

Telephone Relay

In May, Olafur Eliasson called a number of experts from various fields outside art. The conversations were inspired by many of the ideas and challenges that arose during the development of the exhibition at Louisiana. Each conversation led organically to the next, creating a spontaneous chain of discussions about themes ranging from the conditions of art-making to audience participation and the museum as institution; from atmosphere, nature, and our relationship with animals to the body, craftsmanship and tacit knowledge; to community and the meaning of “we”.

Niels Albertsen

Olafur Eliasson: Niels, you're the first person I've called. In fact I won't really know who else to talk to until we have spoken. I'd like to talk to you about the concept of *atmosphere*, which is something you've done research on, and for me atmosphere is crucial to having an experience. Atmosphere, of course, is not something that's built into an artwork or a building, for example; it's our involvement that creates it.

Niels Albertsen: I certainly agree that experiencing an atmosphere is a matter of engagement or *involvement*. If your senses aren't receptive, you experience nothing. In sensing the whole space of Louisiana, you will presumably be highly present and responsive. You will experience it directly – probably not only what is nearby, but also things that are farther away. The sensory impression will also point somewhere else, outside the specific space and work you are in. What we are calling atmosphere here – the totality of the sense of space, the installation, the acoustics, the effects of light and colour, etc., interacting with the individual participant's experience and moods – is a kind of mediator; it sets something in motion in the space and landscape and in the individual.

OE: The exhibition is a local phenomenon, where you walk through some spaces with a landscape in them that is clearly constructed, and I'm interested in what the landscape has to do with the rest of the world. When we're in familiar surroundings, in our circle of family and friends, our senses are very finely tuned, but the further away we get from the local context, the duller our senses become. I'm wondering whether our focus on atmosphere can give us a relationship with something that is very abstract and far away – the North Pole or global warming, for example?

NA: Relating actively to such global environmental issues doesn't require you

to think up strategies for action that are just as hyper-complex as the phenomena that they address. If instead you try to focus on the many different single issues of which the global network consists – in relation to environmental issues, for example – then you can break down the complexity. In breaking it down, there is potential for action. You can view yourself as active in many less comprehensive dimensions of the hyper-complex global context, which no one can perceive in its totality anyway.

OE: So the solutions lie in local decisions and actions, carried out with a sense of the broader perspective. That actually isn't so different from the way art works. Whether a work of art is more or less successful depends, for me at least, on whether it allows for several parallel modes of awareness at the same time. I think you can have several experiences at the same time when you encounter the landscape at Louisiana. One is purely physical – the floor is uneven, it may be wet and the sound and light are different from the normal museum situation. You have to invent a different approach to the motor skills involved in moving around a museum. So there's a discrepancy between your expectations and what actually happens, and that will help to strengthen or focus the experience.

But the other experience is about your ability to see yourself in a larger context. It's when the gaze is turned around that you sense your own presence.

NA: It makes me think of a discussion I had many years ago with the architect Christian Norberg-Schulz, who placed a lot of emphasis on the bodily sensation of a place, the place understood as a more or less closed unit. I would counter that argument with an example from my own experience of standing at a given place near my holiday home up in Hirtshals and looking out over the sea; from there I can see ships where most of the ship is below the horizon and just the wheelhouse

appears above it. It is an experience of sensory presence and at the same time it is an experience showing that the earth is round. It was an experience and a placing of myself within the greater system of coordinates.

OE: Yes, you experience not only the curvature of the earth but also yourself and your own ability to experience. That is where you get to see yourself from the perspective of the surrounding world. It's incredibly important that you sense your own envelopment in the world and thus also a responsibility for the world – even when it concerns things that are hard to verbalize.

NA: The singular "I" that understands itself in this way is involved in the same motion outside itself, out there with a "we". That's where it becomes political. There is a level that is neither – to use two classic concepts – *Gemeinschaft* [community] nor *Gesellschaft* [society], but is based on a collectivity that simply transcends such distinctions.

Niels Albertsen (b. 1945), professor at the Aarhus School of Architecture, Department of Platform Urban Landscapes, and director of the Centre for Strategic Urban Research, researches, among other things, urban development and planning.

Inger Thormann

Olafur Eliasson: When I am working on an exhibition, I often think about what people will actually experience. What are the premises for their experience? How does the museum play its part as an institution? I'm very interested in the idea of feeling secure, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, daring to take a risk. You could say, in fact, that there's a certain risk connected with trying to be aware of who you are. You're a child psychologist, and, for many years, you've worked at the Skodsborg Observation and Treatment Home, which, incidentally, is quite close to Louisiana – or it was until it fell victim to cuts. For children, security and being able to trust the

surrounding world is of extraordinary importance. I think there are some interesting points of contact between art and psychology here that we can talk a bit about.

Inger Thormann: The two institutions do in fact resemble each other, not least in their locations. Both have the forest at their backs and face the water. I'm thinking about the spatial situation of having the forest close by; you can seek a kind of security in it, and also explore it. The water too gives you a sense of security, and where the garden of the treatment home stops and the water begins, there's a little wall half a metre high. Over the years, I've often observed how children who are traumatized or brain-damaged – for example, because of the mother's drug and alcohol abuse during pregnancy – would quite spontaneously go down there. I've seen the children stand at the little wall and linger by the water to find peace and quiet. The calm that nature creates allows for in-depth experience. It creates a space where you dare to reflect, to look at yourself with critical eyes. But we've also observed that some children need to be under a roof – it gets to be a bit too intense with the sky and the sea – so we built a pavilion with glass walls down there by the water, where they felt the most comfortable. This created an extra degree of intimacy, especially if there was a calm adult nearby who could contain the pain many of our children felt. Then there was room for the big emotions and thoughts, for *being*. I'm reminded of a four-year-old boy who was about to meet his father for the first time. I spoke to him about where he wanted the meeting to take place, and he suggested the pavilion with the view out over the water. The spatial security where you're out in the natural environment and yet slightly sheltered offered possibilities we couldn't find indoors.

