounter the new student cohort for the first time.

Sebastian Behmann
First floor, Studio Olafur Eliasson
Berlin, Germany
July 6, 2010

Alex Coles: The architectural projects have increased in scale and complexity considerably: from architectural-type installations [*Fivefold tunnel*, 2000; *360° room for all colors*, 2002] to the pavilions [*Your black horizon*, 2005; the Serpentine Gallery Pavilion, 2007]. Now there are models and drawings around the studio of actual buildings. Has the studio had to adapt to accommodate them?

Sebastian Behmann: To understand this development you have to go back some years. When I started at the studio about a decade ago, it was still very small, really an artistic practice in the more traditional sense, and there was basically neither the knowledge nor the clients to deal with this scale of project. Then the studio gradually increased in size in response to the projects Olafur wanted to take on. Rather than base the work on expert knowledge from engineers and others outside of the studio, we began developing skills in drawing and dealing with all aspects and complexities of the projects in house. We had to, in a way, rather than expect to get the relevant knowledge from an engineer or architect who had been contracted by the host institution. Often the artistic idea cannot be realized through conventional channels. A good example is *The weather project* [2003] at Tate Modern—had we relied on the infrastructure already available, the mirror would never have made it onto the ceiling. The same thing happened with the Serpentine Gallery Pavilion. From the smaller kaleidoscopes to the larger pavilions, it has been a gradual process where we've learnt to do many things ourselves. Conjoining within the team itself the various kinds of knowledge needed to realize the projects leads to a better result, not least because it enlarges the creativity of the design process.

So, to get back to your question: within the trajectory of the studio, the current projects are quite logical. But we work with a core team based outside the studio, too, of course, and maintain close relations to engineering and production companies in many fields—and these relationships have gained in strength over the last few years.

One thing that is important to stress is that we try not to distinguish between art and architecture projects, but rather see them as all being more or less complex projects that require extensive knowledge and project organization. Planning a museum exhibition can be rather challenging. Every element in the show has to be thought through, rethought, built, and sometimes rebuilt, without referring to what is available on the market. Many architectural practices are premised on a more industrial model of design and production, which is based on specialization. This is very different to what we have at the studio where people have a broader skill base that feeds into other aspects of our activities rather than existing in isolation. The team has been built very gradually and has accumulated much knowledge from the past decade of projects. By retaining people we ensure a rich knowledge base. And it's important for us to maintain the structure of an artist's studio. It is a very conscious choice that we don't have an architecture unit operating separately.

AC: The studio has obviously grown quite organically. But do you think that an artist's studio that produces a broad range of spatial experiments across a number of mediums and scales can successfully meet the demands of larger architectural projects?

SB: Yes, but you have to look very carefully at how the projects are actually commissioned to understand how they differ from the usual architectural project. The buildings are nothing like commercial buildings, in terms of our client relationship. We try to see them as large artworks that involve establishing a close relation between Olafur, as an artist, and the client, as someone interested in Olafur's artistic practice and thought. Their

discussions are more about art and ideas than the pragmatics of the building. And the studio commitment is similar to any other project here: art commissions, exhibitions, and these projects all get our full attention. The client will probably only be in conversation with Olafur and maybe me throughout the entire process. The quality of this dialogue with the client is crucial to these projects.

Following Olafur's talks with the clients, a challenge for the studio structure is to then provide design solutions for a fully operating structure without shifting too much responsibility to technical consultants or engineering companies. And in order to do that, people have to be carefully integrated into the studio process and thoughts.

AC: I guess the way you work on these projects also means that Olafur's conceptual drive is present at each stage of a project.

SB: We try not to develop too rigid a vocabulary but rather begin with the conceptual nucleus of the project generated by Olafur and allow it to steer the design. To make it possible for a number of studio members to share the design work, the conceptual discussion initiating the project has to form a rather precise grammar that can be followed throughout the entire process. Olafur's role in this process is to maintain clarity and conceptual precision. Seldom do we begin with even a basic notion of the form the work or project will take. Instead this is slowly generated as the idea develops.

