
Studio Olafur Eliasson

Out of a thick white mist comes a set of eyes framed by a pair of metallic-rimmed glasses. They focus on me: a new face in the studio in the winter of 2009. “So what do you think?” asks Olafur Eliasson. I fail to reply—the mist of this spatial experiment serves as an apt metaphor for my lack of comprehension of his entire studio.

The reason for this state of confusion is that Studio Olafur Eliasson forces the visiting critic to reconsider what an artist’s studio encompasses, and the critic’s relationship to it. For the most part, this is due to the studio’s labyrinth-like complexity—the bewildering depth and range of projects and people in play—but it is also caused by one simple factor: another critic, Anna Engberg-Pedersen, is woven into the studio’s very fabric. During a discussion on a later visit, Engberg-Pedersen puts it most succinctly, “So I’m a productive obstacle?” In a way, she is.¹

Yet Engberg-Pedersen’s role inside the studio is quite logical given the arc of Studio Olafur Eliasson’s development: the way it tends to incorporate its requirements—be they skills, tools, knowledge—into its by now transdisciplinary structure in response to the projects and experiments being developed at any one time. The perpetual process of incorporating its needs into its structure rather than outsourcing is driven by Eliasson’s predilection for channeling the energies of skilled workers into the studio in order to intensify the dialogue between them, the better to achieve the primary aim: to produce new work. To Eliasson and his team, a critic in the

studio simply marks the addition of another skilled worker—a discourse worker. With so much of Studio Olafur Eliasson’s energy directed towards discourse production—besides the works, this includes seminars and publications, an operational archive, and a pedagogical model for a new art school—these often unquantifiable aspects of the activity around a practice become a vital form of currency within the practice.² And Eliasson’s incorporation of a critic into the equation doesn’t mean omitting others: a vital aspect of Engberg-Pedersen’s role is to work closely with critics, theorists, and historians on collaborative projects.³ These collaborative projects not only contextualize aspects of the studio’s activity but can also generate new ideas to be fed back into the studio.

Since 2008, Studio Olafur Eliasson’s enormous macro-studio has been housed in a converted brewery in Berlin-Prenzlauer Berg. The studio’s top floor is split into two parts: the smaller used as a painting atelier, and the larger, more provisional part, used for spatial experiments like the one I experienced on my first visit. The floor below is dedicated to the art school Eliasson has established, including studio spaces for the students—a series of studios set within the larger studio. Below this there is another hub of activity: the *Model room* (2003), a wunderkammer of models serving as the backdrop for a number of my dialogues with studio employees. This is followed by an administrative and archiving area where the discourse workers sit (and where I’m assigned a temporary work station) and banks of desks for architects. Library shelves, and a series of paste-up boards full of compelling images of projects in various stages of development, including a building for a Right Bank wine estate in Bordeaux and the headquarters of an investment company in Vejle, Denmark, act as room dividers. A door at the far end leads through to Eliasson’s private study. Downstairs, through the metal workshop, the ground floor opens out onto a giant space for

rehearsing installations, followed by a production area, and then Eliasson’s own personal studio space. On my first visit, Eliasson is experimenting with small stones and concave wall-mounted mirrors for a new series of small projected works. Opposite his study is the kitchen and a long dining table where lunch is served daily. Finally, nestled in the basement, is the wood workshop and general storage area.⁴

Eliasson also has a micro-studio in Copenhagen where he spends part of the week. The morning of the first day of my visit in summer 2010, Sebastian Behmann, the studio’s principal architect, diligently outlines the micro-studio’s layout and purpose: “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. ... We also have images and models of our current projects on the walls there. This gives [Eliasson] the opportunity to reflect on them and for us to talk without the pressures of the main studio here in Berlin.” Speaking with Eliasson on the same day in the lunch queue I ask him about his third studio—a mobile-studio in Iceland. “It’s basically an old camper van with a bubble on top. I use it to take photographs of the landscape and sometimes to paint,” he says.⁵ Each of these studios is important to Eliasson’s creative process: the mobile-studio being where he can be alone amidst the relative silence of Eidar in Iceland; the micro-studio affording Eliasson and key studio members the space to reflect without the pressures of a large studio; and the macro-studio facilitating the production of it all, while also hosting the parallel activities of the school and the seminars.