OE: What possibilities are you thinking of?

IT: The possibility of being able to tolerate being in the midst of what is difficult, and to let go of the fear of what could happen in the worst case, to let go of the uneasiness. But that probably doesn't have so much to do with art, Olafur.

OE: It has to do with *many things*. After all, art also deals with how we are in the world, and the extent to which we live with social control and marginalization. Some of the things you have worked a lot with are things we can't directly verbalize – traumas and emotions, for example. For me, creativity and art are a kind of language you can use to put words to what hasn't yet been verbalized. Verbalizing can mean giving form, colour or sound to an emotion.

IT: But it can also have a negative effect. Sometimes you impose on others an emotion that they don't really have through the way you talk. That's something social workers and psychologists have to be very aware of. You should let the child come first. It isn't right to say, "Well, you must be hungry now, eh?" or "You must be able to smell the lovely scent here." There's no guarantee that the child thinks it smells lovely. But you can ask, "What did you smell? What should we call this smell?" and then the little girl answers, "It's pink, cos I love pink", and she thinks about pink as she smells a yellow lily.

OE: But that's just what art museums also work with: making room for someone to ask, "What does it sound like?" and the answer to be, "Oh, well, it sounds green." That's a completely legitimate answer.

Inger Thormann (b. 1942), Danish psychologist, social worker and writer, worked from 1982 until 2012 at Skodsborg Observation and Treatment Home (closed 2012).

Pireeni Sundaralingam

Olafur Eliasson: The artwork I'm making for Louisiana is essentially a landscape, very minimal. Just stones, small stones, big stones, and then that little bit of water. So it's not like a beautiful garden. This work is about showing that time, movement, your navigational skills, getting lost, the feeling of finding yourself, that all of these are among the co-producers of your experience.

Pireeni Sundaralingam: One of the things that strikes me when you talk about this landscape is how it grants us the opportunity to explore a space free from familiar words and categories. Our days can sometimes seem like a voyage between names, packed as they are with objects that we can readily name: the tree, the street, the train station. But with your work, in the absence of those familiar objects, we are free to move between different scales. Perhaps our eyes widen to take in the expanse of the landscape, or perhaps they are drawn down to the pebble, the stone, the rock. The installation is no longer just a physical space with preordained labels, but a continuing experience in which our brains and our minds struggle to create meaning. Another striking aspect of this work is the way in which it privileges the body. In a landscape seemingly empty of linguistic labels, the ability, as you said, to feel the embodiment of your knowledge is restored. When we're within a cityscape – and the majority of human beings now live in cities – we're subject to the way that urban features such as concrete sidewalks have been designed to allow us to walk efficiently without having to pay too much attention to negotiating the space or having to lose precious time. Similarly, digital route-finder apps allow us to traverse an urban space with speed and certainty,

following predetermined routes that minimize unpredictability, minimize the time we spend engaging with the environment. The landscape at Louisiana, in contrast, needs to be negotiated constantly. It is impossible to ignore your body, or its passage through time, as you stumble and trip and fall.

OE: It's interesting what you said about the way we proceed through the landscape. One is sort of left to notice how the brain works.

PS: Walking through the show definitely feels like a kind of cognitive experiment exploring our attentional system. There's a growing focus among neuroscientists on what happens when we are in quiet states like contemplation or daydreaming, and it strikes me that proceeding through a gallery space such as this may well activate such states of "quiet" attention. In a paper called "Rest Is Not Idleness" the researcher Mary Immordino-Yang and her colleagues have argued that having time to reflect or daydream is extremely important: it allows the brain to be more efficient later when full attention needs to be given to complex tasks. They point out that those people who can switch most clearly and cleanly between this "default mode" and "active attention" tend to have the highest scores on IQ and memory tests or other attention-demanding tasks. They even suggest that time spent in the default mode may be crucial to healthy socio-emotional functioning and that this mode may be significantly impacted when hindered by high levels of environmental distraction, such as the hyper-disruption experienced when we become over-immersed in digital social media. The space of the gallery seems to offer a counterbalance to all this – a space for the mind, like the river, to meander and find its own course, to engage without being hyper-alert, to rest without being idle.

OE: I'm interested in exploring how the landscape may radiate beyond the

walls of the museum and trigger consequences for the world.

PS: It makes me think of a recent cognitive science experiment by Simone Ritter and her colleagues in which actively engaging with unexpected situations or landscapes in a lab boosted subjects' subsequent creative thinking and cognitive flexibility. In one lab condition, people were plunged into an "alternative" virtual reality in which they experienced unusual physical conditions for three minutes; in another, they were simply required to make a sandwich in an unusual way. In both cases, being actively engaged with the world in unexpected ways – even when doing something as simple as making a sandwich differently – was enough to change people's subsequent levels of creative thinking profoundly. Actively engaging with one's body in the landscape, being puzzled, being lost – these are all ways in which we can experience an unusual situation and carry an expanded cognition into the outside world.

