FROM OBSERVER TO PARTICIPANT

IN OLAFUR ELIASSON'S STUDIO

BY PHILIP URSPRUNG

I had heard how, at Olafur Eliasson's Studio in Berlin, a whole group of artists, architects, and technicians work and experiment together as they would in a laboratory, so I arranged a visit as part of my research for an essay on the modern-day artist's studio. On an icy-cold day in January 2006, I stood in front of the Studio, located in a warehouse right next door to the Hamburger Bahnhof Museum for Contemporary Art. This part of the city had always fascinated me. For decades, it lay on the edge of West Berlin, close to the Wall, but has now once again regained its position at the heart of the German capital, a place where the "East-meets-West" feeling still pervades. On one side are construction sites, warehouses, small industrial companies, and haulage contractors. On the other, the main railway station, the Federal Chancellery and Reichstag building—an ideal neighborhood for the studio of an experimental artist like Eliasson.

Eliasson had been obliged to cancel our planned meeting at short notice, so it was one of his assistants, the art historian Caroline Eggel, who led me through the Studio. The heating had broken down, and the few staff who had come in to work wore thick jackets and gloves as they sat huddled together in the small office, which had a separate heating system. Eliasson graduated from the Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts in 1995, but had been living in Cologne since 1993. In 1994, he moved to Berlin, where he set up home and studio on Rungestraße. There he worked, at first alone and then with three assistants, until moving to new premises in 2002. The unexpected chill of the place reminded me that Eliasson's art also points out the fragility of man-made systems like art and technology and how likely they are to break down.

At the heart of the Studio is a large, well-lit space, where finished and half-finished works of art stand around, and materials for various projects are spread out on large tables. Scattered about the place are instruments for measuring spatial and chronological phenomena, along with refractors, mirrors, and prisms of every shape and color. Here, installations are tested, built and dismantled, geometric shapes are explored and adjusted, parts of façades erected, prototypes hung on walls and scrutinized, and reflections of light studied. I visited the Studio several times and on each occasion it looked different.

The first time I was there, I noticed the chassis of a BMW on which Eliasson was working, having been commissioned to turn it into an "Art Car." Another time, small-format prints of photos of his most recent trip to Iceland were spread out on large tables. From among them he was choosing suitable shots to be enlarged and assembled in a series. The hall has a fitted kitchen and a long table, at which everyone can eat lunch or take a break.

Above the large central area is a gallery. There, a group of about eight architects was working under the supervision of Sebastian Behmann. (More of this later.) In the basement is the work space of Einar Thorsteinn, an Icelandic architect, theoretician, and artist with whom Eliasson has worked for a good ten years—their first joint project was a pavilion built in 1996—and whose geometric models in cardboard, paper, and plastic are among Eliasson's many sources of inspiration. From 1969 to 1971, Thorsteinn worked with the architect Frei Otto. Nearby is the workshop where various assistants assemble artworks, saw wood, solder wires, and weld metal. A specially designed white room is used to test optical effects and find out how our perception of objects changes when they are lit with varying shades of white light. Everywhere there are wooden crates for transporting artworks to galleries and museum spaces all over the world. Next to the office and administration department at the entrance is the archive managed by Biljana Joksimović. It contains files of the numerous projects worked on since the mid-1990s, along with stacks of catalogues and publications. And this is where data is organized, which is available to assistants and other interested parties who want to refer back to earlier projects, whether or not they came to fruition.

The atmosphere in the Studio is relaxed, professional, and productive—a mixture of architect's practice and laboratory—and usually as busy as a small city. Eliasson has a staff of around 30. Some are permanent and have been there for several years; others are hired short-term to work on specific projects. On my first visit, I was struck by a table covered with jars of white powder. I was told that the artist Daniel Lergon was engaged in finding out everything about the color white and collecting all the different pigments now on the market. Eliasson was in the process of exploring how the once-rich range of pigments had changed in response to market pressures in the course of the 20th century. Before 1900, there were hundreds of different pigments on sale, but there are now very much fewer. Architect Andreas Eggertsen was researching the mechanisms of the harmonograph, a device widely used in the late 19th century but now virtually forgotten, which translates pendulum movements into images. In the course of experimentation, Eliasson had the harmonograph, which makes two-dimensional drawings, reconstructed and modified so that, using LED (light-emitting diodes), it could produce three-dimensional drawings to be used in architectural plans. Meanwhile, another architect, Kerstin Schmidt, was gathering information on the history of the camera obscura and building models of different sizes in order to combine several of these devices in a single work—for example 15 are used in *Dream house* (2007) [see under S]. Eliasson has long been interested in this piece of equipment, which links photography and architecture and enables several people to observe visual phenomena at the same time. Between 1999 and 2006, he created five such works: *360° camera obscura* (1999), *Camera obscura* (1999), *Camera obscura for the sky* (2003), *Camera obscura für die Donau [Camera obscura for the Danube]* (2004) [all, see under S], and *Kaleidoscope with camera obscura* (2006).

After the workshop staff, the architects make up the largest group in the Studio. Sebastian Behmann showed me some of the current projects, including a vision for the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden in Washington, D.C., which explores the communicative potential of the building in order eventually to optimize it. Further on, I saw a kaleidoscope that was to feature in a planned hexagonal walk-in installation with three entrances. The intention was that viewers would be able to step into it as they would into a small garden pavilion and observe a variety of refractions and patterns created by light entering from above. Just at that moment, Portuguese architect Ricardo Gomes was working on a series of geometric color samples from which Eliasson would select a few for further processing. A British colleague, Ben Allen, was busily making sketches of the movements of the sun. This is one of the basics of an architect's training, enabling him, for example, to calculate how shadows cast by buildings will affect neighboring structures. In this case, however, it was not about anything so practical, but an exploration of how solar curves could be used to generate a design for an arts center in Iceland. The walls were covered with print-outs of different variations, with analog and digital representations in a variety of colors.

A large part of the work, as Behmann pointed out, consisted of independently researching one's own ideas, sketching models, and producing series of drawings. What they were used for and whether they would be included in an actual project was of secondary importance. He told me that, from an architect's point of view, Eliasson sometimes seemed almost like a client. Behmann described him as someone who provided concepts and ideas, who approached the team of architects with precise wishes, asked for suggestions, and then selected the ones to be developed further. I was fascinated by this notion that, under certain conditions, the artist could seem like a client in his own studio, since it goes against the popular image of the artist as a totally independent creator demanding full control at every stage of a project, from the first sketches to finished product. Later visits confirmed my initial impression that individual members of the team were allowed plenty of room for their own

I WAS FASCINATED BY THIS NOTION THAT, UNDER CERTAIN CONDITIONS, THE ARTIST COULD SEEM LIKE A CLIENT IN HIS OWN STUDIO.

creativity, and that they not only used other people's ideas, but could also bring their own imagination and critical faculties to the design process.

THE PRODUCTION OF PRESENCE, THE PRESENCE OF PRODUCTION

As one of those rare places in an industrial society where physical labor and complete production cycles remain visible, most people find an artist's studio fascinating. For an art historian like me, who spends so much time alone at a desk, they are particularly appealing. It seems that Eliasson never works alone. And no one in his Studio remains a detached observer. I, too, experienced the Studio not as an enclosed entity that I could reflect upon and observe, but as an efficient machine, inviting not only Eliasson and his team but also me to improve or change things—maybe tightening a screw here or adjusting a valve there. I very soon became part of the Studio. Was I using the machine? Or was it exploiting me? Was I beginning to influence it? Or would it absorb and take control of me, changing my attitudes and my way of looking at things? Although Eliasson himself was not there during my first visit, I immediately felt I was partly responsible for the smooth running of the machine. In the twinkling of an eye, I had been transformed from interviewer to participant. I genuinely had the feeling that I had embarked on a daring adventure. So it came as no surprise when, somewhat later, Eliasson asked me whether I would like to collaborate with him on a project—the project being this book.