Every architect, painter, technician, tutor, theorist, administrator, craftsman, and cook in the Berlin studio—currently between forty and forty-five in total—conduct themselves quietly and conscientiously. Other than in the noisy workshops, no music is played—the only sounds are those of work: quiet chattering in multiple

languages during a meeting or phone conversation is all there is to be heard. The studio employees are used to being observed by a wide array of visitors—everyone from curators and gallerists to a few journalists from satellite TV stations and the *New Yorker*—and so there is an air of professional restraint as I tour the studio for the first time. Everything experienced during the tour—a conversation, a meeting, the partial fabrication of a work—feels like it has been specially staged for me. Wanting to break through this, on a number of occasions I walk into an area unannounced or double back through a room I just left, but each time the same professionalized collaborative ethic pervades. After the first few visits, the studio employees become more familiar with my presence, and I become more comfortable conducting research within such a large and effective operation—soon convinced that what goes on in the studio is no act—which gives way to a deeper sense of the studio’s inner workings. The overriding impression is of how members of the studio team all coexist as they go about coproducing Eliasson’s work. Over the course of my four visits to the studio in 2009 and 2010, and my continued correspondence with some members through 2011 the initial difficulty of comprehending the complexity of Studio Olafur Eliasson as a large scale entity is partially overcome.

Even lunch at the studio is a coproduction and proceeds efficiently. Everyone eats a selection of freshly prepared vegetarian dishes together on the long table opposite Eliasson’s small private studio space. So instead of a machine, the studio has the sensibility of a living transdisciplinary organism in a constant state of mutation. The administrative structure in place bespeaks soft power. This has obviously become the most appropriate way to maintain the flexibility needed to optimize the research and production process of new works and their attendant discourse—including that of a critic like myself attempting to generate fresh discourse on the structure of the studio.

Sitting in the *Model room* in the summer of 2010, Eliasson reflects on the vital place dialogue and collaboration play in the studio. The “back and forth between looking at something for yourself ... and then looking at it from the plural point of views of the team, of friends, knowing from where they speak ... is very inspiring,” Eliasson says, taking his glasses off and rubbing his eyes. Where in many studios there is the impression that the principle practitioner started alone and then gradually developed their studio to aid them in the realization and delivery of their work, at Studio Olafur Eliasson it’s clear that even at the beginning there was more than one—the studio was always a place in which Eliasson’s work was coproduced. The dialogue generated by the studio has just become more complex as the sheer range and quantity of projects Eliasson takes on have increased, with the studio’s structure constantly adapting to enable it to nurture the dialogue more effectively. In our conversation the day before, Behmann had already carefully explained how Studio Olafur Eliasson’s model differed from that of an architectural practice because of the flexibility needed to enhance the collaborative nature of the studio’s production process. “Many architectural practices are premised on a more industrial model of design and production, which is based on specialization,” Behmann says, which 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.” Further along in our conversation the following day, Eliasson insists there was never a specific moment when he consciously increased the studio’s scale and transformed its mode of operation to fulfill its need for dialogue. “Due to the nature of the work I’m doing, the methodological principles at play keep changing,” Eliasson comments, and 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.”

In 2009 Eliasson introduced a further element into the studio: the school.⁶ “It’s hard to imagine the studio without the school,” Eliasson notes, “the life of the Institute supports and amplifies the diversity of the studio and vice versa.” The fundamental difference, he explains, “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.” The next afternoon I attend an informal seminar run by Eliasson with the school’s two co-directors, Eric Ellingsen and Christina Werner, which centers on a student exhibition based on a recent trip with the students to Iceland set to take place in a weeks’ time. Some of the students want to build a pool on the top floor of the studio where they can verbally share their Icelandic experiences with visitors to the exhibition. Given the timing, a very limited budget, and the general lack of a palpable sense of enthusiasm from the students, Eliasson doesn’t feel it’s a very practical solution, and concludes a lengthy explanation by saying, “and anyway, it sounds a little too arty.” Another student suggests that fabricating a book using the photographs generated by the trip and then sitting the books either on tables placed around the exhibition or hanging them from cord suspended from the ceiling would be a more appropriate means of communicating their collective experiences. Eliasson readily agrees. Further ideas are raised in rapid succession by different students—almost exhaustively so—and by the time of the seminar’s close the situation is even more inconclusive than it was at the beginning.