Pireeni Sundaralingam, poet and cognitive scientist, studied at the University of Oxford. She has held scientific research posts at Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Cambridge, US, and University of California, Los Angeles.

Steen Koerner

Olafur Eliasson: I'm very interested in how body and movement generate space. Of course, body and motion also involve time – the time it takes us to go from one place to another (through the landscape at Louisiana, for example), or the time it takes us to have an experience. I'm often inspired by dance and think of the body as a kind of drawing machine – by moving, it outlines space. We've talked a lot about that, Steen, and we've also worked together at my studio in several sessions where, thanks to slow-motion experiments with your street dance friends, we've come closer to what it means to see body and space as one thing.

Steen Koerner: Absolutely. When you use what we in the dance world call "isolations" and "fixed points" with the body, you create a space around you. If I fix a point with my left index finger as far from my body as I can, then I can move in a circle around that point. In that way, the body can draw circles, create squares and so on. There are choreographers in the world of modern dance who set up strings in the space to choreograph the dancers in certain varied patterns and then remove the strings. The audience doesn't know that they were ever there; it's as if there's something invisible that makes everyone follow the same rules. You could say there's a kind of extra programming for everything, from t'ai chi to electric boogie, ballet or *touch*, which is also inspired by 3D programs and the way you draw a space on a computer. We live in the year 2014, and you can see that on the body.

OE: Of course, there is still the more traditional view of space, where the body is the dynamic element while space is static, a container, but as you have also said, space is far more relative. It contains friction; it depends on the people who use it.

SK: Exactly. If I pretend the whole floor is made of rubber and every time I take a step, I actually seem to sink into the floor a little, then I am playing with gravity. That creates a feeling that I am in a different space from the one the viewer is in, although we are only two metres from each other. I can make the space I'm standing in pitch and roll, or I can make it look as if I'm walking under water, even though there is no water. A sensation of mass is achieved by making the resistance real. For the body of the person doing it, it actually does feel like walking under water. But you can also act as if you're walking through something even heavier – thick porridge, for example. Depending on what you choose, you can create a new space.

Steen Koerner (b. 1968), Danish dancer, choreographer and director. He has engaged in a number of collaborative projects with Olafur Eliasson, including *Movement microscope*, which is part of the exhibition at Louisiana.

Timothy Morton

Olafur Eliasson: Tim – I've been looking forward to talking to you. Your *effort* in verbalising thoughts has turned out to be very inspiring for me. While working in my studio on an exhibition, I often just trust my instincts or feelings and then make decisions based on them without necessarily articulating why I do what I do. But it can also be rewarding to turn towards a verbalizing process. I like to see language as something proactive, as an agent, a doer. Words can be co-producers of reality.

Timothy Morton: That's terrific. The thing is, I tend to think that art is actually thought from the future; it's something you can't quite say or think right now, something hard to articulate. I like to look at artworks as things I haven't thought yet. Art is *in front of thinking*, so to speak, so I like very much this idea of proactive work.

OE: My question to you is actually about words. To me, a word is like a small sculpture. When you say something, it's almost like a gust of wind that flies through the room. The word leaves your mouth, vibrating, and it takes shape in the world. I love this idea of the word having a body, a form, and all kinds of tonalities. It has a built-in activism – it can actually effect change in the world.

TM: Speech isn't just words, it isn't just mental concepts. It is physical thinking, it is itself physical. If you think about it, any physical form is a delivery and memory device: a delivery of "itself", if I can speak a little paradoxically, and traces of other things that formed it. This applies to speech, which is precisely, as you say, a physical being. An mp3 recorder is a form

of delivery, or a speech on a podium. Also a voice bouncing off a surface is a kind of delivery. And in a way that surface has become the memory. You have memory directly and temporarily inscribed onto, let's say, the rock surface off which the sound is bouncing. This is just like the memory of a chip or the memory of movements of breath that made a beautiful glass vase, inscribed directly into the shape of the glass. So I love to think of speech as exactly that. It is directly physical. It might be ephemeral, but it does not belong in some abstract realm.

OE: I totally agree. I'd say that a poem is a space. Not just a passive space that you enter, but a performative space from which you cannot exit. It spaces. But I think our culture has prioritised a disembodied relationship with language. We've forgotten what language can do.

TM: I'm saying this a bit weirdly, but free will is a little bit overrated. A Coca-Cola bottle wants you to hold it a certain way, just like a hammer wants you to hold it a certain way. These kinds of directives come from all entities. When you drive down a road, the flow of traffic kind of sucks you in. In a similar way, the poem tells you how to read it; in fact, often encoded into the poem are quite explicit instructions of how it should be read. But even without those, the form of the poem is shaping you – the reader – in many different ways.

OE: Interesting. When I was a young artist in the early 90s, phenomenology was very influential. The argument of philosophers like Maurice Merleau-Ponty that the subject is a co-producer of reality was considered extremely relevant. But today the consequences of our actions on our biosphere have manifested themselves in climate change and we are increasingly feeling a sense of responsibility and maybe even humility towards this force that we have turned out to be. And theo-

rists like you ask us to look at objects, animals, and other non-human stuff as co-inhabitants of our planet. This change, in turn, requires a re-evaluation of the position of the subject. So I've come to see the subject in a slightly more decentralized way than I used to, primarily through the ecological thought of Bruno Latour. Bruno has criticized my rather Romantic relationship with phenomenology.