In many respects, the Studio resembles Eliasson's exhibitions, because they too are frequently part of a whole series of experiments and tests. I remember the installations standing around the Studio that, not long before, I had seen in the exhibition *The body as brain: Projekt Sammlung (3)*, at the Kunsthaus Zug, Switzerland [see under I]. As is so often the case, Eliasson's idea was very simple. He had diverted the stream that usually flowed around the outside of the museum so that it ran through the building. Simple though the concept might be, the realization itself was highly complex. As one can imagine, it is every curator's worst nightmare to find water running through the inside of a museum. It was a pleasure to follow the course of the water, to enter the museum by the back door and observe the play of the light on the little waterfalls that Eliasson had constructed. Internal and external space became one; the surroundings encroached on the museum and became part of the installation. Inevitably the viewer wanted to join in.

In the Studio, all the equipment standing about, the plans on the walls and the models on the tables, had precisely the same effect on me. It is less important to know *what* the machine is producing than to see *how it works.* The product becomes secondary to the production process. The studio-machine is there not so much to create anything specific as simply to keep moving. Its purpose is to keep changing, to cast new light on its environment, and to push the boundaries of knowledge. The product of this "equipment," if we can really call it that, I would describe as "presence," in other words the creation of concrete presences, of a "here and now." By "presence," I do not mean that feeling we experience when we encounter something that overwhelms us, bursting through its own boundaries in the way described by American painters and theoreticians in the 1950s and 1960s. Nor do I mean the quasi-religious experience of looking at works of art that the art critic Michael Fried had in mind when he wrote "presence is grace" in his famous 1967 essay "Art and Objecthood." And I do not mean the effect of the sublime so important to many artists since the 1980s, from James Turrell to Anselm Kiefer, and from Andreas Gursky to Mariko Mori. Rather, I use "presence" in the sense of a communal presence of people, a bond forged in the here and now, and a situation in which all those present are engaged in what can best be described as "paying attention." Our industrial societies are organized in such a way that we are nearly always focusing on the future or the past, whether in politics, commerce, science, or even art. We await the fulfilment of our wishes in the future or look back to events of the past. The "here and now" is a scarce good, and the tourism and entertainment industries are booming precisely because there is an ever-growing demand for events that allow us to enjoy mere presence. Could that be why so many observers see Eliasson's Studio and his art as "cutting edge"? Is it precisely because they produce this substance, this "presence"?

In the Studio, "presence" also seems to operate within a timeframe all its own. While in most architects' offices pressure to meet deadlines can be felt and the atmosphere seems tense and breathless, processes here are often long-term. It is not about finding the fastest way to achieve the final result, but to create a dynamic of experimentation, continually producing variations that can also be used for completely different projects. It is about constantly asking new questions, which also affect the structure of the Studio itself. And, of course, Eliasson has to meet deadlines for exhibitions or commissions. At the same time, however, there is an ongoing project involving the entire team: namely, the development of and continuing changes to the Studio. On some visits, I gained the impression that the Studio would function even if there was no actual work to be done. This is made clear in the title *TYT* (*Take your time*), which Eliasson chose for the Studio magazine, published about three times a year and directed at those working in and with the Studio, as well as the wider public. The form of the publication fits in well with the Studio's way of working. It serves as a tool that lends itself to change. The "take your time" concept can, on the one hand, be seen as a call to allow oneself enough time to achieve the best possible result. On the other, in a society based on the division of labor, it can also be read as a challenge not to allow oneself to be told how to use one's time, and to take all the time one needs. While most well-established art journals present their readers with information from the art world—thereby helping them to pass their (spare) time—*TYT* offers a platform for experimentation and reflection, as well as the potential to make the most of that time.

With this concept of presence, the Eliasson Studio occupies an important place in the most recent developments in the history of art. It is part of the function of art to move the observer, to arouse religious, aesthetic, or political emotions, and to set off thought processes and encourage exploration and discourse. For me, one of the great virtues of art is its ability to let us see the world anew and through different eyes. It is crucial to know where art comes from—in other words, to know the studio, especially since the 1950s, when American art focused attention on the relationship between artwork and viewer. The studio is not only the place where the work of art is produced. It is also a showplace where art can be seen, indeed it molds our idea of how art functions. It makes clear that artworks *cannot* be reduced to isolated and complete objects in an exhibition space. Their primary role is to make the connection between production and reception, acts and decisions, trial and error. So it was that in 1950, Hans Namuth filmed and photographed Jackson Pollock as he worked on his Action Paintings. It was as though Pollock himself were standing right *in* the paintings. And anyone who has seen Namuth's pictures will never again experience Pollock's works as easel paintings created to be viewed from a distance, but rather as a kind of stage and backdrop for the artist's—and the viewer's—performative action. The most spectacular attempt to extend pictorial space and involve the viewer as Pollock had done was Allan Kaprow's "environments." In 1958 at New York's Hansa Gallery, he created an environment filled with scraps of canvas, wire netting, colored light bulbs, newspaper, broken mirrors, electronic sounds, and even artificially cre-

IT IS LESS IMPORTANT TO KNOW *WHAT* THE MACHINE IS PRODUCING THAN TO SEE *HOW IT WORKS*.

ated smells, which viewers could enter. Under the title "Notes on the Creation of a Total Art," he stated his intentions: "In the present exhibition we do not come to look *at* things. We simply enter, are surrounded, and become part of what surrounds us, passively or actively according to our talents for 'engagement,' in much the same way that we have moved *out* of the totality of the street or our home where we also played a part."[1]

Kaprow's environments were aimed at transforming the remote and largely passive observer into an active participant. In Kaprow's art there were no longer viewers, only collaborators. As he said himself, the success of his works depended significantly on the engagement of the spectator. For these works, he invented the term "Happenings." His Happenings—most of which took place not in normal gallery spaces, but in caves, at construction sites and rubbish dumps, or on the beach—were created alongside a new conception of sculpture, which was designed not to be viewed from a distance within an autonomous space but to share space with the viewer. The protagonists of Minimal Art, such as Donald Judd, Frank Stella, and Robert Morris, who also featured as dancer and performer, completely rewrote the rules on the relationship between a work of art and its surroundings. To put it simply, for these artists it was all about taking paintings out of their frames and lifting sculptures off their plinths. For a "specific object," as Judd called his blend of painting and sculpture, or Frank Stella's "shaped canvases," the entire gallery space, or "actual space," was brought into play. Confronted with this kind of art, spectators are required to keep moving about—in other words, to perceive the relationship between the objects and their own physical presence in the exhibition space.

However, unlike Kaprow, the practitioners of Minimal Art did not demand that the onlooker should actually join in. They confined themselves to letting the perceptions and emotions of the viewers become more apparent. Eliasson builds on and extends this tradition. Where he stands out from the rest is in his interpretation of what it means to perceive. Perception, he believes, is not a dispassionate, neutral act, but the product of cultural and historical conditions. As distinct from the sculptors of the 1960s, he does not regard space as a naturally occurring substance but as a completely cultural product, which changes as time passes and as it is used in different ways. In this respect, he shares the view of Robert Smithson, who in the 1970s criticized the romanticism of his colleagues, stating that "Nature is simply another 18th- and 19th-century fiction."[2]

STUDIOS PAST AND PRESENT

Is Eliasson's Studio a special case? How does it stand in relation to the history of the artist's studio and vis-à-vis other studios on the contemporary art scene? Isn't an artist's studio, in any case, the product of its times? Didn't the conceptual artists of the 1970s promote "post studio art" and dismiss the notion of the studio as the place where things were produced as hopelessly outdated? And, even before, didn't the artists of the 1960s declare war on the glorification and fetishization of the artist's craft, delegating the production process to specialists? Could not some, like Tony Smith, be said to have created sculptures "over the phone"? And, since then, have we not seen how the practice of art is not restricted to an enclosed space but can happen anywhere? One only has to think of an artist like Daniel Buren, who claims to work *in situ*, or others like Andrea Fraser or Rirkrit Tiravanija, whose art consists of site-specific, ephemeral performances that rarely, if ever, produce tangible objects. In fact, we can legitimately ask whether today there still exist permanent, self-contained, creative spaces—in an age in which many artists such as Eliasson, just like museum directors or the owners of large architectural practices, spend so much time on planes and have projects all over the world. On the contrary, an insight into the everyday life of the art world shows that, far from being an anachronism, studios are an integral part of the production process. A studio with assistants and facilities for administration and logistic handling is essential to nearly all today's internationally active artists, from Jeff Koons to Pipilotti Rist, from Jeff Wall and Vito Acconci to Tacita Dean and Thomas Demand, whose studios are next door to Eliasson's in Berlin.