An example of how much feedback there is between the school and the studio—that is, how effective Eliasson’s process of incorporating the elements he requires to produce his work—comes with the exhibition “Innen Stadt Außen” at Martin-Gropius-Bau in the spring and summer of 2010, curated by Daniel Birnbaum. Caroline Eggel from Studio Olafur Eliasson was the museum’s key curatorial conduit

to the studio—introducing a further skill into the studio’s fabric.⁷ The relationship the exhibition triggers between the city and the museum was tested out on a number of occasions by studio staff and by the students. One of the school’s experiments with the body in the city took place in a class in January 2010. A mirror—a vital element in Eliasson’s practice in general and in the projects taking place outside Martin-Gropius-Bau in particular—was used by students to navigate their way around a part of Berlin. Later, during the exhibition’s run, the school also hosted a three-day space activism marathon with architects, artists, activists, urbanists, historians, and skate park designers.⁸ Ellingsen meets me in the *Model room* as Eliasson and I conclude our interview, and he explains what place the school has within the overall framework of the studio. Ellingsen clarifies why the school is called the Institute for Spatial Experiments, “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 [the studio]” once they arrive. “One thing that really interests me,” Ellingsen continues, “is the way Olafur conducts his own spatial experiments by choreographing himself around the studio and allowing it to in turn choreograph him.”

The next day I go to see “Innen Stadt Außen” and realize how experiencing the exhibition, the studio, and the school simultaneously, is crucial to a fuller understanding of all three elements’ dynamism. “Innen Stadt Außen” replaces the smoothness of “Take your time: Olafur Eliasson” at SFMOMA (2007) and MoMA and MoMA PS1 (2008) with a more guttural relationship to the building and a fully textured dialogue with the city. The exhibition consists of a number of dynamic, overlapping platforms: a large exhibition filling a portion of Martin-Gropius-Bau, with most works produced for a particular space in the museum; a series of interventions in the city; and the re-siting of *The blind pavilion* (2003) on Peacock Island

near Potsdam. All of the works in the exhibition have a makeshift air, each infused with a sense of motion—as if they were passing through the museum instead of being installed there for a sustained period of time—and thus a reciprocity between the locations is created. This is exemplified by *Innen Stadt Außen* (2010), a film of a van with a mirror strapped to one of its sides being driven through the city, which plays on a loop in one of the museum’s rooms. “Innen Stadt Außen” confirms that Eliasson is at his most effective when he dematerializes form, as almost all of the works in the exhibition do, rather than when he literally builds it—whether on his own in *Umschreibung* (2004) and *5-dimensional pavilion* (1998), or in collaboration with architectural studios, like *Your black horizon* (2005) with David Adjaye, and the Serpentine Gallery Pavilion (2007) with Kjetil Thorsen.

Through the pillars surrounding Martin-Gropius-Bau’s central atrium hangs a number of sculptures. Adjacent are a series of rooms, including one brimming with a new version of *Model room*. Further rooms proliferate, eventually leading through to *Your blind movement* (2010), an installation in which all objects and precise distances are dissolved by a dense purple and red mist. So overwhelming is the optical experience that it also becomes a tactile experience—as if the color can actually be felt. The installation broadens viewers’ optical capacity until it opens a back door onto the tactile. This is not due to the aggressive nature of the optical but the heightened bodily awareness the colored mist brings about as the beholder suffuses with it and so becomes a proactive presence within the installation. Not only does the beholder change the work by his presence, but he too is changed by it as he becomes increasingly aware of his own body and its relationship to those of others. Eliasson’s practice has long been underpinned by what he has referred to as “the dematerialization of the art object and ... [its] consequences,” expressly with the aim of adding

what he terms “a dimension of cause and effect to phenomenological questions by introducing an understanding of space where ... the contract between the space and the person in it—the spectator or user—could be renegotiated.” In the *Phenomenology of Perception* (1945), a key book for Eliasson early on in his development, Maurice Merleau-Ponty casts this discussion of the optical and the tactile in terms of the body’s relationship to objects and color. While the “gaze pairs off with color” and the “hand with hardness and softness ... it cannot be held that one acts while the other suffers the action,” writes Merleau-Ponty, apropos the fusion of the optical and tactile senses.⁹