TM: But I do think some kind of Romanticism is deeply necessary. Not just because it's a nice idea but because it is built into what a thing is before it is even perceived or talked about by a human. Think about my favourite form of irony, Romantic irony. This is where the narrator finds out she or he is a character in the poem. Think about *Blade Runner*, in which the detective finds out that he is a criminal! Now notice that this involves a weird – literally, *twisted* – flip between two hermetically sealed domains: that of the narrator and that of the poem. The narrator is different from the poem, yet the same. Now think about how this is a model for things in general: a thing, in order to exist, is weirdly different from itself, without requiring an observer of this difference. Think about quantum states of coherence, where things can vibrate and not vibrate at the very same time. If you think about it, nature is not something distinct from me or outside of me – somewhere over there or underneath the street or hundreds of miles away in the mountains. If you think that nature is actually in my body, it is right here, then nature itself changes into just the fact that the non-human is already part of social space, which means that social space was never only human in the first place. And that's what we need to notice, that social space was always already populated by all kinds of non-human beings.

Timothy Morton (b. 1968), endowed chair at Rice University, Houston. Author of books and essays about ecology, philosophy, and the arts, including *Hyperobjects: Philosophy and Ecology after the End of the World* (2013).

Lone Frank

Olafur Eliasson: There's a tradition of seeing the human being as a subject and what is outside us as an object; that's how it's viewed in phenomenology, for example, which I "grew up with" at the art academy. But in the meantime other people have emerged, and they're really interesting: Bruno Latour, for example, and Timothy Morton, who I got to know recently. I'm working with Bruno on another exhibition at present, and he tends to tease me that I have certain "phenomenological weaknesses". For him, it makes no sense to see humans as separate from nature.

Lone Frank: As a biologist, I think it's very clear that we're part of nature. We see this part from the inside and put ourselves on a pedestal, as if the rest of the world were something else, something outside us. But obviously we're part of the evolution that has taken place on the earth, and the fact that we start to intervene in nature is – if I can put it that way – just another event in the course of evolution. We have arrived at a stage where people talk about an *anthropocene* age – that is, a period in which mankind is one of the driving forces of geological and climatic development. That's an extremely huge thing.

OE: So nature isn't just *out there*, it's also *inside us*.

LF: Yes, we *are* nature, and with time, we've grown into a considerable force of nature.

OE: That's really interesting, and it must have consequences for how we experience the world. But part of what we experience on a daily basis still falls into a very strict division between

object and subject, not least because of our consumption-oriented surroundings, which support the sale of objects and experiences in nice packaging. What I'm interested in with my work at Louisiana isn't really that you experience an object, an artwork, but that you experience yourself.

LF: The question is whether you can transcend experiencing yourself as a subject and instead experience yourself as a part of nature. In reality, we're just temporary vehicles for some genetic information, but you don't have that experience of yourself, do you? So it's a matter of being aware of where we are in this whole cycle.

OE: Yes, it's crucial to see your own position in the ecosystem more clearly – and embodying ecology through our senses is an important tool in this.

LF: We mustn't forget that we sense the world the way we are *able to* sense it – not as it *is*. We sense what our brains make it possible for us to sense. We see the trees as green because our eyes work the way they do. We can't see ultraviolet light, and we can't feel magnetic fields and that sort of thing.

OE: So in that perspective, mankind is a limited measure of the world. A kind of barometer that only works at particular frequencies. As I was saying earlier, I'm interested in the new eco-criticism that has emerged with Latour, who reinterprets the role of the subject and challenges the Romantic view of nature. But as an artist, I often get tangled up in Romantic notions of nature, and, all other things being equal, Louisiana is also built up around a Romantic idea of the garden and nature and the meanings of culture and nature.

LF: Culture is something that arises from the human brain's way of functioning, from our way of being animals. Culture refers to certain ways of existing in the world that we set up and that *work* for us to some degree. And

as we encounter ecological problems, and as climate change affects us, it's logical that we have to see ourselves in a different way. A change in culture has to come.

OE: How much do you think we are linked to animals?

LF: Oh, we're endlessly linked! I don't think you can point to *the specifically human*. As far as I can see, there are only differences of degree. Throughout history we've tried to point to the specifically human. Is it the use of tools? No, there are a number of animals who can also do that. Nor is language categorically different in humans; it's just better developed. So the more we look at nature, the clearer it becomes to us that we aren't separate from it. Darwin toppled us from that pedestal 150 years ago. He said we are simply an offshoot of the evolutionary tree. That is the core of his revolution and thinking, which has been almost unbearable for very many people.

OE: Let's look at a softer issue. Do you think there's empathic potential in the idea that animals and people are not essentially different? Does it offer a possibility for solving problems of social exclusion or marginalization?

LF: That's just it – the ethical circle has widened. First, it was the men of the tribe that had the highest status. Women were slightly inferior and animals even more so. Now people are talking about special rights for other primates because they resemble us so much. People are also beginning to take industrialized farming seriously: what is it actually like for those animals? A pig is pretty close to a human being and is both an intelligent and emotionally highly developed animal. So yes, we live in a kind of "age of empathy", where much is made of empathy or sympathetic understanding. Rationalism is no longer a holy grail. And if you cultivate empathy, that has to mean opening up to feeling more for the rest of nature.

Lone Frank (b. 1966), Danish science journalist, associated for many years with the newspaper *Weekendavisen*, TV host and writer, PhD in neuro-biology. Frank has won a number of prizes, including the Future Prize in 2006.