Eliasson's spacious and well-organized Studio is nothing unusual on the current scene. However, he is much more engaged than his fellow artists in the processes and structures created by the Studio. This does not mean that, like some artists—Bruce Nauman, Paul McCarthy, Matthew Barney, or the late Jason Rhoades—he mythologizes the Studio and makes it the subject of his art, with performances, installations, and films revolving around the tradition and aura of (masculine) artistic creativity and its phases of melancholy idleness and productive creativity. Eliasson has no interest in reflecting on the history of the Studio. For him, the Studio is not the *subject* of his art but the *instrument* with which he produces it. Therefore he strives constantly to expand and improve its precision and efficiency. At the time of my first visit, I did not realize that Eliasson was already looking for a new, bigger studio. In addition to production, he wants to create space where he can work on projects with students and broaden the field of experimentation. Clearly, he uses the Studio as a means of overcoming the separation between the "practice" of the artist's studio and the "theory" of academic education. He makes it a place for projects that, because the structure of our society is based on the division of labor and bureaucracy, have no hope of being realized anywhere else.

What makes his Studio so different from those of his fellow artists and architects is that it underlines the experimental nature of his art and leaves the various stages of the production process exposed to view. It does not separate the conditions of production from the finished work of art, but makes them clear to see. The place where the work is produced is interwoven with the place where it is displayed and admired. This is most obvious at exhibitions where the Studio is effectively reconstructed to accommodate the visitor, in examples such as *The curious garden* (1997) [see under J] or *Surroundings surrounded* (2001) or *Model room* (2003) [see under B], which are variations of a continuing process of radical change and successive experiments with absolutely no ambition to find any kind of "solution." In such exhibitions or works, he turns the structure of the Studio inside out and transforms the surroundings into an experimental laboratory. Likewise, many individual works of art seem to lay bare the mechanics of their production, implying that they form part of a greater whole and are elements of an overall process.

Eliasson's Studio is certainly one of the largest on the current art scene. But if we cast an eye over the history of the artist's studio, we notice that, in days gone by, studios employing large numbers of people were commonplace. Studios like those of Rembrandt and Rubens were run like small businesses employing a range of specialists, enabling the artists to take on numerous commissions. Even in the Middle Ages, when our modern term "artist" was not yet in common use and artists were regarded as tradesmen and belonged to guilds, such as the goldsmiths' or architects' collectives, studios were more like workshops, where whole teams of workers went about

---

1 Allan Kaprow, "Notes on the Creation of a Total Art," in *Allan Kaprow: An Exhibition*, The Hansa Gallery, Nov. 25–Dec. 13, 1959, quoted from the slightly modified version in Allan Kaprow, *Essays on the Blurring of Art and Life*, Jeff Kelley (ed.), University of California Press, Berkeley, 1993, pp. 10–12, quotation from p. 11.

2 Robert Smithson, "A Museum of Language in the Vicinity of Art" (*Art International*, March 1968), reproduced in Robert Smithson, *The Collected Writings*, Jack Flam (ed.), Berkeley, University of California Press, Berkeley 1996, pp. 78–94, quotation from p. 85.

[ELIASSON] DOES NOT REGARD SPACE AS A NATURALLY OCCURRING SUBSTANCE BUT AS A COMPLETELY CULTURAL PRODUCT, WHICH CHANGES AS TIME PASSES AND AS IT IS USED IN DIFFERENT WAYS.

their business. Anyone wanting to become an artist had first to learn how to grind pigments, stir them into the carrier medium, prepare wooden panels for painting, and do other preparatory tasks for the master painter. One of the most important changes in the history of artistic output came in the 15th century, when artists began to shake off the "tradesman" label and gravitated towards the *artes liberales*, or liberal arts. For many years, a painting's religious or political program, in other words the decision as to which figures and which subject it would represent, was the business not of artists but of patrons or their religious or political advisers. Now it became up to artists like Filippo Brunelleschi, Andrea Mantegna, and Leon Battista Alberti to plan their own works, formulate their own rules, and work in a scientific way. One only has to think, for example, of the establishment of centralized perspective as a mathematically based form of representation, or the use of anatomical studies. This crystallization process leading to the highly educated, all-round artist culminated around 1500 in the person of Leonardo da Vinci. He could afford to treat virtually any project as an experiment with new techniques. Today, he is still seen as the perfect embodiment of the universally cultured artist who combines art and science, who developed a new way of describing the physics of light and shadow as well as an irrigation system for rice fields. Nor did he shy away from trying to explain scientifically the Great Flood described in the Book of Genesis or even the phenomenon of the eternal snow on Mont Blanc. The experimental nature of Eliasson's art, his forays into the realms of the natural sciences, meteorology, and engineering are truly reminiscent of the image of the artist in the days before specialization took hold.

We can assume, therefore, that the artist's studio has always held a huge fascination for patrons of the arts. The history of art is peppered with portrayals of artists' studios. Interest in the studio was particularly keen in the 19th century, when the end of the *Ancien Régime* and the collapse of the aristocracy following the French Revolution also brought to an end the traditional division between the functions of patron and artist. From the moment artists ceased to serve a particular patron and were obliged to promote themselves and find their own commissions, studios also changed. Their place within the social order was no longer assured. In the light of industrialization, they increasingly looked like a leftover from a bygone era, autonomous microcosms that refused to submit totally to the pressures of rationalization and mechanization and hence became surfaces on which a variety of ideas and desires could be projected. Gustave Courbet's monumental painting *The Artist's Studio, a Real Allegory of a Seven-Year Long Phase of My Artistic Life* (1854—55) is the perfect example. The painter is surrounded by 30 or so life-sized figures, about whom Courbet wrote in a letter to the French novelist Champfleury in 1855: "It is the moral and physical history of my studio, part one: all the people who serve my cause, sustain me in my ideal, and support my activity; people who live on life, those who live on death; society at its best, its worst, and its average; in short, it's my way of seeing society with all its interests and passions; it's the whole world coming to me to be painted."[3]

The late 19th century saw a kind of replay of the aristocratic past as kings and popes competed for the favors of artists. Men like Hans Makart in Vienna and Wilhelm Lenbach in Munich made themselves indispensable to the upper classes as portrait painters. They behaved like "painter princes," building themselves luxury villas, collecting art, and receiving clients and visitors in studios stage-managed like palaces. They offered the bourgeoisie a platform for self-promotion, an ambiance comparable to that of opera houses, department stores, concert halls, and museums. The opportunity for self-glorification was one reason why there was considerable public interest in the place where art was created. Another was—and still is—the fact that within the framework of an industrial society based on the division of labor and in the context of "alienated labor," as Karl Marx would have said, the studio somehow represented a kind of cohesive production process. The workplaces of artists and architects are among the few sites within an industrial society where the creation of things, from initial idea to finished product, takes place under one roof and passes through only one, or only a few, pairs of hands. They are also among the places where physical labor is neither hidden nor suppressed, but clearly visible. Artists such as Pablo Picasso, Henri Matisse, Constantin Brancusi, Alberto Giacometti, and Jackson Pollock have taken advantage of this. What these modern versions of the studio have in common is the fact that the place and the process of artistic creation transfigure, glorify, and focus exclusively on the figure of the individual artist. There is no tradition of depicting artists' co-workers. There is no painting that shows Picasso's assistants at work, and nobody knows who lugged Brancusi's blocks of stone around.

Things changed radically in the 1960s. Andy Warhol, who could look back on a successful career as a commercial artist and knew all too well about the division of labor, fought his way to the top of the art world, taking advantage of, among other things, a new kind of studio, which he called "The Factory." In a loft—in other words, in a space once used for the type of light industry that in the course of the 1940s and 1950s had been driven out of the inner city, so disappearing from the cityscape—assistants, including filmmaker Gerard Malanga, actors such as Edie Sedgwick, musicians like The Velvet Underground, visitors, critics, collectors, and curators such as Henry Geldzahler all came together. The Factory became synonymous with the fact that, in keeping with the image of New York as the new capital of the art world, at Warhol's place there was always something going on. In the "city that never sleeps" there was a factory that never stood idle. It was factory, stage, party room, gallery, and apartment all rolled into one—a world unto itself.