The day after I visit “Innen Stadt Außen” an impromptu lunchtime conversation with Iris Mickein, an occasional archivist and administrator in the studio, about the reception of Eliasson’s work leads to an invitation to peruse the extensive bibliography the archiving department has accrued. This tells the story of the studio as a discourse generator. Immediately apparent is that while recent essays place Eliasson’s work firmly within a tradition of architecture and fine art—including historical precedents, as various as El Lissitzky, James Turrell, and Robert Irwin, Buckminster Fuller, and Paul Scheerbart—none consider design.¹⁰ The omission is indicative of an ongoing tendency to not only overlook design’s impact on art but for design to generally be denigrated by members of the art world.¹¹ In this specific case, the blind spot means that the work of the designer Bruno Munari has gone completely unnoticed by the historians and critics associated with Eliasson, even though Munari’s work adds substantially to our understanding of what Eliasson’s works achieve by incorporating characteristics previously assumed to be specific to the designer.¹² To overlook design, then, is to fail to interpret the breadth of Eliasson’s practice, the nuances of his Berlin studio, and the role his works frequently play within the public realm.

The most obvious series of correspondences are between the continuing series of lamps Studio Olafur Eliasson produces, like those hanging in “Innen Stadt Außen” (including *New Berlin sphere* [2009] and *Yellow to purple activity sphere* [2009]), and Munari’s series of mobiles, such as the Useless Machines begun in the 1930s, and his *Aconà Biconbi* (ca. 1962), a geometric puzzle that could be composed and recomposed by the owner.¹³ But the importance of design for a deeper understanding of Eliasson’s practice is nowhere more pertinent than when *Your blind movement* and Munari’s *Projections with Polarized Light* (1954) are considered together. Much more than just a formal affinity—in this sense Eliasson’s *Between inside and outside* (2008) is closer in configuration to *Projections with Polarized Light*—these works reveal the extent to which both Munari and Eliasson have similar goals in mind for their respective works: stimulating a heightened awareness in the beholder by rendering him an active coproducer in the work through the dematerialization of form.¹⁴ While being a goal Eliasson shares with many artists of his generation, this is an element rarely found in contemporary design practice, which tends to be closed regarding its relationship to the user and so provides them with less room for maneuver. Unfortunately, the recent interface between art and design—culminating in the designart trend—has tended to downplay the participatory dimension of design at the price of playing up characteristics associated with more traditional forms of art practice.¹⁵ Just as art was beginning to open up by increasing the role of the beholder, design practice was reducing it.

It could even be argued that Munari’s projections are a more vital precedent than the Light and Space artists for Eliasson’s installations—besides *Your blind movement*, earlier works such as *Who is afraid* (2004), *Fivefold sphere projection lamp* (2004), and *Colour space embracer* (2005) point to this. Like Munari, Eliasson makes a point of exposing the mechanism—in the case of *Your blind*

movement, a number of light bulbs and a fog machine—operating each of his works, whereas the likes of Turrell opt to hide theirs in an attempt to transport the viewer into the realm of the sublime, a technique and an effect entirely at odds with Eliasson’s installations.