Henrik Vibskov

Olafur Eliasson: I was just talking to Lone Frank about whether mankind and nature are in reality one and the same, and she said something extremely interesting about that – among other things, that we are in fact not essentially different from pigs! And that makes me think about whether you could see yourself designing some clothes for pigs? I also had the idea of releasing pigs in the exhibition at some point, and they could be wearing your clothes.

Henrik Vibskov: That would be fantastic. I did in fact work on the possibility of releasing some pigs in London when I graduated from the academy, but they wouldn't let me. I wanted to reflect Denmark at some level, and that was part of my background, my family's background. I'm very closely connected to pigs – that is, breeding and slaughtering them. There are five million people and 20 million pigs in this country, right? Instead, I ended up making a bag that was supposed to look like a pig, a suitcase that was a big, life-sized sow with a handle and zip fastener. With regard to your exhibition: when you come into this room and see that Olafur has created a mega-cool landscape there, you get what you already knew confirmed. But let's say you didn't know there were pigs there too – if that information were missing, or if the pigs only appeared *now and then*, then you would lose the certainty you normally feel about going to Louisiana.

OE: Certainty and confidence are actually things I'm very preoccupied with at present. It's important for me to make exhibitions that are capable of reflecting the people who see them.

I'm thinking of those things in us that can be positive and life-affirming, and those that are more problematic or hard to handle. And that requires the exhibition to have an atmosphere that invites people inside, gives them confidence that this is worth getting involved in. If you like, it can also be an atmosphere that isn't only affirmative for them, but also involves an element of risk or uncertainty. Do you see parallels to this in your work with fashion shows?

HV: People at these presentations are actually often uncertain. They come into a new atmosphere, and they like to see that on the seat, there's a bit of paper with writing on it explaining what the presentation is all about. But I stopped doing that when I saw that people were forgetting to experience things. They just sat there reading. For that reason, I try to think about catching not only the eye but also the other senses. My stuff is sort of conceptual-ish, and sometimes some quite trippy ideas come up: "Aha, it's about sharks!" Well, okay, I hadn't seen that one coming, and, anyway, it wasn't what it was about for me. But all sorts of other perspectives grow out of it if people are not just sitting there, pre-programmed by a piece of paper.

OE: Clothes are the architecture closest to the body; they're what we live in. And then come our houses, surroundings, the city maybe, and then finally the world. These circles are all different layers of clothing. What I think is interesting is that clothes and architecture can be used to constitute and strengthen us, but also to study ourselves.

HV: I think a lot of people who come to Louisiana have the feeling when they leave that they have found something to wear. They're influenced by the whole set-up – by the food, the experience, the wild garden, the architecture, by entering it. When they step out of the museum and go home, it's as if the atmosphere sticks to them at least

for a quarter of an hour or more – for some people, even longer, I think. This atmosphere, the "I've been to Louisiana today" experience, is felt close to the body.

Henrik Vibskov (b. 1972), Danish fashion designer, multi-artist and musician, trained at Central Saint Martins in London, 2001. In 2012 he was appointed a member of the *Chambre Syndicale de la Mode Masculine*.

Andreas Roepstorff

Olafur Eliasson: Right now I'm calling around to people who know something about something I know less about. One of the things I'd like to talk to you about is how we experience atmosphere. Atmosphere can be hard to put into words.

Andreas Roepstorff: Yes, it's hugely underdescribed. What an atmosphere *does* is give a kind of total description of a space of possibilities that unfolds in front of you. Atmosphere is something you both enter into and bring with you. It's the aggregate of us, the others who are around us and the physical world we are in. In that sense you're a co-producer – you're complicit.

OE: That idea of complicity prompts a discussion of ethics and responsibility that is extremely interesting. Gernot Böhme, the German philosopher who – as far as I understand – was one of the first people to describe and introduce atmosphere research in philosophy (incidentally, in a really good way), sees it only as an aesthetic concept. He defined atmosphere as something relatively autonomous; it can be an almost objective quality of a city – which is to limit the potential of the concept, I think, and detach it from the strong research on sociality that we have in Scandinavia. You and I have spoken about the social "we" feeling with Dan

Zahavi, who has set out to map the “we” at his Centre for Subjectivity Research here in Copenhagen. This is an indication of a burgeoning scholarly interest in new ways of defining feelings of community. But we have just had an election for the European Parliament, where there seems to have been a striking absence of focus on the “we”, on a *European* “we”. The “we” lost this election, which is truly sad.

AR: You’re quite right that we’ve lost the notion of a European “we”, or perhaps we’ve never had it. The EU hasn’t done much to profile itself as a framework for a perception of itself as a larger “we”. But you can also choose to read the European parliamentary elections differently, and see, for example, the high number of votes that the Danish People’s Party received in Denmark precisely as an invocation of a “we”. The whole conceptual basis for the Danish People’s Party and the rhetoric around it signal that there is something about being who we are that is important and worth holding on to. You can then criticize the fact that this isn’t an inclusive “we”. It’s “us” and “them”. But I don’t believe you should underestimate the element of the “we” feeling in the voting pattern we’ve seen in the European parliamentary elections, both in Denmark and in other European countries.

OE: That’s interesting. Do you think you can compare a political “we” with the way the art museums define “we”?