Eliasson's Studio is a good example of how the situation has changed since then. It demonstrates how art is produced in a globalized art world. For this world has undergone a dramatic change since the mid-20th century, when it was confined to certain streets in London's Soho, and a few districts in Paris, Düsseldorf, London, and Rome. The term "art world" first cropped up in the early 1960s, superseding the older "artist's world." Since the 1990s, it has extended right across the industrialized world, taking in major commercial centers like Basel, Miami, Cologne, and London, as well as the urban centers of Europe, North and South America, South-East Asia, Australia, and, more recently, the Middle East. Since the 1970s, its expansion seems to know no bounds. Year after year, even places that only a short time ago were a no-man's land for art connoisseurs, are opening new biennials, establishing new artist exchange programs, and building new museums. In the face of such dynamic development, the term "art world," once used to describe an easily understandable community of artists, collectors, curators, dealers, and critics became increasingly problematic. The world is constantly changing, and artists have to adapt. The structure of Eliasson's Studio, in particular its capacity to expand very quickly and, when necessary, to shrink back, proves how well he understands the process of change. It allows him to satisfy the art world's appetite for exhibitions and a constant stream of new projects, an art world that has adapted to the globalized economy and therefore concentrates cultural capital, ceaselessly opens up new markets, and guarantees high prices for a stable portfolio of big-name artists. The reason why he, like many of his colleagues, has settled in Berlin—rather than, say, New York or London—is that Berlin offers affordable studio spaces and, more important still, that many eminent artists and theoreticians have moved to the city, drawn by the spirit of experimentation that prevails there.

[3] Gustave Courbet, "Letter to Champfleury" in *Art in Theory, 1815–1900*, Charles Harrison and Paul Wood (eds), Blackwell, London, 1998, pp. 370–72, quotation from p. 370.

MANY OF ELIASSON'S WORKS OF ART HAVE A SURFACE STRUCTURE THAT VERY QUICKLY OPENS UP TO THE VIEWER, GIVING HIM THE IMPRESSION THAT THE WORK IS ADDRESSED TO HIM ALONE. [...] SUCH A SURFACE COULD BE DESCRIBED SIMPLY AS THE PRODUCT OF NEVER-ENDING FACETING.

Of course, the appetite of the art world was already insatiable a quarter of a century ago. In the 1970s, Andy Warhol found himself in growing demand as a star personality, but got round the problem by hiring actors to travel and give lectures in his place. And Robert Irwin, whose work Eliasson has long admired, has said that while on the one hand he envies the young artist's energy and his large Studio, on the other he would not like to take on the stress of so much traveling: "The air travel alone would kill me."[4] However, it is not only the expansion of today's art world but also the professionalization of the artist that has made today's studios totally different from Warhol's Factory. There, the line between private and professional life, living and working, day and night, became blurred. The Factory's interior was always painted silver, the windows covered, all hermetically sealed against the outside world. It was another world, a utopia, totally different from its surroundings. It was unmistakable as a stage, a backdrop, on and in front of which Warhol paraded himself and his idiosyncratic way of producing art. By contrast, Eliasson's Studio is first and foremost a workplace, rather than a showplace. His exhibitions might look like studio situations, but they are not about his Studio. And at certain times, the Studio may seem little different from an exhibition, but it is not itself art. Above all, it is not a place where private life and work overlap. Staff members decide for themselves when they come to work; in other words, the Studio organizes itself. But there are no sleeping quarters and the Studio never becomes a party room. Eliasson himself commutes between Berlin and Copenhagen. In Copenhagen, he lives with his family and, as well as his extensive library, he has at home another small office where the art historian Malene Ratcliffe works. In this peaceful studio in Copenhagen, we later met with Eliasson's colleague Anna Engberg-Pedersen, also an art historian, for several conversations, which form the basis of the encyclopedic entries later in the book.

CRYSTALLINE SURFACES

Many of Eliasson's works of art have a surface structure that very quickly opens up to the viewer, giving him the impression that the work is addressed to him alone. I would call this structure "crystalline." It reveals itself through a specific, finely faceted surface that produces countless mirror images of anyone who moves in front of or inside it. Many critics have remarked on the affinity of Eliasson's work with the structure of crystals. There are formal similarities with the utopian architecture of Richard Buckminster Fuller, with the faceted surfaces of his geodesic domes and "tensegrity" structures. And there are affinities with some forms of German Expressionism, such as Bruno Taut's glass pavilion at the 1914 Werkbund Exhibition in Cologne, or Wenzel Hablik's visions of crystal architecture. This crystalline surface structure is clear to see in many of Eliasson's most popular works, such as *Your spiral view* (2002) and *Colour spectrum kaleidoscope* (2003) [both, see under K]. My interest in his use of crystalline structure is mainly due to the fact that it enables him to expand a surface to the maximum degree, both spatially and thematically. Such a surface could be described simply as the product of never-ending faceting, complex contortions, and undulations, in which the image of the surroundings is broken down, prism-like, into an infinite number of new images in which every observer can ultimately recognize him- or herself. The impression of diversity is intensified by the fact that visitors can usually move freely inside the installation. They can walk around as if onstage and stand not only in front of but also behind and even inside the object. Their viewing position is not fixed, as it is with video and film installations. This means that changing perspectives produce countless variations and fresh images.

Eliasson's interest in the phenomenology and function of surfaces is part of an overall trend and of a widespread debate surrounding the changing perception of space. This discussion first came to a head in the 1980s—that is, before Eliasson began his studies in 1989. To put it simply, at that point, most theorists agreed that the Modernist logic of depth had given way to the Postmodern logic of surface. Concepts such as "crystallization," "mosaic," "texture," "fold," "expansion," and "atmosphere" were gaining ground, while others like "distance," "causality," "linearity," and "expression" were devalued. According to the theory, there was no longer any "outside." Fredric Jameson, in his book *Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (1991), describes the atrium of the Westin Bonaventure Hotel in Los Angeles as a crucial experience of the new three-dimensionality. Its reflective glass façades seemed to disappear into their surroundings. Behind them (for those who could afford it) there opened up a city within a city. Portman's Hotels—where client, financier, and architect were all one and the same—are for Jameson the epitome of late-capitalist space. He writes of the lobby: "I am tempted to say that such space makes it impossible for us to use the language of volume or volumes any longer, since these are impossible to seize. … A constant busyness gives the feeling that emptiness is here absolutely packed, that it is an element within which you yourself are immersed, without any of that distance that formerly enabled the perception of perspective or volume. You are in this hyperspace up to your eyes and your body."[5]

The experience of "hyperspace" is the starting point for the central thesis of Jameson's book. He contends that the Postmodernist phase, which he defines as the period from the early 1960s, is characterized by the explosive expansion of the sphere of culture at the expense of its former autonomy. He presents this new logic metaphorically, as a surface that covers everything, a changing notion of space that replaces "depth" with "surface." Everything is surface, there is no longer anything "behind," and hence the "critical" distance, which traditionally separates the realm of culture from other areas of society, is no longer conceivable. His idea of "depthlessness" calls into question genuinely Modernist thought patterns based on the assumption of spatial depth within which something hidden is brought to the surface. As examples, Jameson quotes hermeneutics, dialectics, Existentialism, psychoanalysis, and semiotics.

Building on Jameson's ideas in their book *Empire* (2000), Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri attempt to produce a progress report on the new world order. They speak of a "smooth space" and of how the Empire—as they term the globalized economic area—occupies space in its entirety and fails to draw up any territorial borders. As they put it: "The Empire does not fortify its boundaries to push others away, but rather pulls them within its pacific order like a powerful voter. With boundaries and differences suppressed or set aside, the Empire is a kind of smooth space across which subjectivities glide without substantial resistance or conflict."[6]

Another book central to the understanding of Eliasson's working method is Henri Lefebvre's *The Production of Space* (1974). Here, Lefebvre outlines a bold "unitary theory," in which he attempts to fuse social, mental, architectural, and historical space. Unlike the current idea of space as an empty vessel to be filled with something, he is interested in how space is produced. A body is not simply *in* a space; it generates space itself. In isolation, bodies have neither meaning nor

[4] Robert Irwin, quoted by Cynthia Zarin in "Seeing Things: The Art of Olafur Eliasson," *The New Yorker*, Nov. 13, 2006, pp. 76–83, quotation from p. 78.