With overtones redolent of Umberto Eco’s notion of the open work, in a chapter devoted to his Continuous Structures from *Design as Art* (1966) Munari offers a lucid account of the importance of placing the beholder at the center of the work:

We need to give the spectator more room to penetrate into the work itself, and works which allow this are called “open.” It is a form of art that adapts itself to the artistic sense of the beholder. ... Today the person who looks at a work of art is more sensitive, more accustomed to simultaneous and intense stimuli, to brand new technical and scientific concepts, so he is no longer interested in a “closed” work of art. Art that is too defined ... leaves a man of today standing isolated and apart. ... There is very little actual participation involved. ... But in an open work of art a person participates much more.¹⁶

The beholder’s participation—what the design world terms “user interface”—is inherent to a designers’ process. Munari intensified his investigation into this with his polarized light projections. Describing them in *Design as Art*, Munari states, “Polaroid has the same effect as a glass prism, which ... breaks down a ray of white light into all the colors of the spectrum. ... If we take two sheets of Polaroid and sandwich a piece of Cellophane between them, folded over two or three times, we shall produce a color.”¹⁷ For the *Projections with Polarized Light*, Munari inserted slides between two Polaroid filters. By rotating the filter fixed before the projector, the polarized light passed through the materials in the frame and decomposed into the colors of the spectrum, disrupted as the beholder passed in front of them.¹⁸

In the preface written for the English edition of *Design as Art* in 1970, Munari insists that the designer is the most well equipped practitioner to place the beholder at the center of the work. For Munari, artists must regain the modesty they had during the Renaissance when art was just a trade and make contact with the public once again. This is the reason, he writes, “why the traditional artist”—by which he means the avant-garde artist—“is being transformed into a designer.”¹⁹

But Munari’s account of the relationship between design and art is actually more complex than it first seems. As the book’s title makes clear, Munari’s claim is that the designer must produce design as art. “There should be no such thing as art divorced from life, with beautiful things to look at and hideous things to use,” Munari writes. “Anyone who uses a properly designed object feels the presence of an artist who was worked for *him*.”²⁰ Munari concludes: “When the objects we use every day and the surroundings we live in have become in themselves a work of art, then we shall be able to say that we have achieved a balanced life.”²¹ Munari is not arguing for a form of design that occupies the role of art—that is, is unique and thus sequestered in galleries (like designart)—but rather that mass produced industrialized design be so appropriately designed for its deemed function that it infuse design with a level of precision and flexibility that engages the user. This explains Munari’s insistence on why the artist must be “transformed into a designer” in order to increase his or her level of effectiveness.

Where in his early work Eliasson occasionally infiltrated the everyday by literally injecting his work into it—for *Green river* (1998) dye was poured into rivers in Bremen, Los Angeles, and Tokyo—Eliasson has also opened up the museum so that it becomes a vital part of the city. While this occurred spontaneously during *The weather project* (2003), due to the public’s overwhelming response to the

work, it was an overt part of Eliasson’s strategy for “Innen Stadt Außen.” Even when Eliasson remains comfortably within the exclusive confines of the museum, his installations still respond to Munari’s call for the artist to transform him or herself into a designer by placing the perception of the beholder at the center of the work. *Your blind movement* is the apotheosis of this.

Eliasson’s response to Munari’s call for the artist to transform him or herself into a designer has not come from the manipulation of the language of design as per Tobias Rehberger or by providing a “service” as do Superflex. Instead an element of design enters Eliasson’s work through its emphasis on the role of the beholder and the way they can be phenomenologically transformed into a participator.²² Initially it seems that Eliasson’s installations only target the individual, but since sense perception is a faculty shared by all and Eliasson’s installations are changed by the presence of others—a presence that alters the work and therefore each individual’s experience of it—then a broad collective can be impacted by each of his works.

By transforming the beholder into an active participator in *Your blind movement*, Eliasson fluidly transfers a fundamental issue at play in the studio—the dialogical—to the work. This procedure is crucial; it is only through the participation of others and the dialogue they generate that Studio Olafur Eliasson attains the transdisciplinary. With new workers perpetually being introduced into the studio and a constant stream of visitors (from professors of neuroesthetics to light manufacturers), Studio Olafur Eliasson is able to produce an ever-widening range of works within the fields of painting, sculpture, design, photography, and architecture. In some instances, they can even embed the studio’s proclivity towards the transdisciplinary into a single work—*Your blind movement* being a case in point. Not only, therefore, does Studio Olafur Eliasson accommodate

this dialogue with others but the studio pragmatically depends on it for its very vitality.