AR: The museum as an institution can go both ways – it can be a dynamo for the feeling of inclusion and participation, but it can also go the exact opposite way by functioning as a place that excludes certain values and creates profiles along the lines of, “Do you have taste, or don’t you?” But to get back to the political “we”, which you put on the agenda with your front

page in *Politiken* this Sunday:¹ for me, it works really well as an artwork, not only in the aesthetic sense, but also in the sense of an experience, since what it set off in me was the feeling of, “Well, yes – the election we’re involved in now is about me, but it’s also about the way we construct our ‘we’, the way we construct our world.” It’s a “we” that is both within myself and lies outside myself. A work like that offers us scope for interpretation. It is open. The “inner we” can also easily be understood within the logic of the Danish People’s Party.

OE: That openness or uncertainty about what something means is something that interests me a lot. Sometimes we face a choice, and actually it isn’t the choice that interests me, but something more: what kind of confidence or emotion is it that inspires us to make a risky choice? What makes people risk leaving their comfort zones? And what about museums – when are they prepared to transcend their comfort zones? As an artist, I am of course aware that there may be more money and visitors in sticking to the comfortable institutional model. It’s hard to have a blockbuster exhibition where the visitors are urged to *work* and take a risk.

AR: If our lives are at stake, risky behaviour is encouraged, of course. But a situation with a relatively high degree of security and the feeling of a lifeline behind you – I think in reality that can also stimulate risk-taking behaviour. It offers you the chance to try things out, to take risks, but of course it requires a social context that ensures you won’t be punished in the subsequent evaluation for your willingness to take risks. It’s the classic Danish problem – you are ridiculed by the community. “We all knew it would go wrong.” But in reality we could develop a culture that is both secure *and* risk-seeking, where the risk you run when you try something new is appreciated and valued.

1 *Your inner we*, front page, *Politiken*, 25 May 2014, created by Olafur Eliasson on the occasion of the elections for the European Parliament.

Andreas Roepstorff (b. 1967), professor at Aarhus University, director of the Interacting Minds Centre and co-director of MINDLab at Aarhus University Hospital. He works with human cognition in the space where the humanities, social, natural and health sciences meet.

Connie Hedegaard

Olafur Eliasson: There is a lot of theoretical work being done and poetry and literature being written about the environmental challenges we are facing today. One of the perspectives on the situation is that there is only one object of concern – our biosphere – and we are inside it. We can’t step outside the object and see the problems from a distance – there is no *outside*, as Bruno Latour says – so we must quite automatically see ourselves as part of the ecosystem. In reality, we can also work with the mindset that doing something about the climate is obviously doing something for ourselves. We are nature. You are situated in a highly operational part of this discussion, and I think that is extremely interesting. This is where ideas are translated into action. What view of nature underlies your work with the climate?

Connie Hedegaard: The premise for much of what I do is the fundamental conservative view of life – that we have an obligation to pass things on in at least the same condition as we ourselves received them. It’s a view that requires us to reflect on the role of mankind in relation to nature. How much effect do we allow ourselves to have on nature? Nature isn’t something we can simply exploit at will.

OE: One of the things you work a lot with is talking about climate problems to motivate people to take action.

CH: Climate issues are huge, but I think you can generate action by breaking the problems down into

blocks that are more specific, more manageable for the individual. I have to be able to see that there's a point, and there has to be a relationship between what I can do and the size of the challenge. I also think it's really important to have a sense that others are acting towards the same vision. It isn't enough to appeal to people to do what is morally right. It isn't enough to stress that you have a duty to act responsibly. It's good if it becomes a positive experience, if you feel you are part of a community. The other day I was at an event in Brussels where schoolchildren had worked for six months with a "green makeover". When you see that you have no doubt that these 10-to-12-year-olds had the feeling that "We have understood something together", "We aren't alone in this", "We have developed some new habits" and "We think this is fun and important". One of their first recommendations was that people should participate in social contexts. I think one of the problems for politics at present is that the "we" has been undermined – as if people can manage everything by themselves, just because they have become financially independent. We think we have little need of others; we've closed ourselves off. The pendulum has swung a lot in that direction, but I think it's starting to swing back towards an understanding that many of the challenges we're facing can only be dealt with if we reinvent the "we". It's no good trying to turn us all into consumers; consumers only think about "me". There also has to be a *citizenship dimension*.

OE: The "we" that has to be activated in connection with the climate requires a high degree of emotional identification. What I experience, on the contrary, is that there's a lot of rhetorical one-dimensionality in the way people talk about these problems. How can politicians verbalize the challenges so that it becomes easier to identify with them and see their relevance to oneself?

CH: The higher people rise in the political system, the more pressure there is on them, in terms of both time and responsibility, and there's a great tendency for them to adopt the language of power, which can be identical to the language of the technocrats. This has much to do with pressure from the media. If you happen to say something as a politician that's just a tiny bit inaccurate, you risk being wrongfooted by it. You talk so that you won't be caught out by the thousands of people who understand such complicated topics or by the journalists, but, at the same time, you must communicate with the people who elected you. In a way, you're talking to half a million or a million people at a time. And in that situation, it would be better if you didn't have to hide behind the language of technocracy. It's the job of the politician to talk in terms of values.

Connie Hedegaard (b. 1960), Danish politician, EU commissioner for climate action since 2010. As Danish Minister for the Environment (2004-2009), she has worked to prioritize climate on the national and international agenda, at the UN climate change conference in Copenhagen in 2009, for example.

Minik Thorleif Rosing

Olafur Eliasson: You once gave an example that I've actually used on several occasions: when you stand looking at a landscape – a fjord in Greenland, for example – you may catch yourself thinking, "I wonder if the fjord is a couple of hours', or a day's or maybe a whole week's walk from here." The moment you stand still, you have a kind of non-bodily relationship with the place; you can't really feel how big the space is. You lock down the perspective. But if you start to walk, then you bring scale into the space. And at the same time you get scale in under your skin. What activates the contract between the landscape and you is your motion.