[5] Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, Duke University Press, Durham, 1991, p. 43.

[6] Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA, 2000, p. 198.

EVERYONE, [...] ONCE THEY CONTEMPLATE ELIASSON'S ART, WILL SOONER OR LATER FIND THEIR OWN MIRROR IMAGE THERE.

existence. They are reflected in and translated into the changes they create in their milieu, or in their own space. Lefebvre replaces the notion of space as a "geometric concept" or "empty milieu" with "substance," which he admits is simpler to experience than to understand. The connection between Lefebvre and Eliasson's art is obvious. In the same way that Lefebvre sought to escape the institutionalization of his times, whether in the form of the Communist Party, the Leftist theories of the 1970s, or the higher-education system, so too is Eliasson's art imbued with skepticism toward any kind of definition or standardization. And as Lefebvre opposed the separation of phenomena and advocated interaction, Eliasson seeks to synthesize rather than analyze, preferring to create specific, complex situations rather than to separate disciplines and practices.

The ideas of the Frenchman Henri Bergson, who in the early 1900s, along with his calling as a philosopher, was also interested in the photography of the invisible, are useful in this context—for example, his theory that the world consists entirely of images. In his book, *Matter and Memory*, he defines "image" as "a certain existence which is more than that which the idealist calls a representation, but less than that which the realist calls a thing—an existence placed halfway between the 'thing' and the 'representation.'"[7] Bergson's critique of dualistic thinking, his skeptical response to the notion that the physical and the spiritual should be seen as separate realms, has lost none of its validity. And his belief that objects exist not in isolation but in relation to one another could serve as a caption for one of Eliasson's works: "Does not the fiction of an isolated material object imply a kind of absurdity, since this object borrows its physical properties from the relations which it maintains with all others and owes each of its determinations, and consequently its very existence, to the place which it occupies in the universe as a whole? Let us no longer say, then, that our perceptions depend simply upon the molecular movements of the cerebral mass. We must say rather that they *vary with* them, but that these movements themselves remain inseparably bound up with the rest of the material world."[8]

In Eliasson's art, this spatial crystalline structure corresponds with a thematic structure, summoning up an encyclopedic abundance of themes and concepts that we recognize from our day-to-day experiences and to which we ourselves have something to contribute. To extend the comparison a little further, Eliasson's art could even be compared to the complex surface of a virus, also serving to demonstrate how easily a virus can find a host to which it can attach itself and pass on its information. As viruses can adapt to practically any conditions, thus ensuring their own survival and growth by infecting and "informing" their environment and thus spreading and increasing, so the physical and thematic surfaces of Eliasson's works permeate their surroundings.

PAYING ATTENTION

It is hard to escape this effect. On my first visit to the Studio, I noticed an enormous mirror that was to be used in an exhibition. To me, it came to symbolize how everyone—myself included—once they contemplate Eliasson's art, will sooner or later find their own mirror image there. Indeed, there is an impressive list of people drawn to his work to such a degree that they write about it, exhibit or collect it, or simply engage in dialogue with the artist. They range from the philosophers Paul Virilio and Peter Sloterdijk, sociologist Bruno Latour, art historians Daniel Birnbaum, Ina Blom, Jonathan Crary, and Mieke Bal, architects Beatriz Colomina, Diller Scofidio + Renfro, Yona Friedman, Rem Koolhaas, Sanford Kwinter, Lars Lerup, and Mark Wigley, and curators Molly Nesbit, Hans Ulrich Obrist, and Peter Weibel, to patrons of the arts, clients, collectors, and museum directors. As well as the core team at the Studio and close associates like Eliasson's gallerists in Berlin and New York, there exists an ever-changing network of people who in various forms, some only sporadically, others for longer periods, contribute to the production at the studio-machine. In this context, it is unsurprising that Eliasson has also succeeded in arousing the interest of industrialists, scientists, and entrepreneurs such as those in the fashion industry. By commissioning projects from him, they support—at least indirectly—his experiments. For example, BMW has asked him to create an Art Car, picking up on the tradition of commissioning artists to design vehicles that began in 1975 with Alexander Calder. How Eliasson goes about it is, of course, left entirely up to him. In 2006, he performed a range of experiments on the theme of freezing, still not knowing what the end result of his work on the car might be.

No doubt, industry is interested in Eliasson's work because, on the one hand, it has many points of contact with the world of science and technology. On the other, it has the potential not only to invent complex systems, but also to enable them to be presented in visual form. Even though he sees the product as less important than the process, his projects always exist in real space and are made of robust materials. Because they are immediately perceptible through the senses, they represent an alternative to the abstract, intangible nature of so many processes in commerce and industry, politics and science. One example of this is the way scientific publications use formulae and diagrams to present research results. Another is the way company reports or policy statements from companies and organizations are couched in the sort of language that only specialists understand. 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. The more complex and abstract the connections with science, politics, and economics become, the stronger the need to create not only logos and images but also spatial events, and even atmospheric moods. The more uncongenial and ponderous language becomes, the greater the importance of visual and atmospheric articulation capable of embracing and affecting all the senses, connecting things with one another, and enabling us to establish our own position within a constantly changing environment.

Of course, there are many different examples of artists and architects who articulate political and economic phenomena. They range from star architects like Herzog & de Meuron or Toyo Ito, whose creations have helped define our present-day lifestyle, to Rem Koolhaas, chosen by the European Commission to design the European Union logo. By means of design, provided by an architect, politicians expect to be able to stick a "corporate-identity" label on a politico-economic construct whose complexity makes it well-nigh impossible to represent visually. Eliasson's art has other aims in view. While Koolhaas represents the "EU" construct by a new symbol, a colorful expandable barcode to supersede the circle of stars on a blue background, Eliasson is more concerned with taking concrete action to break down the barriers between objects and symbols. Unlike the artists and architects of Koolhaas's generation, he does not perceive the world as "text" or "image," as something that can be "read" or "seen" and reduced to an abstract symbol. To him, it is a much more

7 Henri Bergson, *Matter and Memory*, translated by Nancy Margaret Paul and W. Scott Palmer, George Allen and Unwin, London, 1911, VII–VIII.

8 Ibid, pp. 11–12 .

WHEN I VISITED [*THE WEATHER PROJECT*], WHAT I SAW WAS SO UNEXPECTED THAT IT LEFT ME SPEECHLESS FOR A MOMENT.

dynamic construct of conditions and situations, relationships and interactions, atmospheres and moods, concepts and ideas, produced and continually modified by people themselves, within which they can find their way around and sharpen their powers of perception. That is why he has no interest in signs and symbols but in the way in which people relate to their immediate environment and to one another, how they assure themselves of their own physical presence in the environment and define their identity as subjective, aware individuals. His project *The very large ice floor* (1998) [see under D], an area of ice installed at the São Paulo Biennial on which visitors were encouraged to walk, provided a graphic representation of the complex and much debated theme of the boundaries between art and everyday life, discussed in the writings of Pierre Bourdieu. His lamp, created as a window display for Louis Vuitton and entitled *Eye see you* (2006) [see under Y], ignored the luxury goods on offer and literally threw the spotlight on the relationship between seeing and being seen. In so doing, he drew the shopper's attention away from specific products and focused on the fundamental principles of perception and calculation of worth. Reflected in the surface of the lamp, window-shoppers saw themselves and their desire for the absent—and for many utterly unaffordable—consumer goods. *The weather project* (2003) at Tate Modern, London [see under D], was a huge popular success, not least because it centered on a topic that concerns everyone and about which everyone has something to say, the subject *par excellence* to get people talking to each other—the weather.