Riding the S-Bahn on my journey home in the autumn of 2010, I reflect on the white fog of the experiment I witnessed during my first visit.²³ The experiment was for an installation that, like *Your blind movement*, has no spatial boundaries—a fitting example of the ethos of the entire studio itself. With seemingly no disciplinary or spatial boundaries whatsoever, Studio Olafur Eliasson continues to drive towards the transdisciplinary by incorporating skills and ideas from other fields, perpetually transforming as a structure.

- 1 See the interview with Engberg-Pedersen. Also see the comments made by Caroline Jones on the role of the discourse worker in Studio Olafur Eliasson.
- 2 Seminars include “Life in Space 1,” June 2006; “Life in Space 2,” June 2007; and “Life in Space 3,” May 2008, and their associated publications. See the comments by Jones on how, especially in Eliasson’s case, “any art writer has to become aware of how they are part of what [Walter] Benjamin theorized as the ‘author as producer’ model when they write,” page 312.
- 3 A partial list of visitors includes Daniel Birnbaum, Beatriz Colomina, Caroline Jones, Sanford Kwinter, and Mark Wigley.
- 4 On the physical fabrication of Eliasson’s work, see the interview with Frank Haugwitz.
- 5 For more on Eliasson’s mobile-studio see *The Conversation Series: Hans Ulrich Obrist/Olafur Eliasson* (Cologne: Verlag der Buchhandlung Walther König, 2008), 93–122.
- 6 Institut für Raumexperimente has not been factored into the current research on the pedagogical turn in art practice and curating—yet. For the most recent installment of this turn see Paul O’Neil and Mick Wilson, eds., *Curating and the Pedagogical Turn* (London/Amsterdam: Open Editions/de Appel, 2010). In terms of structure, Frederick Kiesler’s “design correlation laboratory” developed in the 1930 forms an appropriate analogy to the relationship between the school and Eliasson’s studio. See Stephen Phillips, “Toward a Research Practice: Frederick Kiesler’s Design-Correlation Laboratory,” *Grey Room* 38 (Winter 2010): 92–93.
- 7 See the interview with Eggel.
- 8 Vito Acconci took part in the marathon. See the interview with him.
- 9 Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Phenomenology of Perception* (London: Routledge, 2002 [1945]), 248.
- 10 On Eliasson’s relationship to architecture see Henry Urbach, “Surface Tensions: Olafur Eliasson and the Edge of Modern Architecture,” in *Take Your Time: Olafur Eliasson*, ed. Madeleine Grynsztejn (San Francisco: San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, 2007). On the Light and Space artists, see Pamela M. Lee, “Your Light and Space,” in *Take Your Time: Olafur Eliasson*. And on the Soviet Constructivists, see Klaus Biesenbach and Roxana Marcoci, “Toward the Sun: Olafur Eliasson’s Protocinematic Vision,” in *Take Your Time: Olafur Eliasson*. See Eliasson’s comments on his resistance to the more narrow definition of design in terms of “lifestyle” and “styling” in Louise Schouwenberg, “A Change of Climate,” *Frame* 49 (March/April 2006).
- 11 For more on this tendency see Rick Poyner, “Art’s Little Brother” (2005), in *Design and Art*—a heavily critical review of my *DesignArt* reprinted from *Icon* 23 (May 2005).
- 12 In by far the longest essay on the role of the studio in Eliasson’s practice, Philip Ursprung, who has developed some of the most engaging writing on the contemporary studio, opposes the methods and aims of Eliasson’s work to those of design—repeating the usual hierarchy between art and design:
Eliasson is part of a general social trend of recent years: namely, the increasing demand for art to articulate the things that surround us. We can call it “design” in the broadest sense of the word. It is a practice that transcends what is normally understood by the term “art.” It is also a practice that should not be confused with product design. Rather, it is a blueprint of our environment, of the way we move and behave; in fact, it is all about our life.
See “From Observer to Participant: In Olafur Eliasson’s Studio,” in *Studio Olafur Eliasson: An Encyclopedia* (Cologne: Taschen, 2008), 15. While the essay is impressive in scope,

Ursprung's interpretation of product design—and of what motivates product designers—is deeply problematic since it is based on a reductive and somewhat stereotyped reading of the activity of a designer. And despite the conceptual acuity of her essay on Studio Olafur Eliasson, Jones too omits design from the equation, listing “the trading zones,” active in the studio as being those between art and “architecture, mathematics, engineering, and physics.” See “The Art of Olafur Eliasson: The User/Server Mode,” *Artforum* 46, no. 2 (October 2007): 325.