Minik Rosing: Yes, it's your action in space that becomes an experience

that enables you to understand the landscape. And that's why I also think that the landscape installation at Louisiana is probably pretty irrelevant if you just stand in the doorway and look in at it. Walking around in the landscape – that's where the experience arises. You also have a quite different understanding of a vast landscape when you walk through it compared with the perception you have of it if you fly over it in a helicopter. You can see that on very old maps of areas of Greenland: people had asked the local inhabitants if they could draw a map of a local area. That was before there were aircrafts. No one had ever seen the landscape from above. These old maps are in fact very accurate. They are relatively true to both angles and distances because people had walked through these landscapes and experienced them with their bodies. They had a realistic sense of the dimensions. Another example is when you walk out to some destination you have selected in a large landscape. It feels like a very long walk because you don't know when you'll get there. But when you turn around and walk home it feels like a much shorter walk, although by that time you may be more tired, because then you already know what you're up against; you have an understanding of the scale that is tied to activities, to the fact that you're moving in a space.

OE: Perhaps we can take that thought a step further: for me, sight or the gaze that isn't supported by motion is a kind of consuming gaze. It swallows up the surroundings. So I also think there's a critical potential in motion, in the time it takes to walk through a space. If Louisiana dares to allow motion to have meaning, it can avoid the consumption-based premises that drive the "experience economy" today. And in this respect, it's the great advantage of Louisiana that the land-

scape and the buildings are based on this idea of motion.

MR: It's actually true of the whole shape of Louisiana in relation to the surrounding landscape. Children can roll down the hill and grown-ups can be afraid of breaking their legs. That's an important part of the museum's atmosphere.

OE: There was another thing I wanted to talk to you about – the perception of history and objectivity in science. Something that greatly fascinates me as an artist is the way you translate your knowledge of bacteria, for example, by linking it to present-day discussions of the climate. Your research is out in society. It's both exploratory and active; it connects knowledge of the past with the problems of the present.

MR: A fundamental principle of geology is to start with present-day experience to understand the past. At the same time, the past is also the key to the future. Only by understanding how things have evolved can we relate to what our own role is today and understand ourselves in our present. People talk about science as something very objective, but in reality it is *selectively* objective. It reveals a small part of reality; it doesn't relate objectively to *all* of reality. Science is an abstraction from part of reality, and you can perhaps be critical of that. But, on the other hand, it's all we can deal with as human beings. We can't understand the world to its full extent; we have to understand tiny segments. You can easily feel a certain dizziness in the scientific world because no matter how fantastically clever you are, you only have tiny shards of understanding of something that is extremely complex, but also extremely relevant to our present.

Minik Rosing (b. 1957), director of the Geological Museum and professor of geology at Copenhagen University. He has participated in the geological exploration of Greenland and is world-famous for the backdating of the origin of life on earth by several hundred million years.

Ursula Munch-Petersen

Olafur Eliasson: You're a ceramicist, and I'd like to talk to you about crafts and the value of craftsmanship today. In the society we live in, it seems as if intellectual, verbalized knowledge has a higher status than physical knowledge and action.

Ursula Munch-Petersen: Well, I quite agree with that, and it's a big problem. Recently, I looked up an old article by Tor Nørretranders where he says that the body is wiser than the brain. That's really great. He gives some examples – like when you fall off your bike and stretch out your arms to protect yourself before you have time to think about it. Or if a footballer thinks about how to kick the ball into the net before he actually does it, then it's *far* too late. The body itself must know what to do.

OE: I think we can scan a room better by experiencing it with the body than by thinking about it. You deal with craft, the work of the hand, and what I'm interested in is how knowledge in the hands feels.

UM-P: I had an experience I can tell you about. Many years ago, I made a butter dish, where the block of butter is turned on its side and inserted completely into the dish. I don't do big production runs; I made it in my own studio and sold it at Clausens Kunsthandel. Once they are sold out, I make a new series, which I've now done quite a few times. I have a book in which I write down all sorts of things about materials and colours, also about the butter dish – "Remember this and that, and do such and such". Many of the first dishes I make simply won't do, there's something about the clay being distributed slightly wrong. But the last time I had to make it, I had the experience that it was really inside my hands. At some point, it just works out, and that's simply so nice. It's as if you're in a quite different world. But you have to make an object lots and

lots of times before it is inside the body.

OE: One of the qualities I think art has overlaps with one that craft has, in the sense that both fields value the challenges and skills involved in creating something, in the actual process. Of course, that isn't a formula for good art. But the creative process, where you take an idea or an emotion or an instinct (and it may be political or environmentally aware or whatever) and transform it into action – that is quite crucial. You, if anyone, are able to give shape to unspoken knowledge by virtue of the experience inherent in your hands. I don't want to romanticize, but it isn't simply about designing.

UM-P: No, the designing is also moulded by the craftsmanship. In a material like clay, the design is very much subject to the craftsmanship. The clay contracts and resists – that's the premise when you make an object.

OE: Mattias Tesfaye has written a book about having knowledge in your hands – *Kloge Hænder* (Wise Hands). Have you read it?

UM-P: Yes, I really like it. I think it's interesting that someone takes the issue up and respects craftsmanship. He mentions a new construction project in Ørestaden that has won prizes all over the world, and of course it was conceived in a fun way, but Tesfaye, who is himself a bricklayer, says that he has investigated this prizewinning project and that it's so badly built that it will have to be repaired even before it's finished, because there has been no respect for craftsmanship.