AC: Do you think these architectural projects will increase in scale to the degree where the current studio structure will be overly pressurized? Or do you ensure the projects you take on are always achievable with the current studio structure?

SB: The core of what we are doing is art and exhibition production. We also have the Life is Space seminars, for instance, that are very much

situated in the context of the artist's studio. Even when we link with other fields, like with Starbrick [2009], which is a product design developed in collaboration with Zumtobel Lighting, to keep the studio fresh and moving forward, it all gets fed back into the art.

There is no reason for Olafur to actually do commercial buildings—architectural projects are not the basis of his practice. They are taken on because they provide an opportunity for Olafur to develop ideas that wouldn't necessarily be possible within the existing structure of the art world. They are a way for both him and the studio to grow.

AC: Did the studio work on the design of the present studio we are currently talking in?

SB: The architecture of the studio was always important to us—its structure informs our working process and how we perform. It has to fit the various everyday requirements: work presentations, workshops, experiments, symposia. The studio has become increasingly important for us in its spatial conception. The renovation of the building we are in now was part of structuring the studio anew back in 2008.

AC: Was scale the main thing driving the shift from the old studio to here?

SB: For the last year in the old studio things had become impossible. The space the architecture team occupied was originally supposed to be for a trainee, but all eight of us ended up there! Every time we had a delivery, the studio's huge doors would open and all of our drawings and papers would fly around; the people in the metal workshop would be grinding away while we attempted to make phone calls. Things needed to change: there's cozy and then there's impractical. We think of the studio here as a house which contains us. The previous studio was more like camping.

AC: Do you foresee a time when you'll start pressing against the walls of even this studio?

SB: No, I don't think so. It's a question of time—Olafur's time. Everything we do here—and one should not forgot this—is actually about him and his ideas and research. The studio is not an autonomous entity that works without him. Everything is related to his interests. Now we've arrived at a stage where we are able to organize his time and our time in a healthy way. To grow again would put too much pressure on that.

AC: Could you walk me through the studio's design process? When a proposal comes in, how do you start to generate the vocabulary for the project?

SB: Talking. Lots of talking.

AC: Who gets the discussion moving?

SB: It depends on the nature of the project. There are generally some pre-discussions with Olafur and our organizing team, meaning Felix [Hallwachs], Caroline [Eggel], Anna [Engberg-Pedersen], and myself. For example, if we agree on accepting an invite for an exhibition, this project usually starts with a dialogue between the curator or director and Olafur and Caroline that generates a framework for the artworks and the spatial requirements that have to be met in the museum. These are translated into form and sometimes architecture, which is where I actively join in. This work is based on intense drawing by the studio team. Important elements are built as models or one-to-one tests and brought back into the discussion of the context of the show. The team generates a language and discussion base for the other participants in the project.

Pavilions or larger structures I generate in a similar way, it's just that the participants within the studio change somewhat. Sometimes Olafur

knows precisely what he wants from the very beginning. The image of it just may not be very sharp—so it's a case of bringing that into focus. Mostly, these kinds of projects begin with a discussion between the two of us in the studio in Copenhagen. My role is usually one of asking questions in order to transfer his image into my head. Once I understand what Olafur envisages, I can start to work with the studio team on it. It is then about mediating the design process between Olafur and the team, between us and the outside, and integrating experts or consultants where needed. Really it's a process of translation, which can be either complex or straightforward, depending on the project.

AC: Can you tell me a little about the studio in Copenhagen?

SB: It's main function is to keep Olafur going when he's in Copenhagen during parts of the week, on weekends, and during holidays—if there's no studio or office then there's no place for him to work.

AC: Scale-wise, it's really a micro-studio?

SB: It has two spaces: one an office space and the other a more flexible design or production space, both being relatively small. The Copenhagen studio is a more contemplative studio space that gives Olafur time to draw and paint. We also have images and models of our current projects on the walls there. This gives him the opportunity to reflect on them and for us to talk without the pressures of the main studio here in Berlin. Members from the Berlin studio frequently travel to Copenhagen to make use of the intimate atmosphere and reflect on the ongoing projects. Here we can maintain a depth that is sometimes difficult to preserve under the pressure of the workflow in Berlin.