Another reason why Eliasson's art has such an effect on so many people is because it is targeted directly at the viewer, calling for a response. His works of art are aimed both at the individual observer and the wider public—unlike paintings and individual photographs, for which there is always a preferred viewing position, making them better suited to the lone observer. Unlike many hermetic works of art whose deliberate intention is to be incomprehensible to the general public, Eliasson's installations are designed for a number of people to enjoy at the same time. The intention is reflected in the titles, which often begin with a possessive pronoun: *Your strange certainty still kept* (1996), *Your inverted veto* (1998), *Your circumspection disclosed* (1999) [all, see under R], *Your windless arrangement* (1997) [see under I], *Your blue/orange afterimage exposed* (2000) [see under C], *Your only real thing is time* (2001), or *Your spiral view* (2002) [see under K]. All these titles encourage visitors to take possession of the works and look at them from their own perspective, turning them into *My spiral view*, *My inverted veto*, and so on.

Titles, such as *Your sun machine* (1997) [see under T], which describes an opening in the roof of the exhibition space at the Marc Foxx Gallery in Los Angeles, through which changes in the sunlight can be followed from inside the gallery, could serve as instructions for use or captions. They are vague enough to make us think. They leave enough room for interpretation, so that the meaning of the work is neither fixed nor too readily accessible. They indicate how the works should be used and also that they are available to everybody, at least for as long as they stay and contemplate them. These include *Einige erinnern sich*, *dass sie auf dem Weg waren diese Nacht* (1994; Some recall that they were on the way that night) [see under W], the 2002 exhibition *Chaque matin je me sens différent, chaque soir je me sens le même* (Every morning I feel different, every evening I feel the same), and *Your natural denudation inverted* (1999) [see under I], a column of steam outside the Carnegie Museum of Art in Pittsburgh. Only connoisseurs of American heating systems could have known that steam was a common heating method in the United States. And only those with an intimate knowledge of the museum could have known that, directly behind the museum, was a large steam power plant and that Eliasson had tapped into the boiler in the museum's cellar and pumped steam through a pipe to the outside, "turning it around" so that it heated air outdoors. While most Minimalist sculptures of the 1960s and 1970s bore the stereotypical *Untitled* label—thereby suggesting that their meaning lay far beyond what could be expressed by language—Eliasson's titles demonstrate that there can be no separation between artwork and title, between meaning at the level of the image and meaning at the level of the text, and that each is dependent on the other. His works first function as icons. Straightaway, installations like *Double sunset* (1999) [see under L] or *The weather project* make an impression because they are photogenic and are easy to reproduce. More people will remember the picture than the title. This makes them more accessible to international audiences, because they so easily break through language barriers. At the same time, however, the titles can be seen as purely practical, as advice to the viewer or user on how to deal with Eliasson's works of art. They are also a challenge to visitors to participate in the production of meaning, to take on a little more of the responsibility, so to speak, and make their own contribution to the work and its possibilities.

BEAUTY

These effects of immediacy and space folded in upon itself can be described using a controversial concept that, since the 1990s, has repeatedly cropped up in debate and which is also inseparably linked to our understanding of surfaces: namely, the concept of beauty. The word "beauty," as used both in aesthetics and everyday speech, has a long history. In the context of 20th-century aesthetic discussion, it was frowned upon and regarded as ambivalent, but, because it was so elastic, perfectly suited to describing the work of many contemporary artists and architects. To me, "beauty" means images and situations that make an immediate impact on viewers, captivating them and making them glad to be involved. It can also apply to relationships between individuals and objects, or between one object and another, which cannot be reduced merely to the visual, but which also appeal to the sense of touch or possess some musical quality.

Although Eliasson does not see the concept of beauty as central, it is striking that one of his earliest works, *Beauty* (1993) [see under P], appears in many exhibitions and in numerous publications as marking the beginning of his artistic career. In an installation as simple as it is effective, a beam of light shines through a curtain of mist onto a dark background, creating a rainbow and getting right to the heart of the discussion about whether beauty can be both ephemeral and have cultural connotations. Just how ambivalent the word "beauty" can be is demonstrated by Eliasson's project *Green river* (1998) [see under L]. Between 1998 and 2001, without forewarning, he tipped non-toxic colorant into rivers in various parts of the world, briefly turning the water green. Passers-by were either shocked, like those in Stockholm, or indifferent, like those in Los Angeles. But those like me, who did not witness the event, will find it hard to forget the photographs of bilious green rivers. The effect is based not least on a small change in the habit of looking at what was once called "natural beauty" and what is covered by the term "landscape" today. While in present-day propaganda, the word "green" suggests naturalness, growth, and new beginnings, and has positive connotations—from the British Petroleum logo, by way of the political green parties, to well-tended lawns, the organic-growth certificate on food labels, and green traffic lights. However, when we see the same color in the specific context of river water, it signals pollution, artificiality, and danger.

In *The blind pavilion* for the 2003 Venice Biennale, I was able to experience for myself how Eliasson treats the relation between architecture and nature, or "landscape," in sophisticated ways. The pavilion felt to me like a kaleidoscope, which

[THE TITLES OF HIS WORKS] SHOW THAT, IN THIS DAY AND AGE, THE PRODUCTION OF VISUAL ARTIFACTS CAN NO LONGER BE NEATLY AND TIDILY SEPARATED FROM DISCOURSE, AND THAT, RATHER THAN SIMPLY TALKING *ABOUT* THINGS, WHAT WE SAY BECOMES AN INTEGRAL PART OF THOSE THINGS.

alternately reflected the viewer's own mirror image and, in some places, opened outwards. However, the openings were not like those usually found in pavilions in the Giardini, whose natural surroundings are organized, domesticated, and accessible, like a picture in a frame. Here, the effect was more like a complication. The image of nature was fragmented and I, the observer, was not in control. Instead, I was at *its* mercy. Traditionally, Biennale pavilions are designed to promote interaction between the exhibits and the surrounding nature of the Giardini. But at the same time—as architecture—they destroy that nature, pushing it away and reducing it to a mere image. Eliasson deliberately distanced and distorted the pavilion to make it look like a cultural product. The pavilion housed nine works. *Soil quasi bricks* (2003) [see under Q] seemed to mimic the pavilion's brick structure. *Colour spectrum kaleidoscope* transformed the image of the exterior into a pattern of colors. *The antigravity cone* (2003) [see under G] consisted of a hexagonal wooden structure through which visitors could look down into a water tank, where a strobe light flashed to reveal a little fountain suspended in space. *Room for one colour* (1997) [see under N] consisted of a yellow monofrequency light. *Camera obscura for the sky* (2003) turned the image of the sky and trees inwards, at the same time demonstrating how much an image can vary when projected. *The glass house* (2003) offered a perspective of the surrounding bushes. Structures on the roof, such as *Triple kaleidoscope* (2003) [see under K], linked interior and exterior. Finally, at the very top, *The blind pavilion* (2003) [see under U] gave a fragmented view of the surrounding area. Back in the pavilion, the sequence ended with *La situazione antispettiva* (2003; The antispective situation) [see under P], where visitors found themselves surrounded by almost endlessly multifaceted, crystalline mirrors, in which their reflections were broken almost randomly into countless pieces. The pavilion served as housing for "viewing machines," which created an interconnecting array of protruding surfaces that were themselves reflected in the changing interplay of light. Natural beauty was replaced by a plethora of views among which it was no longer possible to separate nature and artifice. The pavilion was in no way the frame for a picture of nature. Instead, it provided the setting for a whole series of experiments exploring the correlation between architectural space and that of the surrounding landscape. It also examined how human perception constantly produces new ideas about what is natural and how the concept of nature is continually re-created.