OE: That's really intriguing because it means that the reality the building has in a two- or three-dimensional rendering is valued more than what is actually built. The concept, which has been verbalized and quantified and is sold in a prospectus, is in focus. I can easily understand the dilemma architects are in today because they have

to formulate a language of design, but the conditions in which they have to do it – first and foremost an unrealistically low price per square metre – mean that you have to compromise on craftsmanship. That's too bad because craft is about the body and hands and emotions; it's about "embodying" a space. Good craftsmanship can make the space better at containing you.

UM-P: Just a little story that's so great when it comes to ceramics: the Chinese philosopher Lao-Tse said, two thousand years before our time, that the most important thing about a pot is something that is nothing: it's the space inside.

Ursula Munch-Petersen (b. 1937), Danish ceramist, trained at the Danish Design School and at the Royal Academy of Fine Arts. She has worked for Royal Copenhagen and elsewhere, and has won several prizes for her design, including the Georg Jensen Prize.

Tor Nørretranders

Olafur Eliasson: Just now I'm thinking about what happens when people come into the exhibition. In a way, I don't think there's any reason to talk any more about a subject that senses and an object that is sensed. The work, the viewers, the museum – it's like it's all one situation, a whole ecosystem.

Tor Nørretranders: One of my favourite expressions is that we are "natives" – that is, we belong to the ecosystem and the biosphere. Much of western socially critical self-perception is a bit apologetic because you see yourself as a tourist on a visit to an ecosystem where it would actually be best not to use things. And that is radically wrong because we have a *useful function*. There's a need for us to use things – the plants need the carbon dioxide we breathe out if they are to grow. We are part of a cycle; it would not be a happy situation at all if we weren't here. We do a lot of stupid things, but the basic fact is that we belong here. If we take this "native" concept further, into the

concept of the "kindness of the world", I think much of our way of being aware of the world bears the stamp of agricultural thinking: the idea that we have to standardize the world and make it our project. We have to cultivate a part of the land, so we call it a wheat field – we make it an object for ourselves. The feeling is that we need to work very hard and control the world very intensely to get anything to eat at all, to get energy and water and so on. We think of the world more or less as an enemy. And then there are shifts in consciousness where we suddenly realize: "Wait a minute – the world is full of food ..." There are huge quantities of water, and huge quantities of energy. We just have to reach out and capture it with some wind turbines. In reality, the world is extremely kind, and we have no need at all to be so controlling with it; we just have to trust it. You have to tune your senses and abilities and skills to say: "The world is full of edible things that grow all by themselves. There are loads of insects and strange plants that are worth eating." The trustful approach to the world is to say: "Let's go out and search. Let's go out and be open. Let's go out and participate." We tend to see the world as an object we take bits from instead of a flow we enter into.

OE: These were some of the things I talked to Ursula Munch-Petersen about – moving from theoretical knowledge to a physical relationship, where you feel and touch and work with something, produce and construct. In our society, we experience a kind of deterioration of experienced knowledge. And I say this not because I want to be anti-intellectual, but for me it's not just about what we know and how we convert it into action; there's also what we carry with us in our bodies. How do we become aware of that? In fact that's the kind of discussion I think should be raised by a museum.

TN: In philosophy it's called "tacit knowledge". That's the knowledge we

have when we walk or ride a bicycle, for example – knowledge we can't account for. It's impossible to walk in a relaxed, strolling way and at the same time explain how you do it. There are many things we do best without putting them into words, without having to think about them. And when you ask how one expresses such tacit, non-verbal knowledge – for example, in a craft or in cooking – the key concept is confidence in yourself as a biological being who dares to trust the wisdom of your own body. I've been very preoccupied with the American psychologist Barbara Fredrickson, one of the so-called positive psychology researchers. Last year she published the book *Love 2.0*, whose basic idea is that love is not a "top-down" concept that is suddenly there or not there. Love has a kind of basic ingredient, what Fredrickson calls "micro-moments" – small moments when two people make eye contact and for a split second get in synch with each other. Her point is that a micro-moment like that can easily arise with someone on the pavement who just moves aside so you can pass, or a bus driver who waits for you. They make that little "I relate directly to you" gesture. When you engage in such small synchronisms with people, it makes you happy. And the brilliant thing is the insight that each time you've accumulated a micro-moment with another human being, you build up a little more trust – a trust and a relationship with that person, which becomes a good working relationship with a colleague or a friendship or even love in several variants. But it's all built up from that tiny basic ingredient. My point is that our immediate community is always presenting us with those micro-moments, when we exchange trust with another human being. And that leads us to trust ourselves, our own skills and our ability to be in the world – and thus the kindness of the

world – a little more. It may also mean that we dare to do something that isn't just about our local community, but is perhaps about communicating with someone from the other side of the world over the Internet or creating works that mean something for other people.

Tor Nørretranders, b. 1955, Danish writer and the foremost Danish communicator of his generation on science, known for his book *The User Illusion* from 1998. Nørretranders has been awarded the Publicists' Prize among other awards.

60–65: Superimposed video stills from *Your embodied garden*, 2013
HDV 16:9, 9:23 min

66–69: Superimposed video stills from *Movement microscope*, 2011
HDV 16:9, 14:15 min

70–73: Video stills from *Innen Stadt Aussen*, 2010
HDV 16:9, 10:00 min