- 13 That this series of lamps has led to the production of an actual working lamp, Starbrick (2009), Eliasson's first product, brought into unlimited production in collaboration with the lighting manufacturer Zumtobel only makes the point more acute.
- 14 See Eliasson himself on the necessity of going beyond casting formal correspondences in terms of his relationship to historical precedents in “In Conversation: Daniel Buren and Olafur Eliasson,” *Artforum* 43, no. 9 (May 2005): 209–214.
- 15 So-called critical design, piloted by Anthony Dunne and Fiona Raby and continued by the likes of Beta Tank, has attempted to expand on this potential within design, but so far with varied results.
- 16 Bruno Munari, “Continuous Structures,” in *Design as Art* (London: Penguin, 2008 [1966]), 169. Umberto Eco's *The Open Work* was published in Italy in 1962 and has recently been contextualised within the debate around participatory forms of art practice in Claire Bishop, ed., *Participation* (Cambridge, MA/London: MIT Press/Whitechapel, 2006).
- 17 Munari, “Projections with Polarized Light,” in *Design as Art*, 189.
- 18 This series was staged at the Museum of Modern Art in New York in 1954. See

Munari, “Projections with Polarized Light,” 188.

- 19 Munari, “Preface,” in *Design as Art*, 13.
- 20 Munari, “Design as Art,” in *Design as Art*, 25 and 26.
- 21 *Ibid.*, 27.
- 22 Ronald Jones conceives of Eliasson and a number of other artists of his generation as “Experience Designers.” See the interview with Jones. For a critique of Experience Design, see the comments made by Bonsiepe. The very same characteristics of Eliasson's installations that render it Experience Design for Jones, turn it into the art of the spectacle for James Meyer in “No More Scale: The Experience of Size in Contemporary Sculpture,” *Artforum* 42, no. 10 (Summer 2004).
- 23 This experiment was actually a test for *Your blind passenger* (2010), presented at ARKEN Museum of Modern Art, Denmark. The work gradually transitions from cool white to warm white through to yellow.

Åbäke

With one arm outstretched, Maki Suzuki leans against a pillar outside a building in New York's SoHo, while Kajsa Ståhl stands to his left, arms dangling by her side. Because of the angle, Ståhl partially obscures Nina Persson—the lead singer of The Cardigans—who is eagerly gesturing at something with her right hand. The precise poses struck by all three would not feel out of place in a Dutch seventeenth-century group portrait by Franz Hals.

This photograph hangs on the wall of Åbäke's micro-studio in Dalston, London. It is an homage to Food, the experimental social art project that a collective consisting in part of the artists Gordon Matta-Clark and Tina Girouard and Caroline Goodden set up—the three of whom were photographed outside the Prince and Wooster Street location striking exactly the same poses in June 1971. Suzuki and Ståhl—who founded the graphic design studio collective Åbäke in 2000 with Benjamin Reichen and Patrick Lacey—were in the neighborhood for a meeting about the artwork for one of Persson's album covers and noticed that it coincided with the anniversary of Food's opening.

Though taken on a whim and never published, the photograph is very telling. If the niche, now-defunct graphic design journal *Dot Dot Dot* updated its article devoted to portraits of collective graphic design studios, then this photograph, had all four members of Åbäke been present, would surely be fitting.¹ Like the photographs of the other collective graphic design studios in the article—including a laid back Push Pin Studios from the 1970s, a sharp professional looking Total Design from the 1980s, and a conceptually erudite poster portrait of the three members of Graphic Thought Facility rendered in silhouette from the 1990s—the 2008 photo-