"MY" WEATHER PROJECT— IN THE WAKE OF GLOBALIZATION

Among Eliasson's works of art, the one that has so far most impressed me, and many others, is *The weather project*. On show from fall 2003 to spring 2004 in the Turbine Hall of Tate Modern in London, the work made me look at Herzog & de Meuron's museum with new eyes. For *The weather project*, Eliasson brought back into the hall something it had long ago ceased to contain—machinery. Having blacked out the entire hall, he took down about a fifth of the ceiling and covered it with mirrors. Fog machines spread a fine mist around the interior, and a gigantic circular sun cast its light through the artificial fog. When I visited the exhibition, what I saw was so unexpected that it left me speechless for a moment. While you usually stroll, quite relaxed, down the gently sloping ramp into the Turbine Hall and, almost without noticing, enjoy passing from the outside to the interior, you now immediately entered a dark space. In contrast to the usual hubbub of tourists scattered along the ramp leading to the gallery, an awed silence reigned. Many visitors lay on their backs to look at their reflection in the ceiling, which, because of its mirrored surface, seemed to be 60 m further away. Others, like me, approached the great disc in amazement. Eliasson had quite explicitly shown the interplay of illusion and disillusion and made the deception obvious. We could see the jets from which the mist streamed. The sun turned out to be a semicircular bit of scenery lit from behind. And from the top level, visitors could see the device by which the ceiling, covered with a reflective layer, was suspended. You needed plenty of time to explore the work and to understand the connections it was making. But at the same time, its impact on those entering the hall occurred in only fractions of a second. Now, even people who never saw the work and who perhaps have never even heard the name of its creator recognize it at first sight. The work was on show for almost six months, but was dismantled afterwards. It was a transitory event, not a permanent installation, which also served to underline its effect as something unique. It is precisely because we know it is a time-limited event that it has become inextricably linked with photo reproductions taken at the time. We need photography to enable us to visualize an event again and again, long after it is over.

The work of art demanded that I react. It forced me to question how I, as an art historian, should deal with it. It is so immediately accessible that it requires neither explanation nor clarification. At the same time, it has been more talked about than most works of art in recent years. Not least, the exhibition was accompanied by an extensive catalogue, in which Eliasson articulated his ideas at a roundtable debate and in a statement. This also applies to other projects. For example, *Olafur Eliasson: Surroundings Surrounded, Essays on Space and Science* (Zentrum für Kunst und Medientechnologie Karlsruhe, 2001) is a 720-page anthology, as the name suggests, of space and science. Were the chapter order less random—the texts of the individual chapters do not follow a logical sequence but are thrown together higgledy-piggeldy—the book could be seen as a conventional collection of learned articles. However, since it was published to coincide with an Eliasson exhibition, and the selection of texts was ultimately left to Eliasson, it also serves as a kind of theoretical horizon against which Eliasson's art is set.

But how important are his writings? They are not autonomous, like those of Modernist and Postmodernist artists such as Marcel Duchamp, Barnett Newman, John Cage, Robert Smithson, and Dan Graham. They are not a key to understanding his work. Their purpose is rather to intensify the effect of the work inasmuch as they extend its surface, taking it into fields beyond the world of art: namely, architecture, science, and politics. They, too, could be called crystalline—or, as Henri Lefebvre writes in another context, "not texts but texture."[9] They serve as extended titles; in other words, they are a means of getting the discussion going, leaving meaning open to interpretation. They show that, in this day and age, the production of visual artifacts can no longer be neatly and tidily separated from discourse, and that, rather than simply talking *about* things, what we say becomes an integral part of those things. Moreover, they show that critical distance is not possible; that any reflection becomes mingled with and absorbed into the object that is reflected; that our perception changes the object while being produced by it. They point to the fact that it is not about uncovering hidden meanings, but adding one's own meaning, or indeed generating it. In this connection, *TYT*, the magazine mentioned above, plays an important part. To Eliasson, it is as much his own work as his installations and photographs. It provides a platform for the research that takes place in the Studio, but never finds its way into museums and galleries as finished projects. The magazine functions as a kind of proving ground for new production methods, and also explores issues sur-

9 Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, translated by Donald Nicholson-Smith, Blackwell, Oxford, 1991, p. 222.

WE ARE INVOLVED NOT BECAUSE OF OUR PURCHASING POWER BUT BECAUSE WE HAVE FREELY CHOSEN TO COLLABORATE WITH THE ARTIST IN CREATING MEANING.

rounding the way in which Eliasson's work is perceived. The collective structure of the Studio is reflected in *TYT.* Potentially, it is a position from which that same structure can be changed. Not least, the magazine is a new venue for Eliasson's art and for encounters with other fields.

With *The weather project* making the front pages of so many daily newspapers, Eliasson received worldwide attention, reaching an audience extending way beyond the borders of the art world. This exhibition was made possible not least thanks to the structure of the Berlin Studio. Because the complexities of the installation appeared too demanding for the technical staff at Tate Modern, Eliasson decided to prefabricate the whole thing in Berlin, ready to be set up in London. This meant that the entire process was in his hands. The structure of the Studio, where planning and execution overlap, gives him the capacity to respond quickly and capably to questions from museums and private collectors. At the same time, Eliasson has been presented with a new line in commissions, taking him right into the architectural field. As a result, the Studio has become a highly efficient and productive machine that not only formulates new questions and carries out experiments, but which can also react with flexibility to growing demand. Of course, architects and designers also face similar issues. The rapid growth of practices like Herzog & de Meuron or Bruce Mau Design at the turn of the century typifies a general trend, which has gripped the worlds of art, architecture, and design, as it has commerce and industry. However, while these practices somehow veil the studio structure, Eliasson proclaims it aloud.

Now, since more than two million visitors have seen *The weather project*, demand to collaborate with Eliasson has positively exploded. Of course, he was already an artist much sought after for exhibitions and architecture-related projects. But after *The weather project*, he became, like many of today's top architects, a public figure attracting the interest not only of museums and galleries, business people and scientists, but also the media. It is a trend inextricably linked to the dynamics of globalization and its tendency to personalize facts. For this reason, it is instructive to consider how an artist's biography can affect the way in which his works are presented and received. From previous publications, we know little about Eliasson's life, other than the fact that he was born in Copenhagen, lives in Berlin, and has deep-rooted connections with Iceland. In fact, he grew up in the small Danish coastal city of Holbæk, his parents are Icelanders, he speaks Icelandic and makes regular visits to Iceland. Although it is difficult to describe modern art in terms of national characteristics, it is remarkable how much weight critics place on the person and life story of the artist. The same is true of Eliasson. In the eyes of the general public, and contrary to Eliasson's own way of thinking, his Scandinavian background automatically offers a guarantee of authenticity and competence when he comes to deal with the phenomenon of "nature." Following the general trend towards personalization, most interpreters stress Eliasson's origins—and say much less about the fact that for more than a decade he has worked mainly in Germany. As always, this discussion is characterized by the dualistic thinking analyzed in Leo Marx's book *The Machine in the Garden: Technology and the Pastoral Idea in America* (1964). In it, Marx claims that modern culture is based on the conflict between the longing for unspoiled nature and its destruction by industrialization. Like most artists of his generation, Eliasson has long since left this argument behind. He believes that we cannot, in any case, regard the natural world as "natural." Even before industrialization, it was seen as landscape, the product of human perception.

From my perspective, as I describe Eliasson's Studio and art not from the outside but from within, sometimes even working with him, it is not very helpful to attempt to use his biography to explain his work. It seems to me less important to observe the man than to discuss the place of his art in today's society, and how it articulates the changes produced by the globalized economy. Among them are the increasing social differences that have existed since the 1970s, the increase in capital concentration, the weakening of government influence, the softening of international borders, as well as the accelerating speed of financial transactions, data exchange, and the immaterialization of work, with the introduction of e-commerce and teleworking, and the need for millions of workers to migrate. Precisely because Eliasson is one of those artists whose work is inseparably linked to the globalized economy, I want to ask how, regardless of his own intentions, his art can help us better to understand and position ourselves in relation to the dynamics of globalization.

To explore this question, I shall try to relate his art to a phenomenon that has come to symbolize globalized architecture: namely, IKEA buildings. There is, of course, no causal relationship between IKEA and Eliasson, that is to say, between a globalized company offering millions of consumers a particular lifestyle and an artist who, *in the context* of globalization, works with problems of spatial environment and design. I choose IKEA as a case of which everyone is aware, and relate it to Eliasson's art in order to examine two central changes brought about by globalization—the perception of space and the experience of time.

Using as a starting point Jameson's feeling of disorientation in "hyperspace" in a luxury hotel, we can describe a spatial experience that most people in the industrialized nations have had—shopping in an IKEA store. The blue warehouses, hermetically sealed from the outside, which since the 1970s have been appearing at traffic junctions outside major cities, could be described as monumental enlargements of the container, introduced in the 1950s as the key component of the worldwide freight transport industry and an essential building block in globalization. What is special about the interior is that storage and distribution, consumption and purchasing, are all melded into one continuous space. The space is part of the plan to save on storage and transport costs, but consumers also experience that same space as a spectacle in which they themselves are taking part. They lose themselves in the labyrinth of room arrangements and tall shelving systems, while at the same time, confronted with so many consumer products, they receive constant reassurance of their identity as individuals. The excessive scale of the store is offset by the reasonably priced furniture. Items on sale have amusing names and are easy to assemble at home.

Eliasson's art also deals with this kind of disorientation. Certainly, at least as I understand it, he neither approves nor disapproves of this kind of three-dimensionality; he simply lets himself—and us—fall into it, making his presence felt within the space, exploring its dimensions and its effect. He shows us how, ultimately, space is all around us, from seemingly neutral white gallery space, by way of urban space, to the wide open spaces of Iceland. The great void of the IKEA store is also found elsewhere, such as in Tate Modern's Turbine Hall. His—and "my"—*weather project* made me aware of the connection between IKEA stores and the great storeroom that is the interior of the museum. However, unlike IKEA's spectacular "installation," which uses consumer goods to occupy (and to some degree obliterate) space, Eliasson uses space as material for his art and also sees in it a chance to look at the world in another new and ever-changing way.

He produces installations that encourage exploration of the horizon, while allowing individuals to see their own distinctive horizon. In contrast to the furniture store, we do not see them from the momentary personal standpoint of consumers caught up in a commercial process over which we have no control. We are involved not because of our purchasing power but because we have freely chosen to collaborate with the artist in creating meaning. His installations plumb the depths of this new kind of space, measuring it and making it accessible to us.

"Think global, act local," said Buckminster Fuller, thus positioning himself among the first to acknowledge the dualism we have inherited from the world of globalization. Eliasson's art also focuses on the relationship between the local and the global and the interplay of the specific and the generic. His œuvre can be seen as a process, as a seemingly unbroken chain of interlocking installations cropping up in

[...] THE [ARTISTIC] PROCESS REMAINS OPEN-ENDED [FOR ELIASSON], SO THAT IT CAN BE DEVELOPED FURTHER IN ANY DIRECTION. IT SUCCEEDS BECAUSE THE ARTIST IS ALWAYS MORE INTERESTED IN QUESTIONS THAN IN ANSWERS.

very different places in the art world. Art enthusiasts find them in various local contexts but, of course, not beyond the borders of the art world, which covers precisely the same ground as the globalized nations. It is true that some of his installations are in remote and fairly inaccessible places, such as in Iceland. They are not confined by the architectural boundaries of exhibition centers, even though they still depend on such centers or on individual collectors. Even so, they always call to mind important connections, and function as part of a wide-ranging whole. They serve as catalysts; in other words, they link seemingly disparate spheres with one another, aesthetics with science, theoretical discourse with design. They can be translated seamlessly from one language to another and understood in every artistic sphere. They are universally valid, even though people experience them in totally different ways.

In the wake of globalization, along with the concept of space, that of time is subject to constant re-evaluation. In *Empire*, Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri speak of how history has been suspended and a kind of eternal present has become the hallmark of globalization. The loss of spatial orientation after the disappearance of territorial boundaries goes hand-in-hand with a loss of chronological orientation, since history is no longer divided into periods, and historical memory is suppressed. Here, however, political, economic, and legal processes are under discussion rather than the everyday experience. At the same time, in talking about the perception of time, the reason I find the experience of shopping at IKEA so interesting is that it brings consumers face to face with several events at the same time. There are no delivery dates at IKEA. Consumers are given the impression that the goods are already in stock, available at any time, part of an uninterrupted, fast-flowing stream. How much greater is their disappointment when the product they are looking for is not in stock. And although products change year by year, the suggestion is that an item will always be available, as will the promise of a never-ending stream of new designs to suit consumer lifestyles. Objects age, but not in the sense of classic designer furniture, whose value lies in its timelessness and inherent historical dimension. They wear out and, after a certain time, are quietly disposed of. No one expects them to grow old because they do not perform against a historical horizon. They are neither dated nor limited. IKEA is all about an unbroken cycle of consumption and the principle of "just in time."

As an artist, Eliasson is interested in exploring this changing perception of time, as well as the ways in which we can use it productively. Precisely because his artworks deconstruct apparently natural cycles—such as the hours of the day—in the form of the eternal sunrise/sunset sequence, or sundown seen double as in *Double sunset*, they demonstrate how our relationship with both time and space is uncertain, culturally conditioned, and how there are always new and different ways of approaching them. Very slow processes—like the melting of a block of ice in *The very large ice step experienced* (1998) [see under F] and the growth of moss and aquatic plants—clearly show the limitations of the logic of historicism, to which we are so attached. Eliasson is interested in past and future, in history, in expectations and recollections. However, his work does not acquire its meaning by referring to the art of earlier periods. Neither does he produce linear processes with a beginning and an end, preferring gradual transitions between different states. This is also obvious from his fondness for the present participle, which he uses in the titles of many of his works, such as *Seeing yourself sensing* (2001) [see under F]. In his own words: "I don't think it is really possible to talk about the past and the future—however, maybe it is possible to talk about memory and expectation."[10] His idea of time is firmly opposed to periodization and the demand for beginnings and endings prevalent in modern art and criticized by many Postmodern theorists. He thinks in terms of slowly changing phenomena and fluid transitions, which make us think about how we, too, deal with time. He does not claim that his ideas offer an escape from the current politically and economically dictated changes in the modern idea of time, to a place beyond time and history. Nevertheless, as they do with the changing perspective of space, Eliasson's artworks enable us to explore and more clearly comprehend this perception of time and to situate ourselves within it.

The question is not whether Eliasson's attitude to the globalization process is positive or negative. In our conversations, it immediately became clear that he is highly critical of what he refers to as the "market economy." However, if Fredric Jameson is correct in his theory that the expansion of the cultural sphere must mean the loss of its autonomy, critical distance is no longer feasible—neither for an artist vis-à-vis economic and social phenomena nor for me vis-à-vis art. The more important issue is whether, through art, we can more clearly understand certain phenomena that only gradually reveal their conceptual meaning. Hence, Eliasson's art is relevant, firstly because it is in the right place at the right time, directing our gaze to a historical process that for a brief moment becomes visible; secondly, because it always reaches out beyond itself. It is not self-referential, but constantly stretches itself to the very boundaries of knowledge. The present-day economy lends support almost exclusively to applied research, in other words to projects whose results can be put to visible use within one or two years and reflected in concrete products or as added value. Meanwhile, research without any clear aim, experimentation for its own sake, is regarded as risky. Eliasson's art continuously allows us to experience this discrepancy anew because, rather than simply solving specific problems, it always poses new and fundamental questions.

His approach is similar to that of many of his contemporaries in that it has abandoned the traditional concept of art in favor of a visual and atmospheric expression of our environment and the way in which we relate to it. So far, no theoretical term has been found to describe this phenomenon. What also connects him with other present-day artists and architects is the emphasis on surfaces, the interest in the crystalline, in contortions, mirages, irridescence, and convolutions, in narrative components effortlessly presented, which are immediately imprinted on the mind of the observer as images or impressions. Without question, what makes him different is his firm position within a (pseudo)scientific discourse. But, as far as I am concerned, the most important difference is this: his endeavors are not a one-man show; they do not take place in the creator's imagination. They are genuinely collective undertakings, joint ventures. The fundamental characteristic of his style of art is that he manages to transmit the same feeling to everyone involved, encouraging each one to contribute something of his or her own. He creates syntheses of differing attitudes and points of view without subjecting them to a utopian perspective, such as the idea of the multi-media performance. And the process remains open-ended so that it can be developed further in any direction. It succeeds because the artist is always more interested in questions than in answers, in making the meaning of his art less rather than more clearly defined. And it succeeds because he channels much of his energy into developing the Studio—the very instrument that makes this kind of activity possible.

---

10 Jessica Morgan and Olafur Eliasson, "Interview" in *Your Only Real Thing is Time* (exh. cat., The Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston, MA), Hatje Cantz, Ostfildern, 2001, pp. 16–23, quotation from p. 16.